

Christmas Party
The Invitation is over
December 20, 2009
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Its Christmas week already; did it surprise anybody? You know it did. Friday my wife informs me that we haven't done our Christmas shopping yet. Now, this is the first time she's had a full time job and usually I do the hardest part of the shopping; I write a check and I am done. So because she's working she's like, we've got to do our Christmas shopping. You've got to be kidding me! I have five children, two son in-laws and two grandchildren. Her mom's husband and her grandma...let's just say I've got a lot of people to buy for. We've waited this long and then she introduced me to the greatest invention...the Visa Gift Card. I was so excited. She would say, what do you think we should get them? I said a Visa Gift Card! For everybody...just get a bunch of gift cards and we'll be done. I know a lot of you feel the same way because it's just so hectic during this time. We're running around, we're so busy, you have party after party after party to go to. Your kids have programs and all this stuff is going on in your life and you're feel like you're just running, running, running and you never get to stop and I understand that. This Friday we had to run off and go see Dawn's grandmother in Tyler in the nursing home so we had to go see her because this may be the last Christmas and I really hope that you don't think I'm being mean. She's been telling me that since I was twenty. This may be my last one. She's had plenty of Christmas'; she's a hundred and forty but we have that pressure from families and from in-laws and just running and doing all the things that you have to do. Sometimes it feels like we never slow down enough to ask ourselves the most important questions. It's like we never slow down in life enough to ask the questions that really make a difference. We don't have time to ask the most important questions in our lives...where will I spend eternity. We don't even think about it because things are going so rapidly and so quickly that all we can think about is trying to keep the pace. It reminds me when we went and worked out. Our staff got together and we hired a personal trainer. Huge mistake, we picked this guy that was about 6' 4, 280 pounds solid muscle. His nickname to me was Satan incarnate because he was an evil, evil man and he was so big that when he would tell me to do something, I was afraid not to. That's why I can't have a small trainer or even a girl for a trainer because if they say do this and I look at them and say no, what are they going to do but I knew this guy could hurt me. All the staff gathered together and he started working us out and he decided we would do something called interval training. This guy loves it. He would take the treadmill and he would put it at the highest incline he possibly could and then he would speed it up to twelve, the fastest it would go. Then there are three of us and the goal was you have to run for twenty minutes at this pace, but you can trade out and so you run a minute or minute and a half or as long as you can, you jump off then the next guy jumps on and then when he runs as far as he

can he jumps off then the next guy jumps on. If one guy drops out, guess what? You get to run more. I had the misfortune of having Coleman in my group. Lee Coleman; it was not a positive experience for him. Apparently that big body doesn't run quite that quickly and we got through the first round and we all ran a little at a time and then it was time for probably the third or fourth round and it was time for him to jump back on the treadmill and run fully inclined at full speed. He jumped up on that treadmill and apparently his feet couldn't go as fast as the treadmill was going and that treadmill shot that big man straight off the back and across the floor where he promptly threw up. It was awesome! I was laughing so hard and you don't know our staff well enough to know that we have no compassion at all. There's no gift of mercy, the new guy seems to have the gift of mercy but we'll beat that out of him soon. Everybody's just laughing at this big lump on the floor throwing up and he crawls off to the bathroom and we're just laughing hysterically. But I think about that and I think that's how some of you live your life. That treadmill is jacked all the way up as fast as it can go and you're just trying to keep your feet moving. You're just trying to go as fast as you possibly can and you know if you ever stop something horrible is going to happen. Now to be fair, when we first started being introduced to treadmills, my wife took me up to the YMCA and I didn't have much experience on treadmills and one day we were on the treadmill and she was jogging with me and we were running on the treadmill and I happened to look down and noticed my shoe was untied. So it wasn't that I couldn't go at the pace that was set, I just decided I would stop and tie my shoe. This is what I did...that's all I remember. I think I came back to consciousness with my lovely wife who also has no mercy, laughing hysterically on the treadmill because I shot through the back and just barely missed the window. Even if the treadmill isn't running that quickly, some of are afraid to even stop because we're afraid life will shoot us out the back and so today I want you to stop for just a moment. I want to turn the treadmill off and I want you to seriously ask yourself this question. Where will I spend eternity? As we ask this question, we're going to turn to the Christmas Story in Matthew 2 and today we're going to look at the Christmas Story just a little differently, through the eyes of Herod. I want you to see a little bit of this through his eyes because he is a big part of the Christmas Story. I want you to see that we have a loving God who is pursuing you. We have a loving God who is pursuing you with everything in him and he is relentless pursuing a relationship with you. He is doing things all around you today to try to get your attention. He wants to get your attention and he's using circumstances in your life, he's using feelings in your life. He's using people in your life. He's using the bible in your life to get your attention but most of us are not even aware that he's trying to get our attention. Most of us are not aware that he wants a relationship. In fact, I want to give you an awareness test. I want you to watch this video to see how aware you are. [video] *This is awareness test. How many passes does the team in white make? The answer is thirteen but did you see the moon walking bear?* That freaked me out the first time I saw it. I thought no, no, no, they just added that so I rewound it and made sure I was looking at the

original. He's there but when you're not aware and your attention is somewhere else, it's amazing how many things we overlook. Today many of you are on that treadmill and your life is going so quickly and so fast and there is so much going on in your life that you're not aware that God's trying to get your attention. You're not aware that God is calling out to you and so today I want you to see and be aware and understand who this loving God is that wants a relationship with you. In Matthew 2 it says, *¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod,* now King Herod like many of us on the outside had it all together. He had an incredible life so far. He was the governor of the entire area by the time he was twenty five years old, there was a revolt that happened in the nation of Israel so they took him out of Israel and brought him into Rome. When they finished the rebellion and they put it down they decided they would send Herod back but the Caesar named him King of the Jews. What an honor. He is going back into this land and he is the king of the Jews. He has power, he has prestige, and he has popularity. When he comes in everybody cheers and welcomes him, he is the King of the Jews. That's what they wanted. They wanted their own king and so here he comes. He married a Jewish woman, he had connections with the high priest so he had the religion thing going, and he had politics going, he had everything together. He was as rich as he could be but we know during this time in his life, he had something wrong on the inside. In fact, Herod had a chronic kidney disease and he was a very sick man. So there were times in his life that he knew something was wrong. Can you imagine a kidney disease back before they had the medications we had? He had this terrible disease inside of him and there are many times in his life even though everything on the outside looked good, on the inside something was wrong but he seemed to be able to ignore it. God was trying to get his attention like he's trying to get many of your attention today. There's a lot of times you come into this place that you know something on the inside is wrong. You feel it. You experience it. You are sitting here and God is trying to get your attention and he's telling you something is wrong. Pay attention. Let's read on in the verse. It says, *Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ²and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."* This star was over Bethlehem where Jesus was born. This star was six miles away from Jerusalem. It could be seen. People a thousand miles away in present day in Iran and Iraq in that area saw this star and began following it and they watched this star in the sky and they realized God was doing something incredible that God had sent the King of the Jews, that God himself had come down and these men were following the star in the sky to be able to worship this new king; Jerusalem, the center of religious activity, the temple which Herod was actually building. In fact the wall that exists today in Israel was built by Herod himself, called it the second temple project. The center of religious activity, God was trying to get his attention, the star was six miles away and he never saw it. He was so busy looking down; he was so busy in his own life, running on that treadmill that he never looked up and saw that God was trying to get his

attention. Verse 3, ³*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.* ⁴*When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.* Look at verse 4, he's calling all the church together, he's calling all the religious folks together and said man I am disturbed, something is going on, tell me where is the Christ child being born? You see, when a lot of times when people get disturbed they come to the church. After 9/11, the churches were packed all over the country because there was this fear and when we're disturbed we go to the church but I want to tell you something, the church misses it. A lot of times the church, the religious people, they miss it. Let's look, they came to church, they opened up the scriptures and they knew them by heart, in verse 5, ⁵*"In Bethlehem in Judea,"* they knew where the messiah was going to be born. *they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶" 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"* So here we have the church gathered, opening the bible, reading the bible, understanding the Bible, the Christ child is to be born in Bethlehem six miles away. Something incredible is happening, they ended the church service, walked out and did nothing. It happens every week, every week the spirit of God moves in our hearts. Every week the Spirit of God has been trying to get your attention and you're coming to the church and you're opening the bible and your hearing the word and you're being stirred but as soon as church is over you're off to the restaurant because you've forgotten. It's amazing; religious people seem to always miss Jesus. They can't find Jesus. Here they have all the things needed but they're not interested in looking around and seeing this God. They're simply busy about their own life looking down constantly and never looking up to see the Christ child. What is God trying to do to get your attention? Are there circumstances in your life that are going on where God is trying to say, look at me? Are there things going on inside you? Have you come to the church and have you studied the bible and you know there's something you need to do? But week after week you reject him; week after week you fight him. So what is the problem? Why do we fight this God who is relentlessly pursuing us? I think for a lot of you today the problem really isn't you don't feel like you're fighting God, you believe there's a God, you have faith that there is a God, you know that you need to follow him but you're just delaying it because right now there's just too much to do. Right now there's too many things going on and so it's not that you're opposed to God, it's just I've got to get some things handled before I give my life to God. I got to do some things before I get right with God. I've got to get my business started; I've got to get my job in hand; I've got to get my house; I've got to get my kids raised; I've got to do something and then I'm going to come to God. We delay it. We all do it. How many of you have made a commitment to start dieting and exercising in the New Year, anybody? You know you've said to yourself...boy, when the New Year comes that's my year brother, I'm getting in shape. You've said it. But then all of a sudden

you realize that January the 1st is on a Friday. Come on, nobody starts a diet on Friday. That doesn't even make sense! So you're going to delay it and you know you need to do it. You're sure not going to start right now because there is way too much to eat at Christmas. Nobody diets at Christmas, that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. So instead of starting the 1st, you're going to start on the 4th. That's a Monday so that works. Except you remember on the 5th is The Biggest Loser premiere so you say to yourself, I'm going to lose weight with all those fat people. That will be good inspiration watching every Tuesday and I will lose weight with all of them. So you sit with a bowl of ice cream to watch The Biggest Loser and you know that's going to be the last bowl of ice cream you eat and the next day you realize it's Wednesday so I can't start on Wednesday so I'll start on Monday the 11th. You get to Monday and say you know what...screw it I'll start next year. It's true; I speak as one who knows! I understand that perfectly. We know what we need to do but we delay it. Some of you today, God is trying to get your attention but you just keep delaying it. You say, not now, in a little bit. For some of you, you've just reached a point where you deny it. You're just in the denial stage and that's where we are going to see Herod. Herod gets to the denial stage. First he delays it, *⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."* Yes, he too is delaying it. I'll get there, you go find him and then come back to me and I'll get there. That's the dad that sends their wife to church. That's the teenager who says you know what, it may work for you but it doesn't work for me. That's the person who says, you know what...I'll get to it later and pretty soon you enter the denial stage. Read this, *⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.* You see when you meet Jesus everything changes. When you meet Jesus, you fall on your face before him and you truly worship and these men came and they worshipped the savior. *"Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route."* They knew they could not go back the direction they came. Once they met Jesus and once they worshipped him, they knew they could not go back the way they had come. There is a lot of people who tell me when someone accepts Christ they just simply reject their old friends. They walk away from their old friends and their old friends are insulted by that and feel like this person who accepted Christ thinks that they're better than us. I want you to hear me, when you accept Christ and worship Christ, you can't go back into your old ways. You can't go backwards into the things you used to do.

You have to move forward and that's what happens in your life when you truly meet Jesus. So let me tell you something, if you've had a religious experience, if you got baptized when you were an infant and you blew out a candle at confirmation, if you joined a Baptist church through VBS and just got baptized and your life is no different than the life that you used to have, your life is no different from the lost people around you, you truly need to evaluate if you ever met Jesus face to face. Because when you do, you worship him and you can't go backwards. After you go long enough denying all kinds of things begin to happen. In verse 13 *¹³When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."* *¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."* Herod continually rejected Jesus. He continually denied that this was the Son of God. He denied that this was the Savior. He denied that this was the King of the Jews. You see, he was the King of the Jews. He was the one in control. He was the one in charge and he denied the fact that Jesus had a rightful place in his life like many of us today want to be the ruler of our own life. We want to set the direction of our life. We want to be the Lord of our life and Jesus says listen, I want to be your Lord. My yolk is light, listen I have the best for you. But like Herod you continue to deny him and you continue to take center stage and Herod comes to the point, listen to what he does. *¹⁶When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."* Herod was so bent on rejecting Jesus as his King that he killed all the babies under 2 years old in the entire region. Do you think when Herod was a young man he ever thought his legacy was going to be to be a baby killer? Do you think he ever thought as a young man, I hope one day comes and I kill all the babies in my kingdom? Of course not; what happens is when you deny Christ long enough, God moves him out of your way. When he has called you and called you and called you and you have refused him pretty soon, God says, you know what...okay, the party's over. I'm not going to pursue you anymore and when he steps away from your life, the sin in your life has no limit. The sin in your life has no bounds and you will do things and one day you will wake up and say, I can't believe where I am today because Jesus answers your prayer leave me alone. So one day he does and the sin inside you has no bounds. You will be shocked. That's why he cries out when you hear my voice, when I get your attention, when I use circumstances, when there is something inside

moving you, when I use people in your life, when I use the church, when I use the word of God, listen and today do the right thing because you may get your prayer. You keep denying Jesus and you keep delaying the fact that he needs to be the Lord of your life and one day he will answer your prayer and walk away. That's why in Hebrews 3:7 it says, *⁷So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, verse 15, ¹⁵As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."* He goes on in 4:7, *⁷Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."* Today he gives a warning. Today he says I am pursuing you and you're fighting me. Today I want you to hear my voice and I want you to call to me, I want you to bow your knee to me, I want you to make me the King of your life, today. So we go back to the original question, where will you spend eternity? Have you made peace with that? Do you have peace? I'm about to read three of the scariest words in the bible. There comes a point where God says, I'm done. Enough is enough; game over. Verse 19, after Herod died what do you think happened? Herod went straight to hell. Straight to a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth where the worm never dies, where there is darkness and isolation and there's fear and there's the absence of God for eternity. I know some of you are saying you can't say that, God's a loving God, God never gives up, God continues. No, that's not true. The bible says it very clearly and with Herod, God tried to use internal circumstances. God tried to tell him something was wrong. God tries to use a star in the sky to get his attention. God brought the Magi to him; he tried to use people to say recognize Jesus as your King. He tried to use the church; he tried to use the scripture. God tried and tried but Herod continued to reject and at that point as it says in the book of Hebrews, Just as a man is destined to die once and after that face the judgment he faced the judgment of God without the grace of Jesus. This is what it says, if we deliberately keep on sinning after we've received the knowledge of truth, no sacrifice for sins is left. Anyone who rejected the Law of Moses, died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses, how much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished, listen to this, who has trampled the Son of God underfoot. Who has treated as an unholy thing, the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, who has insulted the spirit of grace for we know him who said, it is mine to avenge I will repay and again the Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of a living God. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of a living God without the grace of Jesus and he says very loudly today is the day if you hear my voice, do not delay, do not deny because one day I will answer your prayer and I will leave you alone. Do you have a peace? I know some of you are thinking man, that's not a Christmas sermon. It's the greatest Christmas sermon ever because it says Jesus Christ came into this world so we wouldn't have to put ourselves in the hands of a living god. He paid a price for God so loved the

world that he gave his only Son that whoever believed in him should not perish, should not be in the hands of an angry god, and should not be in the hands of a living god. We can face him with the grace of Christ covering us and he makes us his son instead of his enemy. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God but God demonstrated his love for us for while we were sinners, while we were opposed, while we were Herod, ignoring all of the signs. Jesus Christ died for you and I so we're back to do you have a peace? Do you know that you have eternal life or are you going to be put in the hands of an angry god? Would you bow? Father God as we are here today God we're a testimony to you, the love that you had, the grace that you give. Today I want to ask you to do me a favor...if you know and you have that peace that I just talked about, I want you to pray for the people around you. If you know that you have eternal life and you will be in front of a living God with grace and mercy, I want you to pray for the people sitting next to you and all around you today. You don't have to pray for them by name, but there are people here today that are hearing the voice of God and there's coming a day that he will no longer call our name. If you need to make him the King of your life would you just look at me wherever you are; just look me in the eyes. I want you to pray this prayer, *Father God, forgive me for not recognizing you in my life. Forgive me for trying to live my own way. God I confess my sin to you and I ask you to be the King and ruler of my life. God and I don't understand what it means completely, but I trust you God. I want to follow you, I'm not going to delay or deny you any longer, in Jesus name.* As we sing, we're going to sing a song about the King coming. It's going to be a glorious day for many of us. I hope today if you hear today you hear his voice, you will obey. I will be in the front if you would like to speak to me. The altar is open for prayer all the time. Our staff will be available at the end. If you want to fill out the card that you've accepted Jesus, you can leave it in the seat and we'll follow up on that.