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Psalm 25:1-10 – Advent Conspiracy – Worship Fully**

This year for Advent our sermon series is Advent Conspiracy. At some point in our culture we have forgotten the true meaning of Christmas.

And I know that many people probably discuss this every year. We mention our consumerist culture and how it distracts us and in a way sucks us into thinking that we need more and more stuff. My goal is not to get us all not to celebrate Christmas . . . to give up buying gifts for each other and to stop spending time with family and traveling . . . that is not the goal. The goal is to help us to find some ways to reprogram our Christmas traditions around the reason for the season.

Over the next 4 Sundays of Advent our topics will be worship fully, spend less, give more and finally love all. Each of these concepts are deeply rooted in Jesus' existence, but have been forgotten as Christmas has been turned into a cultural phenomenon rather than a life altering event. What has happened? **How did a celebration of the arrival of a poor Jewish boy who became the Savior of the world turn into a cheesy holiday where we spend lots of money on things that nobody really needs?**

Watch this video that I think will help you understand what I am talking about.

Our text that we want to examine this morning is Psalm 25:1-10.

There are 3 things that I want to emphasize from this text that describe how we are to worship God. 1) we are to lift up our souls to God and to trust God, 2) we are to put our hope in God, and 3) we are to allow God to teach and guide us.

The text begins with our first instruction for worship. **“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God.”**

This is the problem when we are really honest with ourselves. God does not really get us going much. What really gets us excited? What really makes us content? If you could be doing anything that you wanted, what would you choose? There are a whole host of things that come to mind when we ask these

questions. Some of us get most excited **watching a sporting event**. I have a hundred memories of jumping off of the couch, yelling at the television after watching an amazing sports play. When Illinois made the national championship basketball game, I was extremely excited or when the bears made the Super Bowl. There were lots of time of pure excitement. **And when I think of contentment . . . I think of being outside on a farm with little to no noise**. We were in the big city of Mt. Sterling this weekend and we were out on one of the farms letting the girls see the horses and I just love that feeling of being in nature.

And often when we think of doing anything we possibly could be doing, we don't put the worship of God at the top of that list.

But I don't think the issue is that we don't answer . . . that standing up and singing praise songs to God is the most exciting, content giving, and vital aspect of our lives. **I think the problem is that we have an extraordinarily narrow view of what it means to "worship" God and that we do not acknowledge Him in most of what we do on a daily basis.**

My favorite definition of worship . . . and it's a little racy . . . is **"worship is lovemaking with God."** It is based upon the fact that the most common New Testament word for worship – proskuneo – literally means to **"step towards to kiss."**

The idea is that we can say how much we like God and we can talk a lot about how great he is from a distance, but we must be close, intimate, trusting and vulnerable if we are to step forward into God's embrace.

Worship is not singing songs . . . it can be that, but it is not only that. Worship is not just getting on your knees and praying . . . it can be that, but it is not only that. Worship properly speaking is our response of love to the God who has reached out in love to us. It is a personal interaction with God. It is an experience of God in some way that causes us to respond in dependence.

We become like that upon which we focus. Worship is our deepest act of surrender. It is meant to be intimate, personal, and all consuming.

When we fail to worship God, the issue is not that we are doing something wrong . . . the issue is that we are not seeing God rightly. If we truly see God for who He is, we can't help but worship him. We have no choice when face-to-face with God other than to worship.

What happens though is that we concoct all sorts of ideas of God and before we are done making God into what we want Him to be . . . we have put together some lame notion of God that is not worth our worship. He is boring. He is uninteresting. Uninvolved. Distant. Irrelevant altogether.

Instead we create our own gods. And we focus on them.

To worship is to focus on something. In Hebrews 3, we are told by Paul to **"fix your thoughts on Jesus."** Later in chapter 12 he tells us to, **"fix our eyes on Jesus."** That is worship.

We know what it is like to fix our eyes on something. That first crush on the opposite sex is like this. I remember my first crush was on a girl named Jennifer. I had a hard time concentrating on anything else. If you have ever seen my handwriting and or noticed the fact that I only print, I blame that on Jennifer in 2nd grade. It was tough to concentrate. I was too busy trying to impress her. **I was focused on the wrong thing.**

My family raises standardbred race horses. One of the problems with harness horses is that when they are racing they sometimes get distracted by the things around them. So what we do is put what are called blinders on them. The blinders just function as tiny leather walls that set on the sides of the horse's eyes. The horse cannot see anything on either side, but simply sees what is ahead of him.

In a sense this passage is calling us to do the same. We are to put on blinders, and to stay focused on what is straight before us. **We "fix our eyes on Jesus," and run the race focused in his direction. "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God.**

And this is the struggle with Advent and Christmas in our modern world. Sure, we acknowledge that reason that we do all that we do is because of Jesus. If someone asks us why we celebrate Christmas we could regurgitate the story of Jesus being born in a manger and so on and so forth. But we don't exactly make Jesus the focus of the experience. Going to a worship service might be a part of our family tradition

and certainly a good thing to do, but it just reinforces that God is someone that we acknowledge during the Christmas season like noticing someone's beautiful Christmas lights on their house. **We don't focus on God.**

Our understanding of God is too narrow. I have really appreciated one author's metaphor for our understanding of God. I am going to read a large passage from an article, but I think it is a good illustration for us.

“I remember it well: a dark green and orange box with 64 crayons. Crayolas, they were called—every one a different color. The hues were often only slightly varied, but each crayon was unique and colorful nonetheless. Some had unusual names such as ochre and chartreuse; others were basic colors, but with light and dark shades. Yet my parents thought that that large pack was somewhat "mature" for me, and so the 8-crayon, and then the 24-crayon box had to do for a long time. But one of my childhood goals was so to improve my skills at coloring pictures that my parents would buy me the largest collection of crayolas available: a 64-crayon box. And, then, to use every one of them in kaleidoscopic harmony! Somehow I believed that my experience of the world was at least a 64-crayon experience. The world was so full of life and color; how could one capture its various tints and hues, except with the largest quiver of crayons available?

For most of us, even that array of color cannot begin to capture the wonders of our daily experience of the world and its people. We are surrounded with rainbows, both cosmic and personal, even in the midst of the storms of life. Why is it then that most of us seem satisfied with an 8-crayon God? We seem content with only a few strokes of color in our talk about God. In fact, oftentimes the language we use to speak of God is almost monochromatic. So familiar have a few oft-used colors become, they blend into a fixed color scheme. We have a ready-made God-canvas, which looks the same regardless of the light which may be available, or the many angles of vision provided by daily experience. Is it any wonder that many people are not attracted to the faith in God we profess? They cannot see how it is possible to fit together a 64-crayon experience of life in the world with our 8-crayon God.”

The more and more that we seek to understand God the more and more we will see him become relevant in aspects of our life that we never believed he mattered.

Our second instruction for worship is to hope in God. Verse 3 says, “no one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame.” And then the Psalmist says in verse 5, “my hope is in you all day long.”

Hope is a powerful thing, especially around Christmas. We put a lot of hope in junk.

I think our primary problem with putting our hope in God is that we are impatient. And what better time to focus in on our impatience than as we begin the season of Advent.

I am not a patient person. And my impatience is often a roadblock to deeper faith. Impatience is just a nice way of saying that I don't trust God's timing . . . that I am not willing to wait for God's work . . .

We live in a culture that moves very fast. This weekend in Mt. Sterling we were at my mom's house and tried out a new slush maker that she got. The thing was a beast. Next to it in the cabinet was a nifty little hand crank ice crusher. It was really really slow. It took almost a minute to crush ice with the manual crank. The electric ice pulverizer could crush ice into microscopic fragments in 20 seconds.

We live in a world of fast food. This past week I spoke about Thanksgiving to the local Exchange Club and we discussed how much our world has changed over the years. That the center of the living room is no longer the fire place where conversation takes place, but the television, where everyone stares collectively at an electronic box. Instead of getting a few gifts for Christmas, entire cars and living rooms are full of gifts. Most of them designed to brake in a couple years or at the very least to need an upgrade to a newer model.

One author says, “Americans are obsessed with throw-away diapers, entertained by instantaneous electronic media, educated by digests, condensed novels and crash courses, indoctrinated by an economic system which insists on "instant" credit for which we are encouraged to buy now and pay later, programed by a society which promotes immediate gratification, cured of ills by miracle drugs and laser beams.”

We do not know patience. We do not know how to wait. Well, the season of Advent . . . our preparation for Christmas is all about waiting. We know that Christmas is coming . . . we even know the

day, but we still must wait. Waiting feels so unnatural to us though. We hate it. But we often have no choice. We have to wait for Christmas, we can't make it come any sooner.

Advent means "coming." The clear idea is that we are waiting for the "coming" of Jesus. We have eager expectation for the day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

That is what drives us crazy . . . we work really hard at speeding up our lives, but no matter what we do there will always be times and places in our lives where we must wait. We really are fighting a winless battle. Waiting is simply a part of life.

Although I will be honest and say that I am very far away from truly understanding this . . . I believe that waiting is a natural part of the rhythm of life. It is really in waiting . . . in being patient that we surrender control over our lives . . . we find peace in relinquishing our agenda to that of others . . . and ultimately to God.

The reality is that there is no hope apart from God. And God works at his own speed. Even if a hearty Christmas meal or a new computer or a gift certificate for 10 massages give me some pleasure for a moment . . . it won't last and we know it. Look in your garage or in your closets. You were so excited when you first got that stuff. How do you feel about it now?

On Christmas morning 2000 years ago, the only hope for the world arrived in Jesus Christ. He did not seem like much, just a baby, but it would be through him that we would have the possibility to know God. And Jesus is coming back . . . when we don't know . . . but we must wait. Every bit of our being grasps wildly into the air for things and stuff, but they all turn up empty, if not the day after Christmas . . . in the years that follow.

Our final instruction for worship appears in verses 4-5, "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior." Verses 8-10 make a similar point. "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant."

Worship is not idleness. Worship is loving participation in what God is doing.

To love God is to do what he commands of us. Scripture makes this clear. John 14:21 says, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

The drama after the offering was clearly an exaggeration, but we know the reality all too well. Today is the beginning of Advent and this is when the madness often begins. Friday was Black Friday and millions got up very very early to spend spend spend. Our plea this Advent season and this morning is to slow down. To reflect. To lift our eyes up and trust God. To put our hope in the only being worth trusting. And to allow God to guide our steps.

It’s time for us to conspire to take Advent and Christmas back. It is up to you to take it back for your family. In the back of the sanctuary in front of the sound booth we have Advent family devotions that you can take to get you started. Each devotion has a scripture reading, discussion, prayer, and an activity for you to do together.

References consulted:

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Fretheim, Terence E. “The Color of God: Israel’s God-Talk and Life Experience.” Word & World 6, no. 3, 256-265 (Summer 1986).