

The Advent Conspiracy  
Conspiring Together To Change Our Priorities  
James 5:7-11

- I. Welcome to the Conspiracy.
  - a. Worship.
  - b. Relational Giving.
  - c. Resisting the Empire.
  - d. Sharing God's Bounty
- II. James takes us quickly to a place that may seem uncomfortable.
  - a. A pointed reminder that its not about us.
    - i. It's not about you – be patient, he says.
    - ii. It's not about you – don't grumble and complain.
    - iii. Even your troubles and sufferings – they're not about you.
  - b. Despite our affirmations to the contrary – it so easily becomes about us.
- III. Advent is another reminder that its not about us.
  - a. We are fond of saying that the “reason for the season” is Jesus.
    - i. If the reason for the season is Jesus then the Conspiracy begins to hit home.
      - 1. God is trying to change our priorities.
      - 2. God us trying to reorient us from being self-centered to being God-centered.
  - b. In reality, the reason for the season – is US.
    - i. In practice we worship at the altar of ME.
    - ii. And do just enough for others to salve our conscience.
      - 1. Over 50% of Americans say – We're spending less.
      - 2. Most Americans spend an average of \$800 per person in their household.
      - 3. We give far less to our brothers and sisters around the world in very real (severe) need.
  - c. But it's not just about our money and our spending.
    - i. It's about our priorities.
    - ii. It's about where our heads and our hearts are.
  - d. We're succumbing to a Christmas that has so little to do about Christ.
- IV. John in Matthew. (Matthew 11:2-11)
  - a. John is ...
    - i. Captured by Herod. {Pretender; more Greek than Jew}
      - 1. Hellenizing.
      - 2. Known for Construction.
        - a. His father re-built the temple -- It was bigger than ever.
        - b. But still smaller than Herod's palace.
        - c. Herod Antipas built a theatre, a coliseum, and Tiberius (a city on the Sea of Galilee built to honor Caesar.)
      - 3. Give up the culture of God.
      - 4. Embrace the culture of the Romans like Herod.
      - 5. Herod turned his back on his people, his heritage and his God.
    - ii. In prison.
    - iii. Losing influence.
    - iv. “Are you the one?”
  - b. Jesus answers focuses John on new priorities. {Matthew 11:4-5}
    - i. The blind receive their sight.
    - ii. The lame walk.

- iii. Those who have leprosy are cleansed.
    - iv. The deaf hear, the dead are raised.
    - v. The good news is proclaimed to the poor.
    - vi. The overlooked are looked upon; the forgotten have been remembered.
  - c. John's eyes are opened.
    - i. It's not about John.
    - ii. Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. {Verse 11}
    - iii. Even so – Priorities -- yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. {Verse 11}
- V. I've been struggling this Christmas.
  - a. I wanted so much to change.
  - b. Instead of merely turning the page – I wanted to jump ahead to the final chapter.
    - i. I didn't want progress – I wanted
    - ii. I haven't been entirely successful in that.
    - iii. I've felt frustrated at nearly every turn.
  - c. I find myself fighting to keep my focus on Christ this Christmas.
    - i. The very Christmas I wanted to do so much better.
    - ii. I've had to remind myself constantly of what really matters.
  - d. I've been saying to myself – “I will not walk the way of Herod.”
- VI. That's been a tall order.
  - a. The way of Herod is well lit, well paved and well travelled.
  - b. I feel like the road to Bethlehem is a lonely dirt road.
  - c. But I will not walk the way of Herod.
- VII. During this time I've learned that waiting is not passive.
  - a. Waiting is active preparation.
    - i. Matthew 25:1-4 – “Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.
    - ii. It's not just about anticipation; its about preparing.
    - iii. It's about what you need to DO in order to be ready.
  - b. Waiting is about doing.
    - i. We have guests coming next weekend.
    - ii. What are we doing – we're getting ready. {cleaning/cooking/haircut}
    - iii. John's words from last week's scripture - *Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.* { Matthew 3:3}
    - iv. Sounds like work – sounds like doing.
  - c. Waiting is not passive.
    - i. What are you doing as you wait for Christ's coming?
    - ii. I can think of some things that I need to do.
      - 1. I'm re-thinking my spending.
      - 2. I'm re-thinking my time – bible study/devotion/accountability/my leisure.
      - 3. I'm re-thinking my relationships.
- VIII. Patience is not weakness.
  - a. When patience is passivity it also can look like weakness.
  - b. James mentions Job in Chapter 5 {Verse 11}
  - c. Others look at Job and see weakness.
    - i. That's what Job's friends thought – Job 18

1. Bildad (Job's friend) says that Job is ripe for the picking
  2. Why? Because he is weak.
  - ii. That's what Job's wife thought – Job 2:9
    1. Curse God.
    2. Why are you just sitting there?
  - d. It's not weakness; it's a quiet strength.
    - i. James – patience of Job.
    - ii. Jesus was silent before his accusers.
      1. Waiting for the plan of God to play out.
      2. Was he weak – no! Quiet strength.
- IX. If Jesus is coming our priorities will change.
- a. God first (in your life) – nothing matters more than your relationship with God.
  - b. God first (in your response to others) – nothing matters more than living the Gospel so that others see Jesus in you.
  - c. God first in everything!
    - i. That's crazy – Yes.
    - ii. Revolutionary – absolutely.
- X. This is what I mean by Resisting the Empire.
- a. I don't believe that Jesus came so that the world would remain largely the same after he left it.
  - b. I believe he came to “set things right.”
  - c. That requires a complete God-directed rearranging (a changing) of our priorities.
  - d. “I will not walk the way of Herod.”