



WHY JESUS IS BETTER THAN SANTA CLAUS

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, (12) Teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and piously, in this present world; (13) Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ; (14) Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

WHY JESUS IS BETTER THAN SANTA CLAUS

- 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 did. 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 the tree... JESUS became our gift and died on a tree. It's obvious there is really NO comparison. We need to remember WHO Christmas is all about. We need to put Christ back into CHRISTmas, JESUS is still the reason for the season! Yes, Jesus is better, He is even better than Santa Claus!!
- A little baby was born nearly 2,000 years ago under very unimpressive circumstances. He was born to poor working people living in an oppressed country. He was born while the parents were on a journey that was required by a tyrant, and they had to stay in a stable instead of in a home. Luke 2:11-12 For to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (12) And this shall be a sign to you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger.
- The baby was laid to sleep in a trough from which cattle usually ate. And yet, Christians down through all of those years have believed that there was something very special about that birth. We have believed that, in that event, something from God dropped into our world and the circles of significance of that event spread throughout the world like ripples spread across the surface of a pool when a pebble is dropped into it. Those circles of significance are still spreading today.

Matthew 1:20-23 *But while he thought on these things, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take to thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. (21) And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. (22) Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken from the Lord by the prophet, saying, (23) Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

- What is the significance of that birth and of the life that followed from it? What have its results been? And what may they yet be? Our text tells us a lot about the significance of that event. But we will have to work our way through it slowly and analyze it a few words at a time.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, It starts by saying, "Grace has appeared...." Grace is the freely given love of God. That one who has created galaxies beyond our ability to imagine has done something to make God's love known.

- That is really important. It answers that most basic question that every person asks. From the moment we are born, we begin to look out at the world that surrounds us and ask, "What is all of that out there? What is it all about? How does it relate to me? And, how should I relate to it?" The answer we come up with to that basic question will do more than anything else to determine the shape of our lives. And the answer is not always easy to guess. The world around us gives mixed signals. People come up with lots of different answers. As a result, people live lots of different kinds of lives.
- But Christians believe that, in the coming of Jesus, that greater reality which is present in all of the little realities that bump up against us, did something special to make us able to know that God loves us, and that God loves everybody, and that life is a good gift given to us by God. Think about the love of the ones who love you most. Then, think about a love even bigger than that coming from the one who gives you life and comes to meet you in every new day of life. That is grace. Learn to believe that and to live as if it is true and that belief will make a big difference in your life.
- That is why the text goes on to say, Titus 2:11 For the grace of God
that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
- "Grace has appeared, bringing salvation." Salvation means a lot more than many people think it means. It means more than having your guilt atoned for so that you can go to heaven after you die, wonderful as that is. It also means being set free from the power of fear and greed and hate and indifference and all of the other things that can mess up our lives and generate all of that guilt. It means being liberated for a life of freedom and purpose and love. If you learn to live trusting God's love, God will enable you to live in love. That interaction will become a lifelong process of having your life shaped and fulfilled by God. It is a very complex process because it works itself out differently in the life of every person. But it is also a very simple process because it is always a working out of the impact of God's love on your life.
- Think of a message that brought you the news of a new possibility that changed your life, a college scholarship, a new job, acceptance of a marriage proposal. Then think of another new possibility many times better than any of these. That is salvation.
- God's love works to save in the life of each individual person. But God's love also works to save the whole world and to build a new and better world. It is important for you to know that God loves you, you as an individual person, and that God wants to do a saving work in your life. It is important for you to know that the birth of that little baby, and the life, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus that followed from it, and all of the many, many things that can mean, are for you in the most personal possible way. It is important for you to take that into your life and let it do all of the saving work that it can for you. But it is also important for you to know that it was meant for everyone else in just the same way that it was meant for you.
 - Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
The text goes on, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all." - "For all!" God loves everybody just like God loves you and God wants fullness of life for everybody just as God wants fullness of life for you. As you grow in love and learn to love as God loves, you will learn to love others as you love yourself and to want fullness of life for all others just as you want it for yourself. That love will be a part of what shapes your life. It will generate in you a commitment to justice and well-being for all people and it will also generate in you a compulsion to share with others the good news that is shaping your life, the good news that the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all. Think of the thing that stirs up the greatest commitment within you, love for your country, love for your family, love for life. Christ hopes to stir up in you just that kind of commitment to the salvation of the world.
- That will indeed reshape our lives. "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to

renounce impiety and worldly passions and to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly...." Yes. God works in our lives to make us into the very best people we can be. That is part of the process of the salvation that Jesus came to bring into our lives.

***Titus 2:12** Teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and piously, in this present world;*

- Our culture has taught us to be skeptical of morality. It has taught us to resist being told what to do and to insist on the freedom to do just whatever we choose to do. It has also taught us to use that freedom to indulge ourselves. But our culture has not always produced people who are either very noble or very happy. All of us have working in our lives some of the influences of that culture - all of us. That is part of what we need to be saved from.
- God's love works within us to make us want a better life, to set us free for a better life, and to enable us to live a better life. Yes, the moral teachings about what is right and what is wrong may come from beyond ourselves. But love, working in us, makes us see the reason for them so that we take them into ourselves.
- Instead of being dominated by rules made by others, we are reshaped from the inside out by convictions and commitments that we have made our own. We learn to live better, more truly human, more genuinely happy lives that are really our own. Faith and morality grow together. It is not that we have to be good so that God will love us. It is that, once we have discovered God's love and taken it into ourselves, God's love works within us to make us good. Think of athletes training for the Olympics. They subject themselves to rigorous disciplines and do it gladly because they want to accomplish something that is important to them. Training in righteousness is like that.
- But wait. The last time we repeated our text, we left something out. "The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly ..." - "in the present age." Today is the only day you have to live and today is the day for your salvation and for the living out of life in its fullness. Yes, God acted almost 2,000 years ago to show us God's grace. But, the same God who was made known to us then is still God right now. What God did then, God is still doing now. Think about waking up tomorrow morning, before you ever go to the breakfast table, or, if that doesn't work for you, think about walking out your door to go to school or to work or wherever you are going tomorrow. Now think of that as the beginning of the day when God wants to do a work of salvation in your life and, through your life, in the world.
- God is still at work in our world and in your life to bring salvation to you and to all. Right now is the time for you to respond to God's saving work so that it can make a difference in your life, and right now is the time for you to commit yourself to God's saving work so that God's saving work can make a difference in the world. It is true that right now may not seem like a good time for salvation. It never does. There are always lots of things in our world and in our culture and in our lives that are working against it. But that will always be true. If you are ever going to live life in its fullness, today is the day to do it. God is working with you to make that a real possibility for you. And there has never been a time when the suffering and the need of God's people all over the world cried out more urgently for the building of a better, more just world. God is at work now as always to accomplish that. And today is the day on which God calls you into participation in that work.
- But today is not the end of the story. "God's grace has appeared bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." Today is the day for salvation but salvation teaches us a hope that keeps us looking forward to something more. Having sampled fullness of life in Christ, we look forward to fulfillment. Having caught a vision of the world as God wants it to be, we look forward to its actually becoming what God is making it. That may mean that we are looking forward to something that will happen beyond our lifetime.
- That gives a new dimension to our lives. When we are investing ourselves in something that reaches beyond our lifetimes, we will find that we are living bigger lives with bigger meanings. And the promise of our faith is that God has something good in store for us beyond this life. Even in the fulfillment of Christmas there is still the expectancy of Advent. Expectancy is a part of our faith. Because we know that the future is in the hands of God, we look forward to it with hope and we commit ourselves to the accomplishment of all that God is working to bring about in our lives and in our world.
- Think of a time when you will know that the end of your life is coming near. Will you be able to believe that the

investments you have made of your life and your love will yet bear dividends for you and for others even beyond the end of this life? Or, will you have to believe that it has all been lost? God wants to bless us with the knowledge that our time is lived out in the context of God's eternity.

- he author adds another sentence which adds a significant dimension for all of us who are called Christians and members of the church. "He [Jesus] it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." God has given us a role to play in the drama of salvation. We are called to be a special people set apart for the service of God. We are to live out an example of the possibility that God has opened to all people. We are to live lives through which others can see the grace of God that has appeared bringing salvation for all. And we are to be zealous of good works so that God can work through us to carry forward the work he began in this world through Christ. Think of a time when you were given responsibility for doing something really important, something you thought was worth whatever it cost to do it, something in which you found great satisfaction. That is what it means to be part of the church. That is another dimension of the adventure in faith into which God has called us.
- Is your brain hurting from overload? The writer of the book of Titus has put a lot of meaning into a few verses. But all of that is part of what follows from the precious simple event that we celebrate on Christmas Day. With shepherds and Wise Men, we gather around the manger and gaze at a newborn baby. And we know that there is something special about this baby and about this birth. In it, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is he who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." The next time you find yourself standing by a manger scene, look at the figure that represents the baby and whisper to yourself, "Grace has appeared."

TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE JESUS CAME

- Twas the night before Jesus came and all through the house, not a creature was praying, not one in the house. Their Bibles were lain on the shelf without care, In hopes that Jesus would not come there. The children were dressing to crawl into bed, Not once ever kneeling or bowing a head. And mom in her rocker with baby on her lap, Was watching the Late Show while I took a nap. When out of the East there arose such a clatter, I sprang to my feet to see what was the matter. Away to the window I flew like a flash, Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash!
- When what to my wondering eyes should appear, But angels proclaiming that Jesus was here. With a light like the sun sending forth a bright ray,
- I knew in a moment this must be THE DAY! The light of His face made me cover my head, It was Jesus returning just like He had said. And though I possessed worldly wisdom and wealth, I cried when I saw Him in spite of myself. In the Book of Life, which was held in His hand, Was written the name of every saved man. He spoke not a word as He searched for my name; When He said, "It's not here", my head hung in shame. The people whose names had been written with love, He gathered to take to His Father above. With those who were ready, He rose without a sound,
- While all the rest were left standing around. I fell to my knees, but it was too late; I had waited too long and thus sealed my fate. I stood and I cried as they rose out of sight; Oh, if only I had been ready tonight. In the words of this poem the meaning is clear; The coming of Jesus is drawing near. There's only one life and when comes the last call, We'll find that the Bible was true after all!