

CATARACTS ON CHRISTMAS

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Luke 24:16

It's amazing how large small things become when they are in the wrong place. A silver dollar, for instance, isn't very big. About an inch and one-quarter across. And yet, when that silver dollar is held in front of your eye at a certain angle, it actually blots out the sun.

A tack isn't very big either. Maybe 3/8th of an inch long. And yet we all know how large it becomes when it's sticking in the sole of our shoe!

I was talking with Dr. Joe Brandt the other day. He's one of the fine, young physicians in our church. He told me a piece of tissue no larger than your little finger nail can completely cut off all sight if that piece of tissue is a cataract. A growth on the eye.

Indeed, small things loom large when they're in the wrong place! That's true in the realm of the Spirit as well. In the last chapter of the gospel of Luke, there is the story of Jesus meeting two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. It was just after His resurrection and we're told in verse 16:

“Their eyes were holden that they did not know Him.”

Or, as one modern translation puts it:

“Something prevented them from recognizing Him.”

Obviously their problem was not physical. They had perfectly good eyesight. From the purely physical point of view, they probably had 20/20 vision.

They could see the countryside through which they were passing. They could see where they were going.

They knew the man with whom they were talking was a fellow traveler.

Physically they were 100%. Spiritually, they were victims of cataracts.

They were blinded by a film of doubt and despair which had grown over their hearts.

They had thought Jesus was going to set up a political Kingdom and they were going to hold high and influential positions in a new government. His untimely death put an end to all that.

It wasn't until that day, on the road to Emmaus—when they got a fresh understanding of the meaning of His death from the lips of Christ Himself—that the cataracts of disillusionment were removed and, as the scripture puts it,

“Their eyes were opened and they knew Him” (Luke 24:31).

I got to thinking about this business of cataracts the other day when someone, and for the life of me I can't remember who, said they were dreading Christmas this year. As far as they were concerned, they found no excitement in the fact that Christmas was only a few weeks away.

As I recall, I had to agree that, in many senses, Christmas is pretty much of a chore. But as I got to thinking about it later, I began to wonder why that should be. It occurred to me that maybe one reason was that some of us had developed Cataracts On Christmas. That, like the disciples of old, in some strange way we had become blind to the real meaning of what is going on around us.

I guess that's one of the dangers of growing up. It's so easy for us to become blasé. Cynical. Sophisticated in Spirit.

When we were children, Christmas was a time of great anticipation centering in what Santa might bring.

A little later, in our teens, Christmas was a time of many social events and happy parties. But, as we grow older, around 30 or 40 or however many Christmases there have been for you, we become perplexed and begin to wonder what it's all about.

It's so easy for our spiritual eyes to be clouded over by surface things. The mistletoe. The holly. The yule log.

The economic devices used to boost business, which become increasingly apparent each year in our material-minded civilization.

These all have a way of dulling our vision.

Before we know it, Christmas has become a matter of colored lights and tinsel. The task of buying things and getting gadgets, and wrapping packages, and mailing boxes all loom large. So large, in fact, they crowd out the supernatural. A thin mist forms over the eyes of our soul and, for a moment, we become spiritually blind with Cataracts On Christmas.

We lose the wonder of it all.

It becomes a task.

A chore.

A thing to dread.

Rather than an awesome adventure.

I remember reading somewhere the story of a little cabin boy on his first voyage aboard an old-fashioned sailing vessel. He was fascinated with the sea and with more than a bit of salt in his veins was constantly talking about the romantic stories of the sea:

The Flying Dutchman...

Mermaids...

Sea serpents...

Derelict ships slipping like ghosts in the night.

He was only a boy and his constant questions were a source of irritation to the hardened seamen who made up the rest of the crew.

One day an explosion occurred and a fire began in one of the holds. A sailor was trapped in the debris. The little cabin boy was the only one small enough to crawl through a hole in the

bulkhead with a rope which could pull the trapped sailor free.

The boy took the rope and crawled in, but in the process of rescuing the sailor, he was fatally burned.

He became delirious in the last moments of his life. He began to talk about the old stories of the sea and then, as life slowly ebbed away, he turned to the captain who was bending over him and said, Captain, do you see them?" The captain smiled and said, "Yes, Son, I see them all."

The little boy said, "I thought you must have." And closed his eyes. The captain turned to the rest of the crew and said, "I saw them all...on my first voyage...and so did you."

There is a danger in growing up. It's possible for us to take on an air of sophistication. A business-like attitude toward life, so it loses its luster. Even the romance of Christmas becomes a chore. A thing to dread.

Maybe that's why Jesus said,

"Except ye become as little children, ye cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt.18:3).

He was not suggesting we become childish, but child-like. He was urging us to approach life here—and eternity hereafter—with an air of awesome wonder.

We might do well to remember those words this Christmas season

"Except ye become as little children".

We can't turn back the hands of the clock, and we wouldn't if we could. This is an exciting time to be alive. But --

We can ask God to operate on the eyes of our soul.

We can peel off the veneer of cynicism which has robbed us of our spiritual vision.

We can try to remove the Cataracts On Christmas so, once again, we will look at this day which honors the birth of our Lord with a bit of wonder. With a sense of glory in our souls.

Christmas is a day to glory in and we must never lose its meaning. We must never forget its true significance. We must never allow

the gift lists...

the shopping tours...

the package wrapping...

and the many chores to cloud our minds.

Rather, we must dispel all sense of dread by becoming as little children once again.

Yes, we can remove the Cataracts On Christmas this morning...if we wish to! And strangely enough, we won't do it by doing. If it happens at all, it won't happen in a fit of feverish activity. But rather, in the quiet of communion. For as we worship in silence, if we let our mind run back across the centuries, we may hear the angels song again:

“Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth toward men.

For unto you this day a Savior has been born.”

Yes, on this first Sunday of Advent—a day of hope—for this is the *season* of hope...we can remove the Cataracts On Christmas if we wish to. We can learn, once again, to look forward to Christmas. The day which the Lord has made. The day when our Savior was born.