

It was August 5, 2010. In the San Jose copper and gold mine in northern Chile, a forty-five story tall block of granite broke loose and plunged through the levels of the mine. Portions of the mine's exit ramp collapsed, trapping 33 miners nearly a half-mile deep in the earth.

Hector Tobar, author of "Deep Down Dark," a book about these Chilean miners explained, "It's the darkness that makes it so unbearably terrifying. One miner told me that that's where the madness is...in the dark. It drove him to the brink." Understandably, they were terrified of the crushing, pervasive darkness.

How about you? Are you afraid of the darkness? I'm not asking whether you'd be afraid to be buried deep in the earth, or whether you bury yourself deep under your covers at night. Are you afraid of the darkness... in the world? The darkness in your life?

A quick viewing of the nightly news brings to light problems like domestic violence, sex trafficking, natural disasters, wars, school shootings, and political animosity. A quick reflection on our own lives reveals problems like financial struggles, depression, anxiety, health issues, grief, fear, broken relationships, and guilt. These things make our world, and our lives, pretty dark at times.

Whether you realize it or not, that's a major reason you're here today. When confronted by darkness, our natural reaction is to reach for...the light. Because darkness is cold; lonely; uncertain; scary; disorienting. But light is warm and inviting; light reveals what's really around us. Light drives away fear.

And that's why it's good to be here. Not for well-lit Christmas trees, or copious candlelight. But to celebrate and cling to the only true Light in this dark world.

700 years before Christ's birth, the prophet Isaiah shared a message from God to the people of Judah, who also lived in a very dark world. The brutally violent Assyrians were closing in. Substance abuse and sexual immorality ran rampant. Neighbor fought against neighbor. The poor and needy were common, but the merciful and compassionate weren't. And a growing number of people dumped God for idols.

The more things change, the more they stay the same, right? Isaiah called the people of Judah "***The people walking in darkness***" and "***those living in the land of the shadow of death.***" Fitting titles for us today, too! So, how do we deal with the darkness?

There are three ways people respond to the darkness in this world. First, some people try to ignore it. In their first few days underground, the miners did all they could to maintain a positive attitude of hope. But as 2 weeks in darkness passed, their positivity became despair.

Some people try to maintain a positive attitude about the world too—convincing themselves that people are still naturally good; things will get better; this darkness will disappear someday. But each day, we're reminded how much evil people can produce. Every day war, violence, and animosity remain. Don't get me wrong. Having a positive attitude is good. But positivity can't get rid of darkness.

Second, people work really hard to free the world from darkness. Initially, the miners spent their energy trying to find a way to get out. But eventually they realized, they couldn't free themselves on their own.

Some people work really hard to fix this broken world-- carrying out humanitarian actions; promoting a cause; starting a program; working hard to become a better person and do lots of good things.

Awareness is raised; benefits are held; programs are tried—but 2,700 years after Isaiah recorded the darkness of Judah's day, has the world gotten any brighter? Like a flashlight, our actions can sometimes cut a small beam of light through the darkness. But our actions can never remove the darkness completely.

And here's why. The world and our lives are full of darkness, because people's hearts, including mine and yours, are naturally full of the darkness of sin.

From the very beginning when Adam and Eve desired life apart from God, mankind and all of creation plunged into a world of darkness, sin, and death. There's so much darkness in the world, because we have a sin problem. Every evil action people commit is direct rebellion against God's law. Every natural disaster, health issue, or sadness in our lives results from living in a world corrupted by sin. And our own sinful actions—our hatred, lack of love, selfishness, greed, lust—all reveal the darkness of sin in our own hearts.

That's why positivity or hard work can't get rid of the darkness. Because nothing we think or do can take away our sin problem.

The miners knew they couldn't do anything to save themselves. Their only hope was if someone came to rescue them. And the same can be said of us. We can't escape the darkness of this world, our lives, or our hearts, on our own. We need someone to rescue us.

"The people walking in darkness...have seen a great light." "On those living in the land of the shadow of death...a light has dawned." The Light in the darkness isn't positivity, or a program. The Light is a person! The one who would come to carry out God's perfect rescue plan.

As Isaiah rejoices, ***"To us a child is born, to us a son is given."*** He sends a child? Doesn't seem like much of a rescue mission! The plan to rescue the miners included high-powered drills and an escape capsule. God's rescue plan is a helpless baby?

Yes. But this was no ordinary child. Look at the astounding titles Isaiah gives him. ***"The government will be on his shoulders."*** He would be the Ruler of all nations. He would be called ***"Wonderful Counselor,"*** not a King who needed advice, but one who was his own perfect counselor, who knows all things! ***"Everlasting Father,"*** the author of life, who compassionately cares for and provides for his people, like a father. To a world fractured by war, conflict, and strife, God sends the ***"Prince of Peace,"*** to create perfect harmony, even between a God who hates sin, and sinners like us. As the angels sang to the shepherds, ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men."***

The Light that dawns in this dark world is a child, yes. But although it might not look like it, that babe in the manger is also ***"Mighty God."*** God, taking on human flesh, leaves the perfect light of heaven to enter into our dark world of sin and death. That's the way it had to be. Driving out darkness wasn't about positive thinking, or God would have sent us a psychiatrist. Driving out darkness wasn't about working hard for change, or God would have sent an activist to teach us. God knew we needed someone who could remove the world's sin problem.

So God sent his own Son, born of a woman, to be a true human being. That baby Jesus needed to be born with blood in his veins, so he could one day shed it on a cross as payment for sin. He needed to be born with a beating heart, so it could eventually stop beating as he died the death our sins deserve, and start beating again when he rose from the dead.

But this child also needed to be God, so that his life could count as the perfect substitute for the imperfect lives of the whole world; that his suffering in hell would mean no sinner would ever have to again. The only

way to free the world from darkness would be to drive away sin and death forever. Only Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man could carry out such a rescue mission. And in love for you, he did just that!

The third way people respond to darkness, is to have faith in the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. The true God ***“who lives in unapproachable light”*** draws near to us in our darkness, to be Immanuel—God with Us-- to be our Light; our Savior. By clinging to Christ by faith, the darkness is driven from our hearts, and we are saved. The single greatest Christmas gift ever received!

There are some gifts though that can only be received in humility. If you open up a gym membership tonight, and then look down at the Christmas cookie gut peeking out from beneath your sweater, you can put two and two together. Your loved one is trying to tell you something you need, even if you don't like to admit it.

We receive the gift of the Christ-child with humility too. Even if we don't always like admitting it, we can't do anything to drive the darkness from our world or from our hearts. We need the Light! Thanks be to God, that he sent his only Son, born on this holy night to drive away the darkness, and let us see all things clearly. That Christ will make all things new. That you are God's own child. That heaven is yours in Christ!

It was October 13, 2010. After 69 days trapped underground, all 33 of the Chilean miners emerged from the darkness into the light. All of them had been rescued. And the sunlight never meant more to them than it did that day.

It's December 24th, 2018. Once again, we stand in the Light of the Christ-child, as sinners emerging from the darkness. You have been rescued by the Light! The Light is warm and inviting. The Light drives out fear. The Light means more to us, with every passing day. Silent night. Holy night. All is calm. All is... bright.