

Sunday School Lesson



INTRODUCTION

"A DAY OF Joy and Gladness" - what a happy title for a lesson! In reality our study today is about the love of God, for it speaks of a gladness that can be known only from within the boundaries of His love. The love of God is spontaneous. That is, it originates from within Himself, a voluntary movement toward us.

Contemplate that last statement. God's love is a voluntary movement toward us! Can it be true that God's love is really spontaneously directed toward us, even though we may be unlovable? Yes, it is true. It is the mystery of grace or undeserved divine favor. And this truth is the theme of the entire Bible. God is forever seeking to draw us into His fellowship so that we may receive blessings.

The word "happiness" does not appear in the Bible, and even the word "happy," which we do find, could well be translated "blessed." The kind of happiness God bestows is a divine blessedness that is experienced in spite of conditions. It comes from knowing that God is near at all times and in all circumstances.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In our study of Isaiah, we should note that chapters 34 and 25 belong together. The former speaks of God's severe judgment Edom is singled out to receive the wrath of God for her wickedness toward Judah, the people of God.

That notion is used as an example of how God will deal with all who set themselves against Him and against His people. But the storm of judgement promised in chapter 34 gives way to the sweet calm and blessing that constitute the promise of chapter 35. This chapter is a promise of the transformation of the wilderness into a beautiful garden. People will also experience renewal: the weak becoming strong; the fearful brave; the blind able to see; the deaf, able to hear; the lame, able to walk and the tongues of the speechless, able to sing.

(Isaiah 35:1-6) (Read it) Isaiah's assurance that the day of gladness would come was not based on a belief in what man could accomplish. He had seen what man could do to blight both humankind and the earth. His confidence was in what the Lord could do and would do, to bring deliverance.

It would be natural to view these words as a prophecy descriptive of Israel's happy return from captivity and the Jews who later read them would undoubtedly understand them in this light. Nor would they be wrong. Isaiah was speaking to the people of his day, and his message had meaning for them. But the prophecy received its perfect fulfillment in Jesus. Thus, Isaiah was speaking of something greater than ever he may have realized.

(Vv. 3-4) "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees." Figuratively or literally, the returning exiles would need to be strengthened for their journey. Emotionally, strength would be provided when the joyful news of salvation was proclaimed. Beyond that, whatever assistance the strong could provide for the weak should be freely offered. To us the same admonition is given: "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." (Romans 15:1).

"Strengthen ye the weak hands." It is not enough just to sympathize. Feeling sorry for others must not become a substitute for doing what we can do to help them. "Confirm the feeble knees." Those who grow tired on the journey need to be reminded of the glory awaiting them and be helped along the way. (V. 4) "Say to them that are of fearful heart, be strong, fear not, behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you."

Many of the exiles would be of a fearful heart, concerned that they might not be equal to the journey. These would need to be encouraged. The same is true of those who would walk in the way of God today. It is no sin to admit that we are weak. Indeed, to boast of strength, may be the prelude to downfall. Remember Peter, who declared to Jesus, "Even if all fall away, I will not," (Mark 14:29). Yet he was weak like the rest. Even so, Jesus said to him, "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brother." (Luke 22:32).

"Behold your God." The assurance of the presence of God gives courage and strength to the fearful heart. This promise was given by the Lord to His people from the beginning: "Be strong and of good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them, for the Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." (Deut. 31:6). God with His people! Therein is the source of the pilgrim's strength. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

God will come with vengeance.



BELK DEPARTMENT STORE
—In Monroe Mall

Hunley Says:

Blacks Are Significant In Belk Stores' Profits

By Karen Parker
Post Staff Writer

According to a recent national consumer survey conducted by Roper Organizations, Belk Department stores rank number one in the nation.

Belk, headquartered in Charlotte and located in 17 states, apparently pleases more customers than the popular Macy's of New York and May Co. of California.

Charles L. Hunley, executive vice president and supervising partner of the Belk-Hunley stores, stated he doesn't have statistics indicating the number of dollars spent by the black community, but he is "absolutely certain," blacks are significant in Belk's profits.

"Relating to population, I know we have some Belk stores in cities where the black population is 60 percent," Hunley noted. He also mentioned, because of the monetary influence which blacks have in its approximately 400 stores, they (blacks) must be represented in management positions.

Hunley spoke about some blacks and women who have had long, progressive careers with the Belk company. Two of those were Charlotteans Rev. George E. Battle, Jr. and Johnson C. Smith graduate, Richard Miller. Miller continues to work for Belk as a manager in buying service.

Hunley spoke proudly of Belk, which started as one store in Monroe, N.C. in

4-H Workshop

The Gaston County 4-H Program is offering a workshop concerning the three phases of good health - Mind, body, and Soul.

The workshop is entitled "Looking Good and Feeling Fine" and will take place February 7, 9 and 14 at 7 p.m., at the Agriculture Center in Dallas. Workshops are open to all youth ages 6-19 and their parents. A \$2 registration fee covers costs of workshop materials.

Preregistration is encouraged. Call 966-3775 for more information.

Karate Classes

The SCLC Headquarters, 1534 West Boulevard, is sponsoring karate classes on Monday evenings, 6-7:30 p.m., Thursday evenings, 6-7:30 p.m. and Saturdays, 10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Youth nine years of age and older, along with adults, are invited to attend. For more information, contact the SCLC Headquarters at 374-0557 or 372-0760.

Black Women

"Black Women: Achievements against the Odds" will be on exhibit at Reedy Creek Elementary School from January 31 - February 9. The exhibit, from the Mint Museum of History, acquaints viewers with black women whose accomplishments over the past 200 years have changed our lives.

For more information, contact Patricia Kelly, assistant principal for instruction, at 537-2156.

First Citizen

The Board of Directors of First Citizens Corporation declared a quarterly dividend on common stock of \$2.50 per share at its January board meeting in Raleigh. This represents an increase of \$.80 per share paid in the previous quarter.



Charles L. Hunley
...Executive vice president

1888. "I was amazed at the number of customers we attract who are above the medium-income," Hunley admitted. "We're definitely getting our share of the market," he professed.

Hunley explained the survey was conducted last September. "I didn't know anything about it until we received the results," he said. The survey of 2,000 consumers across the nation was taken by Colton Bernard, Inc., a management consulting com-

pany in New York that serves the apparel industry.

The surveyed consumers, 32 percent of them living in the South, were asked which department store they preferred foremost. Though Belk is a regional retail operation, the percentage chosen by consumers in the region still ranked it higher than the popular widespread Macy's stores.

CTC Serves Alcoholics With "Intensive Program"

By Loretta Manago
Post Staff Writer

The first step towards recovering from alcoholism is the acknowledgment that there is a problem.

The second step is getting help. Here in Charlotte, the Charlotte Treatment Center does just that.

For 30 years the Charlotte Treatment Center, a non-profit organization, has served alcoholics and their families through its intensive program.

The Charlotte Treatment Center dispels any myth that alcoholism is not a disease. The center believes that once alcoholism is thought of in the same way as cancer or heart disease, then it will be easier to understand that alcoholism is medically treatable. With treatment and abstinence, the Charlotte Treatment Center guarantees recovery.

Upon admittance into the Charlotte Treatment Center, the patient, after undergoing detoxification, is given a complete medical examination.

One-on-one counseling, along with group therapy,

and recreational therapy, is part of the treatment program.

At the Charlotte Treatment Center, treatment is also available for the patient's family. Through counseling and therapy, the family learns new ways to handle problems and to communicate better.

There is also a process called Intervention, that

allows Charlotte Treatment Center to reach the person who doesn't want help.

On the average, a patient stays at the Center 28 days, where they enjoy a pleasant atmosphere, excellent food and semi-private rooms.

Upon the successful completion of the in-patient phase, the individual enters a one-year, after-care program.

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ALL TOO OFTEN, BIG BANKS ARE HEARD BUT NOT SEEN.



Big banks these days are making a lot of noise about being the largest, or the busiest, or the friendliest, or whatever. Very admirable ambitions. But at First Citizens Bank, we think that all of that begins with putting our branches and offices in cities, towns, and neighborhoods where they'll do you the most good.

That's our way of saying that NO bank in North Carolina has more branches, more offices than First Citizens.

But, having more branches isn't what makes us a better bank. In fact, we strongly believe that bigger is seldom better.

So, why does the state's fifth largest bank have more branches than even the largest bank in the state? And more important, why are we talking about it?

To make a point.

One of the reasons First Citizens has more branches than any other bank is that,

in addition to the major urban areas, we have put offices in places that bigger banks have deemed unprofitable, or "too small." Places like Pink Hill, or Henrietta, or Oriental, North Carolina.

Well, to the people that live in those communities, they aren't too small. They have the same banking and financial needs as everyone else in North Carolina. And we think that just because their communities are small is no reason they shouldn't have access to those services.

Now, if you live in one of North Carolina's major cities, you're probably asking yourself, "That's nice, but what does it mean to me?"

Just this: No bank is more committed to the state and the people of North Carolina than First Citizens. The same philosophy of doing business that compels us to open an office in Pink

Hill also compels us to offer better and more financially rewarding services to ALL our customers. That concern with what's best for our customers' bottom line is what has helped make First Citizens one of the strongest, soundest banks in the entire country.

And obviously, the bank that cares about what happens to the people in Oriental is bound to express that same concern for the people in the larger metropolitan areas throughout the state.

That's what it means to you...and thousands of others in North Carolina.

So, if you sometimes get the feeling that your big bank has outgrown the need for your business. If you believe that they have forgotten the people who made them big, we invite you to become a part of the growing family at First Citizens Bank.

We'll be there - anywhere that you need us. Both seen and heard.