

As I finish up my first week, the long flights from Denver to New York; JFK to Johannesburg and Tambo to Lilongwe are now a distant memory and even the jet lag is beginning to fade. I have now completed my time in Mchinji and am preparing to go to Kasungu.

As is often the case in Malawi, there were some problems with scheduling. Though I had sent the dates of my visit and had even been given a schedule of where I would preach, the first three churches were not aware of the actual dates of my coming until the day before I arrived. They had been informed of my coming and had agreed to allow me to speak, but someone forgot to give a specific date. This led to a low turnout(6 at the first church) and a frustration among the area congregations who had heard of the meeting, but did not know the dates until after I was gone. I have been promised it will be better handled next year.

I was given the opportunity to confront the error in the Mchinji district over the role and work of the preacher. The problem arose after some preachers affirmed that preachers were over elders and could take control of any local church as they saw the need. In addition they were immoral and ungodly men who disgusted the brethren with their hypocrisy. Unfortunately, the efforts used to stop the error created another. Some affirmed there is no office or need for evangelists since every Christian was an evangelist. The church only needs elders to teach and preach in a local church. In order to enforce this and keep other preachers out of the district they formed a committee of brethren who now control much of what occurs among the churches there.

Last year I was allowed by the "committee" to preach on the offices in the church and was able to outline the roles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers found in Eph 4:11.

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, Eph 4:11-13*

Most of the "committee members" were present, and the lesson was very well received. I suspect partly because I am from the USA, but mostly because they were convinced from the Scriptures. Thus they "allowed" me to return this year and preach in Mchinji.

I was given several topics by the elders in the village of Nkonda. First, they wanted to hear about the differences between the church of Christ revealed in the Scriptures and what the denominations are teaching and practicing today. Second, the organization of the church, then the family, and lastly, the work of evangelists. All went well the first day, for I had decided to leave the controversial lesson for the second day. I knew that I had to create their respect by teaching well on the things they already believed. But at the end of the day, someone asked about the office/work of an evangelist. I decided to give them something to think about during the night, so I started with 2Tim. 4:1-5 which speaks of the work of an evangelist.

*I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 2 Tim 4:1-5*

Since Paul clearly charged Timothy to preach the word, by convincing, rebuking and exhorting with all longsuffering and teaching, and then stated he must do the work of an evangelist, it is evident that preaching is a part of the work of an evangelist. Since I was just answering this man's question I then used Jesus command to the brethren that those who do the work of an evangelist(preach the word) are to live of the gospel.

*Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. 1Cor. 9:14*

It was not my intention to use this verse to demand they pay a preacher, but only that there was an office in the church of preaching the gospel and doing the work of an evangelist that Jesus

commanded to live of the gospel. I used this verse only to prove there was an office in the church Jesus had commanded to be paid, and that this office was the one preaching the gospel and doing the work of an evangelist. Unfortunately, few churches pay preachers in Malawi, so instead of resolving one conflict I ended up creating another.

We learned that night that many had become deeply disturbed by this teaching. Some said, we asked him to come and teach about the work of an evangelist and he came to demand they be paid. I could see that there was a chance it could destroy all the good I have done. I was struggling with the realization that I had preached the truth, but it had caused them to stumble.

The choice was clear, press on preaching the truth about paying a preacher, or retreat from it and come back to it another time. My choice was influenced by Jesus words to His own apostles, *"I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now"* (Jn 16:12), and Paul's words to the Corinthians, *"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ."* (1Cor. 3:1-2). I pondered this all night, then had a discussion with my three translators, who all agreed that this was the best solution.

So I started the lesson on the organization of the church and the work of an evangelist with an apology. I told them I made a blunder yesterday trying to answer a question too quickly and left the wrong impression. I placed all the blame on myself and used myself as an example. First, I thanked them for already *"paying"* me to preach to them by paying for our room and food at the local "rest house," and they had already fulfilled the verse by helping us while we were there. I also told them that I did not want them to pay all my living expenses, but only help me while I was there preaching.

I wanted them to understand that the preacher's "travel" expenses should be paid by the church, and allow them time to grow into an understanding that they should also pay "living expenses." They were so happy with this explanation and apology that they actually clapped and all began talking at once. I gave them time to express themselves, then began a comprehensive lesson on the gifts Jesus gave to the church (apostles and prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers).

I began with how church organization developed in the book of Acts. In the first seven chapters while the church was in Jerusalem the inspired apostles began revealing *"all truth"* just as Jesus had promised (Jn. 16:13), *"teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you"* (Mt. 28:20). During that time the apostles were responsible for the work, needs and decisions. The money was *"laid at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need."* (Acts 4:35). After Saul laid waste the church and it was scattered into Judea and Samaria, the elders/shepherds began to guide each local church just as the apostles had done in Jerusalem. When a new need for benevolence arose, instead of the apostles, it was sent to the elders (Acts 11:28-30). From that point on in Acts, the Spirit included the elders with the apostles (Acts 15).

The real foundation of the work of evangelists centers on the truth that there are to be elders in every church, those elders tend the flock among them, and as shepherds and overseers make the decisions for each church. They are spoken of as "those" in Heb. 13:17: *"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account."* Hence each local church has elders who *"shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God"* (1Pet. 5:2). So the office of the evangelists is always done under the oversight and direction of the elders.

Once again, as they had done at the beginning of the lesson, they actually clapped and all began talking again when I made this point. The truth had resolved the extremes of the two errors they faced. First, it removed those preachers who sought to control the churches and it also removed the objections of the committee who sought to limit the power of evangelists by denying their existence.

Since several of the "committee members" heard the lesson and were very pleased with its conclusion it is my hope that the church in Mchinji can begin to heal and restore the gifts to the positions Jesus gave them.

I will let you know in the weeks to come what fruit resulted from these efforts.