

December 20, 2009 by Steve Brandon



## Jesus Is Better Than Christmas Traditions (part 2)

### Galatians 4:4-5

Traditions come in all shapes and sizes. There are good traditions; there are bad traditions. There are strongly held traditions; there are weakly held traditions. There are traditions that are in the making. There are traditions that nobody understands.

Paul told those in Thessalonica of the good traditions they had received: "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us" (2 Thess. 2:15). In other words, hold fast to the things that have been handed down to you regarding Jesus. In this case, traditions are seen in a good light. On the other hand, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for the way in which they held to their own man-made traditions. The Pharisees held the tradition of washing their hands in a certain way before they would eat bread. Jesus rebuked them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matt. 15:3). In this case, traditions are bad.

There are plenty of traditions that are not even understood. The story is told of the mother who had the tradition of cutting off the back of the ham before cooking it. She did it for years, always cutting off the back of the ham. At one point, her son asked her why she did that before cooking the ham. She said that it's the way you cook a ham, because that's the way that her mother always cooked a ham, cutting off the back of it. Well, one day, the son had an opportunity to talk with his grandmother (his mother's mother). He asked her why it was important to cut off the back of the ham like she always did. Her grandmother told him, "It's because the oven I had back then wasn't big enough to hold the ham. So, I cut off the back end of the ham to be able to place it in the oven to cook." And here, for all these years, his mother continued to cut off the back of the ham, even when her oven was large enough to fit an entire ham. Such are often the ways of traditions. They are carried through with little understanding of their importance.

Another example comes from my undergraduate school, Knox College. While I was there, our school mascot was the Siwash. We were the "Knox College Siwash." A question that I often fielded was this: "What's a Siwash?" The truth of the matter is that none of us really knew for sure I was told that it was an Indian savage, and so, that's what I told others. We had this mascot, a tradition that we didn't even really understand what it meant. Well, a few years after I graduated, someone did some research into the meaning of this word and found out that it was a derogatory term. And so (in the spirit of political correctness) Knox College changed its mascot. We are now the Prairie Fire. It's an example of a tradition that we held to, that we didn't even know its meaning.

I fear with Christmas, there are many traditions to which we might hold that we don't fully embrace their meanings. With Christmas, this happens all the time. There are many who celebrate Christmas, who have no idea of the meaning behind the things that they do.

This morning, we are looking at traditions. Particularly, we are looking at Christmas traditions. The premise of my message today is that we ought to take the traditions that surround us at Christmas and use them to point us and direct us to Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is better than all of them. This is the title of my message: Jesus Is Better Than Christmas Traditions.

Now, before we begin to direct our thoughts on our Christmas traditions, I want to remind you, once again, of what took place on that Christmas morning, 2000 years ago. Without the reality of Christmas firmly in our minds, all tradition will be meaningless. A good place to begin is in Galatians, chapter 4.

As you are turning there, I want to direct my attention to the children. Do you all know what's coming up this week? Christmas is coming. In how many days? Five days! Are you excited? You bet. How many of you have been counting down the days in anticipation for the event? Now, how many of you have troubles sleeping on Christmas Eve? I know that when I was a child, I had a tremendous difficulty in falling asleep, because I knew what was coming the next day: presents! And I knew that some of those presents were for me. And I was very excited about it—so much so that I couldn't sleep.

Christmas is a day that children, especially, look forward to celebrating. There are times when it seems that it will never come, doesn't it? I remember telling my grandmother on a number of occasions, "I can't wait for Christmas to come." To which she always replied, "But, I bet you will." And she was right. I always waited. And Christmas always came. Well, I want for you to know that God waited a long time for Christmas to come as well. Let's read Galatians 4:4-5. These verses give us God's perspective of the coming of Christ.

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Two thousand years ago seems like a long time ago to us. But, it was a long time in the preparing. That first Christmas night was planned by God long before it ever came to pass. The coming of Jesus into the flesh was the culmination of events that God had planned and predestined long before the world ever came to be. See, when God created the world, He knew full well that we would fall into sin and face

His judgment. He knew that we would need a Savior, if we would ever live in communion with Him. It's at that point, that the Father and the Son had a discussion with each other. That Father asked the Son if He was willing to leave the glories of heaven to come to earth to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Jesus knew that He would be despised (Is. 53:3). He knew that He would be rejected (Is. 53:3). He knew that He would be forsaken of men (Is. 53:3). Jesus knew that His life would be filled with sorrows and grief (Is. 53:3). He knew that He would be oppressed (Is. 53:3). He knew that He would be afflicted (Is. 53:3). He knew that He would die a painful and shameful death for the sins of others. But, Jesus also knew the glories that awaited Him on the other side. He would "bring many sons to glory" with Him (Heb. 2:10). His praise would fill eternity (Revelation 5:13). His disciples would see His glory (John 17:24).

And so, Jesus said, "Yes, I'll go." And so, the Father sent Him to earth. But, it wasn't right away. He had to wait for the right time. Jesus had to wait for the "fullness of time" to come (Gal. 4:4). That day wasn't in the days of Adam and Eve. No, Jesus would bring in an entire multitude to worship Him. Nor was it in the days of Noah, though there were multitudes of people on the earth at that time. It wasn't time for His saving acts. It was time for His judgment. Jesus had to wait until God would call a nation for Himself, that He might show forth His lovingkindness to them. It all started with Abraham, 2000 years before Jesus would come. From His seed, God raised up a great and mighty nation.

But, Jesus still had to wait. He had to wait for God to give Israel a law, filled with pictures and illustrations of what the Savior would be like. He would fulfill the law, living as no man ever lived, obeying the law perfectly. He would be a sacrifice, better than any sacrifice ever offered upon the altars in Israel. He would be a priest, better than any priest who ever lived.

But, Jesus still had to wait. He had to wait for Israel to become a kingdom, that they might understand that their Savior was the true King. As good as David was, his reign didn't last forever, nor was David a perfect king. But, Jesus would be that perfect King.

But, Jesus still had to wait. He had to wait until the prophets would declare His coming. Isaiah described their Savior, saying, ...

Isaiah 9:6-7

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;  
And the government will rest on His shoulders;  
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.  
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,  
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness  
From then on and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this

Jesus had to wait until Isaiah could tell the people that the Messiah would come to rule and reign and to be a governor. Jeremiah described how different it would be in those days for Israel. He said, ...

Jeremiah 33:31-34

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The Messiah would bring in a new end. Micah had to tell Israel where their Savior would be born: "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago. From the days of eternity" (Mic. 5:2).

Malachi had to tell Israel that a forerunner was coming. "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold He is coming, says the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:1).

Daniel had to tell Israel when the Savior would be born: "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" (Dan 9:25) In other words, the Messiah would come some 483 years after the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

So, Jesus had to wait until that time to come. Personally, I think that it was a long wait for Him. He waited eagerly for the day, just like children wait for Christmas morning. But, finally, it came. This is the idea of Galatians 4:4, "when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son."

Jesus waited until the time was right. He came in the fullness of time, that Christmas day, two thousand years ago.

This verse tells us when Jesus came: When the time was right. This verse tells us how Jesus came: He came as a son, born of a woman, born under the law. And He didn't come as we might expect Him to come. We would have expected the savior to come with great pomp and circumstance. We would have expected the Messiah to come on the clouds for all the world to see. And there will be a day when Jesus

comes this way.

But His first coming was clouded with obscurity. He was born in a small town, south of Jerusalem, amidst no fanfare. We picture the wise men coming to worship Jesus in the manger. But, they didn't really come until a year or two later. Jesus, the God of the universe, became a helpless baby. He was born of a woman. He had flesh and blood like all of us. He learned to walk. He learned to talk. Jesus looked like any one of us. There was nothing particularly special about His appearance. You wouldn't be able to pick Him out in a crowd. The only reason why the Magi were able to identify Him was because of the star that pointed out where He was.

Now, the wonder of Christmas is this: Jesus was God. The God of the universe came to live in obscurity. How it is that God could become man, I don't know. How the Sovereign God of the universe took on flesh and blood is a mystery to me. I can barely even try to explain it. It's a mystery. All we can do is marvel at it and wonder at it.

Michael Card wrote the lyrics which express it well.

When the Father wanted to show the love He wanted us to know,  
He sent His only Son, and so became a holy embryo.

CHORUS:

Oh, that is the mystery -- more than you can see.  
Give up on your pondering, and fall down on your knees.

As fiction as fantastic and wild -- a mother made by her own child!  
A hope the babe who cried was God incarnate and man deified.

CHORUS:

That is the mystery -- more than you can see.  
Give up on your pondering, and fall down on your knees.

Because the Fall did devastate, the Creator now must re-create.  
And so, to take our sin, was made like us so we could be like Him.

CHORUS:

That is the mystery -- more than you can see.  
Give up on your pondering, and fall down on your knees.<sup>[\[1\]](#)</sup>

This is our call this morning. It's a call to fall down on your knees. God doesn't call us to know all mysteries. God doesn't call us to explain how it all worked out. God doesn't expect us to know the biology and the metaphysics of the incarnation. God merely calls us to come into His presence as a worshiper. He has redeemed us to worship Him.

Verse 5 says that Jesus came "that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal 4:5). God came to purchase us out of our slavery and to bring us into His family. That's what Christmas means. God has become one of us, so that we might become one with Him. He came to wipe away our sins. He came to settle our debts. All so that we might be called "Children of God."

"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God" (1 John 3:1). It was very appropriate for the Men's Quartet to sing, "The Love of God" this Christmas morning. Jesus in the manger is a picture of the love of God. And there is no greater reality in all the universe. This is the thing that ought to thrill our souls. And, all of our Christmas traditions ought to bow their knees to this great reality: through Jesus Christ we are adopted into God's family, with all of the blessings bestowed on us as His children. No Christmas tradition can be better than this!

Let us look together at a hymn in our hymnals. As an example of where our Christmas traditions ought to take us, let's look at the hymn "I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day." The fact is that people miss so much of what is around us; we miss the reality. This hymn was written by Henry Longfellow during the days of the Civil War. He wrote this hymn in the midst of the Civil War, thinking about the bells of Christmas day. We have all of this tradition, and the bells ringing was a tradition of the time. The hymn goes, ...

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old familiar carols play.  
And wild and sweet the words repeat  
Of peace on Earth, good will to men.

I thought how as the day had come  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along the unbroken song  
Of peace on Earth, good will to men.

And in despair, I bowed my head:  
'There is no peace on earth,' I said,  
'For hate is strong and mocks the song,  
Of peace on Earth, good will to men.'

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep;  
'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,  
With peace on Earth, good will to men'.

Till ringing, singing, on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,  
Of peace on Earth, good will to men! [\[2\]](#)

As we read stanza one, think about what is happening. He hears the bells on Christmas, and in the midst of the atrocities that are happening in the war, Longfellow speaks of the sweet words of "peace on earth, good will to men." It continues to speak, in stanza two, of the traditions of bells ringing and tolling their song of peace on earth. But, Longfellow then remembers the reality of what is happening in the world around him. In stanza three, he tells of how he bows his head in despair, because "there is no peace on earth." The realities of the Civil war were difficult. Longfellow takes the tradition and really thinks about what it means; there really is no peace on earth. He notices (with the third stanza) that as people are singing with the bells, they are mocking the song of peace.

In many ways and with many of the Christmas traditions that we have in our culture, secular people are mocking with what they sing. "O Come Let Us Adore Him:" many people are not worshipping or adoring. They sing with their mouths, but not with their hearts. They are mocking. We see Longfellow here wrestling with these Christmas traditions because they are not the reality. He takes stanza four to show the hope that is coming in God's promise: "the wrong shall fail, the right prevail."

Can we take our traditions this Christmas season and direct them towards Christ? Here Longfellow takes the realities of the Civil war and wrestles with them. Can we, too, take the realities of what's really taking place in our world and wrestle with them? Christmas speaks of so much more than just our traditions; it speaks of Jesus.

Jesus is better than ...  
1. Christmas gifts.

Now, gifts aren't bad. They are good. In fact, Jesus, Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Giving gifts is an expression of our care and concern for others. When we think of Christmas, giving gifts often comes into our minds. I can't tell you how many conversations I have had with others down through the years that began like this, "Are you ready for Christmas?" What they mean by that is this: "Have you purchased all of your presents that you are going to give to people?"

Christmas time is a time of giving gifts. This has been so right from the start. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 2. Here we read of the Magi who came "from the east" (Matt. 2:1). They came looking for the Christ, as they had been following His star in the east (Matt. 2:2). They came to worship Jesus (Matt. 2:2). Initially, they arrived in Jerusalem, but were directed to Bethlehem, as that's where the Scriptures foretold that the Messiah would be born. Let's pick up the story in verse 9, ...

Matthew 2:9-12

After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

Mary and Joseph were presented with gifts from these Magi. These gifts were sovereign gifts. All we know about these Magi is that they were noblemen from the east, probably from Persia, perhaps from India. Their journey to Bethlehem probably lasted for months. It came as a great sacrifice to them.

They saw a star in the east (verse 2) and followed it. Now, this was a miraculous star. You normally can't follow a star in the sky, and yet, they had followed this star from the east. Nor can you find a star which can identify a house. Verse 9 says that "the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was." Many believe that this "star" was actually an appearance of the glory of God that led them to Jesus. When they found him, they worshiped him and presented to Jesus "gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (verse 11).

It was probably these gifts that helped Mary and Joseph fund their flight to Egypt (Matt. 2:13ff). Mary and Joseph were poor people, as they only offered turtle doves or pigeons when they presented Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:24). And in some measure, this began the tradition of giving gifts at Christmas time. Or, at least, it made it legitimate.

We have no need to stop the giving of gifts. The Bible speaks much about giving. God's people are to be those who are open-handed with others. We ought to be known for our generosity, because this world is not our home. We don't need to hold tightly to the things here upon earth. Instead, we can give of our resources to others.

But, in your giving, I would have you remember a few things. Don't give what you can't afford. Too many in our country feel the pull to give and so they give beyond their means, falling into debt. That doesn't honor God for being generous, because it's merely your pride that does so. Giving beyond what you can afford is called "voluntary slavery." The Proverbs say it this way, "The borrower becomes the lender's slave" (Prov. 22:17). Now, that's not to say that you should ever reach a point where you say you that you cannot afford to give. Even the poorest in the world can (and ought to) give. But, it means that you should live below your means, that you should be able to give.

But, let's redeem our giving this Christmas season. Let's use our gifts to show our love to one another. Let's use our gifts to direct us to the ultimate gift that God has given. God showed His love to us that He gave to us His only begotten Son (John 3:16). We merely need to believe in Him, and we will receive the greatest gift of all: eternal life. Our faith, as Christians, is bound up in gift giving.

Jesus was a gift. Our salvation is a gift. "By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8-9). "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). At the end of the book of Revelation, we heard the Spirit saying, "come." We hear the bride saying, "come." Come for what? "Take the water of life without cost" (Rev. 22:17). As we give gifts, let us remember the greatest gift, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

We see how Jesus is better than Christmas gifts. Let's turn our attention to another Christmas tradition. Jesus is better than ...

## 2. Christmas Trees

Christmas trees are all over the place. They saturate our culture at Christmas time. You can see them in shopping malls; you can see them in the city squares; you see them in the front of churches. Even the White House has a Christmas tree. In any public place you can imagine, there are Christmas trees. But, they aren't merely public, you can see them in homes. How many of you have Christmas trees in your homes? Not a Christmas has gone by that I can't remember having a Christmas tree in our home. In many ways, the Christmas tree is the symbol of Christmas.

Many have asked the question, "When did the Christmas tree begin to be used?" The best that we can tell is that the practice started in Germany, somewhere near the time of the Reformation. The practice spread throughout all Eastern Europe. By the early 19th century, the Christmas tree was prominent throughout all Europe and Asia. But, it was condemned by the church in America, because of its alleged pagan connotations. It wasn't until the 1850's that they began showing up in Christian churches. That's really only 150 years ago.

If you were from another culture and walked into ours, you could very easily argue that the Christmas Tree is an idol. We take it in from the forests. We cover it with lights and ornaments and garland and tinsel. We place our offerings (which we call presents) underneath it. We sit around it as we open our presents. Some even sing this song, ...

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,  
Your branches green delight us.  
They're green when summer days are bright;—  
They're green when winter snow is white.  
O, Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,  
Your branches green delight us!

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,  
You give us so much pleasure!  
How oft at Christmas tide the sight,  
O green fir tree, gives us delight!  
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,  
You give us so much pleasure! [\[3\]](#)

Please consider the words of Jeremiah. He writes, ...

Jeremiah 10:3-4  
For the customs of the peoples are delusion;  
Because it is wood cut from the forest,  
The work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool.  
They decorate it with silver and with gold;  
They fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter.

It sounds like a Christmas tree, does it not? It's not. Jeremiah was describing the idols of his day. Brought in from the fields and crafted and worshiped. Now, I'm not saying that we ought to abandon our Christmas trees. I'm saying that we ought to redeem them.

A Christmas tree can provide a family with a fun, wholesome and memorable experience. On a December afternoon, a family goes to a tree farm, takes a saw into the forest, sizes up a tree that they want to take home, and makes the kill. They tie it to the top of their car. They bring it home and decorate it together in a festive environment. The cedar smell provides aroma to the house. The ornaments are filled with family memories. There's nothing wrong with those things. It creates a good family memory together.

Furthermore, there are ways to decorate a Christmas tree to bring attention to Jesus. In years past, Yvonne has decorated the tree in such a way as to bring attention to Jesus. I remember that she made some ornaments out of hymns. I remember that she made some ornaments containing the names of Christ. I remember that she had an angel theme one year. "Glory to God in the highest" was able to be read right across the tree.

I read this week of a conversation that Noël Piper had with her daughter.

Talitha: "Mom, I have a tiny disco ball to hang on the Jesus Tree!"  
Noël: "Before you do that, you need to tell me how that disco ball relates to Jesus."  
Talitha: "Mmm...well...Jesus is the light of the world...and he shines all around..."

Noël: "Good. And he's multifaceted, so there's always more to learn about his glories." [\[4\]](#)

This is a way that we can redeem our Christmas trees and Christmas decorations. And should your practice be that you open gifts around your Christmas tree, may I encourage you to use the time to point to Jesus? Perhaps reading the Christmas story beforehand would be a good practice. Perhaps you can use the tree to reflect upon another tree. Turn in your Bibles to Galatians, ...

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."

This is the greatest reality of the Christmas story. There would be a day when this babe - Jesus - would hang on another tree, like a Christmas ornament. But, He didn't hang on the tree merely as an ornament. No, Jesus hung upon that tree as a sacrifice. The Old Covenant had declared a curse upon those who would hang upon a tree. Jesus took that curse upon Himself, that the curse might not come upon us. So, when you look at your Christmas tree this year, think of the Calvary tree upon which the prince of glory died. And so, redeem your Christmas traditions.

Jesus is better than our Christmas gifts and our Christmas trees. He is also better than ...

### 3. Christmas Cards

One of the greatest traditions that we have in our culture is that of sending Christmas cards. Not everyone does this. Many do. It's a great opportunity for the gospel. It's a commonly accepted practice for people to receive a piece of correspondence from you each year at Christmas time. I know that we get a bunch of letters updating us on the happenings of other people. Many of our non Christian friends send us a letter only once a year - at Christmas time. They tell us what's most important to them. Usually, it's the kids and their activities.

May I encourage you to use any Christmas cards that you send out to tell your friends of what's most important to you? Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:16). So, let your light shine!

I want for you to think about the list of people that you send cards to. Our list is filled with family and friends. I'm guessing that a third of our list is family, many of whom are not saved. A third of our list is friends, most of who are believers (though there are some that are not). A third of them are here at Rock Valley Bible Church. We consider it a great opportunity with the gospel.

Paul wrote to those in Rome, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to those who believe" (Rom. 1:16). So, don't be ashamed of the gospel. Direct people to Jesus with your cards and with any letter that you might send out. It's the best greeting that you can give people: the message of Christ coming into the world.

I know that there are many cards that boast of their kids and all of the ways in which they are growing up and more involved in various activities. So, take the opportunity and boast about Jesus. Perhaps you can include a tract in your Christmas cards.

Jesus is better than ...

### 4. Family Gatherings

One of the great things about Christmas is that it's a time for family. Schools are off during the Christmas season. Many businesses provide several holidays during the Christmas season. Wal-Mart shuts down on Christmas day. This provides many people the opportunity to travel and gather together for family gatherings. There are times when people have many different family gatherings for the Christmas season.

To all of this, I say, "Wonderful! Family is good." It is healthy for you. It is healthy for our nation to have strong family ties. But, Jesus is better than family gatherings. Turn in your Bibles to Mark, chapter 3. In this chapter, Jesus gives us a perspective of family that ought to be a guide for us this Christmas season. We read that ...

Mark 3:20-21

And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."

Here is Jesus, in His hometown. And those who know Him best think that he has gone crazy. The scribes start into the mix as well, saying (in verse 22), "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." From the best we can tell, even the family of Jesus got into it as well. Look down at verse 31, ...

Mark 3:31-32

Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You."

Now, you have to catch what's going on. Jesus is in the midst of preaching and teaching to many people. In fact, there were so many people that His family couldn't even get into see Him. So, they sent a message to Him, through the ranks of the crowds. "Behold, your family is looking for you." And then, Jesus put family in perspective, ...

Mark 3:33-35

Answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

Without doubt, family is important. But, here Jesus puts the believing community as higher than family. Later in His ministry, Jesus would put Himself as higher than family. When "the large crowds were going along with Him," He said, "If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Hear those words regarding those family gatherings that you cherish so much. They are good and they are healthy and they are profitable, but there's something better: Jesus. Jesus is better than family gatherings. [\[6\]](#)

Finally, this morning, Jesus is better than ...  
5. Santa Claus

You parents need to decide what's best to do regarding Santa Claus in your homes. I read this week of an event that took place with John Piper and his young son, Karsten. They were walking down the hallways of a church at Christmas, and one of the older ladies leaned down to squeeze Karsten's pink, round cheek. She asked, "What did Santa bring you?" Karsten's head jerked quickly up to his dad, and he whispered loudly, "Doesn't she know?"

Kids, here you need to know that Jesus is better than Santa Claus. At this point, I can do no better than read to you a little piece I read.

Santa lives at the North Pole ...  
JESUS is everywhere.

Santa rides in a sleigh ...  
JESUS rides on the wind and walks on the water.

Santa comes but once a year ...  
JESUS is an ever present help.

Santa fills your stockings with goodies ...  
JESUS supplies all your needs.

Santa comes down your chimney uninvited ...  
JESUS stands at your door and knocks,  
and then enters your heart when invited.

You have to wait in line to see Santa ...  
JESUS is as close as the mention of His name.

Santa lets you sit on his lap ...  
JESUS lets you rest in His arms.

Santa doesn't know your name, all he can say is  
"Hi little boy or girl, what's your name?" ...  
JESUS knew our name before we were born...  
Not only does He know our name,  
He knows our address too.  
He knows our history and future and  
He even knows how many hairs are on our heads.

Santa has a belly like a bowl full of jelly ...  
JESUS has a heart full of love

All Santa can offer is HO HO HO ...  
JESUS offers health, help and hope.

Santa says "You better not cry" ...  
JESUS says "Cast all your cares on me for I care for you."

Santa's little helpers make toys ...  
JESUS makes new life, mends wounded hearts,  
repairs broken homes and builds mansions.

Santa may make you chuckle but ...  
JESUS gives you joy that is your strength.

While Santa puts gifts under your tree ...  
JESUS became our gift and died on a tree. [\[7\]](#)

The premise of Jesus is better than the premise of Santa Claus! Santa rewards according to works; if you are good or bad, he rewards that way. Of course, "everybody's good." In reality, if Jesus rewarded by works, we'd be sunk. But Jesus gives us salvation by grace. He works salvation in us and we are judged according to the works that God has done in us! This reality is much better than the tradition of Santa Claus or any of the other traditions we have at Christmas. Jesus is better than our Christmas traditions!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 20, 2009 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] Michael Card, *To the Mystery*.

[2] Henry Longfellow, *I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day*.

[3] O Christmas Tree

[4] Noël Piper, "Jesus Tree" found at <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog> entry from December 13, 2009.

[5] Noël Piper, *Treasuring God in our Traditions*, p. 81.

[6] If you are from a Christian family, I would encourage you to redeem your family gatherings. For instance, my father wrote the following letter to all of my brothers and sisters (and their husbands and wives) before we were to be together for Christmas. Such a letter isn't beyond any of you to write to your family. He wrote, ...

Dear Family,

We are meeting for Christmas on Christmas Eve. Barb has the dinner roles prepared already. We look forward to the evening. ...

This year, I would like to go around the room asking what truth you have learned or blessing you have received from Scripture lately. Just a heads up so you can give it some thought. This is for children and adults. OK to also share prayer requests or concerns. We are so blessed individually and as a family.

Barb and I need nothing but your presence.

Love,

Dad

[7] This little piece is found all over the internet.