

1st Report (July 9 - 15)

Like all trips to Malawi one has to expect the unexpected. I left my computer with one of the preachers here to keep and use while I was away. Before leaving I called and asked about it as was told it was fine. Yet after I arrived I found it had been reformatted with a pirate copy of windows and all the programs were gone. It took a week to get the proper windows installed. Finding my programs on the Internet here was also a challenge. It is working now, but is part of the reason this first report is so late.

After leaving Denver at 11:55 pm, I slept about an hour before arriving at JFK. The direct flight to Johannesburg is about 14.5 hours but only slept about 2 hours. I arrived in Lilongwe about 1:00pm Tuesday. After setting up my new phone number, we left the airport and went to the house to visit and rest. Wednesday was a hectic day, gathering supplies, exchanging money and making preparations.

Mponela

We left early on Thursday to begin classes in Mponela. Since first coming to Malawi in 1999, I have visited this church nearly every year. We greeted the elders and discussed with them the topics they thought the brethren needed, but they told us we were free to select what we thought was needed. I spoke with my translators and we put together this list:

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| 1 The Life of a Christian | 3 Church Organization | 5 The church and fellowship with error |
| 2 Giving | 4 Life after Death | 6 Sermon on the Mount |

I started with a lesson on the figures and parables Jesus used to illustrate our growth and development. The new birth reveals the need to begin our lives a second time as a spiritual "*babe in Christ*." We learn to speak a new spiritual language, we unlearn and relearn to walk and live. Using Peter's "*as new born babes, long for the spiritual milk of the word*," and Paul's "*no longer walk as the Gentiles walk*," it was easy to make applications about being holy and sanctified in our walk and talk. I then used Jesus' "*I am the Vine you are the branches*" to introduce our need to bear fruit and Paul's "*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to produce the "good works," that God had "prepared beforehand for us to walk in them."*

The next lesson described the exclusive nature of the church Jesus built. Since He said I will build "*my church*" and not "*my churches*," it is evident He had His own specific design in mind with very distinct characteristics setting it apart from all others. As His apostles warned of the dangers of adding any human ideas to this divine institution it is obvious this is the case. Any modifications to His church would lead to a rupture of fellowship with Him(2Jn. 9-11), since what we would be building is different from His.

This was followed with a lesson on the consequences when members of His exclusive church seek to join with those who had modified their churches to conform to human wisdom. Paul spoke of this in his second letter to the Corinthians. We must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Since even the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness were "*unbelievers*" (Heb. 4:1-4), it is evident that those who do not trust Jesus' enough to follow His plan for the church are also to that extent, *unbelievers*. What happens when a submissive believer is yoked to someone who won't "*trust in the Lord with all his heart?*" It is an *unequal yoke*, like yoking an ox with a goat or chicken. No oxcart can move with such a combination. In the same way, the believer has the power of God and the unbeliever they are unequally yoked to does not. In the same passage, Paul revealed that darkness cannot have fellowship with God and concluded: "*Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."* (2 Cor. 6:17). When holy comes into contact with unholy, the holy can become unclean, but the unholy will never be made holy.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying, 12 "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?" Then the priests answered and said, "No." 13 And Haggai said, "If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?" So the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean." Hag 2:11-13

After the lesson, one of the elders stood up and proclaimed that from this lesson I had given him a double-edged sword. The elders had recently received an invitation to assemble with the Calvary Family church, (a

recently formed “family owned” church). Some had wanted to go and others believed it would be wrong to go. The first group wanted to leave their own assembly on the first day of the week at the church of Christ, and attend services with this other church hoping to preach to them. The other group felt this would be unscriptural but could offer no Scripture. He said my lesson had given them the scriptures necessary to refute those who wanted to attend this assembly. With this knowledge they would not forsake their own assembly to attend this other group. They were very happy that the timely (in season) sermon had helped them draw the proper conclusion.

The next day I spent on the Sermon on the Mount. I had planned to do Church Organization and Giving which are serious problems in Malawi, but the crowds were smaller so I decided to put it off until Saturday when we believed we would get a bigger crowd.

The lunch we were given on Friday had a cooked cabbage dish that looked like it had been first cooked in oil and then boiled. I looked at it cautiously, but determined it had been well cooked. I have learned to be careful with vegetables, since they have made me sick in the past. I knew I had made a mistake when I awoke with severe chills and muscle pain. By morning, I was unable to stand, let alone preach. I soon learned that others also had eaten the same cabbage and were in the same condition. There are two theories on what occurred. One is that the cabbage was not cooked well enough and bacteria caused the illness. Others believe the cabbage had been sprayed with a powerful pesticide that had not had time to be diluted. An entire school nearby had been poisoned a few days earlier in a similar manner. I was shown an article where people had died from a similar incident with cabbage. I guess I will never know which it was, or even which one is the most dangerous. The danger of being poisoned by pesticides was something I had never considered before. As always, after the first time, I become more cautious. I will not be eating cabbage again this trip.