

GOOD TIDINGS FROM 4 GOSPELS
“Jesus Christ, Light of the World”
John 1:4, 5; 8:12

Big Idea – Jesus Christ came to light up your darkness.

Intro: Lights were important in the first Christmas. The angels did the dazzling light show in the sky and the shepherds went to Bethlehem as a result and saw the baby Jesus. The wise men saw another bright light in the sky -- a star -- and they followed it to where the Savior was born.

Light is a major theme in the Bible. The Bible says in 1 John *"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."*

The very first command that God gave in creation was, *"Let there be light."*

John 1:4, 5 says, "In him, that is Jesus, there was life, and that life was the light of all people. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it.

Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. The person who follows me will never live in darkness but will have the light that gives life."

John 12:46 "Jesus said, `I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer wander in darkness."

He's not talking about physical darkness here. He's talking about personal darkness, spritual darkness.

Everybody has dark days. You don't want to get out of bed. You're afraid to face the world. You don't feel like it's worth the effort. You just want to throw in the towel. You don't want to see anybody. We all go through dark days.

I want us to look tonight specifically at four types of dark days and how Jesus Christ the Light is the answer for that. Dark days of **disappointment, distress, doubt, and depression**. You probably can relate to at least one of those.

DARK DAYS OF DISAPPOINTMENT

Job 30:26 *"I hope for happiness and light but trouble and darkness came instead."*
Have you ever felt that way? Hoping for one thing but was disappointed.

There's been a lot of disappointing news just lately in our society

The fact is, life is disappointing sometimes. Things don't always work out as planned. Situations don't always work themselves out. Presents you get at Christmas, you see under the tree, and you think you know what they are -- some of you are in for some big disappointments. As a little boy you look and think, "I can tell that's a basketball!" You open it up and it's a globe of the world!

I imagine Mary experienced disappointment in the very first Christmas. She was told, You're to bear the Messiah, the Son of God. But she has to in the stable. I think that would be disappointing. Not in the Holiday Inn, not in the Hilton, not even a Motel Six. She has the baby in a stable.

Life is disappointing sometimes. We all go through dark days of disappointment.

DARK DAYS OF DISTRESS

That's when you feel overwhelmed, when you're stressed out, stretched to the limit, frustrated. You've got too much to do and you don't have enough time, you don't have enough money, you don't have enough energy.

Mary probably felt distressed in the very first Christmas. In the first place, she was nine months pregnant and she had to ride a donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. That would be stressful. She has the first baby she's ever had by herself, alone in a stable. That would be stressful.

David experienced stress. *"I cry desperately for help but it still does not come."* Have you ever felt that way? Help me, somebody! I'm overloaded! I've got too much to do! I'm stressed out." But nobody helps me. Dark days of distress when you're stretched to the limit.

My guess is that some of you are in dark days of distress right now. You may be stressed out financially. There's too much of the month left over at the end of the money. [I heard of a guy that went to a creditor and said, "We're having trouble with your easy payment plan. Do you have an easier one?"]

You can be stressed out physically. Your get up and go has got up and went. You don't feel good and you don't feel like doing anything. You get stressed out physically.

You can be stressed out relationally. Your marriage isn't working out right. Your relationships aren't working out right -- with your kids, your friends, your boss. When your expectations in a relationship aren't met you get stressed.

I read a story about a preacher who bought a parrot. When he got it home, to his embarrassment, the only thing it said was "Let's make out!" He went back to the owner

of the pet store who said, "What you need to do is buy this other one that all it says is 'Let's pray!' Maybe the good guy will influence the bad guy."

So he bought the "Let's pray" parrot and took it home and left it in the cage together for a week while he went away on a trip. When he came home the first parrot was still saying, "Let's make out" and the second one had started saying, "My prayers have been answered!"

DARK DAYS OF DOUBT

John 12:35 "The one who walks in the dark does not know where he is going." He's drifting; no clear objective. Do you ever lose your way? Do you ever feel like you're up in a cloud and your head is in a fog? When you look at your past you get disappointments. When you look at your present, you get stress. When you look at your future, you get doubtful and worried.

The fact is there are plenty of reasons for us to have doubt and uncertainty as we finish 2021 Will the economy take care of itself? Will it turn around? Will I have a job 5 months from now? Definite things to be stressed about, to have doubts about. When will this pandemic be over? How will they even know it's over?

Dark days of doubt. The one who walks in the dark doesn't know where he's going. Have you ever felt like that? What does my future hold? Where am I headed? You're in a fog.

There was a Pastor from Marysville in Northern California which is notorious for that low fog. One night after church he was coming out of church and he couldn't see two feet in front of him. He pulled out onto the road and all he could see were the tail lights right in front of him. He followed real closely, about a foot behind. He figured the guy knew where the road was. About five minutes later the guy stops dead cold and Pastor Tom ran into him. "Sir, what are you doing just stopping like that." Other guy said, "Well, sir, this is my driveway."

You've got to know where you're going.

When you have dark days of disappointment and dark days of distress and dark days of doubt then comes ...

DARK DAYS OF DEPRESSION

That's when everything seems to cave in. When you're depressed you feel like, "What's the use?" You feel like giving up.

In World War II, Winston Churchill said when the war started in Europe, "The light has gone out in Europe."

Some of you may feel that way about your life. The light has gone out of my life." Lamentations 3:19-20 *"the thought of my pain is bitter poison. I think of it constantly, and my spirit is depressed."* Some of you faced a major crisis this last year in 2021 Maybe it was a divorce, a death of a loved one, a defeat, maybe you got laid off, maybe you faced a major illness. The fact is, you don't feel like being happy at the holidays. The happiness at the holidays only intensifies your pain and your loneliness. Maybe you feel like David said in Psalm 88 "Lover, friend, acquaintance -- all are gone. There is only darkness everywhere!"

When you're in that kind of situation, you wonder, "Does anybody care?"

If you don't get anything else, get this: God cares. He cares about you because you matter to him. Your pain matters to Him and He cares about it.

Everyone of us are in one of three positions, one of three situations: Some of you are headed into dark days right now. You don't know it but you're headed right into them. Some of you are experiencing dark days right now. You're in the middle of it. Some of you have just come out of dark days and you don't realize you're headed into some new ones.

That's what life is all about. One problem solving incident after another. That's life. So where do you turn in your dark days. What's the antidote? 1 Samuel 22:29 "You Lord, are my light; you dispel my darkness."

How does Christ do that? He says, *"I'm the light of the world."* He came to light up our dark days. How does Christ dispel the darkness? How does He light up my life?

Because of Christmas you don't have to stay in the dark. Jesus Christ wants to do four things in your life.

HOW CAN JESUS DISPEL MY DARKNESS?

1. He encourages me when I'm disappointed.

Psalm 34:18 "The Lord is near to those who are discouraged, he saves those who have lost all hope."

The first way God encourages us is He says, "I'm with you." *"The Lord is near"*-- He's not left you. Some of you had tough times this year. Maybe 2021 was a disappointing year. You didn't get the promotion you thought you were going to get. You didn't close a sale, you thought you were going to close. You didn't complete the project that was delayed. Your hopes and dreams and the things you'd hoped would happen didn't materialize.

Where is God in all that? He's where He's always been. He hasn't left you. Immanuel -- God is with us! He encourages me in disappointing times by reminding me, I never go through anything alone. He is with me. The darkest part of the night is when the light shines the brightest. He's with me.

He encourages me by helping me realize He's got a design, a plan, a purpose for my life. Jeremiah 29 "The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans to prosper you, not to harm you, to give you hope and a future." Circle "hope" and "future". God says, I don't want to hurt you. I want to help you. I created you. I have a future and a hope for you.

God uses disappointments to get our attention. It's like a red flashing light. He wants to say to those of you who have been through disappointing experiences recently, "Yes, you have had pain and problems. But my purpose for your life is far greater than the problem that you're facing and there is a purpose behind it." He encourages me when I'm disappointed.

2. He strengthens me when I'm distressed.

This is a great verse. Philippians 4:13 (Amplified) *"I have the strength for all things in Christ who empowers me. I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses inner strength into me."* Some of you need to put this verse on your refrigerator. *"I have the strength for all things..." I'm ready for anything and equal to anything."* I am competent, I am capable, I am able to handle no matter what comes my way. On my own power. No way! But with the power that God puts in my life through Jesus Christ. Nothing can devastate me next year no matter what happens because I can face it. Not on my own, but He will strengthen me when I'm distressed.

(One lady, whose family had been through some difficult times, wrote this letter to her pastor at Christmas, "It's that time of year again. Actually, it's been a very trying year for our family. We're glad to be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We are slowly picking up the pieces and recovering from four major traumas in our lives that happened within six months." The wife's mother died, the husband and wife both lost their jobs, and their daughter left home. "We've grown immensely from our struggles. Our character has been developed in the process. We've exchanged our complacency for sensitivity, humility and gratitude. We've gained a new outlook on life. When you're struggling to make a house payment, all of a sudden a new car and a new dress just doesn't seem so important. God taught us that all we have is a gift from Him and we shouldn't take it for granted. We're still struggling financially and emotionally. But God has been very real to us. I hope all of you remember the reason for the season and our prayer is that you might know God personally and seek His plan and wisdom for your life. We can honestly say that through all our struggles this year, we would not

have traded God's love and our growth and character development for all the money in the world. Having it all cannot replace peace of mind and spirit. God is real and He is good.")

That is a letter from somebody who knows the meaning of Philippians 4:13. "I can handle anything with the power that Christ gives me in His strength.

Psalm 23:4 *"Even though I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me."* The darkest part of the night, that's when the light shines the brightest. There are 150 Psalms in the book of Psalms.

The theme of Psalms in one sentence: Life is tough, but God is good. That's the theme of Psalms.

When you start trying to say, "Life is good and God is tough" you're off base. Life is tough, but God is good! He says, I will not only encourage you when you're disappointed but I will strengthen you when you're distressed.

There are 365 fear nots in the Bible. That's one for every day of the year. God is saying "Get the message! Don't be afraid. I will strength you when you're distressed."

3. He will guide me when I'm doubtful.

When I'm confused, when I don't know which way to go. John 8:12 *"Jesus said, 'I am the Light of the world. So if you follow me, you won't be stumbling through darkness, for living light will flood your path.'"*

What are you worried about? What has got you uptight? What is it that is keeping you awake at night, keeping your stomach churning? You're going to have to make some major decisions in 2022. I don't know what they are and you don't either. But I guarantee you, you will have to make some major decisions in 2022.

On what basis are you going to make those major decisions? "I **felt** it was the right thing to do." Feelings are highly unreliable. You might have just eaten a bad pizza the night before. It's not a good idea to make decisions just on feelings. "Everybody else is doing it" is not a very good reason either. The majority is often wrong.

When you face doubts, there is a reliable source that you know will always give you the right advice and never steer you in the wrong direction. Is there any place in the world you can get that kind of advice?

Yes. It's called God's Word. It won't steer you the wrong way. *"Your words are a flashlight to light the path ahead of me and keep me from stumbling."* It is the only reliable guide for life. It's a flashlight. It illuminates. It keeps you from stumbling, helps you to see things clearly.

James 1:6 says, "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking."

Atheist Russia for years mocked the Bible. It was fascinating to watch the breakdown of the Soviet Union. This quote from Gorbachev around 1991 was in *Time* magazine, "We, in the Soviet Union, have changed our opinion on some matters such as religion. The moral values that Christianity has generated and embodied for centuries can help in the work of renewal for our country." That's not Billy Graham, that's Gorbachev saying that. That puts him ahead of a lot of politicians in America who wouldn't say that. What kind of an upside-down world do we live in? He's saying, We admit it! We were wrong! For 74 years the Communist regime tried to stamp out, snuff out any spark of spirituality in the Russian people and the people of the other republics. They failed because the moment they let it happen again things blossomed. Why? Because darkness cannot stamp out the light no matter how hard it tries. It can't extinguish it.

4. He will change me when I'm depressed.

Did you know that when you get depressed, God doesn't want to just pat you on the back and say, "Cheer up!" He wants to change you. In fact, He wants to use the depression to help you learn some new attitudes, new thoughts, new approaches, new choices. He doesn't want to just keep you going; He wants you to change. He can change you. He says, Don't drive out the darkness, just turn on the light.

Ephesians 5:13 *"It is possible for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also."* When the light of God shines in on my life, it brightens me up and it takes me out of that pit of despair and the light of God fills my life and I start glowing, I start being a bright person shining out.

Ephesians 5:9 *"The light produces in people all that is good and right and true."* When you allow Christ to fill your life with His spirit, it brings out the best in you.

Listen to this Christmas card from a Christian psychologist. "The greatest breakthrough in mental health was conceived long before Adler, Jung or even Freud." You open it up... "It's the conception of Jesus Christ."

He can do for you what maybe years of therapy haven't done. He dispels the darkness in my life. He is the light. Not anything or anybody else.

This Christmas, you may feel overwhelmed. Maybe you're going through one of these dark days -- the dark day of disappointment, or distress or doubt or depression. The

good news is because of Christmas, there is now a light in the world that can drive away that darkness.

1 John 2:8 *"The darkness in our lives disappears and the new light of life in Christ shines in."* It shines in our lives!

When I think about the first Christmas, it's amazing to me about the star the wise men saw to follow from the east. I'm sure many other people saw it. It was in the sky, anybody could see it. Probably millions of people saw that bright, unusual light. But they didn't do anything about it. Millions did nothing about it. But wise men followed the light. That's why they were wise! It's one thing to know there's a light in the world. It's another thing to follow the light. The point is, you can choose darkness or light. You can choose to live in the dark nights of the soul, or the "winter of discontent" as Shakespeare called it. You can live in those dark nights. Or you can choose to live in the light. God shines the sun on everybody. But you can go live in a cave. It's your choice. God shows you the light but you can choose to go blindfolded or say, "I'm going to close my eyes. I'm not going to look" and enforce darkness on your own life.

If you want to get out of the dark days, then you must choose to start living in the light.

Everyone came to the Christmas Eve service for many different reasons. Some of you came tonight just out of tradition. It's the thing to do. Some of you came out of habit. Some of you came out of curiosity. You just came to check it out. Some of you came because of the music. Some of you came because a friend or relative or somebody cared about you invited you.

It doesn't matter why you think you came. You're not here by accident. You may have any kind of religious background or no religious background. I'm not interested in your religious background. You may be Catholic, you may be Protestant, you may be Jewish, you may be Buddhist, or Bible, or Mormon, or Lutheran, or Episcopalian, or Assembly of God or Presbyterian or whatever. I don't care about that. I'm not talking about religion tonight. I'm talking about a relationship to Jesus Christ. You may have thought you came for one reason but God brought you here, I think, to tell you something else. I think He wants to say something to you. "You matter to Me. I know all about you and I want you to know Me. I came in a human form that you could relate to in Jesus Christ. I love you and I want to have a relationship with you." I'm not talking about religion or rituals or rules or regulations. I'm talking about a relationship to the person who made you -- God, your creator. That's what Christmas is all about. He said, "I came to light up the darkness in people's lives."