

There were several changes this week in my work. First, I was given a car to drive while working in Lilongwe. Driving in Malawi takes several mental adjustments. I mentioned in a previous report, traffic is reversed. A right turn crosses traffic and a left turn does not. Sounds simple enough, but sometimes I simply think I will take a right by looking right(as I have done for over forty years. I then realize that I am crossing a left lane with oncoming traffic to get into that right lane. So I have to be alert all the while. I learned a few years back that the simplest way to adjust from one side to another is to always have the drivers side next to the center line. Only in parking lots does it get confusing as a car is coming head on at you and you're not sure which way you are supposed to go.

Another adjustment is the drivers. Though there are less than a million drivers here in Malawi, they have many more fatalities each year than we do. During the day, you simply can't count on them to obey the simplest rules of the road. They will cut out into traffic expecting you to slow down. Minibus drivers are the worst. Oncoming trucks often come over into your lane 2-3 feet or more. Many of the loads are several feet wider than the truck itself but have no "wide load" warning sign. Overloaded trucks driving at 5 to 10 mph, or even broken down in the middle of the road are common. The warning sign for a break down are a few tree branches lying in the road. So when you see leaves in the road you slow down for you never know what you might find. At night, you may come upon a truck or cars without head lights and you still have to look out for a broken down truck.

The car I drive has a scratched windshield and terribly aimed lights and I can't see more than about 30 feet ahead. I try to stay behind a car with good headlights and match his speed. The shoulders often have a 3-6 inch drop. Last night an oncoming truck swerved 3-4 feet into my lane. Fortunately it is my practice to slow down when oncoming traffic approaches. But when I swerved off the road it had a 3" drop onto dirt with very deep potholes. I just held on with both white knuckled hands. It was a sigh of relief to reach Mponela.

I was very excited about preaching in a city church in Lilongwe. Thinking I might get all the comforts of a nice home. My hopes were dashed as we turned off the main road onto the same bumpy dirty roads leading to the village churches. When we arrived at the home, there were candles and no electricity, but it was only because of a rolling blackout. The brother works for the government in the mineral and mining office. He had wireless internet and electric cooking. So I had my first beef(from the store) and chips(french fries) since arriving in Malawi. (I can't remember if I mentioned my eating preferences. Malawi beef and goat in the villages are often like chewing leather. Their chickens are so starved there is very little meat on the bones and what's there is so tough you have to rip it off the leg with your teeth, sometimes pulling as hard as you can. My leg barely looks eaten with all the meat gone. But they eat everything! The fat, gristle, skin, and sometime the bones. I just tell everyone I like eggs. Their eggs are boiled and placed in a tomato/onion soup or fried and placed in the same tomato/onion soup. They always taste good, and I have no left overs. They do get old sometimes, but it is the safest way to eat).

The Chilinde church of Christ in Lilongwe is a nice facility. The benches have backs on them, and the podium was made of wood. They asked me to preach for an hour and a half(a delightful amount of time to develop a subject). They were having some problems with false teaching and asked me to talk about having no fellowship with error.

I started the lesson with Cain and Abel showing that just because people are worshipping God is no guarantee that God is pleased. God rejected Cain and later called his works of worship evil and identifying him as a child of the devil(1Jn 3:10-12) and warned that many have followed his path(Jude 3-4; 11). God accepted Abel because he offered his sacrifice by faith(humble submission to God's will). Then gave the principle that was really the theme for the rest of the lesson.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. Prov 3:5-7*

All service to God requirest that we trust Him with all our heart. That in all acts of service to Him we never

lean on our own understanding. That in every part of our life we acknowledge him by submitting to all that he says about each thing we do, allowing him to direct our paths in our moral and spiritual lives, as well as in our service to Him. Most important, we must never be wise in our own eyes. Human wisdom is useless (Jer 9:23; I Cor 1:18-31). I then went to Jesus warning based on a prophecy of Isaiah that has been fulfilled again and again.

*And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 7 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' 8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men." 9 And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!" Mark 7:6-10*

The Pharisees in Jesus day had written a creed book with human wisdom and human tradition and Jesus said in so doing they fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah. There are many today who walk after Cain who also follow human tradition. All creed books of men are human tradition and all who follow them instead of or even in company with the Bible are also fulfilling this same prophecy. Any one who "teaches as doctrines the commands of men" is not "trusting in the Lord with all their heart," but is "leaning on their own understanding." Sadly there are many today who are fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy and in so doing only draw near to God with their mouths. In God's sight, like Cain, their hearts are far from God and their worship is vain, void of any power to honor or glorify him.

The remainder of the sermon focused on others in the first century who also fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah.

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. Gal 1:6-9*

*Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; 11 for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. 2 John 9-11*

My final point was a specific request of the elders to deal with miracles. The question had been posed, does the performing of miracles negate Isaiah's prophecy? If a church is based on even the smallest portion of human tradition and not fully on Scripture thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, do miracles negate it and prove it is of God?

Since Jesus himself addressed this question, the answer was easy.

*"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Mt 7:21-23*

First, Jesus warned that not all who say Jesus is my Lord will be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven. They must do the "will of My Father in heaven." Those who are not doing God's will are those who fulfill Isaiah's prophecy. They have added human wisdom to God's word. They are leaning on their own understanding and not trusting God with all their heart. They are teaching as doctrine the commands of men.

Note their response. It is so similar to what we hear from many today. "Lord Lord we have prophesied, cast out demons and performed miracles." Jesus revealed that many will believe this. So it is a common problem. Though ignoring the Father's will (Scripture) and leaning on human wisdom, they still feel comfortable because of miracles. Jesus said to these "many" "I never knew you."

Miracles prove nothing! Scripture is the only safe guide. Jesus has never known many of the people who call Him Lord and believe they perform miracles. So keeping God's word without human wisdom or tradition is the only way we can know that we are right with God.

The sermon was very well received. We then drove to Kapanje and spent the night back in under the grass roof on a bamboo mat. The church was smaller, but 8 other congregations also came to hear the classes. They asked me to preach on doctrinal error and the Family. That afternoon we drove to Masala where we taught classes with ten area congregations attending. Our third day about we preached in Chalasa.

I am able to write this report today because we ran into a common problem in Malawi: The funeral. In Malawi if there is a funeral in a village, whether you know them or not, you is expected to stop everything and go to the home of the deceased to wail and wait with the family, or help with the cooking, digging the grave, etc. No one is exempt. I have had many cancelled classes over the last fourteen years because of funerals. This and that is what happened yesterday. So I was able to come back to Mponela and spend the day here.

Unless something else occurs, I will be working everyday until the day before I leave. Not sure if I will get out another report before I leave, but I will try.

As always, Thanks for your prayers and for taking the time to keep up with my work here.

Alan