

One of my favorite parts of Christmas is the lights. It seems that Christmas lights up the world. The first lights go up in the November season when the stores begin to put up their lights -- those who want to get a head start on the buying season. Then in the first few days of December the three Christmas trees at the town squares in the Villages are lit. Along with the Villages Town Squares, the neighborhoods around us see lights being placed on bushes and rooftops. I especially enjoy driving around before Christmas to see some streets that have an awesome display of lights. You can't miss driving down Dunkirk Trail in the Villages, Florida in 2017.

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 when Jesus was several months old, saw another bright light in the sky -- a star -- and they followed it to the house where the Savior was living. 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."* Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world."* He who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." This is the very reason for Christmas. John 12:46 *"Jesus said, 'I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.'" Jesus has come into this world to brighten up your life. Let's take a look tonight at 4 types of darkness in our world, and how Christ brings light to those dark days. Real Light for our Darkness.*

The first type of darkness in our world is disappointment. Life is disappointing sometimes. Things don't always work out as planned. You had something all arranged, and it didn't work out as you thought. 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! I imagine Mary experienced disappointment in the very first Christmas. Here's she been told, You're to bear the Messiah, the Son of God. And she has to be out on the streets of Bethlehem. 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 lean to shelter in downtown Bethlehem. Life is disappointing sometimes. Things don't work out as planned.

The second type of darkness in our world is 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 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 lean to shelter. No medical doctors on hand for delivery, not even a midwife. That would be stressful. My guess is that some of you are in dark days of distress right now. You may 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 the best. You may have young children, that need attention, and you have a regular work position, plus commitments to friends and family. You tend to blow off steam by getting upset real easily. 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.

The third type of darkness in our world is 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. 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.

The fourth darkness out there is death. When you are young, you don't even think about it, because it's way out there, that's what happens to old people. Then one of your friends has a child that is smitten with a deadly cancer. Reality check. When you are old and you take that trip to the hospital, you wonder if this will be your last hospital stay. Death brings with it a great deal of sadness to family members. Whether we like it or not, we will all have to go into that dark cave. All because of sin. All because we broke our creator God's 10 commandments. As the Bible says, "The Wages of sin is death." Not just temporal death but eternal separation from God.

But Christmas brings a bright light to the darkness we find in our lives. The Prophet Isaiah says, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. And again Isaiah says, "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined."

Augustus makes a routine proclamation. A census has been called. A simple carpenter from a backwater town saddles a donkey for his great-with child wife. A ragtag crew of shepherds make their way toward the late-afternoon sheep fields outside of Bethlehem. And a Light is sparked to life.

The initial light is small, but make no mistake. It is a growing light. Christ, the Light of the World has been born. **Christ, the light of the world, encourages me when I'm disappointed.** The first way Jesus encourages me is He says, "I'm with you." I understand you. I walked in your flesh. I was once a child. I went to school. I had family members who didn't believe I was the Messiah until I rose from the dead. I had disciples who turned their backs on me. I know what disappointment is all about. Don't be fooled by my humble birth in a manger. I who was shaped in my mother's womb, am the one who shaped and created this universe. I who was held in my mother's arms, am the one who will hold you in my arms. For I am Immanuel – which means God with us! You never need to go through anything alone. I, Immanuel am with you. The darkest part of the night is when the light shines the brightest. He's with you.

He encourages you by helping you realize He's got a design, a plan, a purpose for your 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". Jesus 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. Jesus uses disappointments to get your 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 you when you're disappointed. **2. He strengthens you when you're distressed.**

This is a great verse. Philippians 4:13 *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens 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 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 in 2018 no matter what happens because I can face it. Not on my own, but He will strengthen me when I'm 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. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'*" 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 2018. 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 2018.

On what basis are you going to make those major decisions? "I thought/felt it was the right thing to do." Feelings are highly unreliable. 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. **He will rescue me from death.** The angels referred to Jesus as Christ the Savior. A Savior is someone who rescues you from some great danger. Jesus has come to rescue us from our sins and the darkness of death. Look at what He did while he was here on earth. He had power over death. To the young man at Nain, carried out of the city gate to be buried, He said, "Arise, and he arose. To Lazarus who had been dead 4 days He said: "Come out of that grave and he came out. To Jairus daughter, he said, "my child get up", and she came back to life. To be sure they crucified Christ, pierced his side and heart, laid Him in a grave, put a seal on the tomb and surrounded him with soldiers. Yet when the angel rolled that stone away, Christ who had been crucified was already back to life, risen, and alive forevermore. Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die". A bright light shines for those who face the darkness of death.

Christ 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 death. The good news is because of Christ, there is now a light in the world that can drive away that darkness. This is a special night because the hope of the nations, the light of the world has come to warm us with his forgiving love as he sets our hearts on fire to follow him! May that light, the light of faith in Jesus Christ, shine with radiance in our hearts tonight and always. Amen.