

Reading Schedule for November 7-13, 2016

Is this a good week for us to read about the Passion of Jesus Christ? Do you know what I mean by that title? I am sure you do; this refers to Christ's betrayal, arrest, beating and crucifixion. We know this from the movie with the same title, "The Passion of the Christ," by Mel Gibson. Each of the Gospels writes thoroughly about these hours in Jesus' life. You may be looking for a more upbeat topic as we are in the month that emphasizes thanksgiving, but couldn't the suffering of Christ be something we are truly thankful for?! This will be our topic, beginning with his arrest.

November 7 – John 18:1-14: "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. 'I am he,' Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground." (v. 5 & 6) This is always my favorite statement. The authority of Jesus is seen as the soldiers fall backwards to the ground. Sometimes it is suggested that the soldiers were surprised by the boldness of Christ in the midst of being arrested, and so they were thrown back. I think it is more than a surprise, but rather the very presence of God that bolted them out of their shoes. Just minutes previous to this, Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane with great travail about taking on the sins of the world. Now we see his true nature as he expresses himself as the Son of God with these words, "I am he." I love that John writes about Jesus being the "I Am." How do you respond to this event? What else stands out to you about his arrest?

November 8 – John 18:15-27: "Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, 'You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?' He denied it, saying, 'I am not.'" (v.25) We have been told previously that the disciples would leave Jesus alone. We read that in John 16:32, but Peter follows along, as well as the disciple John. This shows a great deal of courage. Peter's heart was right, but his motivation crumbled when confronted with the reality of his own arrest. There is no question in my mind that Peter loved Jesus, but the Lord would use this failure to refine him deeply for the purposes that God has in mind for the disciple Peter. I am really drawn to Peter. I can have similar ambitions, and yet when the pressure rises, I find myself weak at times. I have looked back at disappointments, and even failures, as God's refining work in my life, and I appreciate how Peter responds as he writes a letter of great humility called 1 Peter. Peter repents, as we know, but Judas runs away. I want you to be like Peter, and let God refine you through your failures and sin. He wants to use you as his jar of clay, molding you into the image of Christ. Do you agree? What else stirs your heart?

November 9 – John 18:28-40: "Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'" (v.36) I appreciate the reminder that what Jesus cares about most is the kingdom of God. We can be pulled into the activities of this world and become very frustrated. We want to fight to prevent bad things from happening. I am not suggesting that this is all wrong. I am just saying that Jesus had a higher purpose. Jesus' main focus, through the record of the Gospels, is the advancement of the Kingdom. He wants God to reign in your hearts and in his church. The hope of the world is the kingdom expressed through the bride of Christ, which is the church. Don't forget that the world is pulling us to take sides, to fight, and to be distracted from what is most important. Do you agree? How do you respond to the statement about Jesus

and his Kingdom?

November 10 – John 19:1-16: "Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged." (v.1) Each and every time, the Gospel writers talk about Jesus being flogged, it doesn't really express the intensity. Flogging could have killed Jesus – 39 lashes that would rip the skin right off the victim's body. You know the scenes because you've seen them in movies. I could barely watch the flogging in the movie, "The Passion of the Christ." This particular reading today is very difficult because it reminds me of how strongly I want to say, "Stop it!" What do these verses mean to you? How do you respond to them?

November 11 – 2 Corinthians 5:1-10: Just when you think that 2 Corinthians can't get any better, we read these marvelous words. It talks about our heavenly tent and the assurance of eternity. It gives us a sense of focus about what we should be preoccupied with right now, and it tells us that one day we will stand before Christ and give an account of our service to him. Aren't you curious on what emphasis will come out in the sermon? You won't want to miss this Sunday as we look again into the inspirational words from the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. What do you notice in these verses that stirs your heart?

November 12 – John 19:17-27: "When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." (v. 26 & 27) It seems like John would be the one to remember these words, and so this is the only Gospel we read about Jesus' words regarding his mother. Jesus is at a point of intense pain that we cannot imagine, and yet he still is thinking about others. As the oldest son, it would be Jesus' responsibility to care for his mother. This is a great example for me, because sometimes my pain can consume my thoughts. When I have my own personal struggles, I have the tendency to ignore others and focus on my problems. Jesus didn't do that, and the Apostle Paul didn't do that either, as we read in our study in 2 Corinthians. There is something about taking your eyes off of yourself and being concerned for others that actually helps you through your own troubles. Do you agree? Why is helping others oftentimes healing for yourself?

November 13 – John 19:28-42: "He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds." (v.39) Do you think Nicodemus came to faith? We read about his encounter with Jesus in John 3 and we also see him defending Jesus before the other religious leaders in John 7:50-52. He also risks his reputation to provide for Jesus' burial. Most people believe that Nicodemus came out of hiding from being a secret follower of Christ to showing that he had a love and allegiance to Jesus, even if he didn't understand the whole message of the Gospel. He responded in love and faith, and I have to admit that I anticipate meeting Nicodemus in heaven one day. Maybe to many in your life you're a secret follower of Christ. They don't know it and you're not prone to tell it. I encourage you to come out of hiding and share your affection for Christ, and your appreciation of the Gospel. How will you respond to my challenge?

Prayers: Pray for Tuesday, November 8, and the strategic election in our country, that isn't just about choosing a president, but so many other key roles in government. Also pray for the veterans who defend our freedom.