

Brethren,

I didn't realize when I left Mponela that it would be over a week before I returned. Like other aspects of "Malawi time" making schedules and changing them are just part of the culture. I have been blessed this week to be staying William Chimcande (the young preacher I spoke of in my first report). The more I learn about him the more confirmed I am in my opinion that he is the most trustworthy and humble of all the men I have met here. It has been a blessing to work with him. But the secondary blessing is that he has a nicer home with a bed, a concrete floor in the bath house, and solar electricity in the home. It is a nice upgrade when staying in the villages to have such comforts. It offers simple pleasures of comfort not found elsewhere.

We began the trip sitting in the bed of a small flatbed pickup, sitting on a plastic case of soft drinks (Fanta), and bouncing around for about an hour on bumpy dirt roads. The owner was driving and the hired driver was sitting in the back of the flatbed with the other passengers, who became increasingly irate with the owner, complaining about his driving. He kept stalling the vehicle on small hills. Which would not have been such a problem but he had no battery, so every time it stalled, several men had to jump out and push it until he popped the clutch and got it started, which often took several attempts. By the time we arrived at Kasunthu, it was nearly dark. Fortunately, one of the members there owned a car and drove us to Chalinda.

The churches in Malawi do not pay their preachers. Something the early preachers from America never taught them. Some even think it is unscriptural to do so. This forces preachers to work as farmers to feed their family, then preach as they have time. For several years now I have been preaching strongly about the need to pay preachers. I ask them if they enjoy having me preach for them. They all say yes, then I explain to them that it is your sacrifice that makes it possible, and that many preachers in America are paid in the same way that teachers in the schools are paid in Malawi. I then ask them how many preachers through their sacrifices have been sent to America, they laugh at the thought. But they see the error when I explain that many of the men who could preach are forced to teach school or do other things because they cannot support their families. I have begun seeing some changes in the churches, but believe it will be a long time before any real progress is made.

William is such a preacher. He is not paid by the congregation in Chalinda, but works hard as a farmer and also preaches. He had a very good harvest this year and decided to use some of his profits to purchase a small motorcycle. He was going to wait till next year, but when he learned I would be preaching in his area and that the churches were far apart, he made the sacrifice so I would have transportation. This was a true sacrifice for him because he had planned to use this money for next year's crops and then purchase the bike. I have told him I was very grateful since it released me from the need to use a bicycle, and also allowed us to return to his home each day.

It is a small dirt bike (125cc) perfect for the rough roads and paths here, but a little hard on the back as we bump up and down for an hour each way. Since he is a new driver, his skills are weak and I am not always comfortable. I have been teaching him how to maintain and drive a motorcycle. So I drive in the morning giving him instructions then he drives back. I have to pay special attention because they drive on the opposite side of the road. When we meet traffic in America we go to the right, but they go to the left.

Saturday morning we rode to Kasunthu, which is a large trading center nearly 15 miles from an asphalt road. I started with a lesson on prayer, explaining that learning how to talk to God is just as important as learning to obediently listen to His word. Just as we grow in obedience, we must grow in our desire to talk to Him, confiding our hopes and fears, pleading for the needs of others, opening up to Him about our temptations and confessing our sins. Later in the afternoon we did two lessons on the family.

Sunday we arrived at a small church (Mondwe) where I was asked to do the entire service. This meant I would preach a lesson (they asked for quickness (*diligence*)). After this lesson, they have song, a second shorter lesson on repentance. After this is the Lord's supper which often takes an hour by itself. A sermon on the bread and its meaning then passing out the bread. The bread is a single flat piece sometimes rubbery and other times crunchy. When the man finishes speaking, he asks for a prayer and then calls up two or three helpers to pass it out. The three of them break this bread into small pieces. After this there is a second on the significance of the cup and the fruit of the vine is passed out. Finally there is a sermon on giving.

I preached at three different congregations from Monday through Friday. We started at Mbingwa on Monday. Simbi on Tuesday and Wednesday and Dzoole on Thursday and Friday. The lessons varied with the congregations as I always ask the elders what they need before I make my sermon plans. All churches are asking for the lesson on the family. I also preached on worship, church organization, Bible authority, the power of God's word, and life after death. As usual, the real difficulty preaching here is finding suitable illustrations that will work and be understood here. In illustrating power, I first tried using a fire and the wood necessary to keep it going. But it didn't work, so I tried again with a solar panel and a battery which are found in every village. The barber uses it to cut hair and the businesses use it for light.

Malawi time has been a little inconvenient on this trip. They inform us that classes will start at 8:00, so we have to leave early. But when we arrive no one is there. So far in most places we don't actually get started till after 10.

We have already sold 1200 Bibles and are going to purchase more today. The demand is much higher than I anticipated and many are still hoping to have the chance to buy a Bible at this discounted price. A special thanks to all of you who have made this possible. I believe in the long term great good will be done by giving the brethren the opportunity to have a Bible and be able to study it at home.

Thanks for your prayers and taking the time to read about what I am doing.

Your brother in Christ,

*Alan*