

Reading Schedule for January 1-7, 2018

It's important to me to consider the New Year as I put together the reading schedule. I prayed about how to launch the New Year and the Gospel of John just seemed like the right way to begin 2018. John is unique in his writing because he talks more about the divine nature of Jesus. There is also quite a bit of teaching that is accompanied with John's presentation of Jesus. I love the fact that John talks about Jesus doing what the Father tells him to do. God is always at work, and if we can be in step with him, the Lord's Kingdom will advance. May the themes of the Gospel of John inspire you as we begin the New Year.

January 1 – John 2:12-25: “So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.” (v.15) This is a unique account of Jesus confronting the Jewish leaders. In the other Gospels, we have the temple cleansing in the last week of Jesus' life. Some scholars believe that Jesus cleansed the temple twice. I actually have that inclination myself. This would begin a ministry of confrontation to the Pharisees, who focused on the outside and how they looked, compared to a genuine spiritual life on the inside. It is as if the temple represented their own lives. There were manmade rituals and obligations that cluttered the real meaning of the temple. Oftentimes I think we have cluttered lives, and the best thing that the Lord can do is to refine us with a strong emphasis of discipline. The Bible is clear that God disciplines those who he loves. I think of this as my need to be cleansed. How do you respond to the righteous anger of Jesus in this story?

January 2 – John 3:1-21: “Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.’” (v.3) How do you pick a verse in this dialogue that says so much about the importance of spiritual birth? Nicodemus will be a part of our story from time to time, as he is very interested in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus does not hold back in his presentation to Nicodemus as he says, “You must be born again.” In my upbringing in the Lutheran church, they didn't want to use the term “born again.” I know that is one of the weaknesses of my religious experiences – that you were ok because you attended church, or you were a part of the Youth Group. But Nicodemus was a part of the religious order of that day, and he was held in high regard. But he needed to be born again, along with all those who he worked with. Born again is the beginning of Christian life. When we are made new creations in Christ through faith in Jesus it changes us from the inside out, and begins a life of relationship with Jesus and growth with him. How do you understand “born again?” Do you know people in your life who need to be born again? How might you point them to Jesus?

January 3 – John 3:22-36: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.” (v.36) This wraps up this key chapter about receiving eternal life. The way that Jesus explains it indicates that eternal life is not merely a future expectation, but rather a present experience. Life that begins with Jesus is eternal and it is also relevant to my life right now, not just when I go to heaven. Of course, heaven will be perfect and we will have face-to-face fellowship with the Lord. But it begins now. The opposite is true of those who have not trusted Christ. The wrath of God remains on them, which means they remain under God's judgment. How do you respond to these inspiring words about relationship with Jesus Christ?

January 4 – John 4:1-26: “When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’” (v.7) The main storyline for me in this encounter has to do with Jesus' initiative to speak with the Samaritan woman. This would be so contrary to the culture and tradition of his day. But he was way more concerned about this woman's heart than

about the expectations of religious and cultural norms. I am sure the Samaritan woman was quite surprised that this Jewish man was speaking to her. It would be the beginning of her opening up to him and eventually believing. He says many profound things to this woman. Which one gets your attention? How does Jesus' example of “stepping across the room” and reaching out to this woman challenge you? We did a series about walking across the room, which meant to respectfully initiate connection with people who you sense need Christ. I think a great way to summarize would be for you to follow Jesus' example today.

January 5 – John 4:27-42: “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, ‘He told me everything I ever did.’” (v.39) I was impressed that the shepherds were the first evangelists to spread the good news about Jesus Christ. They were looked down upon in Jesus' day. Shepherds were a low class. But even more so the Samaritan woman, who was obviously living a life of sin, especially in that culture. But people could begin to see through her sincere testimony and a change in her countenance that she had experienced something very profound. The people around her believed in Jesus because of her witness. It has always been that way. The most effective way for people to come to faith is for them to see Jesus in you, and for you to have the courage to share his love and life with them. How do you respond to the woman's example of sharing out of the overflow of her life what Jesus has done for her?

January 6 – John 4:43-54: “‘Unless you people see signs and wonders,’ Jesus told him, ‘you will never believe.’” (v.48) It sounds like a negative statement, but Jesus wanted to make sure that they knew that the purpose for him to do miracles was to point them to the truth. Some may become entranced with signs and wonders, and fail to see that they point to Jesus, and hence fail to believe in him. That would mean the signs would be of no effect. This does not mean that John viewed signs, in and of themselves, negatively. Actually he points to the fact that Jesus did miracles, proving who he was. This is the second specific miracle we read of in the Gospel of John, but many will follow. If it was negative for him to do miracles, then Jesus would only come with words of truth compared to acts of power to show his true identity. He will soon say that he is the bread of life and he will have fed 5,000 at the same time. The power of Jesus points us to the truth of Jesus. How do you respond to this second miracle in John?

January 7 – John 5:1-15: “. . . and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, ‘It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.’” (v.10) You might find it interesting to know that the Old Testament does not specifically prohibit such an innocent activity as carrying one's bedroll on the Sabbath Day. Jewish traditions began to elaborate on the commands of God, and went into great detail with burdensome rules that must be kept to honor the Sabbath. This manmade code would forbid carrying an object “from one domain into another.” At another time, Jesus taught that man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for the man. To the benefit of this man, the Lord healed him. This was a good work on the Sabbath, and Jesus said, “My Father is working and so am I.” He did not try to argue with the religious leaders, but let his actions speak for themselves. Why is the Sabbath still important? How do you practice the Sabbath?

Prayers: Obviously the New Year is an exciting opportunity to serve God and grow in your relationship with Him. May you focus your prayers on developing a consistency in your connection with God through his Word and prayer. I encourage you to pray ten minutes a day.