

June 14, 2015

As the third week of my trip comes to a close, my weariness over the long hours is tempered by the satisfaction of what has been accomplished in such a short time. What is most rewarding is the knowledge that the worst skeptics of my decision to work with remote villages have now become convinced and have admitted that going out into the villages has accomplished far more good than anyone thought. Our lessons this year are focusing primarily on “Christian Living” and “Family.” There is no longer any doubt that these lessons are truly changing the lives of the brethren here.

Over the last few weeks I have added some thoughts to my lessons on the family, emphasizing the need of the fathers to be in the home training their children. Most men in Malawi spend time with their friends but are seldom at home and many children are not receiving any training. So I am now pointing out to them that not only are they neglecting their wives when they are never home, but also their children. I use Eph. 6:4: “*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*” After someone reads this verse, I ask them: “Who is this command given to?” “Is it the mother?” Since Paul clearly placed this responsibility on the father to bring them up, train, and admonish the men feel the power of the verse and what they have not been doing. Many are truly ashamed and promise to do better.

Another significant problem here in the churches here is the lack of spiritual growth among the saints. They are simply not growing as Christians. They listen to sermons but feel no reason to do anything with them. They are hearing, but not learning or doing. I have developed a new lesson to get them to understand the need for personal growth and consecration.

Growing as a Christian

Everyone who obeys the gospel is compared to a newborn baby. Jesus affirmation that one must be born again of water and the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-5), proves that God sees us coming forth from the water of baptism as infants who must grow up all over again, but this time spiritually instead of physically (1Cor. 3:1-9).

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, ... Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, (1Pet. 1:22-23; 2:1-2).

We have been born again with the incorruptible seed of God’s word and are expected to see ourselves as spiritual infants who need the pure milk of the word so we can grow. God wants us to grow up healthy and strong just as every mother wants to see her baby do. The writer of Hebrews made God’s expectations clear. “*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food*” (Heb. 5:12-13). After obedience to the gospel, the clock begins ticking and God closely monitors our growth in knowledge of His word. After a certain point, we should be able to teach what we have been taught. Not necessarily as a preacher or teacher, but as we learn about repentance, baptism, or eternal life we should be able to talk to others about them and thus teach. Yet the Hebrews never learned enough to be able to discuss it with others.

James described the process. First we hear, then we learn and then we do.

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:19-20 22-25)

Devout and faithful Christians are to swift to hear, eager for the knowledge so it can be fixed it in our minds and learned well. After eagerly hearing and diligently learning comes the doing and the teaching. Without these things, no one can be blessed in what they do.

There many applications about growing up into productive adults. We must “*put to death our members on the earth*” (Col. 3:1-11), “*put off the old man and put on the new man*” (Eph 4:17-24), and “*add to your faith*” (2Pet. 1:2-11). We must “*worship God in spirit and truth,*” (Jn. 4:23-24), and *give diligence to present yourself approved to God a worker who need not ashamed, handling aright the word of truth.*” (2Tim. 2:15). We must remove the fleshly desires and nature and become spiritual.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. (1Cor. 3:1-3)

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, (Gal. 5:16-17)

I then move to another important topic which is the subject of several parables. In the parable of the sower Jesus wanted it clearly understood that the word of God is seed and our hearts are the soil(Lk. 8:4-15). Only those who allow God’s word to become a productive plant have good and honest hearts. He also used the barren fig tree(Lk. 13:6-9) to make clear John the Baptists words: “*And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*” (Mt. 3:10-11). In John 15, Jesus described his relationship to disciples as that of a vine to its branches. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Those who bear much fruit are strengthened by God who is the husbandman. Those who are not bearing fruit are cut off from the vine. Jesus wanted it clearly understood: “*By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples*” (Jn. 15:8).

After preaching the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told all of us if we hear and do we are building on the rock, but if we hear and don’t do we are building on sand.

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." (Mt. 7:24-27).

The conclusion is then obvious. Every Christian is born again and becomes a newborn babe. If he doesn’t grow by eating the milk and meat of God’s word he will die. Every Christian’s heart is soil. God’s word is the seed, sunshine and rain. It is our duty to remove the rocks and weeds and allow the harvest to come. We must hear eagerly, learn quickly and do it diligently. In so doing we build our spiritual house on the rock that cannot move.

There have been many setbacks and frustrations this week. The vehicle I am using this year is just not as reliable as others I have used in the past. At first, the battery was not strong enough to start the car and we were delayed several times from arriving on time to begin classes. We solved this problem by removing the battery terminal every time we stop the car. On Monday a new problem occurred on our three hour drive to Mchinji. We were traveling at highway speeds when the engine stalled and we began coasting to a stop. The first three times after a few seconds it restarted on its own and we continued driving. Then it quit completely and we coasted to a stop.

A phone call got the brethren mobilized in a nearby village and within thirty minutes a mechanic arrived with one of the brethren on the back of Kabazas(bicycles that mimic a local taxi service). A few minutes later the mini bus arrived. I was one of four in the front seat, Chimcande was one of four in the back seat and then there were three sitting in the trunk(see picture). After a 30 minute ride we arrived two hours late to the meeting. The two classes that day were well received but we started and ended late.

All went well until the final day in Mchinji. We had sent the car to another mechanic to change the diesel filter while we taught classes that day. We finished classes on time and were leaving about 4:00pm. The car was running well while driving on the dirt road, but when we reached the tarmac, it would not shift out of first gear. We took it back to the mechanic but he couldn’t fix it. After a four hour delay, we started the 85 mile drive to Lilongwe in first gear(12mph). Fortunately going down a hill it shifted into second and we could then drive 30 mph. But at the first roadblock, the transmission again stayed in first and we were back to 12mph for about 15

minutes. We were able to get into second again for about half an hour, then a drunk man stepped out into the road and after braking we were back in first. This time it just would not change into second for about an hour. Added to the stress of driving at night that slowly is the concern that someone might hit us from behind. We finally arrived in Lilongwe about midnight.

We now have an old minibus that is more reliable, but worn out. It worked out well the first day as we met a group of ten women going to the meeting and we were able to give them a ride(see picture). They began singing hymns which was a real pleasure to listen to.

In closing I wanted to tell the story about the bridge in the pictures this week. The church in Chalinda where William Chimcande preaches has grown to over two hundred in attendance with members walking 3 to 5 miles to worship. Many have to cross that bridge during the rainy season, but the time comes when the bridge is completely under water. The men are still able to cross, but the ladies were not able to worship during those days. This led them to start a new congregation which is already numbering in the 60's.

Thanks for your prayers and taking the time to read these reports.

Your brother and fellow laborer,

Alan