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O Come, True Light!

Series: O Come!

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I. Introduction

A. I was a Boy Scout

1. Now, Scouting isn't what is used to be
 - a. But when I was involved it was certainly an excellent program through which many boys turned into young men and good citizens
2. I never made it to Eagle Scout
 - a. My brother, three years older than I, did, in fact, achieve that significant milestone
 - b. I never made it; was too involved in other things when I should have been working on all the extra merit badges
3. But I did get far enough in the Scouts to get inducted into a quasi-secret honorary organization
 - a. I say quasi-secret, because, at least when I was involved in it, you were not supposed to let anyone else in the Scouts know what it was about
 - b. They were going to put you through some activities, and you weren't supposed to know what they were until you got there
 - c. Which meant, none of the other Scouts, the "uninitiated", were supposed to know either
 - d. So everyone in our troop knew of the existence of this organization, but nothing about what they did

B. So now, since Scouting has changed so radically, I'm about to reveal some of the secret things we did

1. Now, I'll not name the organization, so that I can always deny that I divulged any classified information
2. First, we went on a camping trip
 - a. Which is no big deal; camping is what the Boy Scouts did, a lot!
3. In this case, the camping trip was in a wooded enclave near the Chesapeake Bay
4. The main idea in this organization was to teach survival skills to the scouts
 - a. Individual survival skills, in that every one of us was off by ourselves in this expansive woods
 - b. No contact with anyone else in the group
 - c. And certainly, no contact with any leader for about a 24 hour period
 - d. We were simply on our own, in unfamiliar territory

5. We were allowed to have a sleeping bag; no tent (you hoped it wouldn't rain)
 - a. And we could have one change of clothes
 - b. No flashlight
 6. After dinner – they did feed us as a group – they filled our canteens with water, and gave us a paper cup, one match, and an egg
 - a. That was for breakfast
 - b. Did you know that you can boil an egg in a paper cup?
 - c. You actually can – as long as you can build a fire and get it going with just one match
 - d. And the paper cup filled with water will not burn at least until it boils long enough to cook an egg
 - e. Now, if you blew the fire, and wasted your match, then you were cooked rather than the egg
 - f. And you went hungry until lunch
 - g. (They weren't completely sadistic; they did eventually feed us lunch)
 7. Well, they led us out to an isolated area as darkness fell
 - a. And plopped us down one by one
 - b. Separated by 50 feet or so from anyone else
 - c. No flashlights allowed
 - d. No conversations with anyone else
 8. And on this particular occasion, there was no super moon like we had last week!
 - a. And even if there was any moonlight, the woods were dense enough to make it really, really dark
 9. So, there I was, in the middle of who-knows-where, by myself
 - a. Completely in the dark
 - b. Laying in a sleeping bag on the hard ground
 - c. No contact with anyone
 - d. Nothing to do but be alone with my thoughts
 10. Nothing to do but wait for the dawn
 - a. And the dawn couldn't come fast enough
 - b. I had to know where I was
 - c. I had to know who was around me
 - d. So it was a disconcerting 8 hours or so
 11. And not everybody in the group made it
 - a. Some couldn't handle it
 - b. They cried out until one of the leaders came and got them out, took them back to the base camp
 - c. And made arrangements to send the home
 12. Oh, how we longed for daylight to break!
- C. I thought of this experience as I began to explore the second verse of the hymn O Come, O Come Emmanuel

1. That's the hymn we are using during the Advent season to capture the essence of what this season is all about
2. Advent – a time of reflection and contemplation in anticipation of the coming of Christ
 - a. Certainly, to reenact, as it were, the first coming of Christ into a dark world
 - b. But also to prepare ourselves, the church, for the second coming of Christ into the darkness of our world
- D. We unpacked the first verse last week and sang the entire hymn
 1. O come, O come Emmanuel
 2. And ransom captive Israel;
 3. That mourns in lonely exile here
 4. Until the Son of God appear
 5. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
 6. Shall come to thee, O Israel
- E. We spoke about the meaning of Emmanuel – God with us
 1. And the importance of the presence of God for His people
 2. And we spoke about the redemption of sinners through the sacrifice of Christ
 3. All in anticipation of the coming of Christ

II. O Come, Thou Dayspring

- A. Today we explore the meaning of the second verse
 1. O Come Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
 2. Our spirits by thine Advent here;
 3. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
 4. And death's dark shadows put to flight.
 5. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
 6. Shall come to thee O Israel.
- B. As we mentioned last week, the hymn writers used four titles for Christ in this hymn
 1. In the first verse he spoke of **Emmanuel** – which has obvious significance for the incarnation of the Son of God
 2. **In this verse the title is Dayspring**
 3. Subsequent verses will speak of **Wisdom** and **Desire of Nations**
- C. Dayspring is a marvelous way of speaking of the breaking of dawn
 1. Of the coming of light after a period of darkness
 2. It is a common theme in the scriptures, both in the OT and the NT
- D. Perhaps the first time we see the scriptures speak of the light of God bursting on the scene of history is the prophecy of that pagan Balaam
 1. Who was, at the time, a spokesman for God, a true prophet – although not a genuine believer in Yahweh
 - a. Balak, the king of Moab, had wanted Balaam to curse his enemy, Israel
 - b. But Balaam could only speak what God told him

- c. And the only thing Balaam could do was to bless Israel
- 2. And in one of Balaam's oracles he said this:
- 3. **Numbers 24:17** (NASB95) —
 - a. 17 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near;
 - b. A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth.
- 4. This, of course, may have been the first prophecy of the star the Magi followed to find the baby Jesus in Bethlehem
 - a. But whatever the significance, God bursts on the scene to vanquish the enemies of the people of God
- E. In Malachi – the last book of the OT – it speaks of the Messiah as the Sun of Righteousness
 - 1. **Malachi 4:2** (NASB95) —
 - a. 2 "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings;
 - b. and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.
- F. In both of these cases in the OT, the light of God emerges from a period of darkness, where the world is captivated by sin
 - 1. And the true people of God are oppressed by the darkness of the world
 - 2. But find hope in the promised coming of the Messiah

III. **Light v. Darkness**

- A. This Dayspring, this coming of the new light, only has meaning when it breaks through the darkness
 - 1. And this theme is expressed wonderfully through the hymn
- B. Now usually, in this time of the year, we love to focus on blessings, on the festivities, on the spectacle of the holiday season
 - 1. When we lived in West Virginia we became acquainted with an extraordinary lighting festival, held every year in Wheeling, WV
 - 2. Years ago, a high school industrial arts department began producing all kinds of displays of lights
 - a. With various aspects of the Christmas themes
 - b. But also with an incredible array of characters – cartoon and otherwise
 - c. Along with displays of sports activities and events
 - 3. Eventually, the whole city got in on the action
 - a. And lights covered the city, from the downtown, to the local state park and golf course, to all the public spaces
 - 4. And literally, streams of cars from all over the region would drive to experience the displays
 - 5. Every year there are new displays, and they begin working on the next year's festival as soon as this Christmas season is over
- C. But all of that misses the point of Advent
 - 1. Where darkness has been endured

- a. Where a longing for light is present
 - b. And where God breaks into the darkness to create light
 - 2. **Isaiah 9:2** (ESV) —
 - a. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
 - b. those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.
- D. O Come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
 - 1. Our spirits by Thine advent here...
 - a. So far, so good
 - b. We're ok to be cheered
 - c. But Advent is more significant than that
 - 2. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
 - a. And death's dark shadows put to flight.
- E. The hymn, you see, is a prayer
 - 1. That the light of Messiah would come and disperse the clouds of night
 - a. Imagine the dawn of a misty morning
 - b. Where first, the darkness is broken
 - c. But where they vestigial remains of the night persist in heavy fog of the morning
 - d. Which can be just as disorienting as the darkness
 - 2. But then the Sun of Righteousness breaks through even the fog, dissipating the mist so that the clarity of morning can be enjoyed in an effulgent display of sunshine
 - 3. And then there's the prayer that death's dark shadows would be put to flight
 - a. So even beyond the normal clouds of darkness, we humans contend with death all the time
 - b. And we pray that the Dayspring will send the darkness of death packing
 - c. Giving us life through to eternity
- F. The message of the gospels is one of light dispersing the darkness
 - 1. **John 1:1–5** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
 - b. 2 He was in the beginning with God.
 - c. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.
 - d. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.
 - e. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
 - 2. **John 3:19** (ESV) —
 - a. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

3. But back to the occasion of the birth of the Savior, and of John the Baptist, the one who would prepare the way
 - a. Zechariah, the Baptist's father uttered one of the great prophecies of the birth narrative
4. **Luke 1:76–79** (ESV) —
 - a. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
 - b. 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,
 - c. 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
 - d. 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
- G. O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
 1. Our spirits by Thine advent here;
 2. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
 3. And death's dark shadow put to flight.

IV. **The True Light Has Come**

- A. So, the gospel message, the good news, is that in Jesus Christ light has been sent into this dark world
 1. And the darkness has been dispelled
- B. John puts it this way:
 1. **John 1:9** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
- C. And yet, the world's darkness resisted the light
 1. **John 1:10–11** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.
 - b. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.
- D. But that resistance did not stop the light from its transforming power
 1. **John 1:12–13** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,
 - b. 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
- E. Jesus, you see, as He Himself said, is the **Light of the World**
 1. **John 8:12** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
- F. In what ways has the light of Christ dispelled the darkness?
 1. First, **it has exposed** the source of the darkness, which is **sin**
 - a. Sin operates in the darkness

- b. We know this intuitively, don't we
 - c. We would much rather walk around in a large American city during the day than we would at night
 - d. Normally, evil operates undercover, in clandestine ways
 - e. We see its effects, even though we aren't always conscious of the sinful acts themselves
 - f. But the light of Jesus exposes sin; shows it for what it is
2. **1 Corinthians 4:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.
 3. Second, **the light of Christ transforms** sinners, giving us the power of holiness of life that we never had before
 4. When the risen Jesus encountered Paul on the road to Damascus, He gave Paul a mission – a transformative mission
 5. **Acts 26:16–18** (ESV) —
 - a. 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,
 - b. 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you
 - c. 18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God,
 - d. that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'
 6. Third, **the light of Christ guides and directs** us
 7. **Luke 11:34–36** (ESV) —
 - a. 34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness.
 - b. 35 Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness.
 - c. 36 If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."
 8. Fourth, **the light of Christ conquers death**
 - a. That's, of course, the answer to the prayer in the hymn
 - b. "And death's dark shadow put to flight"
 9. **Hebrews 2:14–15** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,
 - b. 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.
 10. **1 Corinthians 15:50–56** (ESV) —

- a. 50 I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.
- b. 51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
- c. 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.
- d. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.
- e. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”
- f. 55 “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”
- g. 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
- 11. Remember, as John said, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men”
 - a. The light of the world has the power of life in Himself
 - b. And He Himself dwells in the believer through the Holy Spirit
 - c. So that you have His life dwelling in you!
 - d. And as Paul said, “Christ in you is the hope of glory!”
- 12. The Light of the World has conquered death
- 13. **2 Corinthians 4:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
- G. These, and in many other ways, the light of Christ has come
 - 1. And in this Advent, we remember that He has come
 - a. “To disperse the gloomy clouds of night...”
 - b. “And death’s dark shadows put to flight”
- H. Eric Voegelin: ... the imagery of the Dayspring emphasizes the personal nature of Christ’s illumination. Just as the dawn brings warmth and light to every corner of the earth, Christ’s presence reaches into every aspect of human life, bringing hope, healing, and purpose. His light dispels the fear of the unknown and reveals the path toward a deeper relationship with God. In this sense, the Dayspring is not merely a historical or eschatological figure but an ongoing reality in the lives of believers, who are called to walk in His light and share it with the world.

V. **The True Light Will Come**

- A. But then there is a future dimension of the coming of this light into darkness
 - 1. That’s why we sing:
 - a. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
 - b. Shall come to thee, O Israel.
- B. The True Light has come, but the True Light will come in fullness as we enter the eternal state
 - 1. **Revelation 22:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 And night will be no more.

- b. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.
 - 2. No longer any need to any source of light other than Christ Himself!
 - a. The presence of the full effulgence of His glory is enough to illuminate the whole of heaven
 - b. And will complete dispel darkness and death
 - c. Casting it away the darkness, so that the darkness can no longer infect the humanity that God made in His image
- C. We have a foretaste of His light now
 - 1. In fullness we'll have it in eternity
 - 2. Now we have a glimpse
 - a. There a glory
 - 3. But the light has shone in the darkness and the darkness has not, and will not overcome it
- D. O come Thou Dayspring come and cheer
 - 1. Our spirits by Thine Advent here;
 - 2. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
 - 3. And death's dark shadows put to flight.
- E. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
 - 1. Shall come to thee, O Israel