

“Blown Fuse and Christmas Blues”

Isaiah 9:1-7

Series: The Big Reveal Week 4. The Light in the Darkness

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

Woodside Church

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Every year Clark Griswold tries so hard to create the perfect Christmas. He wants to find the perfect Griswold Christmas tree. He invites all the annoying in-laws over. And he staples 25,000 Italian twinkling lights to his house. Try as he might, though, he cannot get them to turn on. Despite checking every bulb and extension cord he cannot figure out why they won't light up. Then his wife discovers the solution: a switch in the garage. Suddenly all 250 strands burst into light. The glorious display blinds the neighbors, throws the whole town into a blackout and forces the power company to turn on the backup nuclear generator. Despite this triumph Christmas vacation keeps going downhill Clark eventually blows a fuse and his perfect Hap-Hap-Happy Christmas is anything but.

All of us have a dark day now and then. Someone put together this list of warnings which tell you today's going to be rotten:

- You see a “60 Minutes” news team waiting in your office.
- Your twin sister forgot your birthday.
- Your car horn goes off accidentally and remains stuck as you follow a group of Hell's Angels.
- The bird singing outside your window is a buzzard.
- You wake up and your braces are locked together.
- Your wife says, “Good morning, Bill,” and your name is George.

Nobody is immune. A young lawyer suffered from such deep depression his friends thought it best to keep all knives and razors out of his reach.

I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better.¹

So wrote Abraham Lincoln who suffered frequent bouts of depression.

While the Blues can hit any time of year, they are especially common after Christmas. The build-up to the big day is often followed by a letdown. The Mayo Clinic website says,

The holiday season, often brings unwelcome guests — stress and depression. And it's no wonder. In an effort to pull off a perfect holiday, you might find yourself facing a dizzying array of demands — parties, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name a few. So much for peace and joy.²

The Mayo Clinic doctors mention three common causes which trip your fuse.

¹ Roy P. Basler, The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, quoted in Chuck Swindoll, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, Word Publishers, Waco, TX, p. 160.

² <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030>

- **Relationships** - Relationships can cause turmoil, conflict or stress at any time, but tensions are often heightened during the holidays — especially if you're thrust together for several days. On the other hand, facing the holidays without a loved one can be tough and leave you feeling lonely and sad.
- **Finances** - With the added expenses of gifts, travel, food and entertainment, the holidays can put a strain on your budget — and your peace of mind. Not to mention that overspending now can mean financial worries for months to come.
- **Physical Demands** - Extra shopping and socializing can leave you wiped out. Exercise and sleep — good antidotes for stress and fatigue — may take a back seat to chores and errands. To top it off, burning the wick at both ends makes you more susceptible to colds.³

It's easy to see why so many blow a fuse.

What is a fuse? It's a thin piece of metal which breaks or "blows" to prevent a circuit overload. It's the weakest link in the chain. When we blow a fuse it usually appears in our weak spot. Often one of two things happens next. Either we explode in anger or implode in depression. There are, of course, many causes of depression. One common symptom is feeling no one loves us. You've probably heard of children in understaffed orphanages who fail to thrive not because of diet or disease but simply for lack of being touched and held. When you feel unloved, cut off from kindness and care, it's like walking in darkness.

The same is true in Isaiah's time. During our Big Reveal series we traveled back seven centuries before Jesus to Isaiah's dark days. God's people tremble at ominous clouds from the east. The vast warriors of Assyria threaten to sweep down and consume them. Fear seizes every heart. People search for some light in the darkness. They want answers. So they consult wizards, magicians, mediums and false prophets just as some today consult market analysts, politicians, talk show hosts, and new age gurus. They pray to their dead ancestors and worship foreign gods. Yet no one consults the Lord.

Nerveless the Lord stands by them. At the last minute, Judah and Jerusalem are saved. Assyria, however overruns the ten tribes of Israel in the north. Cities are burned, land is devastated, people are deported. These are the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, the people of Galilee, the people who walk in darkness. Isaiah paints a horrid picture of their lives:

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. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness. (Isaiah 8:21-22).

Yet into that darkness, the Lord God promises to shine a spotlight.

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan— The

³ <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030>

people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. (Isaiah 9:1-2).

The Lord will shine a beacon into the deep darkness. It will be a sign to the hungry, the defeated and the depressed, a light which brings joy to their anguished hearts, a light which relieves oppression and wipes away the stains of blood from their war-torn lives. This great light, this heavenly sign, will be a very special child born to reign as God's anointed King. He will even outshine his ancestor king David. This King will establish His kingdom and uphold it with justice and righteousness for evermore.

What's the name of this King? He is so great He will have four names: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. What do they mean?

- **Wonderful Counselor** – He will be a human King who governs His people with the wisdom and understanding of God.
- **Mighty God** – This King will be a warrior Hero who defeats the enemies of His people with the power of God.
- **Everlasting Father** – This King will care for His people with the love of God.
- **Prince of Peace** – This King will put an end to war and give His people a rich, wholesome and harmonious life with the peace of God.

We need God to shine this spotlight into our dark world. Wouldn't it be great for God to send this sign to us, for God to give us this child-King? Hey God, we need a Wonderful Counselor – someone wise enough to straighten out our fragile financial and political messes. We need a Mighty God – a hero who will forever clear away all our enemies. We need an Everlasting Father who will wipe out hunger and poverty forever. We need a Prince of Peace who will give us health, and prosperity. When are you going to shine that spotlight on us God? We're ready anytime You are. In fact, could you hurry it up and send that King? We could have used that Messiah guy years ago.

Two thousand years ago a Child was born to a very common family. He never had any formal education. He never wrote a book. He never earned a diploma. He worked with His hands. Yet there was a wonderful wisdom in this man – a wisdom which continues to change and guide the lives of people in every age, a wisdom which seems to come from above. He is the Wonderful Counselor.

This man never was a soldier, he never commanded an army, never killed anyone. Yet He was a conquering hero and a victor over His enemies. He won the war, not by killing others, but by sacrificing His life. For by His death the power of God conquered the greatest, toughest enemies of all: sin, death and the devil. He is the Mighty God.

This man never was a father, He never had any children. Yet through His care for the hungry and hurting, the lost and lonely, the sick and sinful, the outcast and oppressed the love of God the Father showered upon His children. He is the Everlasting Father.

This man was never rich. He was born among the homeless in a cold barn, died a condemned prisoner without a shirt on His back, and was buried in a borrowed grave. He did not look like a prince nor was there much peace in His life. Yet He said the only reason He came to earth was so we might have abundant life. He came so that, in our darkness, we might find joy, peace and abundant life. His throne is not in a palace. He

reigns in the hearts of all who welcome Him and call Him King. For truly He is the Prince of Peace. He is the great Light that shines in our darkness. His name is Jesus.

Depression is a closed circuit. We feel isolated, disconnected, alone. Self-pity and hopelessness imprison us. Too often, the cycle feeds on itself and we are drawn ever deeper into the darkness. How can you break free from the Christmas blues in the New Year? We need a God's Light to shine in from outside.

Next week we'll start our new message series: Starting Over based on a book by Dave and Jon Ferguson. It begins with "The Sorry Cycle." We long for something more in life yet we make bad choices which cause us to feel sorry, to be trapped in regret. All of us struggle with regrets. There are three common types:

Regrets of Action. The things which make us say, "I wish I'd never done..."
Lies we've told, Relationships we've torpedoed, Insulting labels we've applied
Dumb choices we've made, Rage we've unleashed, Money we've blown
Addictions we've fed

Regrets of Inaction. Here we find things we've left undone:
Opportunities missed, Time wasted, Risks not taken, Love left unexpressed,
Words not spoken, Gifts not given, Forgiveness withheld

Regrets of Reaction. These are reactions to what's done to us:
Abuse, Neglect, Rejection, Betrayal, Mistreatment, Disability, Accident
Illness, Isolation⁴

If we regret these feelings, why can't we break free? Why do many of our New Year's Resolutions end up in the trash halfway through January? Dave and Jon say,

Regrets of action, inaction, and reaction can all be traced back in one way or another to attempts to satisfy longings outside of God. This is good to know, because if there's a spiritual dynamic underlying all our regrets, then there's also a spiritual solution to our regrets. It's in turning toward God that we have the possibility of starting over.⁵

God is shining a great light into the darkness of your regrets. He wants to help you break free from the Regret and Sorry Cycle in this New Year. And that's not only a blessing for you, it will also be one of the greatest gifts to your family and friends.

Dave Ferguson tells the story of a friend named J. R. Ferralez who was walking in darkness. J.R. sat in the dark on a pier jutting into Lake Michigan along Chicago's Lake Shore Drive. He sat in this same spot many times in the weeks since his seventeen-year-old son, Josh, was killed in an automobile accident. Sometimes he spent the whole night gazing out over the moonlit waves, remembering, thinking, praying. J. R. wrestled with God. Sometimes he shouted toward the water, as if God were across the waves and might shout back. Sometimes J. R. swore at God in his anger. There were many tears. Passersby must have thought he was out of his mind. In a sense, he was. He was working through a massive and painful reaction to something terrible.

⁴ Ferguson, Dave. *Starting Over: Your Life Beyond Regrets*. The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 15.

With Josh gone from this world, J. R. didn't want to stick around any longer either. Finally he challenged God aloud: "If I jump in, are you gonna save me?" He jumped into the cold water and started swimming toward the horizon. When he was two hundred yards from shore, he tried to force himself down into the murky water as far as he could go. Twice he did this. He wanted to stay under and drown. But his body kept bobbing back to the surface and forcing him to gasp for breath as he looked into the dark sky. He tried a third time to force himself below the waves and again bobbed up. This time, though, he wasn't facing the darkness. God turned his face toward the lights of the Chicago skyline. He saw the lights of Soldier Field, where he watched many games with Josh by his side. He noticed Grant Park, where they attended summer festivals together. He began remembering good times he enjoyed with Josh. "For the first time since his death," J. R. said "memories came flooding back that brought joy instead of anger and despair. For the first time since my son's death, I wanted to live. I wanted to be there for my wife, and for my other son who was still living, and for my granddaughter." Fatigued yet hopeful, he began to swim back to the pier and to life. This grieving father had been stuck spinning in the Sorry Cycle, unable to come to terms with his teenage son's death. Yet even in his case, by turning to God, J. R. broke free. Of course he still grieves for Josh, but he is no longer bound by anger or confusion. He has moved on to a life that is filled with rich relationships, and he is sharing his story to encourage countless others. If he can break the Sorry Cycle, anyone can.

Don't blow a fuse in the New Year. Let Jesus come in and turn on the Light.