

RELIGION

Sunday school lesson

Devotional Reading:
Ruth 2:14-20
Lesson Scripture: Ruth 2-4

In last week's lesson we were told of a Hebrew family from Bethlehem in Judah who moved to the country of Moab to escape a severe famine. While they were there the husband and father, Elimelech, died. The widow, Naomi, was left with her two sons. The two sons married Moabite wives, but later both sons died also.

The widow Naomi decided to return to her home in Bethlehem, and her two widowed daughters-in-law determined to return with her. Naomi urged both to return to their families in Moab. One did so, but the other, Ruth, would not. So the two women came to Bethlehem: Naomi, bereft of husband and sons, embittered; Ruth, a young widow, a stranger in a foreign land, perhaps fearful of her reception by the citizens of Bethlehem.

The two women were in financial straits when they arrived in Bethlehem, but industry was no stranger to them. Barley harvest was just beginning, so Ruth set about to find food for their table.

"You get what you pay for" is a common expression among consumers. It is generally expected that higher priced goods and services will be superior in quality. When we pay "top dollar," we expect the best in products and labor. And though it doesn't always work out that way, the principle generally holds true.

Such a reciprocal dynamic is definitely at work in spiritual matter. Solomon suggested it: "Cast thy bread upon the water: For thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Jesus was more explicit. He said, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). Whatever you give, you receive in kind; and the more you give, the more you receive.

That's the way it worked for Ruth. She selflessly ministered to Naomi, then received generous and merciful treatment from Boaz.

Of course, receiving mercy must not be the primary motivation for giving mercy. Ruth struck no bargain with God when she chose to be a blessing to her mother-in-law. She pledged her loyalty on the "regardless" level. Likewise, whatever we do for God should not be done to earn personal reward, but to honor Him and to help others. Then rich rewards and personal happiness will be ours. "What goes around comes around."

Great-grandmothers have little way of knowing how great their descendants might become. They may have dreamed of it, but they could not predict it.

Naomi did not suspect that many generations later Jesus, the Christ, would be born to the wife of her descendant, Joseph (Matthew 1). Mary gave birth to Immanuel, God incarnate. Little Obed was truly a temporal blessing to his grandmother, but beyond that he became progenitor of One who brought eternal blessing for all mankind.

Who knows what your great-grandchildren will achieve and contribute to mankind? Perhaps through you, too, generations to come will find salvation in Christ. Pray that you and yours will remain faithful.

Many persons believe that the events that occur are strictly the result of natural or human causes. Believing that brute force controls what happens in life, these persons become uncertain, perhaps even terrified, of what the future holds.

The book of Ruth shows, however, that there is another power at work in our world. It is the power of God, and although that power itself is invisible, its results may be seen. Those who see with the eyes of faith know that these words of the apostle Paul are true: "And we know that all things work together to the good of them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). The power of God works in the lives of godly people. We have seen that in our lessons from Ruth. Naomi's godly daughter-in-law Ruth, the Ruth loved Naomi and she came to love Naomi's God. It is obvious that Boaz loved God.

Although Naomi and Ruth had experienced great tragedy and sadness, God worked through their kinsman-redeemer, Boaz, to accomplish His will, to replace their sadness with joy, and to secure a happy future for them all. The kindness of Boaz has a powerful message for our skeptical age. Who hold the future? God does.

From darkness into the light

Reformed drug abuser spreads God's word

By Andrea R. Richards
THE CHARLOTTE POST

As a teenager, the Rev. Steve L. Carlton wanted to be loved. Instead of being good, Carlton did the opposite. He did all sorts of mischievous activities to be in the spotlight.

Carlton, 41, admits he had a don't-care attitude. "I didn't want anybody to tell me anything," said the pastor of Second Calvary Baptist Church, 114 Nelson Ave. "I was a troublemaker. I was a clown and didn't take school seriously."

The Lenoir native continued to stray from his Christian upbringing and make poor decisions.

"I made a good living in high school," he said. "I sold drugs. I think it was a thing of attention. I was just trying to prove my point that I could be who I wanted to be. I wanted to be 'The Man.'"

But selling drugs soon got the best of The Man. Carlton became addicted at 19.

"Uppers, downers, cocaine. I've done just about every drug, except heroin," he said.

"The worst thing you can do is sell drugs and then become an abuser."

In retrospect, Carlton realized the death of his grandfather, being separated from his mother (His father was killed when he was 3.) and being isolated from his nine siblings caused him to develop a drug habit. The habit increased as his spirituality decreased.

Then, in 1974, Carlton reached a turning point when a local pastor invited him to church.

"I was at wit's end," he said. "There was a new minister in town who gave me and my friend encouragement to come to church. He took us under his wings and made us feel like somebody. He gave us clothes to wear to church."

"Once I came to church one Sunday and heard him speak. The message was 'There is no secret in what God can do. It just struck a chord, and those words have always stuck with me.'"

One year later, Carlton preached his trial sermon, and he has been spreading God's word since.

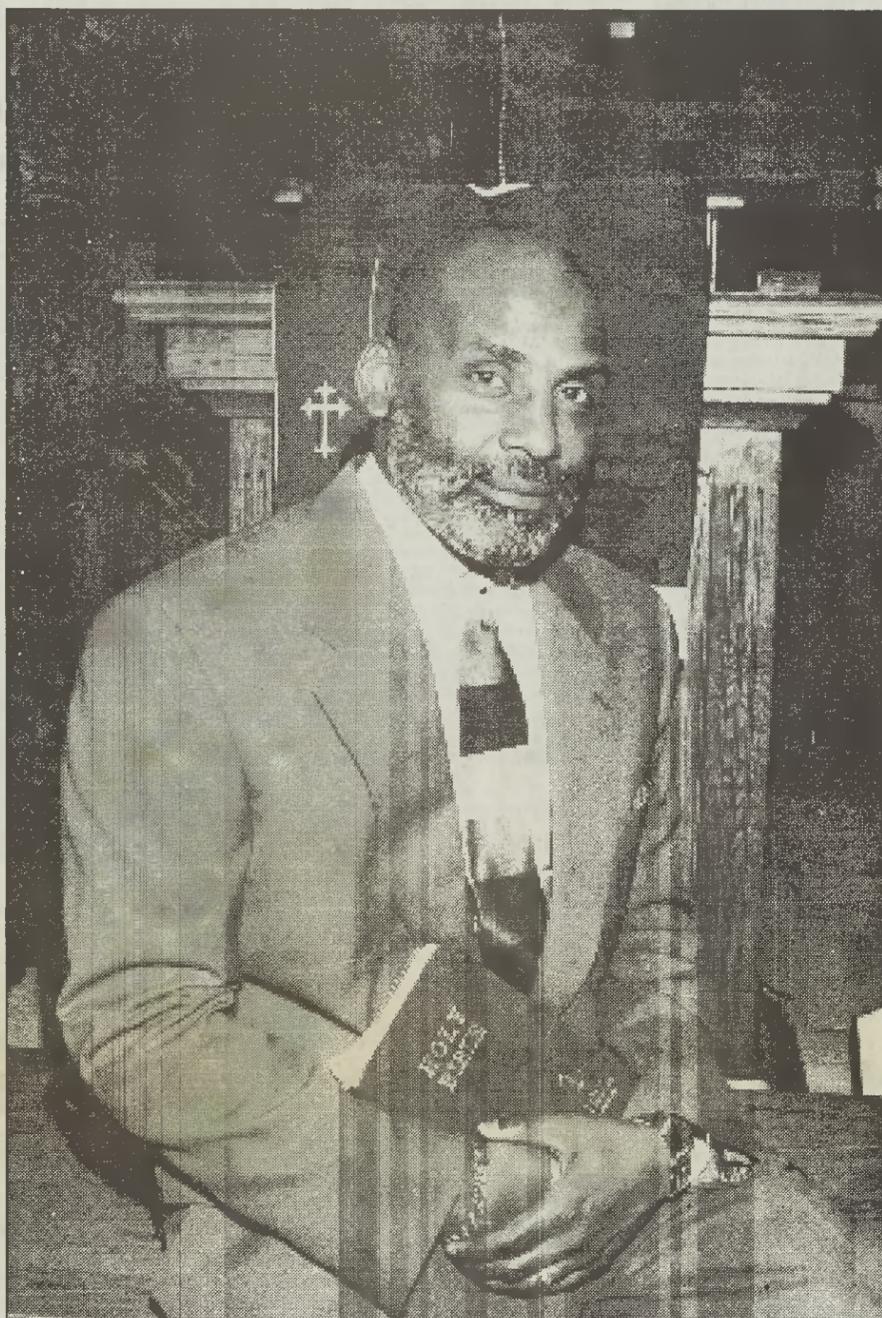
As leader of Second Calvary's congregation (about 500 active members) for the last 18 months, Carlton exudes a warm Christian demeanor that welcomes all. He advises young people who are selling and/or using drugs to seek Christ.

"You're not only destroying yourself, but you're destroying a whole race of people," he said. "You're committing genocide. You're just as much of a murderer as a man with a gun in his hand."

Carlton's goal is to show others that God's most striking victories rise out of the graves of apparent defeat.

"I want Second Calvary, and all churches, to find people where they are and take them to where God wants them to be," he said.

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PHOTO/ JAMES BROWN

The Rev. Steve Carlton, pastor of Second Calvary Baptist Church, believes God's most striking victories rise out of the graves of apparent defeat.

Eye on Gospel

Sweet inspiration: Carlton Pearson's newfound success on the gospel scene is just as surprising to him as it is to the Warner Alliance. After just 15 weeks on Billboard's Top Gospel Albums Charts his sophomore release titled "Live At Azuza" has earned Pearson the status of being the label's top-selling artist. "I don't understand the industry to the degree that I would have a deep appreciation for what's happening but I was hoping that it would bless a lot of people," notes Pearson, better known as one of the nation's most renowned African American televangelists.

Driving sales way up is a 22-minute "Old Songs Melody" which label execs say has touched a chord with traditional gospel audiences.

"We were expecting to do better than the first album," reports Warner Alliance vice president Demetrius Alexander, "but we expected it to build up slowly. Instead it blew up and kind of caught us off guard."

To catch up, Warner Alliance is fanning the flames with an all-out marketing plan and a contest for radio listeners in his three best-selling markets to win trips to Pearson's annual Azuza Conference, held April 14-20 in Tulsa, Okla. (On April 15, Pearson will record his third project for the label, which is not expected to release until early '97.) Thus far, his releases have centered on worship and praise, but Pearson also has hopes of doing a solo project.

"People like BeBe (Winans) have said they want to write for me and do some creative things. So I would like to have one or two studio songs on the next album where I really minister on songs I like perhaps even some songs written by me." But the 43-year-old evangelist who is more comfortable in a pulpit than on stage sees his role in gospel as much bigger than recording.

"There's been a great chasm between the recording industry, the artist and the local church," Pearson said. "Most of the artists have priced themselves out of the realm of the church. There's no real connect, and there's an attitude among a lot of the pastors about the artists - a suspicious distrust. I'd like to

resolve that by bringing the artist back into local churches and having operate more by inspiration that creativity...That 22 minute medley is not a very creative thing but it's strongly-inspired and that what people are are buying into. Not a lot of bells and whistles, just people singing and worshipping God."

Treading new ground: Look for a taste of hip-hop with Ruby Terry's newly-released project form Malaco Records.

"It was time to make a little change," notes the Louisiana-based evangelist, who treads on contemporary ground with her fourth release for the label. Recorded live in Lake Charles, La. with the Lake Charles Community Choir,

the album titled "God Can Do It," also features Dorothy Norwood and Rev. James Moore and the anointing she's famous for.

Credit the new direction to a targeted effort to reach a broader-based and youthful-oriented audience. She's already set a date for next recording. It's May 3 at Grambling University.

Briefly: CeCe Winans is set to star in "Born To Sing," (part three of the stage musical "Mama I Want To Sing"), and is set to premiere at the Paramount Theatre at New York's Madison Square Garden March 1-10.

This week's scripture: "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God," Romans 15:7.

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Gospel musical play hits the local scene

Andrea Richards
THE CHARLOTTE POST

If you enjoy being in a Christian environment and being pleasantly entertained at the same time, then you'll enjoy the gospel musical "Sneaky."

The play can be seen at Ovens Auditorium, 2700 E. Independence Blvd., March 1-3. Tickets range from \$17.50-



Hewitt

Proverbs 18:24 "A man that hath friends must show him-

\$21.50.

Sneaky is about developing good relationships, and it's based on Proverbs 17:17 "A friend loves at all times," and



Brown

Michael Matthews is the author.

self friendly." The theme is based on true friends, although they are rare, they are often used and taken for granted.



Matthews

have them do unto you."

"I write about real things that people experience," he said. "Real people want answers. Sneaky tells them to do unto other as you would

Matthews has written six other musicals: "Momma Don't," "Wicked Ways," "Come Out of the Rain," "No Place to Lay My Head," "I Need A Man," and "Momma, I'm Sorry."

For more information, call 335-3100.