



**COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH**

"Stories"

Part II

Daily Scripture Readings for
May 27 – June 30

WEEK 6 - Esther

Monday, May 27 - Esther 2:1-18

Our story of Esther begins with her becoming queen. The Jewish people are in the midst of exile in Persia. Let's not sugarcoat the horrors of the events leading to Esther being queen. The king gets rid of his current queen because of her disobedience to him. He then enslaves, kidnaps, forces the young virgins of the kingdom to come to the palace as part of his harem. Each young woman gets one chance to... umm...let's go with "entertain" the king. This goes on for over a year, and Esther is the one who was chosen based on his contest.

This reading is a necessary introduction to the characters and plot of Esther's story. Esther is hiding her identity as a Jew, which brings up a very perplexing question of "is it ok to hide your relationship with God in order to achieve a greater goal?" I think this episode with Esther is the exception rather than the rule. In most cases, we never hide our faith in Christ. We stand boldly for our faith, no matter the consequences. If you know the story of Esther, her hiding her identity until the appropriate time is an important plot point to her story. This plot we will read together this week. In conclusion for today, Esther 2:1-18 is not be a text that supports us hiding our faith. We are to be a light of the world. Where do you need to bring this light today?

Tuesday, May 28 - Esther 3:1-6

The main problem of the story is discovered in our reading today. Haman plotted to destroy all of the Jews because Mordecai would not bow down to him. Seems a little dramatic to say the least. Mordecai indicates he would not bow to Haman because Mordecai was a Jew. What is odd about this statement is that there is no law in the Old Testament stating that Mordecai could not bow to Haman. This isn't like Daniel when he was asked to worship the King Nebuchadnezzar. So what is going on here? Esther 3:1 tells us that Haman is a Agagite, meaning he has descended from King Agag of the Amalekites. The Amalekites and Israel have a troubled history which started back in Exodus 17. This history is probably why Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman. And this history is probably why Haman goes to the extreme of calling for genocide against the Jewish people. But the Jews have a person on the inside: Esther. We will see that part of the plan coming later this week.

For today, can you imagine hating someone or a people so much that you wish they were dead? Sadly, too many people in this world, including Christians, have a

feeling toward a person or people group in this way. There is no room for hate and racism in the church (there's no room for it in the world either). Pray for racial tensions to be healed in our communities. Pray for your love to extend to all people. Even if you do have enemies, Jesus said to love them. And you want to do what Jesus says right?

Wednesday, May 29 - Acts 5:17-29

Our Wednesday evening lesson will discuss obeying God instead of man. Acts 5:29 tells us very clearly, "We must obey God rather than human authority." Think about this statement throughout the day. Ask yourself: "what does this mean concerning me and where I live?" Come tonight and let's talk about this question together.

Thursday, May 30 - Esther 4

There are a few statements in our passage today worthy of discussion. One is Esther's attempt to take care of Mordecai while he was in mourning. Another is Esther asking for Mordecai and the other Jews to fast on her behalf for three days prior to going into the king. A third could be her statement of agreeing to go and saying "if I perish, I perish." All of these could be great points to consider. However, there is a fourth I find most interesting. Mordecai makes a statement in 4:14 that if Esther does not speak up, help will rise from another place. Mordecai is convinced that God will save the Jews in some way because he always has. Mordecai and Esther may die, but Israel will remain in some form.

This idea can be applied to our lives in the Kingdom of God. God doesn't *need* us to work for his Kingdom. God could get the work done without us. However, God *wants* to use us in Kingdom work. God gives us the opportunity to be part of his work. God's ultimate plan is going to happen with or without us. The question is if we will join the work or not. Will you grab hold of the opportunity to do the work God has planned or will you miss out on being a Kingdom worker?

Friday, May 31 - Esther 5:1-8; 7:1-10

Every year, at the end of the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament (March Madness), there is a highlights video of the tournament set to a song "One Shining Moment" by Luther Vandross. The point of the song and the video is that these players have worked very hard for many years and this tournament has been their one chance to shine.

You might be able to say that Esther's "one shining moment" comes in our passage today. Prayers and fasting have taken place, and Esther goes before the king who accepts her presence. Through her actions, the Jews are saved and Haman is hanged for his plot. Esther has been through a lot in her life. Her mother and father had died and she was raised by her uncle. She was forcibly taken to the king and included in his harem and against her will made his queen. But once you see the conclusion of this story, God uses the events in her life in order to save the Jewish people.

You are unique. Maybe it's hyperbole to say and I cannot prove it, but never before has someone lived your exact life. You are specially equipped to do something that nobody else on earth can do. What are you uniquely capable of doing that no one else can? I truly believe that God has something special for each of us to do. Something unique that we are best prepared to do. Pray for God to show you what you can do for his glory.

Saturday, June 1 - John 20:31

VBS starts tomorrow night. John 20:31 is the theme verse for this year. Please please please spend time in prayer for all of the workers and children who will be here. VBS is the most evangelistic event we do every year. Pray that the gospel is presented to the children who come in a way where they accept Jesus as their Savior.

Sunday, June 2 - Psalm 5

WEEK 7 - Lydia

Monday, June 3 - Acts 16:11-15

The story of Lydia is the story of the beginning of the church in Philippi. While Paul and Silas were there, they went to the river on the Sabbath. What this indicates is that the Jewish community in Philippi is small if in existence at all. Philippi was founded by Mark Antony in 42 BC as a colony of Roman veterans, which helps to explain the absence of a synagogue in Philippi. To build a synagogue, the community needed at least ten Jewish men. Without that, the people who were "worshippers of God" would meet at the river. Lydia hears the message of Jesus and entrusts her life to him. Her whole household converts as well. Surely, there were countless stories like this in the ministry of Paul. Why is Lydia's story singled out in Acts? Because it's not just Lydia's family that comes to Christ. The church forms in Philippi because of Lydia.

On that Sabbath morning, Lydia was worshipping God the best she knew how. It was not until Paul and Silas went out to the river and told Lydia who Jesus was that she was able to trust Him as her Savior. Is there anyone waiting on you to share your story with them? Are there people trying to live a spiritual life as best they can, but haven't heard the message of Jesus? Pray for God to show you someone to share the story of Jesus with. You never know what God has in store for that person.

Tuesday, June 4 - Acts 16:40; Philippians 1:1-6

Because Lydia's conversion is in Philippi, we read some of the book of Philippians this week as well. In a story we skipped in Acts 16, Paul and Silas are thrown in prison. An earthquake came and knocked down the prison, but Paul and Silas stayed and the jailer was converted. After they were released, they go to Lydia's house and saw the Philippian Christians. We are learning more and more about Lydia's story. We know she was a businesswoman, a dealer in purple cloth. Her family is described as Lydia's household, so she is the leader of her family. The Christians are meeting at her home, meaning it was most likely the place where they regularly came to worship. Churches didn't have buildings in the 1st century, they met in homes. And do you know whose home they usually met in? Their pastor's home. Lydia is most likely the pastor and, along with Paul, the founder of the Philippian church!

What does this mean for us? Well, for one, it is certainly an endorsement for women being pastors. However, we also see the Christian community that has been developed in Philippi, no doubt, because of the work of Lydia and Paul. The church was praying and worshipping while Paul and Silas were in prison. The church was able to rejoice with them upon their release. They saw the power of God that night because the church was gathered in prayer and worship. Pray for that type of community in our church. Pray for the desire for us to come together in prayer and worship, so that we can see God's work in Cleburne. Pray for your ministry staff who, like Lydia, have the task of leading the church to this type of community. What can you do as well to help build a church like the Philippians had under the direction of Lydia?

Wednesday, June 5 - Acts 16:1-5, Phil. 2:19-24

Without Wednesday night service because of VBS, we continue the story of Lydia and the Philippian church today. Today's readings introduce us to Timothy, a co-laborer, with Paul. From the Acts 16 passage, we learn that Timothy was with Paul at the beginning of the Philippian church and Lydia's conversion. It is in Philippians 2 that Paul wants to send Timothy back to the church to help them in this current time.

Timothy puts others' concern above his own. He serves God and serves others passionately. If Paul himself couldn't go to Philippi, then Timothy is an acceptable substitute. Timothy is an excellent example for all of us and would certainly help Lydia and the Philippian church.

Thursday, June 6 - Philippians 3:1-11

There's a story that I've heard of a new pastor at a church. On his first Sunday, he preached a fantastic sermon that the congregation collectively thought was just what they needed to hear. When everyone arrived next week, they looked forward to what the pastor would have for them. Then they were shocked. He preached the same exact sermon. A deacon talks with the pastor to ask what is going on and the pastor replies "well, when you get it, we will move to the next thing." This pastor did not last long at the church.

While the pastor's method may have been upsetting, the reason behind the repetition is exactly what Paul states he is doing in Philippians 3:1. The people in Philippi (where Lydia is a leader) needed to hear the same things which Paul shared while he was there. It is something all of us need to be reminded of as well. All of the successes we have in life are nothing compared to the knowledge of Christ. Too often, we forget this with our actions. We have pride in who we are and what we have done. We boast in our own achievements instead of the achievement of Christ. What "point of pride" do you have that you need to focus less on? Pray for God's forgiveness for the sin of pride. And don't get upset when you hear the same message every time you need to hear it.

Friday, June 7 - Revelation 2:18-29

I include this letter to the church in Thyatira because Acts tells us that this is where Lydia was from. Thyatira was the town of wealth because of the purple cloth that was dyed there. It also was a center of Pagan worship which had started to influence Christian worship. This is the concern that John is writing about in this letter in Revelation. The church in Thyatira was founded early in the first century and was possibly founded by Paul on the missionary journey as described in Acts 19:10. It's hard to imagine that Lydia did not play a part in Paul going to Thyatira. Knowing how great of a story-teller Paul was, I envision him going to the townsquare, river, or synagogue and proclaiming the story of Lydia of Thyatira's conversion. Using her as an example to be followed.

Is your story of faith a story that someone can share to show the power of God? Are you living your life in a way that someone can look at you and know you follow Christ? Pray for yourself today. Ask God to guide you in your actions and words so that others know the God you follow.

Saturday, June 8 - Romans 12:1-2

How do I know God's will for my life? This is our topic for tomorrow night. It's hard to know the plan God has for us. These instructions in Romans 12:1-2 tell us the preparation involved in discerning God's will. The focus of our life is to be on Christ. When our focus stays on him, then the will God has for us is made clearer. Let's talk more about this tomorrow night.

Sunday, June 9 - Philippians 2:5-11

Considered one of the earliest hymns of the Church, it gives us the ultimate example to follow and a picture of the beautiful sacrifice Christ made for us. Come and worship this Christ who humbled himself for you.

WEEK 8 - Jeremiah

Monday, June 10 - Jeremiah 1:1-10

Jeremiah's call is a standard call for many of the Old Testament Prophets. God comes to the person and proclaims that he has been destined to be a prophet. The person makes excuses why he cannot do it. God promises to take care of the issue. Then, there is some type of statement for how the prophet's ministry will go. This will be our focal text this Sunday. It will be a big day at our church. We will be taking Lord's Supper. We will collecting a Special Offering and Pledges for the repairing and repainting of the exterior of the church. We will be celebrating Father's Day. Begin praying for Sunday Worship and don't stop!

Notice the inadequacy Jeremiah feels. Notice the underlying fear he has. Notice the breakdown of his ministry. Jeremiah's story is the story we discuss on Sunday. Do you feel inadequate to do God's will in your life? GOOD. You should. You are inadequate, but our God is fully capable of taking care of our inadequacies and using them for the work of His Kingdom. Pray for God to use you in a powerful way today.

Tuesday, June 11 - Jeremiah 20:7-18

Jeremiah expresses his frustrations with being a prophet in these words we read today. To sum it up, he says “I’m tired of doing this. I wish I was never alive, but I can’t stop.” The prophets of the Old Testament had a difficult job. We learned this as we studied the Prophets earlier this year. My prayer for my life and my hope for you is that you feel like Jeremiah. Not necessarily the part about hating sharing the good news of Christ, but the fact that if you do not share, you feel a fire burning inside of you that the only quench is to share the message of Jesus. Let’s be honest. Life would be a lot easier if we just stayed quiet and just didn’t bother evangelizing. And let’s be more honest. Many of us do just that. This can’t be. We must strive to share the gospel with all people. And it should be so much a part of who we are that when we don’t, there is a burning fire inside of us that must come out.

If evangelizing makes you nervous, as I said to many of you in January, you are normal. Verse 11 should give you comfort. The Lord is with us like a dread warrior. If you are unfamiliar with this term, a dread warrior is one who is to be feared on the battlefield. We have a God who fights our battles. The Adversary has no chance. Our dread warrior will conquer the battlefield for us. Praise God!

Wednesday, June 12 - Acts 6:1-7

Our Wednesday night message will cover the selection of the first deacons for the church. Our focus will not necessarily be on the seven men selected, but on the reason they were selected in the first place. Resolving conflict is an important action in every group of people and the church is no different. The early church had a problem and resolved it with selecting deacons. What solutions are needed in our church?

Thursday, June 13 - Jeremiah 32:1-15

What do you do when your country is crumbling and the enemy is about to lay ruin to the area? Buy land! That was what Jeremiah was called to do in our passage today. On the surface, it is a foolish thing to do. But it points to an ultimate promise from God. There is hope in the land of Israel. Jeremiah is proclaiming to the people that there is a future for the family of Israel in the land of Israel. This proclamation is not with this words, but with his actions. As followers of Christ, we must have our actions follow our words. If we proclaim with our lips to not worry in the face of adversity because “if God is for us, who can be against us,” then we better be following through with our actions. Otherwise, the world sees us for what we are: hypocrites. While Jeremiah’s life was difficult because of his devotion to God, he always remained with

God. His actions always matched his words. Pray that your life matches Jeremiah's today.

Friday, June 14 - Lamentations 1

It is generally understood that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations. Lamentations 1 is a lament from the perspective of Jeremiah (1-11) and the perspective of the personified Jerusalem (12-22). The lament proclaims that Jerusalem is like a widow because God has allowed the city to fall. He has allowed it to be abandoned because of its sinfulness (v. 8). Later in the lament (v. 18), Jerusalem recognizes that she is to blame for her rebellion. I think this lament is a great picture into Jeremiah's mind at the fall of Jerusalem.

Praying prayers of lament can be difficult. Confronting the fear and sadness inside of you is heartbreaking. But it is necessary. We cannot grow unless we confront our struggles. What lament do you need to pray to God? What struggle do you need to bring before your Father? On this Father's Day weekend, let me say it this way: give it to Daddy, and let him take care of it.

Saturday, June 15 - Lamentations 3:22-24

In the midst of sorrow, Jeremiah stops to remember the glory and majesty of God. It is a beautiful reminder that no matter what we are going through and no matter how upset we are, God is still God and we are not. That God is faithful. God is one we can put our hope in. Do that today. Remember, God is our dread warrior. God is for us. God tells us to not be afraid. God's mercies are never ending, including today!

Sunday, June 16 - Ephesians 6:4

On this Father's Day, I hope and pray you can be thankful for a father who lives up to the instructions in Ephesians 6:4. If not, I pray that for the children in your life, you can be like the father in Ephesians 6:4. Fathers (Parents, Adults) are to be calming influences on children. We are supposed to be "the adults." Be the influence God commands on the little ones in your life.

WEEK 9 - Naaman

Monday, June 17 - 2 Kings 5:1-5

Let me try to paint you a picture. As a child, you are kidnapped. Taken away from your family, friends, and home. And you are forced to work for the family of the commander of the army. Would you help the family as best as you could or do the least possible amount of work to get by? Would you seek the best interest of the family or hope for their ruin? Most of us would choose the latter in both questions.

Today, we begin the story of Naaman, and it cannot happen unless a slave girl tells Naaman about Elisha in Samaria. One of the interesting things we will see in Naaman's story is the ineptitude of the characters who are supposed to be the leaders and the faith of the characters who would be marginalized in society. This "little girl" is the exact opposite of the "mighty warrior," but he needs her help in order to be healed. Never discount the people who society discounts. God sure doesn't discount them. God uses them. God sees them as equal to everyone else. Take heart if you have been pushed to the side of society. God wants to use you also. God used this young girl. He can use anyone.

Tuesday, June 18 - 2 Kings 5:6-8

I'm not sure whether to give King Jehoram of Israel credit or not about his response to the King of Aram. On one hand, he recognizes he cannot heal Naaman. This is progress from some of the other kings of Israel and Judah who seem to think they are prophets and priests as well as king. On the other hand, he doesn't think about Elisha being one who could heal Naaman. In fact, instead of recognizing to send Naaman to Elisha, he thinks Naaman's presence is an excuse to begin a war!

The value of the gifts that comes with Naaman is great. Too often, we think along the same lines. Whatever ailment or situation we have, if we pay the right person, then the problem will be resolved. We've learned this because this is what happens in society. God's Kingdom does not function in this way. It doesn't matter how rich you are or how much you are willing to pay, you can't pay your way to salvation. It is a free gift. Naaman is prepared to pay a large sum to be healed. Thursday, we will find out just how much it will cost.

Wednesday, June 19 - Acts 8:26-38

This story gets me fired up! I can't wait to explain it to you tonight at church. For now, I want you to hear these facts. The country of Ethiopia is in Northeast Africa. It is surrounded by Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Eritrea, and Djibouti. Why do I tell you where Ethiopia is? Hear this. In Ethiopia, 62.8% of the population is some type of Christian. In Ethiopia, only 33.9% of the population is Muslim. In Sudan, 97% of the country is Muslim. In Somalia, 99.8% of the country is Muslim. In Djibouti, 94% of the population is Muslim. Along with Kenya, South Sudan, and Eritrea, Ethiopia is one of only a handful of countries in Africa where the majority religion is Christianity. Do you want to know why I think that is? I bet you can guess. It traces back to this story. Let's talk about Breaking Barriers for Christ tonight.

Thursday, June 20 - 2 Kings 5:9-14

We left off Tuesday by asking what would be the price for Naaman to be healed? Well, it is something far harder to give up than possessions. It was pride. Once again, we see the importance of a servant by telling him "just go and wash. You would've done something hard. So just do it" (my paraphrase).

Pride gets in the way of our lives very often. For Naaman, it almost cost him the opportunity to be healed. What has pride cost you? Proverbs 16:18 tells it best by saying "pride comes before a fall." My definition of pride means you knowing more and not admitting you are wrong. Do you hear how dangerous that is as it relates to God? Do you think you know more than God? Do you think you are right and God is wrong? Maybe you don't think it, but do you act like it? Don't let pride cost you a chance at being healed by God. Humble yourself before God.

Friday, June 21 - 2 Kings 5:15-19a

The end of Naaman's story has a lot of odd actions which we could discuss. What I want us to focus on is how God treats us even when we don't get it. Naaman clearly doesn't understand God even after being healed. He wants to worship God only, so he wants dirt from Israel. He believes that God will only accept a sacrifice if it's on the actual dirt from the Promised Land. Naaman also asks for forgiveness ahead of time for fake (I think) worshipping false gods with his master. Elisha surprisingly gives him this forgiveness, but we won't talk about that because this is not Elisha's story. It's Naaman's. Naaman doesn't have a clue about God, but it seems that God (through Elisha) is willing to meet Naaman where he is. We do not hear from Naaman again after 2 Kings 5. We don't know how he grows in his faith. I'd like to think he continues

worshipping Yahweh, the God of Israel and learns more about the God who healed him.

The great thing about God is he doesn't expect us to know everything when we first come to him. God accepts our mistakes in worship and prayer as long as they are honest mistakes. Like the parent who puts the scribbles on the refrigerator from his two year old, God is proud of us. God accepts us if we think we need dirt to have a relationship with him. I hope those of us who have been in church for awhile, accept the mistakes of new Christians as well.

Saturday, June 22 - Proverbs 22:6

Tomorrow night at 5:00 p.m., we will have our Camp and VBS Reports. Come and support our children and youth. And come for dinner as well. You will be blessed by hearing what God is doing in the next generation of the church.

Sunday, June 23 - Psalm 6

WEEK 10 - Peter

Monday, June 24 - Mark 5:37-42

It was May 1, 2006. The Dallas Mavericks were finishing their first round sweep of the Memphis Grizzlies in the NBA playoffs. I had a ritual during that time of my life during the playoffs. I had a Dirk Nowitzki jersey that I would wear for every playoff game. I was in college at the time, and we were going to a movie toward the end of the game. My college roommate told me I couldn't wear the jersey to the movie. It was actually an unofficial first date, and he said the girl wouldn't be impressed with the jersey. So I changed. Then we went to the movies. The girl was LeeAnn, and that evening is forever etched into my memory.

There are moments in our lives that we remember more vividly than others. Weddings, funerals, births, graduations, or sometimes it's a random Monday that turn into something special. Many times, we don't expect the special things in life to occur until they do. For Peter, I think this moment is one of those special times. He remembers everything about the story as he is telling Mark about the event. As he recounts the story, he even says Jesus' words exactly like Jesus said: "Talitha cum."

We don't remember every moment of every day. But your memories are really highlights (or lowlights) of your life. What is one memory that you have like this? If it is a great memory, pray a prayer of thanksgiving for this moment in your life. If it is a hard

memory to recall, pray to God thanking him for bringing you through that difficult time, and also pray for him to give you strength in any remaining grief.

Tuesday, June 25 - Matthew 14:22-33

Several years ago, LeeAnn and I went on a cruise and in one of the ports, we went ziplining. This was something we were supposed to do on our honeymoon, but the excursion was cancelled. If you don't know this about me, I'm terrified of heights. Anyway, we went ziplining. We did a couple of short ziplines, and I started to enjoy the adventure. But then we came to the long ziplines over the rainforest. As we zipped across hundreds of feet in the air for over a minute at a time, great fear seized me. I panicked as I started to slow down far away from the platform. I grabbed the line to start pulling myself toward the platform which actually made me slow down more. About 50 feet from the end of the zipline, I completely stopped and one of our guides had to come out on the line to get me before the next person hit me. Not exactly my proudest moment, nor a moment I will ever recreate.

When you read today's passage, you will understand why I share this story. When we keep our eyes up and focused, we can do as God tells us. It's when we begin to lean on our own devices, when we feel the wind, when momentum starts to slow down, when we think I need to act that we get into trouble. In what area of your life do you need to remember this story? Where have you taken your eyes off of Jesus and focused on yourself? Look up, and turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Wednesday, June 26 - Acts 10:34-43

Do you know the story of Susan Boyle? She was a contestant on Britain's Got Talent in 2009. She is not the societal definition of attractive, so when she auditioned for the show, the judges and audience at first did not think she would be able to sing well. However, as soon as the first notes started, she showed them that appearance and singing do not correlate at all. Luckily for her, she was actually given a chance. The prejudice against her appearance could have limited her opportunity to begin her career which is now worth an estimated \$28 million.

Do we limit who we share the gospel with because of appearance? Do we not allow others to serve with us in the Kingdom because of how they were raised or how they talk? Peter needed a dream to recognize Christ came for all and we are all equal in God's eyes? Do you need a wake up call too? Let's talk about Peter's vision and subsequent realization that "God shows no partiality" tonight.

Thursday, June 27 - John 18:25-27; 21:15-22

No account of Peter's story is complete without the telling of Peter's Denial and Restoration that we see today. I, for one, am glad that our God is a God of second chances. But even after Peter is restored, he is still concerned about what the other disciples have to do. We have this problem too. "Ok, God, I will serve with the children, but what about that person? What are you going to have them do?" I think the response is "Mind your own business." How others follow God is irrelevant to us following God. You worry about your own relationship with God, and let God take care of other people. God's command to Peter (and us) is not "Follow me as long as others do it too." The command is simply, "Follow Me."

Friday, June 28 - 2 Peter 1:16-18

As we conclude the story of Peter today, we encounter one more event that must have stood out to Peter. Like Peter, James, and John were the only ones with Jesus when he said "Talitha cum," they were also the only ones who got to be with Jesus when the Transfiguration occurred (Matthew 17:1-13). This event was so memorable that he recalled it to share in 2 Peter many decades later. Our encounters with Christ should be memorable as well. When can you remember a moment that God encountered you in a powerful way? My task for you today is to share that story with somebody. Tell them how God has been powerful in your life and let them know that God can perform great works in their life as well.

Saturday, June 29 - Mark 12:28-31

Our question for tomorrow night is "When the Bible says 'your mind,' what does that mean?" Read this passage and let's discover this answer together tomorrow night.

Sunday, June 30 - Psalm 7:1-8