

June 28, 2015

As the fifth week begins, I have begun to lose my voice. I think the dust from all the dirt roads has taken a toll, I can't sing at all and I am having to talk quieter while the translator projects his voice to the audience. I preached on giving and family at the church in Magualia. When I finished they had the members of the congregation come to the front so we could see that it was mostly women. I felt sad that I had preached on the duties of husbands to love and respect their wives to a congregation of women whose husbands would never hear it. They now know what they could have, but may never happen for them.

On Saturday I met brother Luke Chirwa. As we spoke, one of my translators informed me he had personally baptized over 7,000 people. It was wonderful to think of his dedication and the opportunities God had given to him. Malawi seems to be in a "fullness of time" period. I was talking to the elders at the church in Area 24 and he told me that whenever they have someone come forward for forsaking the assembly after going home to a village with no church, they mobilize the church and travel out to the village and preach from house to house. In the past few weeks they went to a local village and over the weekend were able to baptize 47 and start a new church.

I had the opportunity to preach to a large urban congregation in Lilongwe on Sunday. I was given 1.5 hours for a class on the relationship of the church to its elders and the elders to the church. They use the term shepherd much more than elder to describe the office, so I started the lesson with the truth that Abel (Gen. 4:2), Jacob (Gen. 31:38-40), and all Israel as they entered Israel were shepherds (Gen 46:32-34).

David also was a shepherd (1Sam. 16:11) before he became king and was called the shepherd of Israel in his role as king. *"Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the Lord said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.'"* (2Sam. 5:2). Hence when David wrote the 23rd Psalm, he was drawing from his personal experience as a shepherd. Jesus too called himself the good shepherd (Jn. 10:11, 13). The idea of a shepherd is the comforting thought of someone who cares for, leads, guide, protects, and feeds us, the sheep.

Both Peter (1Pet 5:1-4) and Paul (Acts 20:17,28) called the elders of the church shepherds, but these passages do not give much information on the role of the shepherd. We can rely on the prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel to better understand God's expectations of his shepherds.

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the Lord. 2 Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the Lord. 3 "But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. 4 I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the Lord. 5 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. Jer 23:1-5

In this passage God contrasted the terrible way the OT shepherds were caring for his people, but promised that when he raised *"to David a Branch of righteousness; A King..."* God would set up shepherds *"who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the Lord.* In Ezekiel, God further described what the OT shepherds lacked that would be done by those in the NT. *"Woe to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, clothe you with the wool, kill the fatlings; don't feed the sheep."* He went on to condemn them for not strengthening the diseased, healing the sick, binding up the broken, bringing back what was driven away, and seeking what was lost. (Ezek. 34:1-18).

With these passages in mind, I made it clear that the duty of the shepherds to the sheep in the church. They are to do all the above to the best of their ability. I emphasized that the sheep (Christians) should expect it from the elders and not be surprised if they get a visit from them to deal with some of these

issues.

We then went to the words of Peter that the shepherds only tend the flock of God among them because these are the only ones entrusted to them.

*Shepherd **the flock of God which is among you**, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over **those entrusted to you**, but being examples to the flock; 1Pet. 5:2-4*

While an evangelist can work with many churches, the elders are limited to one. When working as an elder they can only work with the flock(church) that appointed them. If they visit another congregation they are not elders at that congregation. I used myself as an example. In years past I was an elder in Portland OR. and St. Louis MO., but only an evangelist while working here in Malawi. They fully agreed that if I had sought to rule any church in Malawi as an elder it would not be Scriptural.

We then moved to the term “overseer,” defining the term as one who watches over and ensures that those they are over are doing what they should be doing and ready to intervene and instruct if they are not. I then took them to the parable in Ezekiel about the watchman who sits on the wall of a city watching for danger with the duty to blow the trumpet if an enemy approaches. If they warn the people those who heed will be saved and those who ignore it will have their blood on their own heads. But if the watchmen didn’t blow the trumpet all that followed would be his fault and he would be held accountable for any death or loss. The application God made was that he had made Ezekiel that watchmen over souls.

"So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. Ezek 33:7-9

Several passages in the New Testament give the same flavor to the elders.

*Therefore I testify to you this day that **I am innocent of the blood of all men**. 27 For I have not **shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God**. 28 Therefore **take heed to yourselves and to all the flock**, among which **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**(those who watch), ... 31 **Therefore watch**, and remember that for three years I did not cease to **warn everyone night and day with tears**. Acts 20:26-28, 31*

Elders must first take heed(watch over) themselves and then take heed(watch over) all the flock because the Holy Spirit had made them the overseers. With all the problems the church in Ephesus would face Paul commanded them to watch, and used his own example to warn everyone night and day with tears as how they should be. Because Paul had done this he was free from the blood of all men. This closely resembled what God told Ezekiel. God had made him a watchman, he was told to warn them from me, and would not have their blood required if he warned them.

In addition there is the exhortation to the Hebrews to obey those who watch out for your souls as those that must give account.

*Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for **they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account**. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Heb 13:17*

This too perfectly describes the work God gave Ezekiel. They watch and they must give an account just as Ezekiel must watch and give account. Hence the responsibility of the elders to the church is clearly revealed in the terms “shepherd” and “overseer.”

The duty of the church is to be submissive and obedient as they do all these things. They are to be certain that they follow the direction and guidance of these men. If they do so they will find that it will lead to a strong congregation and to their own salvation. If they don’t then when the elders give

account it will be unprofitable for them.

The lesson was well received and I received many compliments. Later that afternoon I gave an hour and a half lesson on the family. It was a little different preaching in an urban church instead of a rural one, but I was able to make the same applications using different illustrations.

Monday we had to start late as William Chitsulo had gone to the Malawi Bible Society to purchase the next set of Bibles. We have now purchased over 700 Bibles. We arrived at Mitundu at about 1:00 after driving an hour on regular roads and half an hour on dirt. I was asked to do a short lesson on giving followed by a lesson on the family. It was a good day, though we had to leave late and knew we would not arrive until after dark and there is only one "dim" headlight so it is not really safe to drive at night. We just stayed close to the car in front and used his lights. We ended up taking about 15 people with us. They had walked over 12 miles to attend these classes and though prepared to walk home were delighted to get a ride.

Tuesday we left at 8:00, but still did not arrive till after 10:00. Again it was 1 hour on Tarmac and took an hour to drive 18 miles on dirt. This time they wanted a lesson on the eldership and one of the family. This congregation had a major problem with their location. Not sure who moved in first, but there is a maize mill that grinds it into flour for those living in that village located about 50 feet from the church building. If there was any muffler on it, it was not working. It was nearly impossible to be heard over that noise. None of the buildings where I preached this year have any glass on their windows and few have doors. So any noise has free access into the building. As I tried to make myself heard, I had to strain my voice and could not project well by the end of the day. Once again, we took home five women who had walked about 15 miles to hear the lessons and wanted a ride home.

We arrived at the meeting place at 2:30, but needed to leave at 3:00 to get up the mountain before dark. I preached a half hour lesson to a mixed group of people and had been requested to preach a lesson on Christ and the gospel. By the time we finished up with everything it was 4:30. On the way up the mountain the car began overheating, but we got to the top safely and arrived in Dedza Boma where we were to preach in the morning.

Friday we were to preach in Dedza Boma. The elders wanted lessons on the difference between the church of Christ and the denominations, Christian growth and the family. I was allowed 1.5 hours for each lesson and since it was only five minutes from the rest house, we arrived early and got home early.

Saturday we arrived at Linthipe 2 at about 9:30 and began preaching at 10:30. Even though some of the preachers had been at Dedza Boma the previous day they wanted the same lessons. I was able to use just enough different material that it was very well received.

Personal Notes:

More car problems. After the meeting on Saturday we began the trip back to Lilongwe and the car began to cut out and nearly stop. It had no battery so we knew if it stopped running we would be stranded. We were carrying about 15 brethren in the minibus so we had to stop in several places to drop them off near their homes. I tried to find a hill so we could use the transmission to start the engine if it did stop running. The first place we stopped that is exactly what happened, but we were able to start it on the hill. We limped home at about 20 miles an hour. Unfortunately it again got dark and we had no lights. We were stopped by the police at the border of Lilongwe, but after telling him we had just finishing preaching and were heading home, he let us continue even without lights. The mechanics were called and we 3 hours to hear that the alternator was not working and it could not be fixed. The owner of the car had arrived in his personal vehicle and used it to take us back to the house. When we arrived at the house, the watchman had fallen asleep and we had to sit outside the gate till after ten when he finally work up and opened it to us.

Sunday they "fixed" the car, and we are now using it again, but I am skeptical. We have a long drive today on dirt roads, and I expect that we may have more problems today. But in Malawi you just work

with what you have and everyone understands if you are late since it happens all the time. True enough while carrying 15 people in the van, one of them was sitting on the battery cover and managed to short out the battery and the car came to a stop on the dirt road. We took the terminals off and then put them back on and the car started. It also worked well on Tuesday.

Wednesday was my last "day off," but it was spent writing this report, renewing my passport for another thirty days, purchasing hymn books and supplies and then driving three hours to our next preaching location. It could have been a relaxing day except the car wouldn't start. Since we were parked on a hill we were able to push start it, but then had to spend another 2 hours at the mechanic's fixing the problems. We arrived at Kadzagalowa in Ntcheu after dark. This village is situated less than a mile from the Mozambique border. Here, the border is just the main road. The east side is Malawi and the West is Mozambique.

We left the house at 8:00 expecting to arrive at Phange by 10:00. It was a beautiful drive. We were on the upper plateau and dropped about 2500 feet to the lowest areas of Malawi. It was a steep and windy road, but beautiful. Not long after we came out of the mountains, the rear tire blew out. We quickly pulled over thanking God this hadn't happened while still in the mountains. There was a 1" rock stuck in the tire. Unfortunately they had removed the jack so we were stranded by the road. One of my translators went to the next trading center to get a "tire fitter." He arrived with a pump a brick and a small block of wood, but no jack. He placed the block under the frame and proceeded to dig out under the tire until he could remove it. Then he had to dig out the block to remove it. Three hours later we were back on the road, but the spare did not fit the rim well so we couldn't travel fast. At the next trading center we found another tire fitter who had the size of tire we needed. Unfortunately it was more worn out than the one we had.

The elders had a pleasant surprise as they paid for a very nice (by Malawi standards) rest house for my two translators asking me to pay for my own room. Since it was only \$15.00, had a hot shower (first one since leaving America) and electricity, I was very pleased. They even paid for dinner for the three of us (\$8.00). It also includes breakfast. I felt like a king having my own room with lights and a double bed.

We have all agreed that we cannot trust this vehicle for the 25 mile drive on very bad roads to the meeting on Sunday. We have not yet decided what to do. We have three options. First, to get a mechanic to look over the vehicle and see why it is overheating. Second, to get another vehicle. Third to cancel the trip for this year and reschedule another location. Not sure which one will be chosen, but I am voting for the third. I don't want to miss the Lord's day, sitting on a dirt road in the middle of nowhere.