

OVERCOMING CHRISTMAS DISAPPOINTMENTS

LUKE 1:78-79

“Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

For years the third grade class at CCCS had a poem they learned every Christmas, “I wanted a rifle for Christmas. I wanted a bat and a ball. I wanted some skates and a bicycle. But I didn’t want mittens at all... I wanted a whistle. I wanted a kite. I wanted a pocketknife that closed up tight. I wanted some books. I wanted a kit, but I didn’t want mittens one little bit... I told them I didn’t like mittens. I told them as plain as plain. I told them I didn’t *want* mittens, and they’ve given me mittens again.” For Ms. Donna’s third graders **Christmas mittens** were a huge disappointment!

This evening I want to talk to you about *Christmas disappointment*... **Have you ever been disappointed at Christmas?** Perhaps, you asked for a specific gift and you were sure it was coming... but it never did.

It reminds me of the wife who left her husband a note, “Buy me something that will make me look beautiful and sexy.” She was expecting an evening gown or a piece of lingerie. On Christmas morning she was shocked to discover that her husband had bought her an exercise bike. *It was a huge disappointment.*

My greatest Christmas disappointment came when I was a child. I’d been sick the week prior to Christmas, and my mom had taken me to the doctor. Sadly, the doctor misdiagnosed my scarlet fever. He called it a virus, prescribed me some medicine, and assured my mom I would be feeling better by Christmas morning.

Instead, I got worse. My fever that morning spiked to 104, and I’d managed to spread my illness to my little brother. Mom’s two sons both had scarlet fever. That Christmas I got a Army pup tent. Dad set it up in the living room floor. Mom said later all I could do was lay down under that canvas tent - *and sweat and shiver.*

The gift that year I really liked was a battery operated Godzilla. The mechanical green monster was two feet high, and when you switched it on the traction wheels got it moving in a forward direction. The Godzilla came with a rubber-tipped dart gun, so when you shot it its red eyes lit up - it sounded a fierce growl - then it would change

direction, and come straight at you... Godzilla was my *one* enjoyment that Christmas, yet there was a problem. That Godzilla scared my kid brother to death.

When I hit that monster with the dart - its red eyes flared, then that roar... my sick brother would scream, and cry, and panic... For mom and dad it was a long, long, long Christmas morning, *a huge disappointment*.

I'm sure you've had your Christmas disappointments. Christmas can be fun, and happy, and meaningful, but it can also get depressing. *Loneliness grows more acute during the holidays... Financial pressures rise to the surface... A faster pace creates stress and strains.*

And as the stress of the holiday builds - little cracks in family relationships tend to get exposed, and can split wide open. Sadly, the Christmas time of year has the potential of driving families apart, not just together.

Rather than ease a person's pain, often Christmas festivities will intensify their anxiety. Christmas time has the potential of producing serious disappointments.

Frequently, it's the anxiety of wanting everything to be perfect at Christmas that creates the greatest stress... We worry about being *a good host to our guests, or whether dinner is up to grandma's standards, or we fret whether our gifts will match the high expectations of our kids - or satisfy our spouse - or impress our boss - or make the in-laws happy.*

We worry about family members cooperating and getting along. Everybody hopes for a Norman Rockwell Christmas. We want things to be *picture perfect* at Christmas time... *but truthfully, they seldom are...*

Actually, we live in a *very imperfect world*. We're all *imperfect people*. I hate to be the one to break to you, but *life isn't perfect*, and Christmas won't be either.

Hey, if all you've got to worry about this Christmas is whether Uncle Harry likes his \$20 necktie you're a blessed person! Remember, there are people this Christmas who've just been told *their tumor is malignant... The surgeon wasn't able to get all the cancer... Dad just found out he won't have a job in the new year... Students are returning from break with failing grades... There're parents trying to find presents for their kids, with an eviction notice in their pocket...*

In fact, there's a family in our church who were out of town, when they learned Sunday morning their house had burned to the ground the night before... It's tough for me to imagine a greater Christmas disappointment!

Years ago, the rock group, *Pearl Jam*, wrote a bleak song about Christmas... “Cold wind blows on the soles of my shoes. Heaven knows nothing of me. I’m lost, nowhere to go. Oh, when I was a kid. Oh, how magic it seemed. Oh, please let me sleep. It’s Christmas time.

Flowered winds were where I lived. Thought you burned, not froze for your sins. I’m so tired... and cold. Oh, when I was a kid. Oh, how magic it seemed. Oh, please let me dream. It’s Christmas time...” Obviously, the members of Pearl Jam had a difficult time reconciling the idealized Christmases of their youth with the realities of imperfect Christmases since.

People see how Christmas is *suppose to be* - how *they want it to be* - then realize how *harsh it can be*, and the disappointment drives them further from God. *Thus the lyrics...* “Heaven knows nothing of me. I’m lost, nowhere to go.” The song eventually pleads... “just let me bury my head, and sleep away Christmas.”

Pearl Jam had one thing right... in an imperfect, sin-stained, broken, fallen world - there is no such thing as a Christmas that’s totally free from disappointment.

Fictional character George Bailey learned *it’s a wonderful life* - but nobody on earth has *a perfect life*, and there’s no such thing as a flawless Christmas. Hey, ***even the first Christmas was far from perfect!...***

The Christmas story the Bible tells reels with inconvenience, and hardship, and letdowns. The very first Christmas also had its share of disappointments...

We forget the Christmas story starts with a fresh round of taxes. And if you’re a *Republican*, that alone would’ve cast a dark cloud over events that followed.

And can you imagine a rougher start for Joseph and Mary? She turns up pregnant and offers the preposterous explanation... *it was a miracle from God.*

At first, Joseph questioned Mary’s fidelity. *How could such a story be true?* He even concocted a plan to break off their betrothal. It took a divine dream and some angelic intervention to convince him otherwise.

What a complex and tangled set of circumstances for a young couple to have to sort out. My point is, *it certainly wasn’t what you would call a smooth start!*

Then Joseph and Mary had to travel three days and 100 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem... *You signed up for the census in your hometown, and Joseph was from Bethlehem - at the southern end of the country.*

This was problematic... we all know that expectant women don't travel well. Imagine, putting a woman - 9 months pregnant - on the back of a donkey and riding 100 miles across rocky terrain. *I did the calculations and I figured Joseph had to make exactly 447 potty stops.* It's a miracle Mary's water didn't break in route.

And when they finally arrive in Bethlehem, Mary finds that her man, Joe, forgot to make hotel reservations. *There's no room in the inn!* Imagine this, the chosen mother - "the highly favored of God" - has to give birth to the most important baby ever born... *in a stable.* Mary lays her infant in a saliva-stained feed trough.

If this had happened to you and your spouse, it all would've felt more like a *fiasco* - than a *blessed birth*. I'm sure Joseph and Mary had higher expectations.

You'd think, if your baby was the Son of God circumstances would've been a little less troublesome. *Even Joseph and Mary dealt with **disappointments!***

And imagine too, the detour they took to Egypt. Mary had a newborn baby, and like any first time mother she was anxious to get home, and show the baby off to her friends and family. But when it came time to return to Nazareth, God sent the couple the opposite direction, *south to Egypt. How disappointing that must've been?*

And think also of the crushing experience it was when Mary and Joseph heard the news of what had happened in Bethlehem after their departure. An evil and jealous King Herod went on a violent rampage. In his search of the baby who'd rival his throne, Herod slaughtered every boy under the age of two years old.

Mary now had girlfriends with newborns the same age as Jesus, who were grieving the loss of a child.

Mary had safe passage to Egypt, while other young moms she knew, were making funeral arrangements, and picking out miniature coffins. It's really difficult to imagine facing a greater series of **disappointments.**

Which brings us back to Luke 1:78, "Through the tender mercy of our God..." God looked down on our disappointments - *at Christmas and all throughout the year* - with compassion. He saw our hopelessness and lostness - *as self-inflicted as it was* - and He showed mercy. And not just a distant, impersonal pity, but an impassioned mercy. God cared enough *to take it all personal.* Luke calls it, "the tender mercy of God."

This was the mercy and tenderness that drove God to clothe Himself in human flesh, and join our plight. He cared enough to yoke Himself to our predicament, and share in

our dilemma - to engineer for us a salvation. Christmas was initiated by the Father's *"tender mercy."*

And it was conveyed in a visit. *God paid mankind a visit!* "The Dayspring from on high has visited us..." And of course, that visit was in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The coming of the Savior is *"the Dayspring."* The term is a synonym for "Savior" - a name for Jesus.

"Dayspring" is actually an Old English word that speaks of "the dawn or sunrise." I like "daybreak." It carries the idea of the sun suddenly, *without warning*, popping up or leaping over the horizon. *Jesus was the dawning of a brand new day for you and planet earth.*

And Jesus visited us for the primary purpose of giving us light. Our text tells us, "The Dayspring from on high has visited us to give light..." Jesus came to bring illumination, and clarification, and revelation.

Oh, in other Scriptures we're told Jesus came with a smorgasbord of objectives - to heal, and save, and pardon, and deliver, and unite, and reconcile, and win victories - but all of that can't begin *until we see clearly.*

And according to Luke, Jesus visited "those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death." People trapped in darkness desperately need light. Evil and ignorance traps us and hems us in. As Pearl Jam sang, *"A cold wind blows... I'm lost, nowhere to go... I'm tired..." All our problems start with the fact we "sit in darkness."*

Realize, in Bible times, when this text was written, when it got dark, it was really dark. There were no electric lights or flashlights, or even ambient light from a nearby town. *No, darkness was thick and opaque.*

The dark immobilized you. In today's world, we jump in a car, and flip on the headlamps... we have no issue traveling at night, but not in Bible times. When it started getting dark the traveler looked for shelter, or built a fire and bedded down for the night. People of antiquity were seriously scared of the dark. Progress was paralyzed by the darkness... *Until dawn, the daybreak!*

While it was still dark you were frozen. You had to wait for the sunrise for life to thaw and get going again. At first light you were free to move and advance. In the light achievement was once again possible. You weren't just huddled up waiting on the sun to rise...

And this is why Jesus is called “**our daybreak!**” With His coming He shines His light on our path. He enables me to see my life, my self, my world more clearly. New ventures become possible. Hope gets resurrected.

In the dark the traveler succumbed to fear. At night he became vulnerable. Dangers were looming that he couldn't see. *Who knew what was in the shadows?* But when the Dayspring came the shadows, and fears, and uncertainties fled away. Light eliminated the shadows.

Then finally, Luke says, when the Dayspring comes He'll “**guide our feet into the way of peace.**” *Of course He will!* His light brings peace! Illumination - to see clearly - is liberation. It's the uncertainties, fears, half-truths, ignorance, and misconceptions that hold us back from all God has for us. Truth sets us free. We're delivered only when the Dayspring rises in our life.

The first Christmas was full of disappointment, but it saw the initial bursts of a new day rising in the sky.

With Jesus' coming the opening rays of God's light penetrated the darkness. He dispelled the shadows of death... *It's always interesting to note that Jesus was born in the night-time - light invaded the darkness.*

Here's how to overcome Christmas disappointments!

First, accept that life in general - *and Christmas in particular* - will always have flaws and imperfections and disappointments... We live in a very broken world.

But **second**, look to Jesus in the midst of that darkness. Call on God's Son to rise up and shine light on your path. If you sit in *a kind of darkness* tonight - if you're facing questions with no answers - ask Jesus to be your **Dayspring!** He'll illuminate a new way. He'll bring about a better day. *He is the dawn of fresh starts.*

For centuries the world sat in a spiritual darkness and disappointment, hopelessly waiting for the sun, God's Son, to rise... *but the night tediously drug on.* Like an old man who couldn't sleep, mankind tossed and turned, and laid in his dark room *and just waited...*

Did you know that for the last five years one of the leading searches on Google has been the word, “**Hope.**” Not “*how to make money online,*” but “**Hope.**” People have struggled with covid, the economy, political and social upheavals, climate concerns, etc. But when looking for real answers they've consistently typed “*h-o-p-e*” into the

search bar. People today are looking past the shifting uncertainties of modern life, and they're looking deeper for meaning and hope.

Yet on that first Christmas morning the sun rose. Hope sprung above the horizon. A new day dawned.

And Jesus remains *the Dayspring, the first light!* He shines brightly. He readies us to move out. He wants us to journey with Him - to expect more and better and greater. New potentials and possibilities have dawned.

In his book "[The Manger Is Empty](#)" Walter Wangerin recounts an interesting story from his childhood...

Each year his dad followed the same Christmas tradition. On Christmas Eve he'd go into a room in his house, and lock the door behind him. He'd proceed to set up stacks of gifts - all for his family. Of course, his kids hovered excitedly and impatiently in a hallway outside the room, longing for what dad had in store.

But when Walt, Jr. turned just ten, he'd experienced enough of life already to realize things don't always turn out the way we hope. Not even your dad can shelter you from the pain life brings. So in a personal protest, Walt decided to forego that year's Christmas tradition. He thought, "[Why get my hopes up? Why be gullible and vulnerable. Why believe when there's no assurance of an outcome?](#)" So, when the door opened, the other kids bolted into the room, but Walter stayed out in the hall - *a personal protest to life's injustices.*

But that's when something happened Walt didn't expect. *It was his dad's reaction... a look of disappointment fell over his father's face...* It was a painful look that shook Walter. His dad's face was asking, "[why won't you enjoy what I've worked so hard to provide and freely give?](#)" Walt's self-imposed exile pained his dad... He suddenly realized, "[My father also has disappointments with which he struggles. And his hope is that his eldest son will soften and be glad...](#)"

And note the point of the story, **disappointment goes both ways!** *Sure, you'll have your Christmas disappointments. Yes, it's possible for life to upset your plans - and things not go your way. Christmas and life in general always involve a degree of disappointment. We live in a fallen, broken world - that's yet to be fixed.*

But Jesus is *the Dayspring* - the first light in the darkness. The first step in God's plan to alleviate all suffering one day. And for reasons not always known to us, God has purposes for the disappointments and letdowns He allows us to encounter. In fact,

rather than shelter us, His faith is big enough to let hardship run its course. He knows that's what shapes our holiness.

And **disappointment is a two way street...** For the Father also has a heart that breaks and hurts. God has packed a room with blessings for you - *His pardon and peace - His presence and power.* And it was all paid for by the blood of His Son. Again, *the Dayspring shines!*

But are you in the hallway - guarded, cynical, jaded, mad at God because life isn't all cherries and ice cream - *that He finds a use for difficulties.* Why not enter in and receive God's blessings. **Disappointment runs two ways.** God has gifts under the tree for you, and it breaks His heart for you to walk off and say "no."

God made Himself vulnerable to disappointment too. He hung naked and bled and died to pardon your sin. But you can harden your heart. You can reject God and His tender mercies. *We can also disappoint God!*

Here's the ultimate cure for disappointments at Christmas time: **Stop focusing on what you want from God, and set your heart on what God wants for you.** Rather than think how God has disappointed you, this year ask yourself if you've disappointed Him?

Jesus is the One who went out on a limb. He was hung from a tree. He's the One who has most to lose.

Don't disappoint Him by insisting on *your own life, your own way.* Recall, we're the ones who *"sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death."* We need the Dayspring to make sense of life and situations. Until Jesus shines His light into your life you have no right to make judgments on what God should or shouldn't do.

The prescription for people who *"sit in darkness"* is first and foremost *the Dayspring!* It's not just that we see the sun, but the sunrise insures we see everything else clearly as well. Everything changes in the daylight.

Though the first Christmas was far from perfect, and laced with plenty of disappointment for its participants, nevertheless it was monumental, **for the first rays of God's salvation could suddenly be seen.** His tender mercy was real! God did have a plan that included us.

Christmas disappointments are real, but the way to overcome them is to focus on Jesus, *the Dayspring.* The biggest Christmas disappointment would be for the sun to rise, and for you to miss it, and disappoint God.

Let me close with the second stanza of the Christmas carol, "**O Come, O Come Emmanuel,**" "O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high, and cheer us by Thy drawing nigh; disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel! Shall come to thee, O Israel." Let the Dayspring overcome all your disappointments.