

THE WEARY WORLD REJOICES

KEY TEXT: Acts

Some of the material today is pretty heavily influenced by Tim Kellers *Hidden Christmas*. We sent a link out to it a couple of weeks ago and it's really good. You could still download it, and use it in the next couple of weeks to prepare your heart during the Christmas season and for the Christmas season.

Our family lives out in the country and I've never really pulled the actual facts, but I'm pretty sure we share our electrical grid with 13 families. That means that when there's a power outage, we're last on the list for the electrical company to fix. We're the people that get their power back after the workers fix everyone else's, go home to sleep, eat, and come back in the next day. It hasn't happened many times, but we've gone without power for days or almost a week. Which, I know in the scale of things- it's not really all that bad. But, with animals to feed and water, it is pretty tough. But, as long as I know when it's coming back on- we can make a plan. We can figure it out. The way that works is that I get a text and the power company says- your power should come back on around this time. But, every now and again we get a text that says "Your power is out. We're assessing the situation and will report a time frame to you once we know more". That's when it's not so good. That's of course when there's snow on the ground, ice on the power lines, trees down. And you know it's going to be a long time. And, I don't know about you... I still flip light switches! I still try to turn the lights on because you can't do anything in the dark. It's eerily quiet. Prolonged darkness and uncontrollable darkness is no joke. We've all probably been afraid of it at some point in our lives.

Scripture says that the world apart from Christ is dark. Jesus later claims to be the light of the world. And its these truths that we'll spend some time this morning reflecting on and turning our hearts and our minds towards Jesus.

"The Bible the word "darkness" refers to both evil and ignorance. It means first that the world is filled with evil and untold suffering. Look at what was happening at the time of the birth of Jesus—violence, injustice, abuse of power, homelessness, refugees fleeing oppression, families ripped apart, and bottomless grief. Sounds exactly like today.

The other way our world is "in the dark" is that no one knows enough to cure the evil and suffering in it. Isaiah 9:2, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light," is a famous Christmas text, enshrined in Handel's *Messiah* as one of the prophecies of the birth of Jesus. It is the end of Isaiah 8, however, that explains why we need the light from God. In verses 19–20 we see people consulting mediums and magicians instead of God. Then the chapter ends: "Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land.... They will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom" (verses 21–22). What is going on here? They are "looking toward the earth" and to human resources to fix the world.¹ And, I think that these truths are embedded in the words of Scripture.

¹ Timothy Keller, [*Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth behind the Birth of Christ*](#) (New York: Viking; Redeemer, 2016), 6–7.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in your offenses and sins, 2 in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all previously lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the rest.

Colossians 1:21 And although you were previously alienated and hostile in attitude, *engaged* in evil deeds,

Placide Cappeau, the author of the French lyrics, was a wine merchant and poet. Although he was never particularly religious, Cappeau was asked in 1843 to write a Christmas poem to celebrate the recent renovation of the church organ in his home town. And, to do so- Placide studied the book of Luke and references that he made. In his brief study, I want you to pay attention to how he describes these truths.

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,

In these lines, he perfectly describes the condition of the human heart and condition that's evident in Ephesians 2 and Colossians 1.

APART FROM GOD, THIS WORLD AND OUR HEARTS ARE INTRINSICALLY DARK AND BROKEN

And honestly, I doubt it took too much theology to write this last line- "Long lay the world in sin and error pining." It's all around us. The darkness is too present for us to miss in the world and in ourselves. I think some may argue of course. We may point to our driving record, or volunteer efforts. Typically, we try to compare ourselves to the vilest criminals we see on the news. But I think we're all aware that our hearts and minds aren't that great either. And, I think most of us would probably agree that it would be very difficult to prove how great of a person we are if our own thoughts and desires apart from Christ from the last couple of weeks were broadcast on a livestream... No one likes that idea. We might agree to it moving forward for a limited amount of time so we could control what was shown... but the idea of showing what's really in there, deep inside, scares us. You know why? Because apart from God, this world and our hearts are intrinsically dark and broken.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell, doesn't believe there is any God or supernatural, transcendent dimension to reality at all. He instead chooses to turn to science for illumination. But, if you read some of his thoughts, I believe that things end up looking even darker:

Such, in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief.... That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and

that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins ... Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.³² Essentially, we have to embrace the darkness and march squarely into it- because that's all that there is and all that there ever will be...

So, we feel the brokenness. We feel the darkness. I think we feel the dissatisfaction in this world. But, if you feel a dissatisfaction in this world, you're suppose to. It's like going into a dark room and reaching for the light. We reach for sin and find errors. The writer says- in sin and error pining. It's like going into a dark room, wanting to see more- so you reach and only find spiders, or snakes, or clowns. Every time you reach, you find yourself in a worse position, even darker.

And, I think because of that, God scares us. If we know we're broken, and we know that it's not just the world that's dark, but so are our hearts- then he does too. And, what happens when the lights come on? To what extent about us and our hearts are exposed?

But, there's good news. See, the message and story of Christmas is that

CHRIST CAME TO SHED LIGHT IN OUR DARKNESS, NOT ON OUR DARKNESS.

If the opposite of this were true, he wouldn't have come in the form of a baby, born of a virgin, and at his most glorious entry, riding a donkey. No. If Christ came to shed light on our darkness it would have been only in wrath, and only in judgement. He would have come on chariots of fire, burning with fury for our disobedience and completely frustrated and discussed for our ability to distort his creation. And, if this were the case, we could agree that it was deserved. When a Holy God creates us and gives us everything we need to have a relationship with him, and instead we choose ourselves. We can understand why his judgement and punishment in anyway would be justified. But in every way, Scripture paints a different picture of Christ and how and why he came.

Titus 3:4-7 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us,

He appeared for our saving. And it's because of his goodness and love towards us.

not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

John 12:47 If anyone hears My teachings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

John 1:9-14 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own

³ From Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Mysticism and Logic: And Other Essays* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1919), pp. 47–48. The full essay is also available at many places on the Internet.

² Timothy Keller, [*Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth behind the Birth of Christ*](#) (New York: Viking; Redeemer, 2016), 8–9.

people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The lyricist of O Holy night wrote it like this:

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

It wasn't that the soul felt his furry. It wasn't that in his coming our souls feel his wrath. In his coming, I believe this is true- our souls feel their worth. See, we were created in the image of God, in and for relationship with God, to enjoy him and worship him forever. And, even when humanity looked in the mirror and saw him and shattered it to see ourselves, he answered Adam and Eve's distance with his presence. In their hiding, he comes to the garden, fully aware of what they had done, and asks: "Where are you?". Even from the very beginning God comes towards us. He could have left them to their own decisions. He could have allowed them to experience the expanse of his absence. They had no way to go to Him. So come comes to us. And, that's the story of Scripture. That's the story of Christmas. We're reminded once again that God has chosen to come to us.

It's not because of anything that we've done that our souls have worth. It's only because of the image of which we've been created by do we have worth. It's only because he declares worth on us that we have worth. And, we are able to FEEL that worth because of his choice, not obligation, to come to us.

WHEN WE EMBRACE THE IDENTITY AND PURPOSE WE WERE CREATED WITH, THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR SOUL FEEL IT'S WORTH

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;

We can cease trying to find our worth. We can stop trying to make ourselves worth anything by what we accomplish and what we do. Rather, we accept our worth that He gives us through is life and death. And, I think when we do this- no truer words have been written "the thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices".

This summer, we read the tragic news of John Gerrish, Ellen Chung, their 1-year-old daughter, Miju, and their dog who were all found dead Aug. 17 more than a mile from their car off Savage Lundy Trail with "no apparent causes of death," Briese said. Investigators combed the area, searched abandoned mines for signs of entrance by the family and investigated possible exposure to toxic gases but found none.

Investigators did not determine the dog's cause of death.

"Heat-related deaths are extremely difficult to investigate," Briese said, adding that investigators spent time combing the rugged mountainside terrain and determined the family of three and their dog climbed in midday triple-digit heat.

"There was one 85-ounce water bladder backpack located with the family. This water bladder was empty, and no other water containers, no other water filtration systems, were located amongst the family," Briese said.

When I read that story, I was reminded of a similar story that me and our boys found ourselves on our first hiking trip. Although, I don't believe that we were in any immediate danger and I'm not comparing ourselves to that story... I remember what it was like to be thirsty with no water in sight. I miscalculated our mileage and distance between water systems that we could fill up with. One spring that was suppose to be a source was dried up and we were struggling. I figured that we had a couple of miles to go until we hit water- and we call kind of hit a wall. There was an offshoot of another trail that promised water 1 mile, but then we would have to double back. No situation looked good, until a stranger walked up. I'll never forget it. He saw we were in trouble and poured his water into our containers. He brought water to us.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light."

"To accept the true Christmas gift, you have to admit you're a sinner. You need to be saved by grace. You need to give up control of your life. That is descending lower than any of us really wants to go. Yet Jesus Christ's greatness is seen in how far down he came to love us. Your spiritual regeneration and eventual greatness will be achieved by going down the same path. He descended into greatness, and the Bible says it's only through repentance that you come into his light. C. S. Lewis puts it perfectly. In the incarnation, he says,

we catch sight of a new key principle—the power of the Higher, just in so far as it is truly Higher, to come down, the power of the greater to include the less.... Everywhere the great enters the little—its power to do so is almost the test of its greatness. In the Christian story God ... comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life ... down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him.... [O]ne may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to color and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover.⁶

When Jesus died on the cross, darkness fell over the land (Matthew 27:45). The Light of the world descended into darkness in order to bring us into God's beautiful light (1 Peter 2:9). The promises of Christmas cannot be discerned unless you first admit you can't save yourself or even know yourself without the light of his unmerited grace in your life. This is the foundational truth from which we can proceed to learn the hidden meanings of Christmas."³

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 115–16.

³ Timothy Keller, [*Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth behind the Birth of Christ*](#) (New York: Viking; Redeemer, 2016), 17–19.