

# RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Matthew, Chapter 7

## Insight on the Word: Jesus Is Truly the Messiah of All Peoples

BY MICHAEL LINDSEY,  
Dean of North Portland Bible College

The Bible text for next week's Sunday School lesson is Mark 7:24-37. We encourage you to attend the Sunday School class at your local church this Sunday, and to learn more about the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Today's text presents two closely related incidents of healing from the ministry of Jesus. In the course of Mark's Gospel, the encounter with the woman in Tyre (7:24-30), the healing of the deaf mute (7:31-37), and the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-9) all happened outside of the Promised Land, among a people who were mostly Gentile. Their presence here gave the Gentiles in the churches who first received the message, the continued assurance that Jesus Christ was their Messiah as well as the Jews'.

Just prior to these two miracle stories, we read Jesus' great pronouncement on the clean and unclean (7:14-23). In summary, he was saying that it's the evil thoughts which come out of a person's heart that make him unclean—not the outward practices of religion. We would do well right now to carefully meditate on that list of sins in 7:21-22, and recognize which sins we need to confess and repent of today. If you're not sure what some of those words mean, use a dictionary or compare with another translation.

But there was another kind of "uncleaness" which the Pharisees emphasized in their legalistic understanding of the Law. They taught that normal contact with a Gentile (anyone who wasn't a Jew by birth or conversion) was a defilement, and made the Jewish believer unfit to worship in the Temple. This form of racial superiority was not taken seriously by most Gentiles, but it did form a strong barrier to the spreading of the kingdom of God.

When Jesus "arose from thence, and went into the borders [region] of Tyre and Sidon" (7:24), he was boldly moving into an area where Gentiles predominated, where he could touch the lives of people who were unclean. True, he had healed other Gentiles before, in his home land (the Roman centurion's servant, Matt 8:5-13). But

now in the Phoenecian country, origin of the ancient Canaanite enemies of Israel, Jesus was demonstrating that no people were unclean or unworthy of his healing, forgiving love.

Even in Tyre and Sidon, Jesus' fame as a healer attracted great crowds. But Mark tells us only about one Gentile, a woman whose racial background was Greek, Canaanite (Matt 15:21) and Syrian Phoenecian—take your pick, they were all defiling Gentile groups. She sought deliverance and healing for her daughter. And Jesus' response seems cold, till you consider his situation.

Was the Lord ridiculing this poor woman for coming to him for healing? After all, Jesus had taken the initiative in bringing his disciples into the Phoenecian area, clearly planning to teach and heal people there. No, I think the Lord was emphasizing the irony of the situation, and fully intended to deliver the woman's daughter all along.

He told her, "Let the children first be filled." The "children," in particular the Jewish leaders, had repeatedly rejected Jesus and were looking for ways to destroy him. They didn't realize the wonderful love and salvation they were rejecting. (This is one message of his parable of the Wedding Feast, Matt 22:1-14.)

He continues, "It is not meet [fitting] to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs." The usual word for "dog" in the Biblical world was a grave insult; you can find several examples through a Bible concordance. But this word for "dog," used only in this story and Matthew's parallel account, is a gentler word, used for puppies and children's household pets. Don Richardson suggests that Jesus was "winking" with humor as he spoke these words. He knew that the people of Israel would have the first opportunity to respond to his gospel message, but his purpose all along was to give this gospel to all people everywhere.

The woman's response shows that she was not intimidated by the Lord's pronouncement. She said, "Yes, Lord!" in humble acknowledgment of Who he was. And she used his very word ("puppies") to renew her prayer for help. The Lord was so impressed that he immedi-

ately pronounced the healing done (at a distance) and the woman went home and verified the miracle.

As I said at the beginning of this article, the original (Gentile) readers of the Gospel would have rejoiced at the Good News that Christ would save them on the same terms (by faith) once offered to the Jewish nation. But there are some further principles we can consider for our lives today. Let me list two.

(1) Religious people run the risk of racial, cultural or class bigotry. The Pharisees rejected Jesus in part because of his openness to the lower classes, the social outcasts, and even the racially inferior. Jesus loves them all, and his disciples today ought to make a special effort to bring the message of hope and salvation in Christ to the poor, the drug culture, the party people, the immigrant minorities among us. But if we follow the pattern of the Pharisees, we will exclude the many people who don't measure up to our standards, for fear we'll be "contaminated" by the world.

Anyone can see the growing influence of racial hatred and bigotry in our society, among Caucasians and African Americans and Hispanics, and also between Asian Americans and African Americans. There is no room for racial slurs or demeaning prejudices within the Body of Christ, and Christians must take a firm stand against these ugly practices anywhere they arise.

(2) Christ has always had a worldwide ministry in mind for his people. All too often Christians have limited their vision of missions to their own congregation, or to their immediate family and friends. But the Lord warms every tribe and people to become part of his family, and every language to be filled with praises to God and his Christ. He will call out and anoint some of his people, even here in Portland, to go to other parts of the world and proclaim the good news. The question is, are you willing to be available—humble before Christ, ready to say "Yes, Lord" to his will and direction for your life? Then God can use you, and he will, in ways far greater than you could have imagined!

Psalm 34:3

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### Spring Term March 30 - June 12, North Portland Bible College

Temporarily located at Berean Baptist Church  
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Spring Schedule, 1992  
March 30 - June 12  
Evenings, 6:30 - 9:30  
Monday N.T. Survey III Cross-cultural Music and Worship  
Tuesday P.T. Survey III Sermon on the Mount  
Wednesday Inductive Bible Study  
Defending the Faith  
Thursday World Christian Outreach  
III Ministry to Urban children  
Mornings, 9:00 - 12:00  
Tuesday O.T. Survey III

In Loving Memory  
of Charlie (DOC) Kelly  
March 8, 1913-March 9, 1992



Services were held at Caldwell's Colonial Chapel  
20 N.E. 14th Avenue, Portland.  
March 13, 1992 at 1:00 P.M.  
Many thanks to all our friends who gave the support needed in our time of sorrow. Also for the gifts of food, monetary and flowers.  
God bless you from the family of Charles (DOC) Kelly.

### Episcopal Church Women's Guild of St. Philip the Deacon Presents

Springtime & Symphony  
Annual Green Tea Sunday, March 29  
1-4 PM  
St. Philip the Deacon Church  
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Terry Snowden at the piano

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Women's Bible Class  
5:00 pm.  
Evening Worship  
6:00 pm.  
Attended nursery for all services  
Wednesday prayer meeting and bible study  
7:30 pm.

## MT OLIVET BAPTIST CHURCH

Has moved Sunday services to  
Stone Tower Church,  
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Worship Services 8:00 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.  
Church School 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.  
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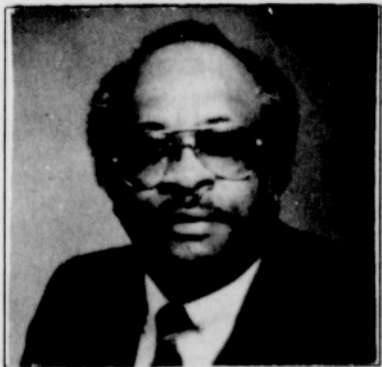
## St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church

8101 N. Fiske Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97203

Church Phone: 289-0147

Study Phone: 289-1911

Sunday Service  
10:45  
Sunday School  
9:30  
Bible Study  
6:00  
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Pastor, Rev. James C.E. Faulkner

Theme: Whatever you're going to do  
for the Lord, do it now

I Peter 4:11

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