

Christmas Party - Invitation to Listen
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While you turning to Luke chapter 2, I want you to know something. In the next few weeks, people are going to get saved here. We've already had four people accept Christ this morning. There are some of you in here today that are going to accept Christ. When people come to Christmas Eve and think they're coming for a candle light service, they're going to find Jesus as their savior so I'm excited and I hope you're excited about what God wants to do in our midst at this time. Last week, I told you that God was inviting you to join the party. This week I want to invite you to listen to the voice of God because you can't join the party until you listen to the voice of God. You can't get in the game until you listen to the coach call your number and put you in there. I want you to know in church and I'm not talking about churches out there, I'm talking about this church. We have a lot of people who claim Jesus as their savior but they're not in the game. Some of them are on the sidelines and some of them are up in the stands. Let me tell you about people in the stands, people in the stands are always criticizing the players on the field have you ever noticed that? People in the stand are always criticizing the coach; in fact let's do a little experiment. How many of you think you could coach the Dallas Cowboys better than Wade Phillips? All of you...ain't none of you qualified to be an NFL coach but we all think we can do a better job because when we're in the stands, our ability is to look down and criticize. Now some of you guys, you've probably said real stupid things before like when you're watching a play and the offensive line just makes this big old hole and how many of you've said, boy even I could run the ball through that hole! Let me tell you something, no you couldn't. As soon as they would hand you the ball, some monster 300 pound man who is not supposed to be able to run a 4,4,40 would chase you down and dismember you. You don't want to carry the ball in the NFL. The problem is in church a lot of us don't want to carry the ball either. We don't want to carry the ball because when you carry the ball, you're going to get hit and getting hit isn't fun. Back when you played football how many of you really wanted to be on the offense? No, we want to play defense because it's fun to hit somebody and it's great when your friend has them all wrapped up and you get to slam into them and I know you ladies don't understand that but for guys that's the greatest feeling in the world. But how many of you guys want to be the guy that gets hit? Getting hit hurts, that's why running backs have the shortest career in the NFL. In fact there is a magic number. If a running back carries the ball 370 times in the year that the next year they will not be productive because of the wear and tear they have on their bodies and so that's why these great backs don't last very long because they're constantly getting hit. In the Christian life the sad thing for me is a lot of people who are carrying the ball get hit and they get hit by the enemy but they don't only get hit by the enemy, their own team is tackling them and so we've got to get past that and learn if we're going to be fully devoted followers, we've got to get in the game and we've got to carry the ball and we've got to advance the ball down the field. We need to run the race to win it. In 1 Corinthians 9:24 says, ***"You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win."*** If you're going to be the devoted follower that we talk about, you're going to need to listen and learn

how to hear the voice of God. You need to hear the voice of God. There are five things associated with hearing the voice of God. We're going to talk about those today.

The first thing associated to hearing the voice of God is action. When you hear the voice of God speak in your life, it is a call to action for you. It is a call to do whatever he tells you to do. It is a call to be in submission to whatever he says. I find a lot of Christians today don't really want to live in submission to the word of God or to the voice of God, the spirit of God. They want to seek permission from God to live their way. In fact, if we rationalize to the point that we ask God permission to live our lives the way we want to live our lives. Let me give you an example of that. How many of you this week broke the speed limit? Put your hand up. Now all you liars that are going to hell, I want you to raise your hand too because we all break the speed limit. Now I know you think, no I don't really break the speed limit because you rationalize it and I understand. I tore the speed limit up. I broke it horribly and I don't feel bad about it at all. I really don't. I rationalize it. I'm going down the highway and if the speed limit is 70 guess what; I can go 72 to 75. Five mile grace right? We all believe that in here. So if we're driving 75 and cars pass us, then we can drive 80. Some of you are saying with me because you know. And if we can drive 80, we can drive 82 or 83 and the only time we're sorry about driving 82 and 83 miles an hour is when? When you get caught, then you're sorry. I heard of a guy who was going with the flow of traffic defense and the police officer pulled him over and he looked at the officer and he's real indignant and he's like why'd you pull me over, everybody was speeding. The officer calmly looked at him and said, you ever been fishing? Did you catch all of them? There are policemen out there thinking that's a good one, I'm writing that down. I'm going to keep that. Thank you pastor, I'm going to pull you over! Please don't. We rationalize it. We don't feel bad about it of course until we get caught. The problem is there are a lot of people in this church that live that way with the law of God. We live that way with the word of God. We rationalize it and we don't see if we can be submissive to God, we see how far across the line we can go without getting caught. We see how far we can step without getting in trouble. Without God being upset with us, we push God and we ask him for permission instead of asking him to live in submission to his word. I want you to see today the word of God tells us how to live and instead of you feeling sorry for ignoring the voice of God, some of you are only sorry when you get caught. To be a fully devoted follower, we don't ask God for permission to live our lives; we live in submission to his word. Turn with me in Luke, I want to read this chapter to you. Luke 2:21, **²¹On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. ²²When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"^[a]), ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."**^[b]

Now you have Mary and Joseph they have just witnessed something incredible. They've had this child born that they knew was special. This baby born of a virgin, the shepherds came from the field; we talked about them last week. They went to Mary and Joseph and they said, God has told us that his son has been born and we'd find him in a manger wrapped in rags and here

he is and he is the son of God. He is the Christ. Mary and Joseph I'm sure were very confused about what to do, but you see they knew the word of Lord. They knew that the law of the Lord was to take the child on the eighth day, the first male born, to take him to the temple to have him circumcised and to offer an offering. So they were following the word of God and they were going into the temple on the eighth day. Now, something interesting was going on because today I'm going to introduce you to a man named Simeon. As we look at the man name Simeon it says in Luke 2:25, ***25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,*** now I want you to see Mary and Joseph are confused, they have no idea what they're doing. They're following the Law, the Word of God and they're moving this way. Simeon being led by the Spirit of God, the Spirit of God talking to him and if you read there three times, the Holy Spirit was drawing him to the temple on that same day and it drew him to one place where the Word of God and the Spirit of God met. Don't miss this because the spirit of God and the Word of God met. The Spirit of God and the Word of God are always in complete harmony. There are too many people in our church that try to look at the Word of God and try to take it and ask God permission to do things that God does not want them to do and they have audacity to say that God, the Holy Spirit told me it was okay. The Holy Spirit will never tell you to do anything that is contrary to the Word of God. They go hand in hand and that's what that action is about. When you hear the voice of God, it calls you to action. When you see God at work, it calls you to action to be invited to be involved in that work. When you see the Word of God, it is to change anything in your life that's why you cannot come to me and say stupid things like God wants me to get a divorce. No he doesn't. He did not say that because it doesn't go with the Word of God. I have people come to me and say God wants me to be happy and so I'm going to do this. No, the Word of God tells us what to do and the Word of God and the Spirit of God never contradict each other. I've had people tell me, we're going to live together. We're married in the eyes of God. Yeah right, you're also sinning in the eyes of God. You need to read the Word of God and be obedient to the Word of God. You need to stop seeking permission from God to live a disobedient life. You need to seek to live in submission by letting your actions go with the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Today don't miss this. The law and the spirit walk together and they always find themselves in the same place. So today I want to see where you are. I want to see if you're living by permission or living in submission. All I am going to do is read verses. Now, some of you are going to get real mad when I read these verses but I want you to understand something, I'm just going to read them straight out of the Word of God. I'm not going to make commentary so if you get mad today, don't get mad at me. First verse I chose to read to you, *Wives submit to your husband's as to the Lord. Isn't that a great verse? I'm just asking permission or submission? Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for. Children, obey your children and the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead*

bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Here's one for Christmas. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you. Malachi, Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this says the Lord all mighty and see if I will not throw open the flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. 1 Corinthians, flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you whom you receive from God? You are not your own, you were bought with a price therefore honor God with your body.

So the question this morning is, are you living in permission or submission to God because the spirit and the word go hand in hand and it causes action in our life. We must be changed by the word of God. Where are you living? Also when you listen to the voice of God, it leads you to worship. I mean when you listen to the voice of God and you hear the voice of God he calls you to worship. It leads you right to worship. I'm afraid many people today seek God for what's in his hand. We seek God for what he will give us. We seek God because we want him to bless us and so our worship is seeking what is in his hand instead of seeking his face. The bible tells us that when we hear the voice of God it leads us to worship God. It says in that passage in Luke 2, Simeon took him in his arms and when he drew near to Jesus he praised God. It's a natural thing to do when you get excited about who God is, when you draw close to God, worship happens. We bring praise to God, we sing glory to God. Worship is what we must do as we get close to God and it's not a once a week thing. In fact in Romans 12 it says present your bodies as a living sacrifice which is your spiritual act of worship. Worship is a daily thing when you find out who God is you live your life centered on him. You live your life saying he's the most important thing in my life. He is the most important aspect of my entire life. Everything else revolves around him but is that how we live? I want you to know whatever you worship is where you'll give your time and where you'll give your money. Whatever you worship is where you give your time and your money and I want to warn some of you young, young parents in here with kids. Some of you are doing incredible damage to your children. Let me tell you why. I want you to teach your children how to worship. If your time and your money go to directly what you worship and then you organize your entire life around your children's activities, what are you teaching them? There are some of you who give up vacation and follow your kids around watching them play baseball, watching them play soccer. Spring comes and you start missing church because you know, this is important. He's part of a team and you rationalize all of these things for why we do these things and I've watched them over and over and I just look at it and I want to cry out a warning and say what are you doing? You've got a five year old throwing a baseball and you're saying he's the next Nolan Ryan! I'm like no he's not. That was four miles an hour. That barely made it out of his hand. But you spend all of your time and all of your money chasing these kids around the country. Listen, you want to kick a ball, come to my yard, I'll let you kick a ball all day long. What happened to the fun part of it? You're out there justifying, rationalizing saying I don't have to go to church to worship. I can worship God where ever I am. I always pray before our tournaments. I pray that my son hits a home run, that's a prayer. We have a bible study. I want you to understand something, when you say that church is not important to worship you are slapping God in the face. Our God, Jesus did not die for something insignificant. He did not

die for something we really don't need in our Christian life. He said do not forsake the gathering together and sacred assembly. He meant that and some of you are taking your children and you're teaching them that all these other things are more important and we'll go to church when nothing else interferes. Those kids are blazing to their teenage years and they're going to get in their teenage years and they will start making bad choices and they're going to start breaking your heart and you're not going to take them to the ball field or to the gym. You're going to bring them to the church and you're going to hand them to our youth ministry and say fix them and I'm going to be rude enough to look at you and say you should have brought them six years ago. You should have taught them when they were young that this was important because you have spent six years discipling them and telling them everything else is more important than this. Worship, coming before God, listen to this verse, *whoever welcomes the little child like this in my name welcomes me but if anyone causes these little ones who believe in me to sin, it's better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drown in the depths of the sea.* What do you worship and what are you teaching your children to worship? When you hear the voice of God, worship follows. Also when you hear the voice of God you recognize Jesus and when you start drawing close to Jesus everything else in your life disappears. Everything gets unimportant. Look at what Simeon says, Simeon drew close to Jesus and everything else disappeared as he took the baby in his arms, now I want that to play out in our church today. Can you imagine you walk in with your newborn baby and some crazy old guy comes up and takes the baby out of your arms? We're calling security but this is what happened and he's holding this baby and you know what, he doesn't care. He doesn't care what anybody thinks about him. He doesn't care what those parents think about him taking the baby out of their arms. He doesn't care about the people around him; he wouldn't care if you called the security team because everything else disappeared because he was holding Jesus in his arms and let me tell you when you draw near to Jesus everything in your life becomes secondary except his face. Listen to what he says, ²⁹**"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss^[d] your servant in peace. ³⁰For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared in the sight of all people, ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."** Listen to that...you, you, you, when you recognize God we decrease just like John the Baptist said. We must decrease so he must increase and I want you to hear something today. When you're in love with Jesus and you recognize Jesus for who he is, the things that we do at the church that bother you stop bothering you. You stop going, I didn't like the worship today. Good, it wasn't for you. I really don't like that song. We're not singing it to you. Or this one, I really loved worship today. The songs were great. I don't care; we're not singing them to you. I'm glad you liked it. That's not worship. A lot of you think worship is did we enjoy the songs today. That's not worship, that's not recognizing Jesus. It's not about what you like or dislike. It's about finding the face of Jesus and letting everything else disappear. I'm telling you abundant, you'll live a lot longer too if you just let Jesus be your focus. Recognize him. As you recognize him, he brings salvation. Listen to what Simeon says, my eyes have seen your salvation, God has send a savior. God sent a savior because he knew we needed a savior. God sent a savior because he knew we needed saving from our sins. He says ³⁰**For my eyes have seen your salvation,** ³¹**which you have prepared in the sight of all people,** ³²**a light for**

revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." I want to be very clear at this point. When you hear the voice of God, you find salvation because there is a lot of people in this room that have prayed a prayer but have not received Jesus as their savior. There are people in this room that tell me things like I was baptized when I was an infant and I went through classes and I blew out a candle. I have people that say, I was a little boy and I came to VBS, we walked forward, I shook the preachers hand and I prayed a prayer. There are many of you today that prayed a prayer but did not receive Jesus as your salvation because when Jesus comes in and saves you, it changes your life. You don't live the way you used to live. Something is different in your heart and today if you've lived this Christian life without any change, I want to challenge you that you have not been saved. I know you're sitting out there and you're going, he's making me doubt my salvation. Good, doubt your salvation. That's fine, I'd rather you work it out with fear and trembling. I believe in God, I'm glad you believe in God; demons believe in God. In fact the bible says they shudder at the thought of it. We don't even shudder. Today, you need to know that salvation has come into your life. If I drop dead right here, which is actually my goal one day, when my eyes open I will see the savior. Will you? Well, I'm a good person. I didn't ask that and that doesn't matter. Have you received the salvation that God offers? Was there the voice of God that made action and made worship and you recognized him and you were truly saved? Now I want to tell you this would be the best place to end the sermon. I would love right now to give an invitation and say Jesus wants to be your salvation and all you have to do it accept him and your life will be great. Accept him and you'll find a job, your wife will come home, your money problems will be over, your kids will turn out but I can't tell you that because that's not true. It drives me crazy watching the people on TV promise you all you have to do is pray this magic prayer and then poof everything is great in your life. It's not true. In fact for some of you, following Jesus is going to be more difficult than your life would have been without him. It's going to be more difficult. Listen to the end of the passage. **³³The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."** Do you hear this? Here's Mary the mother of Jesus, holding this child, she has hopes for him, she has dreams for him. She's heard all the wonderful things and marveled at who this is in her arms, but she is his mother. And I can tell you the plan was not to stand on the sidelines and be beaten beyond recognition. The plan was not to watch her baby have a crown of thorns thrust upon his head and for the crowd to yell crucify him. Her plan was not to stand on a hill and watch her son be nailed to a cross and lifted up in the arm, bleeding out, dying. That was not her plan. Her heart was broken so who am I to tell you if you accept Jesus as your salvation your life will be easy. Why would I tell you that? It's not true. It may be very difficult but let me tell you I would rather it be difficult here than spend eternity with him. I would rather walk through trials and tribulations here than spend eternity separated from this loving God that is pursuing us. So today, have you heard the voice of God? Are you living by permission or submission to him? Will you bow?