

CHRISTMAS SHINES A LIGHT ON YOUR DARK DAYS

Ecclesiastes 11:8

Good morning! Christmas is just around the corner. We all know, however, that 2021 is such a difficult year with so many difficult problems. So, this Christmas I want us to look at the theme of healing and hope this Christmas. That's why we're starting a new series for this month entitled, "Christmas – A Time for Healing, A Time for Hope". And today, I'd like to start it off by sharing a message about how Christmas shines a light on your dark days.

We certainly had a lot of dark days in 2021, but one of the things that I love about the Christmas season is all the Christmas lights. In the northern hemisphere, Christmas is the darkest time of the year for about half of the world. In fact, on Tuesday, Dec. 21, it'll be the winter solstice for the Northern hemisphere, which means it's the shortest day and the longest night. Christmas lights up the world in the darkest part of the year for the Northern hemisphere. First, it starts in the stores. They put up their lights, then the cities put up their lights. Then our homes put up their lights.

Now, did you know that light is a major theme of the Bible? That's why we're going to look at a lot of Bible verses today. Light played a major role in the first Christmas. The Bible tells us the angels lit up the sky with a bright light and they put on a dazzling light show for the shepherds. The Bible tells us the wise men were led to Jesus by an unusually bright star. Christmas is the celebration of God's light entering the world. Now, why is that important? Because the Bible tells us to expect dark days in our lives. Let me read a verse from Ecclesiastes 11:8, *"However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many..."*

The Bible tells us that in life, we will go through many dark days. Now, what are dark days? Well, they're any days where you're feeling negative emotions. There are dark days of confusion. When you don't know which way to turn, you doubt which way you're going. There are dark days of conflict, when you're having relational conflicts with people. There are dark days of disappointment, when things didn't turn out the way you wanted. There are dark days of loss. There are dark days of loneliness, when you're feeling all alone. There are dark days of grief, when we've experienced the loss of a loved one or a job or something, there are dark days of stress and anxiety and fear. There are dark days of heartbreak, dark days of depression, dark days, even of despair.

Isaiah predicted dark days for Israel in his book, in Isaiah 6:21-22, he says this, talking about these dark days, *“Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.”* Does that sound like today? In deep frustration since last year, because of financial and economic and health problems people have become enraged and have shaken their fists at leaders and even at God and everywhere they look, they see trouble and darkness and despair. We are all living in dark days. That was a prediction that Isaiah made many, many years ago, but he also predicted the coming of Jesus to earth at Christmas. And in Isaiah 9:2, he says this: *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”*

How do we have the light of Christ in our dark days? The antidote to your dark days is to turn to God's light. The Bible is filled with references to the effect of God's light in our lives. First off it says that God's character is a source of all light in the universe. Without God, there would be no light. Without God, there would be no universe. 1 John 1:5b says God is light.

That's what it says, it's his nature. All light comes from God. *“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”*

The Bible tells us that God's very first act in creation was to create light. Genesis 1:1-4, *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...And God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.”* God is light. The first act of creation was light. And at the first Christmas, about 2,021 years ago, God came to earth as Jesus to give us more light. Light about himself, light about life, light about death, light about eternity, love, forgiveness, salvation, and much, much more.

In John 12:46, Jesus says this: *“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

Now, what do we know about light? Well, let me just give you a quick overview. Light is an electromagnetic wave. And it's commonly classified in seven kinds of different ways, from large to small. And they all travel at the same speed, which we call the speed of light. There are radio waves. There are microwaves. There are infrared waves. There's visible light. Then there's ultraviolet light, there are x-rays, and there are gamma rays. And I learned this week how different wavelengths of light interact differently with matter. And you know what, there are actually spiritual parallels to how light interacts in different ways.

Now, we all know that light is illuminating, but we often ignore the other effects of light, such as light can be purifying. Light can be healing. Light can be warming. Light can even be transforming. So, this Christmas, I want to ask the question, how does the light of Jesus, when he says, "I'm the light of the world," how does the light of Jesus help you in your dark days? Let me just suggest four different ways. But first, let me share with you one effect of light.

1. Light can illuminate.

Ephesians 5:13 says, *“But everything exposed by the light becomes visible.”* Now, I don't have to belabor this point because you use this principle every time you flip a light switch. Why in the world do you turn on lights? To see better! You can always see more in the light than you can in the dark and the brighter the light, the better you can see. Light illuminates. I mean, this is not a big deal. You know this. Light exposes, light uncovers, light clarifies. Did you ever shine the light under your bed? You see stuff that you didn't know was there.

You see, light gives you a perspective that is completely different than when you're in the dark. If you've ever had surgery, you know that surgeons always want the brightest lights in that operating room so they can see every little detail. They don't want to miss a thing. I mean, no surgeon has ever said, "Hey, let's turn these lights down for a different mood in this surgery. Let's make it look like a bar lounge." No. They want it as bright as possible so they can see as much as possible.

If I asked you to go on a ride with me in the evening and you noticed I didn't have my headlights on, wouldn't you tell me about it? You know that light illuminates the road and will make your journey easier.

Same is true for life. To make the journey easier, you need more light in your life. So where do you find the best light for life? In John 8:12, Jesus says, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* During dark days, trusting Christ will help me see things more clearly.

In other words, in dark days, I need the light of Jesus when I can't see the way forward. When I'm confused, when I'm undecided, when I don't know what's best, when I can't figure out what to do next, when everything looks black and I can't see which way to go, I need the light of Christ in my life.

Now, I know that the common answer in the world when you're confused is this, trust yourself, trust your gut, follow your instincts, follow your heart. But anybody who's tried that knows that at best, you're only right about 50 percent of the time. Your light is weak. Your perspective is small. It's like using one of those little wimpy pen lights you put on your key chain. They don't illuminate anything. And as a result, you've made a lot of bad decisions in life. Instead, here's what the Bible says to do. Isaiah 50:10 (MSG), *"For anyone out there who doesn't know where you're going, anyone groping in the dark, Here's what: Trust in God. Lean on your God!"* In short, don't trust your own light. Trust the light of the Lord.

Now you say, "Okay, Pastor Rolly, I would love to have God's perspective on my problems. I'd love to have his help, his light on my challenges and my choices and my future. But how do I discover God's viewpoint? How can I see what God sees in my life? How do I get God's light on the things that matter to me?" And the answer is this. Get into this book, the Bible. You need to read it. You need to study it, because God's will is always found in God's word. Saturate your mind with the Bible. Psalm 119:105 says this: *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."*

But you know what? I'm always amazed at how many people are always waiting around for God to give them a sign in the air instead of just reading the directions that he's already given us. Stop looking for a vision in the sky and start looking for a verse in the Bible. That's where you're going to find the light. You're going to continue to stumble around in dark days if you spend more time listening to negative news in the media than you spend time reading God's word. Psalm 119:130 says this: *"The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."* If you want to go the right way in 2022, you got to get in this book.

So let me ask you a very personal question at Christmas as we end this difficult year of 2021 and look toward to 2022.

Where, right now, do you feel you're in the dark? I want you to think about that. What is confusing to you in your life? What needs to be clarified? Where do you need God's light to shine and give you direction? Well, it's completely available to you and it's free, but you have to ask for it.

Now, you may be a little worried about what's happening, what's going to happen next in your life. Nobody predicted 2020 and 2021, and nobody can really predict what 2022 is going to be like but let me give you a Bible verse that you might want to make your daily prayer. Psalm 23:4, David prayed, "*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*"

So, the first benefit of filling your life with God's light is that everything gets a lot clearer. You don't have as much confusion. You'll have a bigger perspective on life. You'll see things the way God sees them. And that's called wisdom. Why? Because light illuminates.

Now let me give you the second effect of light. Light not only illuminates,
2. Light can disinfect.

Did you know that? Light is a great disinfectant. It can kill germs. It can purify water. Light can cleanse and sanitize a lot of stuff. In the Philippines, people hang out their clothes and bed sheets to dry in the sun to sanitize them. Besides, people can't afford a dryer. But light has a disinfecting effect.

I read an article about how New York City officials have built a water disinfection facility using ultraviolet light to destroy germs and disinfect its drinking water, which it's brought in and from about 100 miles away. And instead of using chlorine, which most of us use, which has some downsides to it, they're now using the sun's power to disinfect and sanitize their water using light rays. They disinfect 2.4 billion gallons of water every day.

Now, in a similar way, getting the light of God in your life can disinfect and sanitize and purify and cleanse harmful bad stuff out of your life - the harmful words, the harmful thoughts, the harmful actions that make you spiritually and emotionally and sometimes physically sick. Here's what the Bible says. 1 John 1:6-7, *“If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”* Jesus cleanses, sanitizes, and disinfects us. All we need to do is to let his light shine upon us.

So, in dark days, I need the light of Jesus when I want a clean start. I could not count the number of times that people have said to me, confidentially, "You know, Pastor Rolly, I've made so many mistakes in my life. I really need a fresh start. Wish I could just clean the slate, wipe it all off and begin again. I'm so tired of carrying a heavy load of emotional baggage from all my poor decisions." So many people today are going through dark days because they're carrying a load, a secret load of guilt and shame and regret. They may look successful on the outside, but they're tortured by their secrets.

Is there a way to wipe the slate clean? Is there a way to get a fresh start? Yes. It's called being born again. That doesn't mean you turn over a new leaf and try harder. It means you get a brand new life, not a new leaf, a new life. Everything is forgiven and forgotten. Everything is cleansed by the light of Christ and then the darkness is lifted in your life. 2 Samuel 22:29 says this: *“You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light.”* The darkness of guilt, the darkness of regret, the darkness of shame, the darkness of I wish I could have done it differently. The Lord turns your darkness into light.

Ephesians 5:8-9 describes what it means to be completely cleansed and forgiven of your sin and born again.

Here's what it says: *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth).”* So, here's my question for you this Christmas, what secret regret or guilt or shame in your life needs to be cleansed and disinfected by exposure to the light of Christ? I want you to think about that. Think about that. What needs to be cleansed with the light of Christ in my life?

Let's move on to the next benefit of having God's light in your life. It cleans up the mess and the germs and the sin in my life. Now, the third effect of light is this,

3. Light can heal.

Did you know that? Light can heal. Scientists are discovering more and more about the healing properties and the healing powers of light. For example, near-infrared light is now used to treat multiple sclerosis. Phototherapy is being used to treat acne and other skin diseases. Light therapy can also treat jaundice in babies. Our son Eze was born with a high level of bilirubin in his blood and his skin was yellowish when he was born. So, we left the hospital without him as the doctor put his frail body under a light for treatment. Everyday Anabel and I visited him in the hospital and after two weeks he got well. As a result, he got fair skin. I wish I was put under a light too when I was born so that I could have fair skin, too. Although I think they put me under too much light. I got burned.

Anyway, we're now just learning how different wavelengths of light have different healing and pain-relieving properties.

Now, when you think about it, I mean, literally, when you think about it, if everything God created is good, when it's used in the way God intended, then that makes sense. I mean, in the physical realm, water is good for you in the right dose. Air is certainly good for you in the right dose. And light is good for you in the right dose. All of these are essential to your physical health.

But what about your emotional health and your spiritual health? What about your emotional wounds and mental illnesses and spiritual sicknesses that afflict all of us in a broken world? Well, the parallels apply here too.

In dark days I need the light of Jesus when I'm wounded and in pain - emotional pain, spiritual pain, physical pain, relational pain. When I feel discouraged or disappointed or depressed or in despair, the antidote is to turn to the light of Jesus in those dark days. Psalm 69:29 says, *“But as for me, afflicted and in pain—may your salvation, God, protect me.”* And Psalm 103:3 says, *“He forgives all your iniquity; he heals all your diseases.”*

So many people today in their dark days feel trapped. Trapped by thoughts, trapped by compulsions, trapped by fears, trapped by anxieties, trapped by secret addictions. Where do we find the freedom from that kind of darkness? Colossians 1:12-13 says this: *“...and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.”* That's the kingdom of God. The kingdom of light for he has freed us from the power of darkness. The next benefit then of the light of Jesus is he can free us from our darkest emotions and thoughts. So, here's my question here for this third point. What needs healing in your life? What kind of restoration is needed in your life? What needs to be exposed to the light of Christ?

Because light illuminates, it shows the truth me when I'm confused. Because light disinfects, it takes care of all the junk in my past. And because light heals, it restores my physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health.

Let me give you just one more property of light. The fourth effect of light is this.

4. Light grows things.

Light is life for anything living. It's the key to life. Every plant grows by photosynthesis, which is dependent upon light. No light, no growth. No light, no power. You can't live without light.

Now, if you're a vegetable gardener, you can tell you that the more hours of light you have, the bigger your crops will grow. You can also tell you that many crops won't even grow in wintertime with shorter days. Now, have you heard of a grow light? It's an artificial light that helps plants grow. Grow lights either attempt to provide a light spectrum similar to that of the sun, or to provide a spectrum that is more tailored to the needs of the plants being cultivated.

Now again, the same physical effect of light is true in the spiritual realm. In dark days, I need the light of Jesus to change me for the better. I need the light of Jesus to make me grow spiritually when I'm experiencing dark days.

You know, there are two ways that we change - when we see the light and when we feel the heat. One of those ways is far less painful. If we would just change when we see the light, then we wouldn't have to change when we feel the heat.

Ephesians 1:17-18 (NLT) says, *"I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance."*

In the Bible light and life go hand in hand, Psalm 36:9, *"For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light."*

Did you know that verse? The light of God helps us to see the light. We become people who are enlightened, disinfected from sin, healed from our diseases, and growing spiritually. You see, the Bible says life is meant to be enjoyed, not merely endured, but the key is living in God's light.

The more you live in God's light, the more you'll enjoy life. That's why Jesus says this in John 8:12, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* We also know Jesus says in John 10:10, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* And in 2 Corinthians 4:6, it says, *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."*

See all of these verses? Why does God talk so much about light in the Bible? Because God is light. And the light is the light of love and the light of God's life. 1 John 2:8, *"Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining."* So, here's the Christmas question this year. Here's my question for you at Christmas. Are you ready to exchange your darkness and the dark days you're going through, for God's light? This is what Christmas is all about. Jesus came to light up your life.

You see, when you try to live your life without God, you live it in the dark. It's why things don't make sense to you, because you don't have the illumination. It's why you're burdened down with negative emotions. It's why you're not healed of the brokenness in your life. And it's why you stop growing. This Christmas it's time to turn on the light. It's time to flip the switch. It's time to let the light of Christ into your life. Not just for your dark days, but for all your days. It's time to exchange your darkness for his life, light. I would like to pray with you. Would you bow your heads and pray a simple prayer like this?

Say, "Dear God, I've had many dark days in my life, but I need your light in my life. I need your light to heal me. I need your light to guide me. I need your light to comfort me, to warm me. I need your light to help me grow."

And so as much as I know how, Jesus Christ, I open my life to the light of your love and this Christmas. I want to accept you as God's Christmas gift to me, I want to learn to follow you and trust you. And I humbly ask you to accept me into your family by grace. Not because I deserve it, but because I put my faith in your love and in your light, I pray this and ask this humbly in your name. Amen."