

Reading Schedule for February 5-11, 2018

We will finish up our reading from the Upper Room, and focus on the prayer of Jesus that means so much to us today. By mid-week, we will enter into the intense hour of Jesus' arrest, prosecution, and decision made to sentence him to death. We are just two short months away from Easter, and these chapters will help us to anticipate the significance of what Jesus has done for us.

February 5 – John 16:16-33: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (v.33) We all know that life is difficult. We might surmise that from our own experience. But here Jesus is affirming the truth of how we will have trouble. If we follow Jesus, we will be opposed, as he was. But obviously he also promises peace. What did we learn in this reading that gives us reassurance of peace? How can we have opposition and overcome at the same time? These are the last words of Jesus before he prayed for his disciples, and for you and me. These readings through chapters 14-16 are essential words for us in living the Christian life. I think of them more significantly because they were the last teaching that Jesus gave to his disciples. These words were also meant for you and me. How has the Upper Room discourse inspired you?

February 6 – John 17:1-19: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." (v.15) I think I have actually prayed this part of the prayer more than any other. I remember praying for my children that the Father would protect them from the evil one. It is clear that the devil and his cohorts want to do us harm because all they have is evil in mind. But Jesus prays that the Father would sustain them in the midst of opposition, temptation and the deception of the enemy. The word can be translated guarded or protected or keep them. I also emphasize verse 17 because it has to do with how God uses His Word to transform us. Sanctification is a process, and one of the key components is the truth of God's Word. We learn in Romans 12:2 that we are called to be transformed by the renewing our mind. When our mind is filled with God's truth, we are set free; we are made new; we are slowly but surely shaped into the likeness of Jesus Christ. I pray that you will be kept from the enemy, and that you will be filled with God's truth through His Word, even as I pray for the New Harvest church family. How are you inspired by this part of the prayer?

February 7 – John 17:20-26: "... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (v.21) Both verses 21 & 23 are similar in that they emphasize the importance of unity. It is rare that people live in unity from diverse backgrounds. In fact, being close and full of love for each other is one of the strongest ways Jesus draws people to himself. When you and I, as his people, are one, the world takes notice. The "so that" in verse 23 is a purpose statement that the world might know that the Father sent Jesus, and that he is the Savior of the world. Why do you think oneness is so essential to the Gospel? How do you understand these prayers? These seven verses are words that Jesus prayed for you and me. How does that bless you?

February 8 – John 18:1-11: "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.)" (v.5) This connects with the many references that Jesus gave about himself referring to the "I AM." We know that points to deity. We believe fully that Jesus is the Son of God, and he announced it in so many amazing ways. He said unique things like, "bread of life" and "living water." He called

himself "the resurrection and the life." And now he is identifying himself, and when he does the soldiers' reaction is so consistent with the meaning of who he is. When he identified himself, "they drew back and fell to the ground." We read this kind of reaction throughout the Bible, and it always refers to the divine revelation of an angel or God himself. In this dark hour Jesus is still shining with the power of his true identity. I hope you are inspired by this fact, even though the setting is very upsetting because Jesus is being arrested. How do you respond to these words?

February 9 – John 18:12-24: "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret." (v.20) Did you know that Jesus echoes God's words in Isaiah 45:19, where it declares, "I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right. I have not spoken in secret. . ." In Isaiah 48:16, it clearly says, "the Sovereign Lord has sent me," as Jesus points again to the prophecies about his identity. We have read many times where Jesus talked to the crowds and was near the temple speaking the truth of God. What he says is totally accurate. The decision has already been made and this is the beginning of the devil's night, where darkness would reign and Jesus would be abused. Yet the Lord never turned back. Thank God for our Savior's determination. How do you respond to these verses?

February 10 – John 18:25-40: "This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die." (v.32) There is an interesting fact behind this statement. If the Jews had been in charge of putting Jesus to death, he would have been stoned, because the sanction in the Old Testament was to stone someone who was accused of blasphemy. But the form of execution that the Romans used was crucifixion, as I am sure you are well aware. This was considered to be cursed by God. David wrote a thousand years before Christ was crucified that "dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircle me; they pierced my hands and my feet." (Psalm 22:16) There are other statements about Jesus being abused and what he went through for us on the cross in that Psalm. In fact, the whole Psalm begins with, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" which Jesus proclaimed from the cross. In Isaiah 53 it said it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer so that the Lord makes his life an offering for sin. (Isaiah 53:10) These events are happening just like God had ordained, as difficult as they are to read. It was God's plan and purpose, and by simple and sincere faith we are made right with him through Jesus. What do you appreciate about Jesus from this reading?

February 11 – John 19:1-16: "Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.'" (v.11) I appreciate this profound truth. Nothing is happening that God is not orchestrating. Jesus instructs Pilate that God rules over all and that Pilate's authority is derived from God. Pilate is a pawn in the hand of the devil, and will succumb to convenience and accept the execution of an innocent man. Unless Pilate repented, he will be condemned for his sin. Jesus received the 39 lashes and then he was led off to be crucified. It doesn't say that specifically in this record of Jesus being sentenced to death, but in all the other accounts it was the tradition of those crucified to be scourged before being crucified, even though he had been flogged already. We are familiar with these words, but let them move your heart again. How do you respond?

Prayers: Please pray for our staff as they have important responsibilities in our ministry. Pray that God will protect them and fill them with the Spirit.