

**Introduction:** The scheduling problems we faced last week have continued. Even though we learned our lesson in Mchinji and called the churches in Kasungu in advance, they had already scheduled something for the weekend, and did not want to add another meeting. This left us with an empty week, which we quickly filled with other opportunities. We have already called the remaining churches so there shouldn't be any more problems.

So far there have only been a few issues while traveling. A few times we needed to avoid a car trying to pass and give them time to get back in their lane. I listened while all three of my translators related the accidents they had been. One had been in an accident where one person died but he was uninjured. The other two both had multiple fatalities and they both suffered broken bones in their back. This is one of the reasons I always drive. Many Malawi drivers are very inexperienced and I like to be in control if something happens.

Although the drought was even worse this year, they had one storm that brought so much rain the mosquitoes were far more numerous than usual. Thus it was a very bad year for malaria, and it is still common this late in May. Since I arrived both Chimkande and one of Billiatt's daughters have contracted it. I am hoping to avoid it, but am very concerned since it is so prevalent.

I want to apologize for not sending any report on the drought relief we sent this year to alleviate the suffering for the needy saints. I have met with the preachers who helped and we discussed the issues they faced and how we could improve the purchase and delivery of the maize and received a verbal report of the outcome, but have not yet received the actual figures.

I have been asked to preach on giving and Christian growth in several different congregations and wanted to give you a short summary of the points I make to them.

## **Giving**

Although some are slowly recognizing the importance of giving, many Christians have not yet been taught about it. Since most Christians in Malawi only give a small token amount each week, I have begun with the passage they read nearly every week in the churches before they give.

*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. (1Cor. 16:1-4)*

Although they have heard it multitudes of times, they have not made the application the word "*prosper*" requires. Since all are to give "*as he may prosper*," God is requiring a percentage from us. That is the only way to understand the word **prosper**. We are to consider what God has given us in the past week and then depending on the amount, base the amount of our giving on that.

Although the tithe was not taken directly from the Law into the gospel, the basic frame work was. With the tithe, all in Israel were required to add up how they had been prospered by God and then base their tithe on that amount. This is exactly what this verse requires of us. The only thing lacking is for the Christian is the actual percentage.

If we wonder why God did not give an amount, we could conclude that God has left it to our love and devotion to Him on the one hand, and our faith and trust in His promises on the other. To simply bring a coin or a small bill each week with no thought or decision based on our prospering does not come close to fulfilling the command.

I have always believed and preached that since Abraham chose a tenth(Heb. 7:1-4), and Jacob chose that same amount(Gen. 28:22) even before God gave it to Israel in the law, it is a clearly a good starting point for the Christian. After developing this point, I conclude with Paul's promise/warning to the Corinthians.

*But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Cor 9:6-8*

Since God will assess our giving and conclude it was "*sparingly*" or "*bountifully*" and then bless us

according to our choice, it is evident that God wants us to carefully assess both our prospering and our giving. The lesson has been well received, but it will take years to see if it bears fruit.

### **The New Birth**

Another congregation asked me to preach on first principles and Christian growth. I began with a simple question: Why did Jesus call an obedient response to the gospel a new birth? What is it about being born of water and the Spirit(baptism) that led Jesus to say we were born again. I then describe that in our first birth we learned how to walk and language we speak by imitating our parents. We gained our knowledge of our world in school and our moral and ethical principles from our culture. After this first birth we slowly grew into the person we are today.

Hence in the new birth we learn these things all over again, but this time guided by God's word. We relearn how to walk and talk in the spiritual realm. We learn again our knowledge and our moral and ethical principles, not "*from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers.*" Hence "*as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*" (1Pet. 1:13-19).

So a new birth or being born again is the perfect way to describe what is ahead of us after we leave the watery grave of baptism "*raised to walk in newness of life*" (Rom. 6:3-6). This fits well with Paul's words to the Corinthians.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Cor 5:17-18*

In the new birth, old things pass away and everything becomes new. We need to reassess everything we have ever learned and bring it into the context of God's revelation to man. Anything that is not in harmony with the truth God revealed must be discarded and replaced with new things.

Most false doctrine that enters the church arises when people fail to do this. Instead of letting the old things pass away, some seek a way to keep them and influence others. This was the heart of the problem with Gnosticism in the first century. Greek, Egyptian and Eastern philosophers sought to blend God's word with the tenets of their philosophy. We don't want to fall into that trap so we see ourselves as born again and everything needing to be proved and reassessed. "*Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.*" (1Th. 5:21-22)

Many scriptures build on the concept of the new birth.

***having been born again**, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, ... **as newborn babes**, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 1 Peter 1:23; 2:2*

*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. **13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.** Heb 5:12-14*

*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.** 1 Cor 3:1-3*

Each of these passages are based on the concept of the new birth and our need to leave the carnal and fleshly things we learned after the first birth. We then move on to the milk and meat of the Word that leads us to becoming spiritual people and no longer carnal.

Similar figures are the caterpillar to the butterfly by being transformed(Greek -*metamorphosis*), (Rom. 12:1-3) and putting off the old man and putting on the new man(Eph 4:17ff). We are also to set our minds on the things above and no longer on the things of the earth. put off the members on the earth.

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the*

*right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Col 3:1-3*

This lesson is the foundation I use to build any future lessons I give to them that require them to change the way they think.

Thanks for taking the time to read this report and share along with me the wonderful opportunities to preach the gospel in a culture so foreign to our own.