

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Matthew, Chapter 7

Insight on the Word: When You Look at the Cross, What Do You See?

BY MICHAEL LINDSEY
Dean, North Portland Bible College

These weekly columns are based on the International Sunday School Lesson, used by churches in many denominations. We are presently surveying incidents in the life of Christ from the Gospel of Mark. Today's text is Mark 15:22-28.

In modern times we use crosses almost everywhere, especially as jewelry. Crosses come in many shapes and sizes and designs, each with its own history. And the crosses are often richly adorned with gold and gems, so that they are quite beautiful and appealing.

But that was not so in Jesus' time. The cross was an instrument of public torture and humiliation, the worst means of execution used by the Roman soldiers. Crucifixion so appalled even the Romans that a Roman citizen could never be executed on a cross. As I noted in an earlier column, Jesus' requirement that his disciples "take up their cross, and follow me" was a serious call to suffering and death.

So how on earth did the cross so totally change its symbolic value? Perhaps it seems trite to say this, but it is still true: by his death Jesus transformed the cross from a symbol of suffering and rejection into a symbol of new life and reconciliation with God. The early Christians had other symbols for various truths of their faith, such as the fish, the dove, or the butterfly. But the cross demonstrated best the neces-

sity for new life to come out of death, particularly the atoning death of the Savior.

We would do well as we approach the annual celebration of the Resurrection, to move back in time and observe the effects of the cross of Jesus on those around him, and to examine our own hearts carefully.

First we can watch the Roman soldiers charged with carrying out the grisly execution. These battle-hardened men had little respect for the troublesome Jews, who always seemed to be stirring up some little trouble. The soldiers received their victim from Pilate (Mark 15:15), and all got together in the Roman palace, next to their garrison, to have some cruel fun at Jesus' expense. They pretended to honor him as a king, while they were savagely beating him, and cutting his skin with a crown made of thorn briars (15:16-20). They finally led him out to Golgotha, where they completed their task. [Notice how the Gospel writers share no details of the actual crucifixion; they pass over the Lord's agony in reverent silence.]

While they watched the condemned men on their crosses, the soldiers take Jesus' clothes, his only earthly possessions, and divided them into separate piles, one for each soldier on watch. The "casting lots upon them" was their simple form of gambling, to see who got which garment.

Didn't they know how important this Man was, whose garments they di-

vided among themselves? Didn't they see how nobly he accepted their taunts and beatings? No, most of them quickly forgot who he was, and focused on the little bits of clothing they could rightly claim for themselves.

So it is today. Every year the churches call our people to recognize the marvel of Jesus' love, which led him to die for our sins, to "redeem us from the curse of the Law." And we ought to rejoice in the victory which is the Resurrection! Instead, many focus their attention on the new "garments" people are wearing to church, or the fun and games of bunny rabbits and egg hunts. Though Jesus hangs on the cross before them, pouring out his life for them, they are too busy to look up to him.

There were plenty of people just passing by; crucifixion was supposed to be a public deterrent, after all. Many of these same people had cried "Hosanna" at Jesus' entrance less than a week before. But now they mocked him, throwing in his face his claim that he would destroy the temple, and in three days rebuild it (15:29-30). They did not understand the Almighty Power hanging before them, nor the fulfillment of those very words in his death and resurrection.

So many people around us today, if they stop and think about Jesus at all, have the same attitude as these Palestinians and Jews around the cross. Are you one of them? Do you look at the life of

Jesus, and see someone powerless to influence and give purpose to your life today? Is he irrelevant, or a joke? If you think that way, I'm glad you've read this article so far.

Before you dismiss Jesus' death so lightly, carefully reconsider. The people who "railed on him" have disappeared from the pages of history. Jesus' message of hope and new life, of reconciliation with God, has spread to all corners of the globe. If you haven't found the answers to life, you haven't really tried Jesus Christ. His life transforms drug addicts and drunks into responsible adults and happy parents. His love heals the wounds caused by abuse, neglect, poverty and despair. Try Jesus!

Standing back a little from the crosses and the roadway, we can see some of the "chief priests" and scribes (15:31-32). They didn't want to contaminate themselves in the midst of the Passover celebration, but they just had to see their adversary's death, the successful conclusion of their schemes. The words recorded here indicate they were having a great time, ridiculing Jesus (among themselves, of course), calling him "Christ the King of Israel," saying "he saved others; himself he cannot save."

They didn't believe a word of it, though they might have been uneasy as they recalled the powerful healings he'd performed, the demon-possessed he had rescued, even Lazarus whom he had just raised from the dead. Perhaps their

fears were calmed as they saw Jesus helpless, dying before their very eyes.

Many have followed in the path of these religious leaders. The history of the church contains the accounts of many skeptics and false religious teachers who have confidently claimed the demise of the Christian faith. Voltaire often proclaimed the end of Christian faith in his own lifetime; he's been dead over 150 years. Thomas Huxley, the great biologist and champion of evolution in the late 1800's, publicly taught that Darwin's theories of evolution would make the Bible a forgotten book by the end of this century.

Obviously they were mistaken. Jesus Christ, and the Book which presents him to humanity, have proven invincible against the attacks of atheists, agnostics, cults, and various world religions. Sure, lots of people today still ridicule Christ, the cross, and the Christian faith. And many will tell you it is intellectual suicide to defend that ancient creed in the modern world, given our advances in knowledge, technology, and cultural interaction. But Christianity has always been mocked and ridiculed; that's nothing "modern." And yet somehow its truth continues to attract people from all walks of life, and from hundreds of ethnic groups worldwide.

Let's take one final look at the scene before the cross. We see one lonely soldier, a centurion (like a master sergeant in today's army), overseeing yet another crucifixion in Jerusalem. This

time the officer was drawn to the Man on the middle cross, the one labelled "King of the Jews" by Pilate. Very funny. He couldn't get over the calm composure in the midst of agony; this Jesus never lost consciousness before he died—he was able to cry out in a loud voice, even as he "gave up the ghost" (15:37). [This expression in the original is simply "expired, died." No comment on Jesus' spirit is implied in the choice of words.]

The soldier's comment has become a ringing affirmation of faith through the centuries: "Truly this man was the Son of God." From a pagan Roman, this probably meant that Jesus was a divine man or deified hero, like Hercules. But even so, the centurion was the one man involved in the crucifixion who took an honest look at Jesus—and his response was more truthful than he even knew.

According to ancient and reliable tradition, this centurion became a follower of the risen Jesus Christ through the witness of Joseph of Arimathea (15:43). The soldier was later transferred to Britain, and Joseph went with him, establishing one of the first Christian congregations in modern-day England.

When you look at the cross today, do you see a defeated martyr? A wonderful, though misunderstood, teacher? Or a fool on the hill? Like the Roman soldier, may you see Jesus the Christ, willingly giving his life away, that we might have new life in him.

**JESUS LIVES
EASTER
CELEBRATION
SUN. APRIL 19th
11:00 A.M.
CENTER OF
PRAISE**

CHURCH OF GOD
1601 N.E. KILLINGSWORTH
PASTOR: MARCUS IRVING

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

Jesus Loves You!
Allen Temple CME Church
Psalms 34:3
4236 NE Eighth Avenue
(corner of 8th & Skidmore)
Portland, Oregon 97211
(503) 287-0261
Phillip S. Nelson Pastor

**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
Evening Service 7:00 P.M.


Pastor, Rev. James C.E. Faulkner

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

I Peter 4:11

**10th Annual women
Fellowship**

The Christ Memorial Department of Women Affairs will sponsor its 10th Annual women Fellowship and Seminar on April 22 thru 26, (Wed.-Fri.) at 7:00 p.m. and Saturday at 8:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m., and Sunday 3:30 p.m.


Location: 1552 N. Killingsworth and The Best Western Coliseum Inn, 19 N. Weidler, Portland.

Please contact Marlene Wooten for further information at 284-9665.


Birth Announcement

Denise C. and Mark A. Johnson of Portland are the proud parents of Alesha Marie Johnson, born 3-25-92 at 1:07 a.m., Alesha was 19.5 inches long and weighed 6 lbs. 12 oz. at birth.

Alesha has a none year old brother, Terrance Mitchell and grandparents Norma and Al Brown here in Portland.



Mallory Avenue Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
126 N.E. Alberta
Portland, OR 97211
(503) 288-5173



Denise A. Bell, Pastor

EASTER BREAKFAST
AT
MALLORY AVENUE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

126 N.E. ALBERTA
SUNDAY - APRIL 19, 1992
8:00 - 9:30 A.M.

GOOD FOOD ... GREAT PEOPLE ... WONDERFUL FELLOWSHIP

COSTS:
ADULTS - \$3.00.....CHILDREN - \$1.75
FAMILIES - \$6.00

9:45 A.M.
SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES (CHILDREN AND ADULTS)
11:00 A.M.
WORSHIP SERVICE

PROCEEDS FROM THE BREAKFAST GO TO BENEFIT
THE YOUTH CAMPSHIPS FOR OUR SUMMER CAMP PROGRAMS

CALL VI AT 288-5173 FOR RESERVATIONS

**MALLORY
CHURCH OF CHRIST**
3908 NE MALLORY AVENUE



Minister Gregory Fobbs

SUNDAY SCHEDULE

Bible Study
9:30 am.

Morning Worship
10:45 am.

Men's Training Leadership
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.

Radio Ministry Each Sunday, 11:00 AM - KBMS
288-1092
RESTORING
NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

**VANN & VANN
FUNERAL DIRECTORS**



Cleodus Vann

*Family Owned and Operated
Since 1954
Serving the City of Portland
for over 37 years
In your hour of need
Vann & Vann are there to serve*

503/281-2836
5211 N. Williams Portland, Or. 97217



**MT OLIVET
BAPTIST CHURCH**
*Has moved Sunday services to
Stone Tower Church,
N.E. Sandy Blvd. & 30th*

Worship Services 8:00 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.
Church School 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
Bible Study, Wednesdays, 116 N.E. Schuyler
10:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Radio Ministry each Sunday, 8:00 a.m. on KBMS

A Teaching Church With A Reaching Ministry
Dr. James E. Martin, Senior Pastor

**Church Office 116 N.E. Schuyler St.
(503) 284-1954**