

Hebrews 10:19-25

2022 Various
Invited to the Party

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / January 9th, 2022

Remember what it was like before the pandemic when you'd get invited to someone's birthday party? I remember birthday parties being really exciting when I was a kid. Your friend invites you (or their mom), you purchase a gift for them, and then you get to go over to their house for the party. There's cake, games, and maybe a movie and a sleepover if it's a really exciting birthday.

Imagine your best friend has invited you to their birthday. You're really excited because your best friend is best friends with all your other friends, so it's going to be a big party with lots of friends. You get ready, get the gift, and drive over to your friend's house. And as you're walking up to the front door, you look through the window, and you see your friend with a party hat, chocolate cake, and vanilla ice cream. There are streamers, all your other friends are gathered around. And you just savor it for a moment, "I've been invited to this party with the person I love!" As we look at Hebrews 10, we find something even more special.

God has invited us to the party.

Most of us don't think about the book of Hebrews as a party invitation, but it's even better than that. Hebrews tells us God has invited us into his presence. Our verses start like this:

Hebrews 10:19a (ESV)

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,

Now anytime we encounter "therefore" in the text, we have to ask, "What's it there for?" It's always a little clue to look at the passage that came right before to help understand what the author is about to say. So if we were to look back at Hebrews 10:1-18, we would find the author of Hebrews (we don't know who wrote it) talking about the Old Testament sacrificial system contained in the law.

But the author critiques the sacrificial system, saying it could never really make people right with God (vv. 1-4). Otherwise, why do you have to offer sacrifices year after year for the people? The blood of goats and bulls can't take away people's sin. The author of Hebrews pivots to Jesus, identifying him, as the true and perfect sacrifice to take away our sins (vv. 5-18).

Hebrews 10:12, 14 (ESV)

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, . . . 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

In other words, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is enough for our sins. We don't need to sacrifice any more goats or bulls because Jesus is the perfect lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Now let's go back to that "therefore." Jesus is our perfect spotless lamb who takes away our sins...

Hebrews 10:19-22 (ESV)

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

To get to the party, you have to go through the door, sometimes the garage or basement door but still a door. In the Old Testament, God dwelled with his people, but to get to him you had to go through the front door to the temple and then a second curtain. The temple was where God's presence dwelled, not out in the camp, not in the courtyard, not even in the first room of the temple, like the foyer area of God's house. No, God's presence dwelled behind a thick, 60-foot high 30-foot-wide curtain in a square room called the Holy of Holies.¹ Not everyone could go into God's presence.

There was a party, but you weren't invited. Ever been not invited to a birthday party you wanted to attend? It hurts, doesn't it? Imagine a birthday party. A famous celebrity is having a birthday party, and everyone is wondering who they are going to invite. It's the talk of the town. But when it's finally announced, the guest list isn't very long, not at all. It's actually just one person. And that one person has to go through a special ritual and be dressed a special way before they can go to the birthday party.

That's what it was for the temple. The High Priest could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement after taking a bath then dressing in special High Priest garment (Leviticus 16:4). Then he would take the blood of a bull and a goat and sprinkle it on the ark of the covenant (Leviticus 16:15). What a weird party! It's like a really bad version of *pint the tale on the donkey*. But this bloody sacrificial system signified just how holy God is, and how serious he is about sin. But remember, God has invited us to the party, to enter into his presence.

Through Jesus' blood, the perfect lamb, God has opened the curtain. Remember what happened when Jesus died? The curtain was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). No man or woman could tear that curtain in two from top to bottom, but God did it. Because Jesus had spilt his blood for us, and now we can confidently enter into God's presence, bathed pure and holy from our sins through faith in Jesus.

When I was growing up, we never received a "save the date" for a birthday party, but now since I have kids I've received several. We've received an official invite, always with a picture of a cute kids that's party themed and can go on the fridge. Through the blood of Jesus, you've received an official invite as well.

Jesus is our High Priest. He has entered the most Holy of Holies through sacrificing his own blood, and he invites us to follow after him. Jewish tradition says that when the High Priests would enter the Holy of Holies they'd wear bells and have a rope tied around their ankle so that if God struck them down for unholiness, the other priests could pull their body back out. We don't know if that's true, but you get the point. God is terrifyingly holy! Don't mess with God.

But we don't have to approach God in fear, because we can approach him confidently and in faith that he has forgiven us, washed away our sins, and is renewing our minds. We're no longer categorically sinful, but pure. You got the right stuff, through Jesus. And you can have confidence, not fear.

I'm in a wedding party this summer. Do you ever get nervous about what to wear to a wedding? I do. Like is this a suit and tie wedding? A tux wedding? A casual wedding? If it's outside you dress lighter, but what if you start inside and go outside, in winter? Do we worry more about what we're wearing to God's party than actually just going to the party? We wear Christ! We wear his holiness. There's nothing better than him.

And so if you're someone who struggles with self-condemnation. Who is afraid to pray, or afraid to read your Bible, or afraid to go to church, or just afraid God doesn't love you. Put on Christ. That means have faith in Jesus. Trust him, not yourself. *God has invited us to the party through Jesus* so...

Hold onto your party invitation.

If you received an invite to a party that said, “Present this invitation for entry,” you’d hold tight to that invitation, right?! We’ve all heard of exclusive parties with exclusive guest lists. What’s our invitation?

Hebrews 10:23 (ESV)

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

The confession of our hope is the hope we have that Jesus really is our perfect sacrificial lamb, that Jesus’ life really is enough for our sins, that Jesus really is our High Priest who makes a relationship with God possible. You could expand this hope to all the hope we find in Scripture. We hope in him and not ourselves. Jesus has written your name on the guest list and there’s nothing to fear; just trust in him.

But here’s the thing. You can’t hold onto a separate party invitation to hedge your bets. Like, I’ll hold onto Jesus, and my good life. Jesus plus me will get me into heaven. It’s not going to work. You can’t hold onto Jesus and Islam or Jesus and Hinduism or Jesus plus anything. Jesus is enough. He opened the door to God.

So, the question is, have you accepted his invitation? Do you believe? Have you confessed he is your only hope? Do you really believe it? That’s where Christianity begins, and then you keep learning that lesson your entire life. Hold onto your party invitation, and only the party invitation Jesus gave you. Those other invitations don’t lead anywhere good. “Help me, Jesus. You’re my only hope.”

Now go back to your best friend’s birthday party. You arrive at their house. You’re standing outside the front door and you glimpse your friend and everyone gathered for the party. And you watch for a little bit, and a little bit longer. You notice they start to play games. They cut the cake. They sing “Happy Birthday!” They sit down and watch a movie (wearing masks). And you just stand outside the window watching. Not only would this be incredibly creepy, it would also be really sad. And just before the party ends, you turn around, and you drive home. Here’s the question:

Are we neglecting the party?

Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Imagine on the day of Atonement all twelve tribes of Israel gather around the tabernacle, and the High Priest goes through his ritual. But before he can enter, you hear a massive ripping noise, and both the inner curtain and other curtain covering the tabernacle rip. And for the first time in your entire life, you can see the very presence of God, the glory cloud. You’ve been hearing about God, wondering what God is like, afraid of God’s presence. But now a booming but kind voice says, “Come home child! I’ve made a way to me.”

Would you run the other way? Would you just stand there as the countless masses surged forward? Maybe instead you would link arms with your husband or wife or friend, and your children, and walk forward in faith. That’s what this text encourages us to do. Hebrews encourages us intentionally gather and intentionally encourage each other to hold onto our confession of faith and draw near to God’s presence.

There is something special about gathering and about entering into an intentional time of community that cannot be replicated by passively watching a church service by ourselves. So much irony here as we’ve been forced to meet on *Zoom* and *Facebook Live* due to Omicron.

But these times when we can’t be together should make us long to be together. We shouldn’t want to passively watch a church service by ourselves. I am not actually saying it’s wrong to access our church service through *Facebook Live* or *Zoom*. That’s where we are now. But I am saying passive consumption of an worship service where we don’t interact with others is not what God intends for his church.

You can neglect the party by never attending church and only watching the service on Facebook without ever interacting with anyone, no chatting. Or you can neglect the party by being a purely passive recipient where the party is performed before you while you watch. Your body can be at the church building without ever being present. Church is not a spectator sport but an interactive time of celebration, confession, worship.

God invites us to a party where there's cake, communion, where there's time spent fellowshiping and talking with each other, where there's laughter and tears and we all sing "Happy Birthday, Jesus!" There's even a speech where we talk about how great Jesus is and how best to align our lives to his.

But I'm afraid that we (and I don't mean just our church, but lots of churches) have turned Sunday morning into a spectator sport. We hire a professional to give the sermon and those on the platform are the real worshippers. This is why, Lord willing on January 23rd, we are trying something new. We are shifting the Sunday morning gathering to no longer be a spectator sport, but an interactive party.

We're changing our service time to 10:00 AM. For the first twenty minutes (10:00-10:20 AM) we're going to sing to Jesus. For the next twenty minutes (10:20-10:40 AM) we're going to hear a toast to Jesus (that's a sermon). I'm also going to try to curate some additional resources you can listen to and interact with during the week. I did that for my [flourish series](#), and I want to keep doing that. And for the next 45 minutes (10:40-11:25 AM), we're going to divide into small groups, children, youth, and adults to share what's going on in our lives, pray for one another, and talk about what we just heard in God's word during the worship and sermon. Then we're going to come back upstairs to share what we learned and how we engaged (ending by about 11:30 AM). We will have a *Zoom* option for those online who can't come in due to covid to participate. The expectation is that the Sunday morning discussions are a part of the church service.

When we gather on Sundays, are we stirring one another up to love and good works? Are we helping each other hold onto our confession of faith? Are we encouraging each other? I don't want to miss the party.

You're standing outside watching the party, and you know what a really good friend would do. A good friend would open the door and say, "Don't stand outside! Come inside and join the fun!" That's what Jesus has done for us. It's Jesus' party and he invites us. He has opened the way to God's presence. *God has invited us to the party. Will you go?*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at [Cornerstone Congregational Church](#) in Westford, MA.

Discussion Questions

Upward – 1) What does the Holy of Holies and the curtain tell us about God’s nature and character?
2) Now what does the downward tearing of the curtain through Jesus tell us about God?

Inward – Do I relate to God like he is behind a curtain in the Holy of Holies or do I relate to him like that barrier is destroyed and I have free access to God? Please share a bit.

Outward – How can I genuinely help others draw near to God? My husband, wife, kids, friends, family, coworkers, church family?

Spiritual Exercises

Reflect – Ask God to reveal to you if you have been boldly drawing near to him with confidence or have been shrinking from enjoying him in fear. What does he say?

Confess – Confess anytime you have not drawn near to him as you should/could. Confess any passive consumption of church or his presence. Confess any sin the Lord reveals. Receive his forgiveness. He does not condemn you but sets you free with hope and joy.

Worship – Take time to worship and praise Jesus for the great hope he offers. You could listen to the album *Behold the Lamb of God* by Andrew Peterson.

Content Curation

Sermon – Listen to [THE NECESSITY OF GOSPEL COMMUNITY | Hebrews 10:19-25 | Peter Frey - Healthy Habits Sermon Series](#) available on YouTube (27:06). I attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with Peter. He’s a very good preacher. Peter and his wife Mary have a [YouTube channel](#) where they share her ongoing battle with cystic fibrosis.

Articles – I’m sharing two articles with exact opposite points of view that help highlight and explain some of the changes we are making as a church to be more participatory on Sunday morning. *The case against sermon-centric Sundays* by Skye Jethani (you know I like him, right?!) argues for why we need to change the passive recipient model. On the other hand, we don’t want to “throw the baby out with the bathwater” as they say; so, here’s an article from *The Gospel Coalition* entitled *The Case for Sermon-Centric Sundays* by Jeff Robinson. If you notice the dates of the articles, the TGC author wrote his article in response to Skye’s article. Here’s my thinking. Christ-centered preaching matters, but so does community participation! So how can we get the best of both worlds? Let’s give this new way of doing Sunday a try, Lord willing starting January 23rd (or as soon as possible thereafter).

ⁱ Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Book 1.