

## Worshipfully

### Romans 12:1-21

It seems to me that Christmas comes earlier and earlier every year. If it were up to Costco, we would begin celebrating, decorating, shopping and consuming in August because that is when they begin putting their Christmas inventory on the floor. Doesn't it seem like it gets earlier every year? Christmas lights have been up in our neighborhood since Halloween. I've been seeing pictures of Christmas trees on Instagram and Facebook for what feels like weeks. Some businesses and offices have already held their Christmas parties to avoid the crowded month of December.

Well, you might not know it but Advent begins today. These are the days made for waiting and watching, for anticipating and longing, for reflection and preparation. The season of Advent reminds me every year how much meaning the culture has stolen from us. Why wait for Christmas when you can have it today? There's no room for anticipating or longing in our need for instant gratification. And there is no time for reflection, for quiet, for preparation as we race from one event to another, one store to another, one line to another. But Advent is countercultural. Oh, you know that the culture wants in on the Advent gig when there's a profit to be made on Advent calendars: this year, Advent calendars, a tradition hundreds of years old to help count the days leading to Christ's birth, are the season's hot new item only rather than opening a Scripture verse each day, that's the real treasure of Advent, now consumers are opening chocolates, Lego, playdough, and for the young at heart, tea, make up, or wine. But Advent is more than just a calendar full of treats. Advent is a time to slow things down, to intentionally set time apart, to count the days to Christmas, to focus, not on the never-ending to-do list or the shopping list or the sale flyers but on what matters, to focus on the meaning of these days.

One of the reasons I have really grown to appreciate The Advent Conspiracy is because it helps me do just that, to focus on the meaning of these days. It turns the cultural celebration of this "holiday season" upside down so we see how meaningless it has become and it restores an emphasis on the coming of Jesus into the world to save us from our sins, to save us from ourselves. And counter to the cultural traditions where you shop till you drop for months and weeks and days and hours until the very last minute on Christmas Eve when you may or may not dress up in your finest for your annual trip to church for a nostalgic candlelight service, the Advent Conspiracy challenges us to begin this season, to enter this season in worship; to worship fully. Over the past few years, we have been encouraged to set our eyes firmly on Jesus; not to be distracted by all the other gods vying for our attention, with a reminder from the book of Exodus, the very first of the 10 commandments given to Moses and then to Israel and then to us: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me." or to recognize the Holiness of God in those words from the prophet Isaiah who had a vision: In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings:

With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

<sup>4</sup> At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

<sup>5</sup> “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Or to be reminded of those words from the gospel of Matthew, “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” All good reminders. All still true. Despite what we might say, we cannot serve both God and money. God alone is deserving of our worship because He is Holy

But this is our fourth go round with The Advent Conspiracy and I can’t believe I haven’t noticed it before now. It’s just a small detail, easily missed or overlooked by the eye. In the blur of day to day activities, in the crush to get ahead of the Christmas madness, in the glare of the visual distractions: phone, computer, tv, twinkle lights, it’s easy to miss that small little space. I can’t believe I haven’t noticed before now, but now that I have I wonder why its there at all. Worship fully. Two words separated by that small space of nothingness. To worship fully. To give ourselves fully in worship to God – all of myself, everything I am and am not, all that I have, to get out of my own way, to not be distracted by all the pretty things, the expensive things, the glittery things, the stars and starlets who shine in the spotlight. To worship fully. To practice staying focused while I’m here at the church for “worship” on Sunday mornings – I can do that, mostly, except for those moments when I feel my phone vibrating and I’m wondering who is texting me, or I’m thinking about all I have to do after this is over, how much longer until its over, how many more times are we going to sing this chorus again?

Its easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the worship we participate in here is all there is. An hour, an hour and a half on a Sunday morning and the other 167 hours of the week are mine, all mine. It reminds me of an account I read of the death of Howard Hughes who basically built Las Vegas. At the time of his death in the 70’s he had a financial empire worth 2.5 billion dollars, he was the richest man in the United States. He owned a private fleet of jets, hotels and casinos. Time magazine recorded his death in this way: “Howard Hughes’ death was commemorated in Las Vegas by a minute of silence. Casinos fell silent. Housewives stood uncomfortable clutching their paper cups full of coins at the slot machines, the blackjack games paused, and at the crap tables the stickmen cradled the dice in the crook of their wooden wands. Then a pit boss looked at his watch, leaned forward and whispered, “O.K., roll the dice. He’s had his minute.”<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, I wonder if that isn’t parallel to our coming here on Sunday mornings, putting in the hour but anxiously watching the clock until we can move on to what matters.

But what if we read those two words as just one, worship fully? If that little space of nothingness evaporated and those two words cozied up to one another so instead of it being worship fully, it become worshipfully? To

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-illustrations/1367/howard-hughes/>

live life worshipfully? That's what the apostle Paul was writing about in Romans chapter 12 when he said, "Therefore, I urge you, dear friends, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship." To offer our lives as worship. You know, in the Christmas story, the only time the word worship is used is when the wisemen are seeking Jesus. They travelled, likely for about 2 years from Asia, where they first saw a star in the sky, and they began asking around about the birth of a new king, the king of the Jews because they wanted to worship him. And when, after a brief interrogation by a very interested King Herod, the wisemen finally found the child Jesus, Matthew's gospel records that they bowed down and worshipped him. And of course they must have been delighted to finally be in His presence after such a long journey, searching for 2 years. But the searching and the journey and the not giving up and the sacrifices made along the way and the thoughtfulness of the gifts they chose, each part of this was worship. They were living worshipfully. That's what Paul writes about in the verses which follow in Romans 12. That our serving and sharing our gifts and our loving and even our simple acts of hospitality, making others feel welcome, laughing and crying, all to be lived worshipfully as an offering to God. What if we thought of the whole of our lives as offerings of worship? What would change in you if you thought of your life that way? What if our getting up and facing the day was worship? How we greeted our spouse or our kids or the neighbors was part of our worship offering? Our commute? The work that we do, the people we work with, the customers or clients we serve? What if preparing our meals or doing the dishes were acts of worship, if we were intentional, worshipful about where we spent our time, who we made contact with, how we spent our money, what kind of organizations we got involved with? What if I lived my life worshipfully? Life lived through the lens of worship trains my eye to see beyond myself and to look for God at work all around me. I'm not saying that all of a sudden, your workplace is going to magically sparkle and shine, that all the challenges in your relationships are going to disappear, that your mental and physical health is going to be miraculously healed. But, to face the day worshipfully moves me from reluctant to expectant, from resentful to hopeful, from living begrudgingly to living gratefully. To live our lives worshipfully, is to live day by day, moment by moment, in the presence of God and to offer ourselves, just as we are, to Him. So, it begins here. At the table. At this table our family grows but the host never says there's no more room. More places are set and we celebrate a new job, a new baby, a good test result, a life restored. At this table we are honest about our challenges, we admit we need help, we share our grief, we trust that God hears us when we call out. So come to the table worshipfully and to eat and drink here worshipfully and to go from here worshipfully and to go out there, to our homes and our families and our places of work and to our free time and to our challenging relationships worshipfully. To make Jesus Lord not only of one hour of our week but of our whole lives. To give ourselves to Him worshipfully even as he gave Himself fully for us on the cross.

