

# RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Matthew, Chapter 7

## Insight on the Word: Reality Check for Christians: Do You Really Know the Christ?

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The Bible text for next week's Sunday School lesson is Mark 8:27 through 9:1. Please read this crucial passage several times, and meditate on its implications for your own life.

What does it cost you to be a Christian? Would you be willing to give your life for what you believe? Your friends? Your job security?

That's really what our text this week is about. It is really the turning point of the entire Gospel of Mark, and one of the most important passages we can study in the whole New Testament. It teaches us about the reality of Jesus as the Christ, the necessity and power of his death, and the demands (yes, demands) he makes on his followers. I can only give you some direction in digging into these awesome truths for yourselves.

To begin this episode, the Lord left Bethsaida, by the Sea of Galilee (8:22), and went north with his disciples to the villages around Caesarea Philippi, where he knew more large crowds of curious, committed, but maybe even hostile people would await. In the relative privacy of their journey, Jesus initiated an all-important conversation with the disciples. He asked them to report on the opinions of the people they'd met: "Who do people say that I am?" (8:27).

Three answers are recorded. Some said Jesus was John the Baptist. Herod the King was one of those (6:14), which indicates that many were unaware of John's witness to Jesus (1:7-9), and Jesus' testimony concerning John (Matt

11:9-14). These casual observers of Jesus easily bought into the sensational "tabloid" rumor, that John the Baptist had been resurrected; they only wanted to follow the exciting developments.

Others were saying Jesus was Elijah (Elias in Greek). These people were aware of the Scriptures, which predicted Elijah's return (Mal 4:5-6). Jesus identified Malachi's prophecy with the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt 11:14; 17:10-13), but surely many were unaware of these teachings.

Still others said Jesus was "one of the prophets." That's safe, and yet still profound. You see, the prophets had been silent from the time of Malachi, as even the Pharisees would have admitted. Religious writers, afraid to speak in the name of Yahweh (the Lord), had taken to writing "apocalyptic" prophecies of impending doom and judgment and deliverance. These forgeries were written in the name of great Old Testament characters, like Enoch, Abraham, the twelve sons of Israel, or even Isaiah, and gained credibility among the gullible by retelling history as prophecy. Some people who heard Jesus believed that real prophecy had returned, and God was finally speaking to them in a new prophet.

These latter two views (Elijah, or a prophet) revealed some insight, but Jesus wanted his disciples to declare themselves: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter gave the answer the whole group was thinking: "You are the Christ," the Messiah, the Anointed King, the One predicted in the psalms and prophets, who will rule over all the earth in the name of the Lord.

Now Jesus had not taught them this truth directly. He had used his works, his teaching ministry, and the witness of the Spirit to reveal this central truth to them (note Matt 16:17). But since they understood that Jesus was the Christ, he could go on and teach them what it meant to be the Christ—and what it meant for them, to follow the Christ.

For the first time, Jesus "began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things... and be killed, and after three days rise again." (Mark 8:31). This had to be hard for the disciples to take. Jesus had called himself "Son of Man" before, but he had not clarified what authority that entailed. But with the understanding that Jesus is truly the Messiah, the title "Son of Man" had to refer to the vision of Daniel (Dan 7:9-14) in which the Son of Man received an eternal kingdom on the earth, ruling over every nation and people in the world.

Peter and the other disciples were thinking, "The Son of Man is bound for glory, not for humiliation, rejection and death." And impetuous Peter tried to take authority over the situation, taking Jesus aside to "rebuke" him, even as Jesus had rebuked evil spirits in other cases. Peter's mind was blinded for the moment to the spiritual dimension of Christ's kingdom. Of course, he preferred glory over rejection himself.

Jesus knew who was confusing the disciples, and moving Peter to reject the authority of the One he had just identified as the Christ. He turned and rebuked Peter, calling him Satan, and saying "thou savourest not the things that be of God," that is, "you don't have God's

business in mind at all." It would take repeated teaching and the very crucifixion and resurrection itself before they could comprehend the amazing plan of salvation. Some people listen to sermons and read the Bible all their lives and still miss it.

Next the Lord called the crowd of people around him, and spoke to them all about the price of discipleship. These words still apply today, and form a good reality check for anyone who wants to be called a Christian.

Now don't get me wrong. "Whosoever will" may come to Christ Jesus, and receive the free gift of eternal life. But in our text (Mark 8:34-38) there are three other "whosoever" statements from the Lord himself, which we must accept if we want to make him the Lord of our lives.

First, the follower of Jesus must surrender. Jesus challenges the would-be disciple to "deny himself"—take himself (or herself) off the throne, and put Jesus in charge of his life. Then he must "take up his cross"—the only person who took up a cross was a convicted, condemned criminal. As Deitrich Bonhoeffer said, "When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die." The disciples must admit their unworthiness of God's love and mercy, and be willing to "die" to anything in the old life that could be an idol. Finally the disciple must "follow me"—for Jesus himself would show the way to death. Most of the crowd did not know Jesus' plan to go and die, but they knew that his demands were costly and painful.

So why would anyone choose to follow Jesus? Especially in our plea-

sure-crazed society, this surrender to Jesus seems unrealistic. That's why we need a reality check! The follower of Jesus must also adopt eternal values for his life (8:35-37). You want to "save your life" by choosing the things that make your life seem good? Christ says you'll lose everything—in eternity, where it counts. Are you willing to put Christ ahead of everything, including life itself? You'll have the kind of life that really counts—the joy of living with Jesus forever. Many of Mark's church family in Rome had to make that choice, and those who did saw God's power in supernatural ways.

And this implies that the follower of Jesus must take a public stand for his Lord (8:38). Jesus called his generation "adulterous and sinful," and so is ours! True Christians are not surprised when they are in a minority, when others ridicule them individually or collectively, even when they are persecuted for their beliefs. In countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, India, or Nepal, persecution of Christians by adherents of other religions is common and state-sanctioned; meanwhile the Moslems, Hindus and Buddhists enjoy general religious tolerance in many other countries, including ours. But followers of Christ shouldn't be dismayed or discouraged. Persecution of our faith could well come to America someday, too.

These somber, heavy truths make us face the reality of following Jesus. It's not easy, and it's not something to accept lightly. But it's worth it, both in the joy and peace you can have in this life, and the certainty of eternal life with Jesus.

## Gospel Music Ministry Celebrates First Year

The HeavenBound Gospel Music Ministry will be celebrating their first year anniversary Friday, April 3rd, through Sunday, April 5th, at the Greater Solid Rock COGIC, 1705 N.E. Dekum. Friday night April 3rd at 10:00 p.m., will be the kick-off late night Musical and Youth Service which will feature our local music ministries as well as guests from Washington and California. Saturday night has been set aside for the Anniversary Awards Ceremony at Steamers Restaurant, 8303 N.E. Sandy. The donation is \$10.00 and an advanced ticket purchase is required. Sunday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. is the closing program and will feature the HeavenBound Gospel Music Ministry in concert!!! For further information on banquet reservations, please contact Min. Lonnie Hosley, or Bro. Fredric Warren at 283-1524.

### PRAYER

Dear Lord  
Hear us as we pray!  
There are many  
who need you this day.  
But more than that  
our Master and Friend,  
Be a shield  
around us each day.  
Protect us  
from the fiery darts  
we pray.  
In the Holy and  
Precious name of Jesus.  
Amen!



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

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Spring Schedule, 1992  
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Evenings, 6:30 - 9:30

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Tuesday P.T. Survey III Sermon on the Mount  
Wednesday Inductive Bible Study Defending the Faith  
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8101 N. Fiske Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97203

Church Phone: 289-0147

Study Phone: 289-1911

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10:45  
Sunday School  
9:30  
Bible Study  
6:00  
Evening Service  
7:00 P.M.



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

I Peter 4:11

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He that is too good to realize that he need to be saved, cannot be helped. But he that recognize he has a need, can be helped.

### What A Friend We Have In Jesus

Are you a friend of Jesus?  
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Rev. A. G. May, Pastor