

Christmas 11-12-18b

In commemoration of our Christmas holiday season, I'll give you a few little pithy remarks that have been made about it. Phyllis Diller said Christmas is a time when everybody wants his past forgotten and his present remembered. Of course, she also said what I don't like about office Christmas parties is looking for a job the next day.

Victor Borgia, the pianist who would do a little bit of comedy during his performances in later years, said Santa Claus has the right idea. Visit people only once a year. Shirley Temple said I stopped believing in Santa Claus when my mother took me to see him in a department store and he asked me for my autograph.

Herbert Hoover said a good many things go around in the dark besides Santa Claus. Dick Gregory, the black comedian, said I never believed in Santa Claus because I knew no white dude would come into my neighborhood after dark. Benjamin Franklin said let no pleasure tempt thee, nor no profit allure thee, no persuasion move thee to do anything which thou knowest to be evil.

So shalt thou always live jollity for a good conscience is a continual Christmas. Of course, his Christianity was a bit of a murky sort, but he had the right idea there. Some of your earliest commentators on American Christmas mentioned the fire, the warmth of Christmas.

You have Sir Walter Scott who said heap on the wood, the wind is chill, but let it whistle as it will, we'll keep our Christmas merry still. And similarly, Washington Irving said Christmas is the season for kindling the fire of hospitality in the hall, the genial flame of charity in the heart. And that really sort of introduces our biblical study of the season.

The fire of hospitality in the hall, the genial flame of charity in the heart. While that seems like sort of a truism, we have to ask ourselves what is it that we as believers should think and should do when there is a holiday season upon us that is so largely built out of non-biblical or extra-biblical traditions. Well, as I was thinking about this topic, I thought well, if I was going to find a passage in scripture that said what sort of commemoration should we make of the Lord Jesus, the scripture that immediately comes to mind is the Lord Jesus saying this do in remembrance of me.

If you're going to remember the Lord Jesus, what should you do? Well, we've got a passage of scripture that says this do in remembrance of me. And so, oddly enough, although it is typically a passage that we look at during the resurrection time of year, the Easter holiday, turn with me to Luke chapter 22. Luke chapter 22.

We're going to take a look at the upper room, the final meal that the Lord celebrated with his disciples. As Luke records it, this begins in chapter 22. It says, now the feast of unleavened bread drew near, which is called Passover.

Notice the feast of unleavened bread which actually begins on the day after Passover, but the whole thing is summarized. It's a common belief that the upper room meal, the last supper, was in fact a Passover meal. We are pretty sure that it was not because the typical Passover traditions were not followed.

One of the most fundamental of which is you dress in your traveling clothes with your staff in your hand and remain indoors all night. We know that when Jesus and the disciples completed this meal and had sung a hymn, they left and they went out to the Mount of Olives. And they were going to sleep in that cave that was used for pressing olives.

And this is where the arrest took place. The appearance of Judas with the soldiers and the representatives of the Jewish hierarchy went not to the upper room. And by the way, how could these Jewish authorities be out and about if they themselves, as heads of household, were supposed to be indoors observing the Passover all night? Why is it that many of them refused to enter the precincts of the Gentile authorities, because they did not want to defile themselves and be disqualified from celebrating the Passover, as John tells us? Jesus makes statements and he says, With great desire, I have desire to eat this Passover with you.

And they say, Well, this Passover, this must be the meal. But he is looking at the entire season. He says, I would love to eat this Passover with you, but he's not going to be able to.

So anyway, the feast drew near. Chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him, for they feared the people. Satan entered Judas Iscariot and so on.

You skip down to verse 8. He sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat. And of course, this is a multi-day preparation, because you've got several Sabbaths involved. You've got the 14th Nisan, the actual Passover.

And you've got the night which follows it. And the next day was a Saturday Sabbath, because that Passover began on Thursday evening and went through Friday, which was followed by Saturday. And so for that particular Passover, a lot of preparation, a lot of laying in of food and planning of meals had to be done ahead of time, because you had two Sabbaths in a row.

You had a High Holy Day Sabbath for Passover, which was Friday, and you had the regular Saturday Sabbath. This, of course, is why Jesus being crucified on Thursday was in the heart of the earth, as he said, three days and three nights. All day Friday, all day Saturday, and the first half, according to the Jewish reckoning, of Sunday.

Sunday began at sundown Saturday night, and Jesus arose from the grave early the next morning. He was in the grave three days and three nights, as he said, the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday night, three nights.

You don't get three nights any other way but a Thursday crucifixion, which dictates two Sabbaths in a row. And people say, well, you know, what's the big deal? Thursday, Friday, you

know, he was crucified. Why do you care? One of the reasons is it helps us understand passages such as this, when Jesus tells Peter and John, go prepare the Passover.

He's talking about the whole feast celebration, the meal beforehand, the meal of, the meal after on Saturday. And Peter and John are not going to cook the food themselves. They're going to recruit some of the ladies who are a part of the disciple band.

They're going to procure supplies. They're going to oversee it. Notice, they oversee it.

The ladies don't take it upon themselves to just go off and do the stuff. Jesus appointed someone to look over it and be accountable and responsible for it. Peter and John are responsible for the entire celebration of Passover and unleavened bread, first fruits, the whole weekend.

So people say, well, the upper room meal was the Passover. No, it wasn't. And if you understand the Thursday crucifixion, this becomes much easier to derive from the passages.

So you have the man with the pitcher of water and you go to the house and all of that. Then you get to verse 14. When the hour had come, he sat down and the 12 apostles with him.

And he said to them, with fervent desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. But he isn't actually going to be able to eat the Passover because he will be suffering and be finished with his suffering by the time the Passover takes place. There are many things that Jesus desired.

He looked over the city just a few days earlier and wept, cried out loud. This is the strong verb, kleio, for weeping. He cried out in weeping over the city, how long, how fervently I have desired to gather you under my wings as a hen gathers her chicks.

But you would have none of me. Jesus had many desires that were not fulfilled. And this is one of them.

And then in verse 16, notice, he says, with great desire, he's basically saying, I would love to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. Because he knows once he suffers and dies, the whole paradigm of his relationship with the disciples is going to change. And he says in verse 16, I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

I would love to eat this Passover with you, but I am not going to be able to eat of this Passover with you again until it comes in the kingdom of God. Until it is fulfilled. Then in verse 17, he took the cup and gave thanks and said, take this cup and divide it among yourselves.

There is perhaps a skin of wine or a jug of wine, which he pours into the cup. He takes the cup, hands it to the nearest disciple and says, take this and divide it among yourselves. Share it between yourselves.

One cup. Everybody drinks from it. For I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until

the kingdom of God comes.

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them. Same thing. He takes the bread, he breaks it after having given thanks and he hands it to them.

Notice Jesus did not drink the wine, didn't drink from the cup. He's got his own cup that he's going to be drinking from very soon. Broke the bread, gave it to them and said, this is my body, which is given for you.

And here's our phrase. Do this in remembrance of me. Now, if you keep your finger here and turn back to Matthew chapter 26, verse 26, where we have Matthew's account of this evening, have a quite different telling of the story in terms of the way the words are recorded.

Jesus says in verse 21, one of you will betray me. They were exceedingly sorrowful. Lord, is it I? He who dipped his hand with me in the dish will betray me.

The son of man indeed goes just as it is written of him. Judas says, Rabbi, is it I? And he said to him, you have said it. And as they were eating, notice Judas is still there.

Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, take, eat. This is my body. Then he took the cup, gave thanks, gave it to them saying, drink from it.

And he said, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until the day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom. Jesus drank wine, real wine before this time.

He stopped drinking wine at this time. He will resume drinking wine in the kingdom. And whatever else you may think about the dangers and problems with alcohol, which are real and which need great caution and great sober-minded thought, you cannot make a case that Jesus was a teetotaler, that what he made at Cana was not wine, that what the disciples and he drank on a regular basis was not wine.

It was. He drank it before this. He stopped drinking it here.

As an exception, he will resume it in the kingdom. Notice, though, what words do we not find in this account? He does not say anywhere in the Matthew account, this do in remembrance of me, does he? There is no upper room meal account in Mark. There is no upper room meal account in John.

We have only Matthew and only Luke in the Gospels, right? Matthew makes no mention of, as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he comes. It's not here. In Luke, what does he say? When he breaks the bread, it doesn't say anything about the cup.

We tend to think, you know, the cup is really the central part of a communion service. But he

breaks the bread. Take this and divide it among yourselves.

He took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, gave it to them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Do what in remembrance of me? What is the antecedent for this? Do this.

In Matthew, it says, Take, eat. This is my body, right? What does it say in Luke? Do this. He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, Do this.

Do what? What are they doing when he hands them the bread? They are eating together. They are sharing a common meal. That's what they're doing.

Do this in remembrance of me. Eat together, partake of the same loaf together, and do this in remembrance of me. The entire history and tradition of communion, the Lord's table, the Lord's supper, crackers and grape juice, all of it down through the centuries, is built on this episode.

What do you see when you look at the episode? Christmas is a time of celebration and remembrance for Christians of the Lord Jesus Christ. How are we supposed to remember the Lord Jesus? When you share a meal together, when you break bread together, when you are all partaking of the same loaf, do it in remembrance of me. And when you look at the food, when you look at the bread, and remember, people didn't just eat bread.

If you could see the table at this meal, there's not one cup and a stack of unleavened bread. Anybody that's ever been to the Middle East, if you've ever eaten a meal in the Middle East, what is the bread? The bread is your fork and your knife and your spoon. The bread is what you grab the food with.

You can't stick your hand into the lamb or the beef or whatever the meat dish is, the hummus or the tabbouleh or whatever other Middle Eastern delicacies and dishes have been prepared. How do you grab it? The bread is the handle. The bread is your silverware.

That's how you eat a meal, is with the bread. When you break bread and give it to people, they're going to take that bread, they're going to make a little gripper out of it, they're going to grab a piece of meat, they're going to grab some salad, they're going to grab some of whatever is on there. And that's why Jesus said, he that dippeth his hand in the dish with me, they weren't dipping their hands, they had bread in their hands.

And they were taking bread and getting some of that sauce or that whatever was in the dish, they were grabbing it with the bread. So the bread symbolizes the eating of a meal. You can't eat the meal without bread.

Bread is fundamental. That's what you set the table with. We set the table with a fork here and a knife and a spoon here and maybe a salad fork here and a napkin underneath and a salad plate and we set all this stuff out.

Well, in the ancient Middle East, they set the table with bread. Bread is how you're going to get the thing done, how you're going to get it down. It's edible silverware.

So Jesus handed them their silverware, if you will, handed them the means of eating the meal and he said, when you get ready to eat together, do it in remembrance of me. This, if you want the most fundamental expression of the upper room commandment from the Lord, it is when we ask the blessing, when we say grace before a meal. Because we stop before we share a meal together and we acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ who made it possible for us to have that fellowship, to enjoy that provision, to spend time in communion with one another.

Every time we eat a meal. When you gather for a meal, remember me, Jesus said. That's the fundamental idea that comes if you just look at the text, ignore tradition, ignore history, ignore the Catholic Church.

Just look at the passage. What did Jesus say? I'm handing you this bread. He didn't even say eating the bread is what you should do in remembrance of me.

And there's great symbolism when you take that body of Christ and you crush it between your teeth. But remember, the body of Christ, the bread, is also the means of so many other things. The means of partaking of the meal.

The means of conducting the meal and finishing the meal. And partaking of every good thing. You get hold of it with that bread.

That's one of the essential, not the only, but one of the essential truths of that upper room meal. Do this in remembrance of me. Now, that exhausts the gospel accounts.

Matthew and Luke. Matthew says nothing about remembrance. Luke says it once when Jesus hands the bread out.

But we have a third account, don't we? Over in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. So turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. This is the Apostle Paul.

And in probably every communion service known to man, you will typically see the pastor go to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and begin at verse 23. I receive from the Lord that which I also deliver to you. That the Lord Jesus, on the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread.

And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, take, eat. This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Now, if you have followed my suggestion and you're operating out of a new King James, do you notice that you have some text notes there? Look down at the bottom of the page. The Nestle-Allen UBS text omits take, eat. And I think they are right to do so.

What it actually says is, when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you. Broken is also not in those most ancient texts. I cannot think of a good theological

reason why someone would consciously remove these things.

Sometimes we side with the Western or the majority text because we can tell that there's a reason why somebody would theologically decide to alter the text. A scribe or a leader of a community would say, I don't want the Bible to say this. It disagrees with my theology.

And they would change the text. They would just try to help it a little bit. They thought they were making it more clear by changing the text itself.

There is no reason whatsoever for anybody to take these words out. If they are not in that more ancient text, it is most likely because it was not there to begin with. You can see why someone would add it.

You cannot explain legitimately why somebody would take it out. And so by our standard principles of hermeneutics, I would line through this. Take, eat is highly doubtful, is how I'll put it.

If you want to believe it's there, God bless you, go ahead. I don't think it is. Look at Luke.

It doesn't say it. And by the way, who is Paul's traveling companion? Matthew or Luke? It's Luke. Dr. Luke is with Paul.

But Paul says he didn't say, I receive from Luke what I pass along to you. He says, I got it from the Lord. This is my body, which is for you.

And this is completely harmonious, completely in line with what we saw in Luke. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same manner, he also took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. Once again, it is a single shared cup. This is additional information that we don't get from Luke.

But it is easy to see that the principle is the same as with the bread. It is a part of the meal. Now, you say, well, it certainly seems as though the Lord wants us to establish a ritual institution, an ordinance, where we get together and make a special point of breaking bread and sharing a cup, by whatever more modern means we want to do it.

You get your little plastic cups, you get your crackers on a plate. But the idea is there of sharing broken bread and drinking a cup at least together, if not literally from the same cup. People recoil a bit at passing a cup through a congregation of 350 people, and you're number 349, and you're thinking, well, how much drool is on the edge of this thing? I mean, it kind of takes away the whole ability to appreciate the significance of that commemoration.

More about the legitimacy of doing that as a special ordinance in a moment. But look at the text. We want to start with our text.

What does the Bible tell us about remembering the Lord Jesus, fundamentally and centrally? And by the way, look at the context. Why does Paul even bring this up? Does Paul say, now, when you come together as a church, I understand that you're not really doing it right. You've got some ordinances you should be observing, and I don't see you consistently observing these ordinances, and you're not doing them in the right way.

What is the context? Go back to the beginning. And by the way, there's an unfortunate break. I love the New King James in a lot of ways, but I think they messed up in this chapter.

You see there's a break between verse 16 and verse 17, and it says, disorders at the Lord's table rebuked. They're trying to help us out here, and I appreciate that. But the break in the text is one verse earlier.

Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man had long hair, it's a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her, for her hair is given to her for a covering. End of paragraph. New paragraph.

New section. If anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. What custom? A custom of being contentious.

Now, he's transitioning. He is referring back to this whole notion of the woman versus the man and the long hair and whatnot. But at least it ought to stand by itself.

It shouldn't just be shoved up there with the hair and forgotten. If anyone seems to be contentious, he doesn't say if anybody seems to be wearing long hair or if any woman seems to be wearing short hair. He says if anybody is contentious in the church, we have no such custom.

No such custom of being contentious. Nor do the churches of God. This is not what is supposed to characterize a church is contention.

Now, in giving these instructions, I do not praise you since you come together not for the better, but for worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are contentions. There are divisions among you.

And in part, I believe it. There must be factions among you so that those who are approved may be recognized. In other words, if there's anybody that's being contentious, that's automatically going to split the group because I know there are those among you who are approved and are not contentious.

So if there is any contention, that automatically splits the group because you've got the non-contentious and the contentious. Those who are approved are not creating stripes and divisions. And so just by the fact that somebody is being contentious, they have created a division.

Now think about that. It seems like a truism. It seems like a self-evident banality.

But think about it. Contention automatically divides. This is what Paul is saying.

You can't contend in unity. As soon as you contend, you divide. Paul says, I believe there are divisions among you because I know there are people there who are approved, and if others are contentious, you've just divided the group.

If you disagree, if you have an idea, if you would like to see things done a different way, there is a way to bring that up. There is a way to introduce it. There is a way to discuss it.

There is a way to decide whether it is, in fact, good for the group without being contentious. And nothing wrong with having an idea. Nothing wrong with thinking there might be a better way.

But however that is introduced, it needs to be without contention or you are going to divide the body. Therefore, when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's meal. Notice, when you come together, there are families that normally eat meals at home, right? But when these people as a congregation come together and eat a meal, it isn't the Lord's meal.

Now, this is a meal. It's not an ordinance. It's not a ceremony.

It's a meal. Do you see it? It's the Lord's meal. Why would it be the Lord's meal? Because the Lord said, anytime you come together to break bread, remember me.

Break your bread in remembrance of me. Come together as a group and share the table in remembrance of me. It's a meal.

Empty bread with nothing in it is not a meal. It's the bread that enables you to eat the meal, and it is the cup with which you wash it down and celebrate it. When you come together in eating, each one takes his own supper.

It doesn't say he takes his own morsel of bread or his own plastic cup of grape juice. It says he takes his own meal. Ahead of others, one is hungry and another is drunk.

Now, you can't get drunk on a tiny cup of, even if it's real wine. There are large quantities of beverage and large quantities of food, and there are people who are elbowing in there and taking advantage of the communal meal, just stuffing their faces. It's a meal that Paul is talking about.

This is the Lord's meal. This is why he says in verse 22, What, do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? This is self-indulgence. It is selfish greediness.

It is going to a dish of food and taking 80% of it on your plate, disregarding the fact that there are poor people behind you that are going to come up short, and you yourself actually have a full larder, but you're unthinking. You're inconsiderate. You just say, Wow, that is my favorite dish, and scoop it out.

It is inconsideration for the church. You despise the church. You shame those who have nothing.

What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise. Then he gives the description, and he says, Therefore, whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. What does he mean? He's still talking about the meal.

If you come together in a communal meal, and you are discourteous, selfish, and disregard others, you're only thinking of yourself and how hungry you are and how good the food looks. You are eating and drinking in an unworthy manner, because the Lord said when you come together for a communal fellowship meal, it should be in remembrance of him. Remember Philippians chapter 2? Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus.

Let each one look out not only for his own interests, but for the interests of others. Let a man examine himself. Then let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Then let him partake of the communal fellowship meal. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. Now, has he defiled the holy transubstantiated elements? Who is the Lord's body? It's those people in line.

You are the body of Christ. These people are body of Christ. And if you are disregarding them, if you're treating them with despotism, if you're causing them to feel ashamed because they come up to the table and there's nothing left, and they're poor, and they couldn't bring something of their own, you have done despot to the spirit of grace.

You have shamed the body of Christ. You have drunk and eaten judgment upon yourself because you have not discerned that these fellow believers are the Lord's. They are the Lord's body.

This is the reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. The judgment of illness and death in a congregation, Paul says, now this is not the only reason for illness and death, but he said, there are some of you who are sick and there are some of you who sleep because of your bad attitude toward your fellow believers. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

Now, ask yourself the question, which do you think God would take more seriously? That you weren't thinking the right thoughts while you ate the cracker and drank the grape juice? Or that you had disregarded and been discourteous and had sinned against your fellow believer? Which thing do you think would be more likely to bring judgment? You didn't do the ritual right or you didn't treat your fellow believer right? Which thing would be more likely to bring judgment? Ask yourself. If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world.

Therefore, my brethren, look at verse 33. You had at the beginning in verse 20 and 21, when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's meal. In eating, each one takes his own meal ahead of others.

One is hungry while another is drunk. After going through this whole description of what took place on the night before the crucifixion, what does Paul say? Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. Look out not only for your own interest, but also for the interest of others.

Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus, who was sacrificial toward himself and beneficial toward everyone else. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home. You know what Paul is saying? He's not saying, you know, if you're going to celebrate the Lord's table, be sure you eat a meal before you come so that you're not tempted to take too many crackers and drink too much juice.

What is he saying? If you cannot come to a fellowship meal and be considerate, don't come. Stay home and eat. That's what he's saying.

If you cannot come into fellowship with other believers, with the Spirit of Christ, don't come. If you cannot share the fellowship meal with a generous and considerate spirit, stay home. That's what Paul is saying.

That's what he's telling these Corinthian believers. If anyone is hungry, if you're coming because you're hungry for something, you're looking for something, and this doesn't have to just be food. Sometimes people are coming because they're hungry for approval, or they're hungry for being noticed, or somebody else is being interested in them.

If you've got a hunger for anything other than the Word of God and for the fellowship of believers of like mind, if you've got some sort of desire of your own that is of a selfish, sinful nature, don't come. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home. Stuff yourself at home.

Satisfy yourself at home. Don't come and make yourself a spot in the love feast. Remember what we've seen in 2 Peter and in Jude? These false teachers who come and they are spots in your love feast.

They are clouds without rain. They are selfish. They lead people astray.

Paul says the same thing Peter says. Same thing Jude says. Don't pollute the fellowship with your selfishness.

Stay home, lest you come together for judgment. So, as we think about the Christmas season, By the way, nothing wrong with celebrating communion in the traditional manner if you understand what it means. Nothing wrong with water baptism as a ceremony if you understand what it means.

Our Christian life is not dictated by symbols. It is not manifested in rituals. We invest things with meaning.

One person might put up a tree and it's a fertility symbol. Somebody might paint an Easter egg and it's a fertility symbol. That's great for them.

We control the symbols. We control the rituals. It is our attitude and it is our heart that determines the meaning of these things.

I've told you before, every time I look at this ring on my finger, this is my Naval Academy ring, and it initially had a little fake \$15 stone in it. I busted that out and I bought this Black Star Sapphire for \$80 in Thailand. The first year I was a lieutenant.

I went to Thailand, saw this stone in the window, and I really liked that stone. I took it to a jeweler and I had him chip out the piece of glass and put in this Black Star Sapphire. Now, anybody can look at that and say, Well, you know, Naval Academy ring's got a blue stone.

It's a blue peridot, you know, blue and gold, navy blue and gold. That's great for them. Navy blue and gold is great.

For me, I look at this stone because in dim light, it's just black. It's just a black stone. But when a bright source of light shines on it, when you take it out into the sun, this beautiful star appears, this glorious six-pointed star appears.

But the star depends on the light. That's symbolic to me. I think of the black stone like my sinful self.

From the moment I saw it in the window and I saw that star in there, it just struck me. I thought, you know, here's a black stone. It would be ugly if it weren't for the light shining on it.

But the light makes a glory that you can't get out of any other kind of stone. These star sapphires are just so gorgeous in the light. And it reminded me of myself.

I'm worthless. I'm black. I'm just ugly unless the light of the Lord Jesus Christ is shining on me and reflecting out of me.

And so every time I look at my ring, I think of that. I have my own little personal investment of meaning. I saw a pair of earrings once that I got for Patty, and it struck me because there was a little gold branch deal, and there was a heart-shaped zirconia.

You know, it looked like a diamond, but I could afford it. And there was a tiny little ruby to the upper left. And as soon as I saw it, I thought, you know, that little heart could be black and it could be dark, but this little drop of blood has touched it, and now it's like a diamond.

It's pure and it's white. And that meant something to me, so I got those for Patty. We invest things with a meaning for us.

So I say, light a fire, make a tree, hang a wreath, do all of the traditional things. But those things do not define us. We define them.

We see Christ in these things. We celebrate the prosperity. We give gifts to others out of a heart of generosity, out of a giving spirit that puts others ahead of ourselves.

It is more blessed to give than to receive. We define these things. Don't let anybody tell you that your symbols define you.

We define the symbols. We decide what they mean, and we do these things. We invest them with meaning out of our hearts and out of our understanding of who the Lord Jesus is and what he has done for us.

So, in conclusion, I say, Merry Christmas. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and the meaning and purpose that he has given to our lives and made possible for us in relationship with you and in eternal life and in the hope of a bright future.

We thank you for his birth. We thank you for his faithful life, his example of obedience, even to the point of death, the death of the cross, on our behalf. We thank you for the example he set for us in that fellowship meal shared with the disciples as a reminder that every time we break bread together, we remember him.

It is a daily reminder. It is a daily definition for our lives, a daily goal to pursue, a daily example to follow. We pray that in every part of our lives, both in this holiday season and all through the year, that the Lord Jesus will be glorified and his character and his integrity and his love for you will be reflected in us, day by day, month by month, until the Lord Jesus returns for us.

We pray these things in his name. Amen.