

Christmas Party
December 6, 2009
Pastor David Brown

With all parties there are invitations so I want to ask you, have you ever been on the outside looking in at a party? Have you ever been in that awkward position looking in and you want to belong to a group that doesn't really invite you in? Have you ever felt disconnected or left out? Has there ever been a time in your life that you wished that someone was your friend or you wished that you were in that popular group and you just felt like you were on the outside looking in? For some people, church is like that. For some people they come in to the church and they feel like there on the outside and they're left out. They feel like they don't measure up and they're looking in at something they'd like to be a part of or a group they'd like to belong to. They just feel uninvited. You know, for me that hadn't happened in a long time. I'm sure back when I was growing up, but I'm at the age now that if you don't invite me...good I can sit on my couch in my underwear and watch TV. I'm alright with that. I remember my kids growing up and maybe some of you are there now and you've watched your children feelings get hurt because they're excluded from something. They're feelings are hurt because they didn't get the invite that they were really hoping for or the boy or girl that they wanted to ask them out. Something like that happens in their life and so they feel like they're on the outside and I want you to know today the invitation that we give to this party, the invitation that God gave two thousand years ago was that there is an abundant life, there's an exciting life, there's a life full of joy. I don't see a lot of people living that. I don't see a lot of Christians living that. In fact, most of the Christians I see kind of live nominally and live mediocre, mundane lives and I have to tell you those have to be the most miserable people in the world because if you're living a religious life without the joy of Christ, that's a horrible way to live. You don't even get to have the fun lost people have. Lost people, at least they have sin and that's great for them because they enjoy that. In fact the Bible says that sin is fun for a season. So you've got the lost people out there partying and having a good time. You've got the people who love Jesus who have him in their life and they are having the abundant life, the joyous life and then you've got a bunch of you religious people who just follow the rules but don't have the relationship and you've got to be the most miserable people in the world. So I see people all the time where God's invitation is listen, I have an abundant life waiting for you. But you seem to be waiting on him. In fact, I've even heard people tell me, I'm waiting on God. Are you kidding me? How arrogant is it to say I'm waiting on God. You're not waiting on God, God is waiting on you. He has done everything to give you this eternal life. He has given everything so you could have this abundant life. He is waiting on you to take that stand to step up and be what God wants you to be. For many of you, you haven't accepted the invitation because you feel like you're not worthy. You haven't accepted the invitation because you look at the party that God wants us to have, you look at the celebration and you say things like that's not for me because if you just knew me, if you knew the things in my life, I'm not good enough. That's why I love this Christmas story. In Luke chapter 2 we see that Jesus is about to come in to the world. The savior of the world, the savior of mankind is about to enter the picture and instead of the angels going to the king, instead of the angels going to the priest, instead of the angels going to

the temple...guess where the angels show up? Look with me in Luke chapter 2 and let's see where the angels show up. ***8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.***" Now for many of us today, we don't understand the shepherd role because we've kind of elevated it. It's pretty cool, David was a shepherd and he was cool. Jesus is called the good shepherd and so we think of shepherd and think that was a pretty cool job. I was a horrible job. In fact, it was the lowest on the scale of jobs. I can't tell you a job that compares to it because you may work at that job and then I've offended you. Whatever you think the worst job in the world is about two steps below that is where you find shepherds. Shepherds are out in the field, they go from field to field. They're always accused of stealing things. If anything's missing or you've misplaced it, I bet one of those shepherds stole it. That's the kind of people they were. In fact, they weren't even allowed to go into the temple. They were seen as unclean. They weren't part of the spiritual life; they couldn't show up to synagogue, they lived out in the field literally with the sheep morning and night. They took care of them all day long. It was an incredibly boring job. They slept in the pen with them at night to keep them from harm and that's who the angels show up to. Man, you need to see how good our God is because showing up to the shepherds, I want the world to know this invitation to join me is open to everyone. No matter where you find yourself. No matter where you are today, no matter what's going on in your life, whether you have disappointment, whether you feel far away from God, whether you're not living the life you thought you would be living at this time. Whether you're defeated, whether you feel like a failure the invitation is open to you and I ask you...are you living the life you thought you would? Five, ten, fifteen years ago, are you where you thought you would be? Because listen, when you have this abundant life you're following a plan and God's plan is perfect for you and he wants to do incredible things and he wants you to be part of the party. But many of you feel like you're on the outside looking in. That's why the angels came to the shepherds. To the lowest of the low, he came and said Glory to God in the highest. Today a savior is born. That's exciting news. He invited them to be the first person to hear the good news that Jesus is here.

I want to ask you some questions today and the first question I want to ask you is where are you? I want you to ask yourself this question, where am I? Am I where I expected to be? Am I where I hoped I would be? Am I living the life that I believe that God has for me? Where am I right now? Where are you in your spiritual life? Are you still a babe? Are you one of those nominal Christians that are stuck not living the fun life of sin and not living the joyous life of Christ, just religious? Where are you?

The second question I want to ask you is what are you passionate about? Are you passionate about something in your life? I'm not talking about hobbies, I'm talking about something that has eternal value, something that is worthwhile and that will change people's lives. What are you passionate about that will make a difference? I asked myself this question several years ago, what would I attempt for God if I knew it wouldn't fail. What would you attempt for God if you knew it wouldn't fail and second, money was no object? What really gets you going and you know you can make a difference and you'd love to make a difference? So long in churches people thought their passion, whatever they thought was important, they'd look around and say boy, we really need to have a _____ ministry. Do you know what that meant? Calling the church office and saying, you guys really need a singles ministry. You guys really need to have a college ministry. You guys really need to help the homeless. I mean

everybody would call the church and that's what you thought was doing what God has called you to do. But listen, we're a different kind of place here. We want you to take what you're passionate about and we want you to attempt great things for God because that's how you live abundantly. That's how you live this exciting life by you stepping out in faith and living. I would rather live with a little fear in my heart than live with regret the rest of my life. I would rather fail than live with regrets. I would rather jump out there and do something. I was at a conference probably about three years ago and God laid this challenging message on my heart and the preacher said most preachers only lead enough to keep their jobs. They don't attempt anything God sized because they are afraid if they fail they lose their job. I looked at that and I thought about that and thought God, there is so much we should do. Help us to step out in faith so I am asking you today, what are you passionate about? What breaks your heart? That's a great indication. Let me tell you one of the things that break my heart, apologizing for the church; apologizing for Christians. Have you ever had to do that? Have you ever seen someone who has just been beat down by church or hurt by a church? Have you ever seen someone who has had problems in their life and they were considered an outcast in the church? I am so tired of apologizing. When I see a person who found their life in sin, a girl fifteen or sixteen years old that finds herself pregnant and then has been kicked out by the church or a divorced person who's been told you can serve anymore, you're disqualified. Man it breaks my heart to have to apologize to people because the grace and mercy of God covers us and we need to understand and I'm passionate about that and that's one of the reasons that our church reaches out to everyone and says you are welcome here. Now, you need to change yes and God loves you too much to leave you the way you are but I want you to know all are welcome in this place because God's mercy is overwhelming. I was just tired of apologizing for the church. We want to be a place where you come in and you find what you're passionate about and you find your gift and you have the faith to step out and attempt great things for God. Listen, everyone in here is gifted. You are gifted at something and God wants to use you in this church to do something incredible. What is it you're passionate about? Let me tell you, I found out this week it takes 64 adults to volunteer every Sunday just to do our preschool ministry. Can you imagine that, 64 adults just to run the preschool ministry week in and week out. Now, I want you to know that those of you who are gifted to work in preschool, man I salute you and I applaud you. That would be a very hard area for me to volunteer in. My grandson has started something new that I'm not real happy about. My oldest grandson comes to me and says, I pooh-poohed. Good, I'm the papa; get your mother or your daddy. No, no papa...I want you to change me. What?! I'm not supposed to do that anymore! I changed my own nasty kids; I'm not supposed to have to do it with grandkids. That's why you have a grandkid so you can play, play, play and say here you go. But he's looking at me saying, no papa, please change me. What do I do? I have to change him. It's disgusting! I love that little baby, I love those kids like you wouldn't believe and then you people that volunteer in the preschool, you're doing that for kids you don't even know! That makes me throw up a little bit in my mouth! That is an unbelievable gift, it really is and we need to celebrate that some of you are gifted enough. You love those kids enough and you realize how important it is for those parents to bring them to church and you want them to have a good experience and you don't want to call their mama out of the worship service where God's taking to her to change poop. That's a gift! In fact, if you worked in the children's or preschool area I want you to stand up

right now because I want to honor you because I'm telling you it is a incredible thing that you do. Stand up wherever you are; let's give them a round of applause. You are doing ministry right there. Now you think, changing a dirty diaper is that really ministry? Yes. I want to tell you something even more amazing that you may not believe. That gift in the eyes of God is equal to anyone you see on this stage. It is equal to the worship people leading; it is equal to your pastor preaching the word and I want you to use your gift whatever you're passionate about. Do not put it aside and think it's not a big deal because it is. I was reminded of another group that is gifted that people often neglect. I went to the cafeteria for my fifth grader and I brought him lunch and I looked around at all those kids and I thought about the teachers. You poor, poor people....you're underpaid, you're under appreciated, they took the paddle out of your hand which I would have loved to have gone to school where they couldn't spank you. I probably wouldn't have made it through the eighth grade. I am telling you are handcuffed and asked to do this unbelievable job and you're never appreciated so this morning if you're a teacher I want you to stand. I want to appreciate you because you definitely have a gift. It is an amazing job you do and you have an opportunity to impact those children's lives with this Christmas story, helping them understand that there is so much more to Christmas than reindeer, Santa Claus and presents. You have an impact to use your influence.

The next question I have for you is what are you called to do? What is keeping you from stepping out and doing it? I have a feeling what's keeping most of you from stepping out is the same thing that keeps me from stepping out...fear. I'm afraid. I want you to know that I'm excited about that new building and we're not going to be in by March by the way. I don't care if Jason and Lee work overtime. They're probably more in the way but we're going to be in there soon. I go by and look at the excitement of that new building but in my heart I know this. If we don't continue to give and sacrifice in this bad economy and if we don't grow, we literally cannot make the payments and that causes fear in my heart. There are a lot of times that I look at that and think what are we doing and Satan wants to use that fear. But then I read this next verse. You think the shepherds were a little scared? Someone would have to change my diaper if angels were to show up because it was a scary thing for these angels to fill up the heavens. **⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."** Do you realize that in Christ we have the power over fear? Fear paralyzes us and fear keeps us from stepping out in our relationships and fear keeps us from stepping out in this economy. Fear keeps us from stepping out in illness and having faith. Fear paralyzes us that's why the Bible tells us over 300 times fear not, fear not, fear not. I don't want you to live with fear. I don't want you to live paralyzed with fear. I want you to let go and let God understand. He says fear not, what I have called you to do, I have equip you to do and this is how I did it. In verse 11, **¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ^[a] the Lord.** Folks, that is good news right there! That's why we can have a party because God knew what we needed and he sent a savior. God knew what we needed and he sent a savior because he knew that we needed to be saved from hell. He knew we needed to be saved from a meaningless, mundane life. He knew what we needed so he sent the savior into our lives and ladies and gentlemen today that invitation is for you to step into that saviors life and then let me tell you it's a celebration. **¹²This will be a**

sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God" I want you to understand something, when you accept this invitation, praise follows. When you accept this invitation for this savior to come into your life, praise comes out of you. We don't have to teach you how to praise. We don't have to force you to praise. This is an exciting thing because holiness understanding God equals an awesome experience in heaven. The problem here on earth is we've taken the holy and we've translated it into boring and that's what earth is like. I mean, how many of you sat and sing incredibly dull songs that had good words, it was fine with a big old organ blasting us then he'd preach the most boring history lesson I'd ever heard in my life and we'd sing 22 verses of Just As I Am and then the preacher would say, Wow, if you don't enjoy this you're not going to enjoy heaven. I'm like this is heaven?! If this is what heaven's like, I'm not so sure God. This is boring. We took the holy and we turned it into boring. We painted this picture of heaven and how about this picture and we're going to sit for eternity on heaven on a cloud in a diaper and play harps? Honestly?! I've got about five minutes of that and I'm looking for something to do. I'm like God; do have some video games or something? I can't play a harp all day long and I hate video games. But we've painted the picture of the holy as something really boring and mundane and who wants it? We've painted the wrong picture because when the invitation is given and we see the holiness of God, it's an awesome experience and praise follows. We should have the most lively, the most exciting time. That's why when we come in here it is a celebration to God, enjoying this invitation. Giving glory to God, it's an amazing thing. We go on with the story and it says, ¹⁴**"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men** it's not just eternity, its right here, that everlasting life. ¹⁵**When the angels had left them and gone into heaven,** listen to what these shepherds did. These shepherds are the lowest casts remember? These shepherds did not have a relationship with the church. These shepherds were shunned by the temple. What did they do? **"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."** Let me tell you something, when God showed up in their lives they walked away from what they were doing and they went and sought the savior and I want you to know today when God steps into your life, you need to change your life. You need to walk away from whatever it is. One of the things that just bothers me the most is watching people come into the presence of God, celebrate the presence of God, listen to the word of God and then walk out like nothing happened. Just go about their way. You've met an eternal God and when you walk out and all you can think about is are we going to beat the Methodist's to the restaurants. There is something wrong with that. When you see the savior like those shepherds, you'll leave everything behind and you'll seek the savior. Because you've been in his presence, your life will change. So I want to ask you today, as those shepherds walked away from their sheep, what is God asking you to walk away from? What is God asking you to walk away from? So here are our questions...

Where are you? Are you living the life you thought you would? What are you passionate about? Do you have a passion? What is God called you to do this morning? What does he ask you to leave to seek him? That's our prayer today. I want you to know, a lot of us are afraid to step out in faith because when God asks us to give something up; we think it's

going to be too hard. It's going to hurt and so many of us today are not willing to face that temporary pain for long term gain and as a pastor I hear stupid stuff like, God wants me to be happy. Really, I've read the Bible through several times, I can't find that verse. He said he wants you to have a joy in your heart. Joy comes by submission and obedience. God wants me to be happy; no, God wants you to be obedient. Today in your life, what do you need to walk away from to see the savior? It's a wonderful invitation. I want to invite you, we're baptizing next week. We've been baptizing tons of people and you've seen it and maybe some of you today said, you know what, I've never accepted that invitation, I'm afraid, what will people think? It's not that important. Once again, baptism is a symbol that you're obedient to God so I invite you, come and let us know you want to be baptized next week in all the services and if you are that one that needs to be baptized you come. For some of you, maybe it's an invitation to seek the savior, not to be religious but to be in relationship. If you're not living that abundant life today, I want to ask you, accept the invitation. Would you stand?