

11A

RELIGION

Choosing
the right one**Sunday
School Lesson**Devotional Reading:
Matthew 19:23-30Lesson Scripture:
Matthew 19:27-20:16.

"You must leave your home within the hour and take with you only what you can carry!" Faced with that ultimatum, what would you take?

Thousands of American families have had to make that choice in recent years as they have been faced with hurricanes, floods or fires. What have these families carried away with them? Usually not "big ticket" items, such as entertainment centers, though these may have occupied much of their time and attention. Instead, the number one item was frequently the family photo album — not very expensive, but priceless because it never could be replaced and it was personally treasured. When it comes time to make ultimate decisions, amazing changes may take place regarding one's priorities. Then what is usually first suddenly becomes last, and what is usually last suddenly becomes first.

Jesus was always dealing ultimate values in His teachings about the kingdom of Heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt, and where tornado, flood or fire do not destroy. That kingdom has its own set of values, which is often contrast sharply with those recognized in this world.

The parable in today's text was spoken by Jesus after the one in last Sunday's lesson. Both illustrate the grace of God. Last week we learned of God's mercy, expressed in forgiveness; this week God's mercy is seen in generosity to the poor. In both, our minds are stretched to see the dimensions of the divine kingdom. Today's story was told during a stressful time in Perea shortly before Jesus' death. The religious leaders did not like his rebukes of their pretensions to superior wisdom, character, and authority. His own disciples were still displaying some selfish ambitions.

Matthew 19 records a series of related events. Verses 13-15 tell of the Lord's blessing little children as examples of humility that should characterize his followers. Verses 16-26 tell of the rich young ruler who desired eternal life, but not enough to make it his first priority. Verses 27-30 relate a conversation in which Peter wanted to know what reward would be coming to him and others because, in leaving all to follow Christ, they had done as the rich young man had not. The Lord assured them of rewards on earth and in Heaven, but warned that "many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (verse 30).

If we find the Parable of the Vineyard Workers a bit difficult to understand and apply, we are in very good company, beginning with the disciples to whom it was first delivered. It warned against presumptions of importnace, but shortly afterward the apostles James and John were applying for positions of preference in the coming kingdom. The other apostles objected and Jesus had to remind them all that "whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." Demonstration came in time; as Paul, last to become an apostle, came to labor "more abundantly than they all."

Let the charter member of a church learn to welcome earnestly the newest member. Let the one who has labored fruitfully in former years seek out and encourage the one whose fruitful labors lie mostly in the future. And let every Christian build on that number one priority that will not be reversed, because it comes from God in the first place: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33)

Fasting for Liberia's future

By Tammie Tolbert
THE CHARLOTTE POST

"I saw the tears of a woman crying whose husband had been killed in her face, I knew then that something had to be done," said the Rev. Thomas L. Rodgers of Mt. Zion Church of God.

Liberia is a country that is undergoing some troubling times. Tens of thousands of people are suffering on a large scale from the lack of food, water, shelter, and inadequate medical supplies.

Americans can assist by participating in the international fast that will take place from 12 a.m. until 6 p.m. through April 12. Although organizations are sending tons of grain and rice based meals to Liberia, people are dying because food is not supplying their malnourished bodies with the proper nutrients. The people aren't being taught how to farm their land so that they can become self-sufficient.

"We have fed people day and night; people who haven't eaten in days or weeks at a time," Rodgers said. "The people who are suffering the most are

the women and children. The women have to sleep on the ground because they have nowhere else to go. The women are also unarmed and unprotected and they are being raped by the same rebels who have killed their husbands. The women also face the problem of not having an adequate place to deliver their babies nor having enough food to nurture themselves or their child."

The John F. Kennedy Hospital in Liberia is an inadequate facility and is not capable of handling the medical needs of Liberians. "The doctors are doing the best they can, but they don't have running water, electricity, medical supplies, clean linen, medicine, or even the proper equipment for surgery. They do not even have an ambulance to transport the people to the hospital," Rodgers said. Rodgers said that after the war ended, the John F. Kennedy Hospital received less support.

Poverty has intensified the bloodshed among men, women, and children in Liberia. "Survival of the fittest" is more than a cliché to the people there.

During the Reagan administration, the United States sent \$250 million to Liberia, but much of this money went into the hands of dictators and

they invested the money in more weapons.

"These people are reaching out to us and it is up to us to take their hands and help," said Rodgers.

Rodgers and his members realize that giving relief is only temporary, so they have organized a relief organization, Unison Liberia, a non-profit group that has organized a collection of willing and able-bodied people to give some relief to the people in Liberia.

Rodgers, Unison's president, is calling on all Christians, missionaries, pastors, deacons, Liberians and church members to assist in the effort. "Please do not let this international call for fasting fall on deaf ears. These people are in a desperate situation and we need to help them," Rodgers said.

African Americans can really help because they are respected in Liberia. "I have been going to Liberia since 1987," Rogers said. "On my first mission the Liberian people gave me 500 acres of land because they were happy to see that I, an African American had overcome slavery in the United States.

"On this land we have a house where we feed and take in the homeless and we have a ware-

See LIBERIA page 13A

Eye On Gospel

Blacks skip
church; Coley to
appear in Tulsa

The great revival: A new survey conducted by a religious research group has found that church attendance is at an 11-year low, following a five-year slide. This is in direct contradiction to the widespread belief that the country is on the verge of a national revival.

The report revealed that the biggest drop in attendance was among baby boomers. Most disturbing was summation that there was no increase in the number of people becoming Christians. However, black religious experts have all the while contended that the revival being spoken of is indeed taking place in the black church. What's more, national televangelist and recording artist Carlton Pearson said that Oral Roberts revealed to him in a conversation that such a revival would be coming through the black church. Pearson reports that the proof of the revival is in an upsurge of larger non-denominational conference settings generating accelerated attendance numbers of anywhere from 10,000 to 60,000.

"There's a new generation of voices God has begun to raise up in churches of color," reports Clarence McClendon, who pastors the LA-based Church of the Harvest and has been called "the brightest rising star to hit the national evangelistic circuit." "People are moving away from the traditional trappings of religion and instead want a relationship with God. It no longer matters what denomination, people just want God. And wherever they find him — in line with the truth of his word — is where they're willing to go." And go, they are, in record numbers to Carlton Pearson's Azusa Convention, Bishop T.D. Jake's Back to the Bible Conference, as African American churches — particularly in urban areas — experience record growth, and religious events/conferences are fast becoming big-ticket items

and big business. The statistics are more than impressive. Last year, Bishop Paul Morton's Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship Conference drew more than 60,000 to the New Orleans Superdome for a five-day long outpouring of spiritual enlightenment, and a lineup that included the nation's top African American evangelists. Jakes' Manpower Conference in Atlanta drew more than 20,000. Those numbers are expected to rise with the growing popularity of key names on the nation's African American evangelistic circuit. Among the most popular and requested are Bishop Jakes, Rev. Carlton Pearson, Dr. Myles Monroe, Evangelist Jackie McCulloch, Dr. E.V. Hill, Bishop Paul Morton, Bishop Noel Jones, Dr. Tonny Evans, Ernestine Reems and Marvin Winans.

While television is a major factor in determining who the key players are, the average audience for those on the circuit is around 2,000 and is usually found in churches just outside of the larger urban areas. Key events average in attendance anywhere from 5,000 to 60,000, with most of the circuit's highly paid top names speaking to assemblies of the like at least 10 times a year.

Briefly: At the invitation of Carlton Pearson, former televangelist Jim Bakker will be speaking at Pearson's Azusa Conference next month in Tulsa. More than 10,000 are expected to turn out. Speakers and performers include Bishop Noel Jones, Bishop Charles Blake, Andrae Crouch, Angelo and Veronica, Daryl Coley, CeCe Winans and O'linda Draper...

This week's scripture: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" — 1 Timothy 4:16.



Daryl Coley will be featured in a concert with other artists including CeCe Winans, Bishop Noel Jones, Bishop Charles Blake, Andrae Crouch, Angelo and Veronica, and O'linda Draper.