

RELIGION

Sunday school lesson

The servant's victory

Devotional Reading: Revelation 3:14-21

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

The answer offered in this lesson will be one that, this writer believes, is most consistent with both the book of Isaiah and the later statements of the New Testament. In Isaiah, the servant is collectively the repentant Israelite exiles who faithfully suffered through the Babylonian captivity and who became the righteous remnant through whom God would restore the Israelite nation (see 49:5; 46:3). Yet the words of this text describe a servant who suffers in a manner and for a purpose that is ultimately beyond that of the exiled Israelites. He is One not identical to Israel, but One who came out of Israel and died to save the world - Jesus Christ (Acts 8:34,35).

If this answer seems confusing or contradictory, the student should be aware that Old Testament prophecy is sometimes given to dual or multiple applications or "fulfillments."

Today's text is taken from the fourth and final of the Servant Songs of Isaiah (52:13-53:12). The first two songs acquainted us with the servant's call and his mission. Last week's lesson on the third song introduced us to another aspect of the servant's ministry, which is more fully developed in this final song. It is the unique and compelling concept that the servant's suffering would accomplish the Lord's purposes and save His people. This suffering, which is a limited and somewhat symbolic way referred to the struggles of the exiled Israelites, ultimately anticipated the vicarious suffering of the Messiah for the sins of all humanity.

The Bible often uses the metaphor of sheep to describe the Lord's people. Christ himself is called the Good Shepherd. The idea of being protected, guided, fed, and cared for like helpless woolly lambs is a warm and cozy thought. Snuggling down in the shelter of the shepherd's love is a comforting analogy. Psalm 23 and John 10 are favorite texts for all Christians, because they assure us that the Lord is our Shepherd, and He is willing to give His very life for our safety and salvation.

Another aspect of the sheep metaphor, however, is disquieting, to say the least. Sheep are prone to go astray, to go their own way, as it were; thus the need for constant shepherding. And despite the vigilance of the shepherd, sheep often choose wrong and dangerous paths.

Isaiah compares man's spiritual waywardness with the straying of sheep. We are inclined to wander off the narrow way that leads to abundant life. Whenever we insist on going our own way, disregarding the directions and leadership of the Good Shepherd, we sin and place our souls in serious jeopardy. Hear His voice and follow Him.

Paul Brand has written a book titled "Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants." He relates the startling statistic that the people of the United States spend \$63 billion per year on pain relievers. The irony is that, while we have greater ability to manage pain, it seems increasingly difficult for

A turn for the better

By Andrea R. Richards
THE CHARLOTTE POST

A drug and alcohol rehabilitation center is seeking more support from Charlotte's communities and churches.

Right Turn of North Carolina, 2016 Wilkinson Blvd., needs volunteers to help inmates who are trying to help themselves. The center is for non-violent inmates who have a history of alcohol and drug addiction and are ready to become productive, crime-free citizens.

Right Turn is the only program of its kind in the state and has the capacity to house 100 men. Currently, there are 83 occupants. About 70 percent are African American.

It takes 6-12 months to complete the program's three phases. Phase I of the treatment includes drug education, individual counseling and therapy. It's usually completed in one month. Pre-employment training and vocational assessments are added during Phase II.

"In Phase II, we start looking at educational as well as

at vocational skills training. We're stressing interviewing, resume writing..." said Oscar Lewis, Right Turn's executive director. "Also, I am in the process of coordinating businesses in the area to let them know that clients will be coming eligible for work-release, and I'd like the clients to come and interview."

Work-release is the last phase and allows inmates to work at businesses in the city.

Lewis, who helped open the center in September, hopes community participation will increase.

"I'm making an effort to make the community aware of this community-based alcohol/drug rehabilitation program," he said. "A big part of the recovery process is involving the churches in the community."

Businesses can participate by employing clients on work-release.

Lewis said most of the people here became addicted to drugs by associating with the "wrong crowd."

Charles Solomon, 30, credits the center for turning his life around within the last three months.



PHOTOS/ JAMES BROWN



Anthony Davis (top photo) credits Right Turn of North Carolina, for teaching him how to deal with problems. Robert Moore (right, bottom) is one of 83 occupants at Right Turn. Oscar Lewis (left, bottom) is the program's executive director.

"Being that I was uneducated, I thought that was the only way that I could make it in life," said the New York native, who began using drugs in his teens. "Being in the fellowship of Right Turn I learned that that's not the only way. To make it in this world I have to apply myself."

As a teenager, Solomon didn't value education and dropped out of high school three weeks before graduation. Now, he's received his General Education Diploma and is planning to pursue an associate's degree in computer engineering at Central Piedmont Community College.

See ALCOHOLICS page 13A

Eye on Gospel

The Man: "I'm not a worker, I'm a president," Dr. Henry Lyons said to a capacity-filled reception in Los Angeles as he pitched his platform to strengthen the National Baptist Convention Inc. But in making the statement, Lyons had just as surely contradicted himself, for in the time that he took the reins of the 8 million-strong NBC, he has done little but work at turning the historic group around.

Thus far, his efforts are paying off. Since taking over the presidency in September 1994, Lyons has re-energized the group's leadership and direction, while shaving \$1.4 million off the mortgage of their Nashville-based World Center headquarters, boosting attendance at annual sessions from 18,000 to 40,000, converting the group's once-vacant headquarters into a workplace with a full-time staff of nine and establishing a loan program to help struggling churches. His biggest remaining priority is to pay off the existing debt (of \$5.4 million) on the headquarters in Nashville at their annual session in September. Armed with a handful of aggressive and innovative programs, that goal appears to be within his reach. One approach is Lyons' financial solidarity program with member churches, asking every pastor to receive one solidarity dollar from each member in his congregation to tackle the debt and insure solvency. Other programs include his unified program, requesting that the churches contribute 2-3 percent of their earnings on a monthly basis.

Optional for now, his unified program will be mandatory in 1998. A standard-bearer program keys in on those willing to make a personal commitment of \$10, \$25 or \$50 per month. And the group has gotten into the game business with its Heritage Game, designed to recapture the

interest of black children's interest in African American history, while keying in on the likes of Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King and Roy Wilkins. Lyons will ask each one of his 33,000 member churches to secure the book, which retails for \$25.

Lyons has had no easy task. The convention was at a low point when Lyons took the reins. Membership was falling. The group had lost in the neighborhood of 800 churches nationwide and suffered a loss in credibility. According to Lyons, most damaging was the six-month long court battle waged by the outgoing president to determine the validity of the election that made him president. In the end the court ruled in his favor, but in the process, the morale of those involved with the group dipped to its lowest point. Lyons has been working overtime to mend the scars, traveling 80 percent more than he'd anticipated to realign the group's image and numbers. Lyons, who has been preaching some 34 years, acknowledged his call to the ministry while in the 11th grade.

"God told me then," he recounts, "that I was not only a preacher but that I had a definite mission here on the planet and he crystallized that mission to me. That I was to be the president of this group when I was 12 years old. I've had the burden since then. Since taking over, I've had to come back in and rebuild the infrastructure of the convention. To put in a strong foundation...to bring the convention back to the church, to Jesus Christ and to its spiritual roots."

This week's scripture: "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall," Proverbs 16:18.

Down but not out

By Andrea R. Richards
THE CHARLOTTE POST

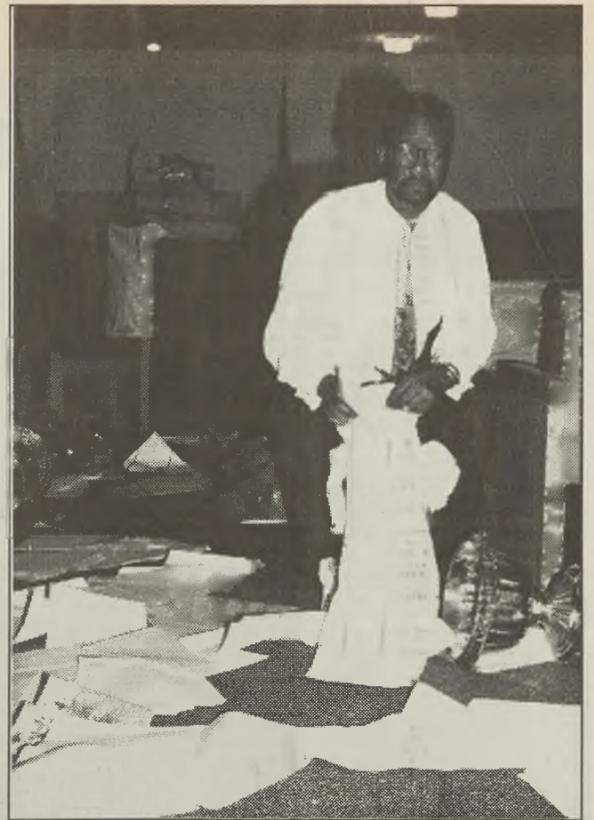
The Jonesville AME Zion church family reunited Jan. 21 to conduct services for the first time this year.

Worship services were delayed twice because of snow and ice on the first Sunday and vandals maliciously destroyed church property on the following Sunday.

Even though more than \$20,000 in damages was done Jan. 13, the congregation of 100 is not stopping. The Rev. Frank Hunter is pastor.

"I felt bad that they came in and vandalized our church," Hunter said. "I am grateful that so much good has come out of it. It has brought the community together. Several of the surrounding churches came to the rescue but I'm sad to say not really much help from our (African American) churches but from other churches."

Vandals broke inside the sanctuary, destroyed stained-glass windows, overturned the church piano and scattered papers and hymnals over the floor. The public address system and church computers were also completely ruined.



PHOTOS/ PAUL WILLIAMS III

Hunter, the church's pastor for two years, said he doesn't expect the incident to decrease membership.

"I'm hoping they will feel safe," he said. "I feel comfortable. I have to feel comfortable. I can't allow people to run me away from the house of God. This is where I'm supposed to be."

At this time, authorities do not have an leads as to who vandalized the church, 5527 Providence Road-West.

Donations to help the Jonesville AME Zion church family can be mailed to SouthTrust, 10630 Providence Road. For more information, contact the church at 846-1076.