

Reading Schedule for June 18-24, 2018

We will wrap up the Book of Esther on a high note. The historical events of Esther are amazing, and show that God will have his way no matter what. I hope you are encouraged by our reading through the Book of Esther. We will transition into the New Testament and take a couple of weeks on the Book of James. It has been a while since I read the Book of James, and it has so many practical and challenging aspects to it, that I think it will be very engaging for us as we enter into the warm days of Summer.

June 18 - Esther 8: "That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her." (v.1) Esther and Mordecai both risked their lives to save others. They were willing to give everything up, and God rewarded them. We may not always experience rewards here on earth for the kind of sacrifice that we see in Esther and Mordecai, but we can be assured that God will bless us eternally with rewards that will be meaningful forever. I want you to be inspired by Esther and Mordecai as they are exalted after humbly giving themselves to the plan of God. The Lord took care of them, and he will take care of you. How do you respond to this exciting chapter that elevates Esther and Mordecai?

June 19 - Esther 9 & 10: "Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews." (10:3) This story reminds me of Joseph in Egypt. Joseph was the most unlikely choice for the Pharaoh, and so is Mordecai, a Jew. I used this last verse as a means of affirming God's blessing over Mordecai, but also as the conclusion of the book. We clearly see that God has his way, and I love what Mordecai said in chapter 4, that God would deliver them one way or another. God is in control, and you can count on his protection consistent with his sovereign plan. Although we may not understand everything that happens to us or around us, we can trust God's protection and continue to do what is right. Both Esther and Mordecai became heroes of our faith. I love the message of Esther, and I hope you do too. No matter what, our God is in control of the affairs of this world, even when we wonder because of our finite perspective. Today, renew your trust in the infinite God who cares about you deeply. What do you take away from the Book of Esther for your spiritual life?

June 20 - James 1:1-18: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds . . ." (v.2) This is probably the most well-known statement in the whole book, because it tells us to have a sense of rejoicing in our trials. It affirms that same truth in verse 12 as well. Because trials deepen our faith and shape our souls, we can respond to them with a joyful perspective. If we wonder why we are going through certain trials, we can ask God for wisdom. The sustaining power of faith, which means confidence in God, will carry us through any trial. These are rich words for us as we begin this very practical book. What verse stands out to you?

June 21 - James 1:19-27: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (v.22) I chose this verse because it really is a theme in the Book of James. Obedience is the hallmark of the sincere child of God. Hearing

the Word of God without responding to it is empty. I have heard that it is said that most believers in America know more than they even are beginning to apply to their lives. Maybe the emphasis should be on application rather than knowledge. But I know for myself that I have to read something several times, and contemplate it is such a way as to figure out how it is to be lived out, and then I will be more ready to do it. There's a combination of receiving and living it out that I need every day. I am more prone to apply as I absorb God's truth. I challenge you to renew your commitment to obey God's Word, not just to read it. Does that make sense?

June 22 - James 2:1-13: "Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (v.5) James tells us how we are to view the poor. He is saying that the poor have a special place in God's economy of salvation. As believers, they are rich in an eternal sense. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom in heaven." James reminds us that the poor can actually be in a better position than one who is rich and weak toward God. If we favor the rich over the poor, James tells us that we are committing sin. These are very practical and challenging words about pride in our possessions and status in life. How do you respond to these challenging words?

June 23 - James 2:14-26: "But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds." (v.18) We are reading some challenging words that have been interpreted in many different ways. James teaches that faith is a life of obedience. This will show itself through good works. How can anyone know if you have genuine faith if you don't show it? The Lord meant for faith alone to save us, but he also meant for our faith to be seen. If there is no evidence of our faith, it is like a tree that produces no fruit. May the challenge of James stir us to good deeds, pointing people to the One who inspires our good works. How do you respond to this section in the Book of James?

June 24 - James 3:1-12: "We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check." (v.2) This is the theme in this section about taming the tongue. A person's words reflect his character, and thus are key to his whole being. Jesus says that what proceeds out of you comes from the heart. If your heart is full and strong in faith, your words will match the genuine vitality of your faith. I am very conscious of the use of my words. The Apostle Paul said in Ephesians, "Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only that which is edifying to others." There is no doubt about the power of the tongue. It can give life, or it can bring destruction. How do you respond to this practical teaching on the importance of your words?

PRAYER: Pray for the children that are attending Canyonview Camp this week. Many of these youngsters are from our After School Program and may not have a relationship with Jesus, but will hear the Gospel this week. Pray for God's work of salvation in many young hearts.