

At the Movies: Christmas Edition!

Week 1: When Reality and Expectations Collide

John 1:1-14

Good morning! It's officially the Christmas season and I've been looking forward to this series for a long time. As we get started this morning, I want to do some polls here. So, show of hands, how many of you:

- Have over 50% of your Christmas shopping done already? 100%
- Been to a Christmas party already? (Cooperider Christmas in Jasonville)
- Have been playing Christmas music? (For the last week? For the last month?)
- Watched your favorite Christmas movie?
- Decorated?

We put our tree up last week and decorated a little around the house. I had to laugh when I put up the Santa Mouse ornament that I talked about last year at our Christmas Eve services. If you weren't here, or had finally gotten that image out of your head...or nightmares...here it is again...(show creepy ornament picture)

I love that moment when the tree is decorated and it's time for the big reveal, so you turn it on or plug it in, the lights come on, and you get to enjoy the beauty of it for the first time. Christmas is HERE! We wanted to share that moment with you all this morning. We had a team of people decorating around the church and in the Worship Center last week.

This room is one of my favorite places to be during the Christmas season. It's always so beautiful with the trees lit up, and glow of the lights, so we wanted to do the big reveal with you all in the room. So, on the count of 3, I'm going to plug it in. Ready?! 1...2...3...

That's not what most of us expected, is it? You expected the plugs to connect, the lights to come on, and for it to be bright and cheery and festive in here. That everything would come together the way it's supposed to. But, it didn't. Our expectations and reality didn't align. And, for some of us, that's what happens this time of year. Our expectations collide with our reality and we end up disoriented or disappointed.

Expectations of getting all of our shopping and wrapping done early, and yet we still rush to get it all done on time. We have expectations of happy and peaceful family gatherings, and then we get together and it's anything but that! We have expectations that the entire family will be together in one room again, and then someone says they're going to their in-laws, or they won't be able to make it home this year. We have expectations that our spouse picked up all of the clues we left them for the gift we want, and then I prove that I'm as oblivious as Amber thinks I am.

We can have so many expectations this time of year only to find our reality to be much different.

We're starting a new series this morning called "At the Movies: Christmas Edition!" And over the next 5 weeks, we're going to use some of our favorite Christmas movies to retell the Christmas story. The story of Jesus, coming into this world as a baby. God's gift of love, and hope, and joy, and peace being born for us. (Turn to John 1)

To me, there's no Christmas movie that captures the gap we're talking about today...the gap between expectations and reality that we can experience this time of year...no movie captures that better than Christmas Vacation.

You have Clark Griswold, who is hoping to have the perfect Christmas. He has all of these high expectations, fueled by sentiment and nostalgia, but his reality doesn't quite match his expectations.

- He expects a big Christmas bonus that'll pay for a pool, but instead, he gets a subscription to the Jelly of the Month club.
- He expects a peaceful family gathering at his home, but instead, he gets Cousin Eddie and his RV.
- He expects a perfect Christmas dinner, but instead he gets this...(play Christmas Vacation clip)

Clark had all of these expectations for Christmas, but his reality collided with those expectations and left him disoriented and disappointed. I think this movie has withstood the test of time because, we've all been there, right? We've had expectations come crashing down before us.

But, it's not just at Christmastime that we experience unmet expectations, we experience them in life, too. You expected that "till death do us part" meant a lifetime, but the reality is you're facing a much different Christmas this year than you have before. You expected to be on firmer financial ground this year, but with the cost of groceries and gas, your budget is as tight as ever. You expected your health to be as good as it's always been, but that one appointment changed everything. You took a new job expecting a greater sense of joy and satisfaction, only to find yourself as discontent as you were before.

I'm sure you can fill in your own blank. I don't have to do it for you. You expected one thing, but your reality was much different. And, a question I've been asking myself recently is, "why do I have all of these expectations for the ideal?" Jesus said, "In this world, you will have trouble," and yet I expect ideal relationships, ideal health, ideal experiences. Why is that?

I think there are a lot of factors at play, but it all comes down to what Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He (God) has planted eternity in the human heart" (NLT). God has put something inside all of us that longs for the ideal, perfect world He created us for. And that

eternity in our hearts is meant to draw us closer to Him. Only He can truly satisfy the longings of our heart.

But, in our brokenness, we turn to other functional saviors to rescue us and relieve our pain. We put a burden of expectation on others to give us what only God can provide. To heal our hurts and make us happy. We look to our careers for a sense of purpose and identity. We look to our bank account to provide us a sense of security. Our health to give us strength. But, in reality, we find that people let us down, jobs get downsized, health fails us, husbands and wives walk out, children stray, family and friends pass away far too soon.

Sometimes, it feels like we wander in the darkness of unmet expectations. And that darkness can feel heavy, especially this time of year. And we know that the only thing that can defeat the darkness we feel is light, which is why this is my favorite time of year. **Christmas is a *celebration* that the light has come!**

Jesus is born to us and He is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Jesus, God in flesh, was born for us to be the light that drives out the darkness of unmet expectations. The darkness of our sin and shame. Jesus was born to be our TRUE Savior, and, in him and him alone, hope has come and life can be found.

I think this is the Apostle John's message in the opening words of his Gospel. Look at what he writes...(READ John 1:1-14)

Jesus is the light that drives out the darkness in our lives and in this world. He's the only one who can do it. And, I think it's interesting that, right here in the middle of John's introduction of Jesus, he mentions John the Baptist and had to clarify that John was not the true light. He was only a witness **to the** light. Later on in the chapter, people were even asking John the Baptist if he was the Messiah, and he's like, "NO! I'm not even worth to untie that guy's sandals!"

People were putting the expectations of the Messiah on John the Baptist and they were disappointed that he wasn't Him. And John's like, "Listen, there's only one Messiah, and I'm NOT him. I don't care if you're disappointed, don't put those expectations on me!" Both John the Baptist and John the Apostle point to Jesus and say, "That's who you really want. He is the Light of the World and only Jesus can give you what you truly desire."

And so I wonder, who or what is your John the Baptist? What is that thing or, who is that person, you are looking to for what only Jesus can provide? Maybe it's even a good thing that's meant to point you to the light, but it's not the Light you need.

Growing up, Christmas Eve was THE holiday for my mom's side of the family. We had some traditions that were set in stone, all the way down to the hosting rotation and what we ate. We even had a system for who my Grandma Horton would spend the night with on Christmas Eve. Our traditions were locked in and on point! Which means, expectations were pretty high for that family gathering.

And that's easy when the kids are young and growing up, but then my oldest cousin got married and Amber and I got married, and all of the sudden, expectations and reality were starting to collide as families were being pulled in different directions! Maybe you're going through that for the 1st time, *or 20th time*, this year!

And I remember trying to convince my mom and Grandma Horton that Christmas was not ruined just because we couldn't get together on December 24th! That it's more important to have everyone in the room than to get together on a particular day. And this was like mind-blowing to them! Their expectations for our family gathering on Christmas Eve were so high that our new reality left them disappointed.

In a sense, it was their John the Baptist. There was nothing wrong with our tradition. In fact, some of my favorite childhood memories are from those Christmas Eve gatherings. But they're not the light, they only point to the light. There's nothing wrong with financial health, but it's John the Baptist, not the Messiah. It's not going to save you. Meaningful and fulfilling relationships are beautiful, but they're John the Baptist. Another person cannot fill a void you feel inside.

So, John spends the first 14 verses in his Gospel telling us that Jesus is the life and light we long for. God has placed eternity in our heart and the only One who can fill that void is Jesus. Expecting that from anything or anyone else will only leave us disappointed. It's like trying to drink from a dry well, and then wondering why you're always thirsty. Only Jesus can satisfy that longing you feel.

John says that all who receive Jesus, who receive that light, become children of God. It doesn't matter how much darkness there's been in your life, the light of Jesus can drive it away. His light of love shines into the darkness of our hearts and drives out our sin and shame. His love draws us out of hiding and into the marvelous light of His grace where we find life. Where we find all that we've been longing for and the blessings Jesus came to give. Hope. Joy. Peace. And love.

So, Christmas is a celebration that the light has come. John says that "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (Plug in lights/Hallelujah Chorus)

The light has come, and it can live in you. And then here's the best part...Jesus invites us to share that light with others! To let the light of his hope and joy and peace and love shine through us to a world that is wandering in darkness so they can experience it, too. And so, here's a question I want to leave you with as we wrap up this morning: **How can I help someone experience the light of Jesus the Christmas?**

All month, we will run into people whose expectations of life and the holidays are not their reality, and it's leaving them feel disoriented and disappointed. What they're longing for is Jesus, and they don't even know it. God has set eternity in their hearts, too, and they will never

be satisfied until they find and follow Him. The greatest gift you can give someone this year is to help them experience the light of Jesus in their life.

And an easy step for you to take is to invite them to join you at one of our **Christmas Eve services**. Jim mentioned it earlier, but we'll have four gatherings to choose from this year. 7pm on Thursday, Dec. 21st for those who will be travelling to be with family. Maybe the person you want to invite will be gone on the weekend, so you can come with them to the Thursday night service. And then we'll have three gatherings on Christmas Eve Sunday...9:30 and 11am, and 4pm.

We'll be using my wife's favorite movie, A Christmas Story, to share about the gift of Jesus that God gave to the world. I hope you'll join us. And pick up some invite cards to hand out to people you know who may be longing for a little bit of light in their life this Christmas.

Jesus is the light of the world who shines his light of love into the darkness of our lives. And, even if life has not turned out the way we expected, Jesus has come to bind up our broken hearts and dwell with us.

(Set up invitation/response time)