

Introduction:

As I finish my third week, I have been confronted with some unpleasant realities. After the sermon I preached in Mchingi on the work of an evangelist, I had hoped we might have had some influence helping them see the error of thinking there is no such work today. Even the elders seemed enthusiastic when I used the Scriptures to prove Jesus gave the gift of evangelists to the church along with the apostles and prophets. I just learned the church there had disciplined and withdrawn their fellowship from those who believed there was an office of an evangelist. These families will now have to begin again with a new congregation and will face the opposition of "*the committee*" that formed to guard and guide the church against this and other errors. We will have to watch for later developments, but at least the truth has been given a foothold in the district. I hope I can return there next year and continue to reason with them.

The second unpleasant reality are the signs I am seeing in each district that the harvest this year was less than last year and will do nothing to alleviate the hunger they faced this past year. Very few people in the Central Region received enough rain. Some are already speaking of possible starvation if the government doesn't help to avert this disaster. We can only hope and pray that they will recognize the need and do something to help their own people.

On a personal level, I have had some interesting experiences in the first few weeks. The first place I preached was held in a primary school classroom. The nearby outhouse had a swarm of African bees in the hole under the cement floor. While the main group of bees were exiting through a vent pipe, they were also entering the room itself through the small hole in the floor. As the day progressed they began to swarm around the sides of this hole. Needless to say it was very stressful to use the restroom that day.

A few weeks later I entered a bathhouse to find a wasp nest right above the basin of water I throw on myself to take a bath. The bath at night was not so bad since their wings were closed and they were dormant. But in the morning I found them with their wings extended, looking down at me. These were not the benign wasps, but a more dangerous variety. I kept telling myself that others had already bathed and nothing had happened to them, but I just didn't look up at them and never stood up. These are the kinds of experiences you could never imagine might happen until they arrive and add a little "spice" to the trip.

Life After Death Life after death is a topic that has not often been preached in Malawi and they are very intrigued when they hear it for the first time. I generally begin with Jesus' words to the thief on the cross: "*today you will be with me in paradise*" (Lk. 23:43) I ask what did He mean with those words? Did He plan on coming down from the cross with the thief to visit some beautiful nearby park or was He speaking of the place where He and the thief would be taken after they died? We know Jesus' soul went to Hades after His death because that is what David had prophesied, and Peter had quoted in his sermon on Pentecost: "*he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption*" (Acts 2:31-32). Hence the only logical conclusion is that Jesus was with the thief in paradise as He had promised, but His soul was also in Hades. Therefore paradise must be within Hades itself.

We then study what Jesus revealed about the death of the rich man and Lazarus. Jesus stated that after the rich man died he found himself "*in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments.*" Yet when Lazarus died, he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom where he was *comforted*. Finally, Jesus spoke of a great gulf separating Abraham and Lazarus from the rich man who is in torments (Lk. 16:22-26).

Since Jesus was in Hades and the rich man was also in Hades, it is logical and Scriptural to draw the conclusion that it is within Hades that both Paradise/Abraham's bosom exist on the one side, torments where the rich man was existed on the other side and a great gulf in the middle. While the wicked rich man was in flames, thirst and torment, Lazarus was comforted and was with Abraham. It is also logical and Scriptural that since Jesus was paradise was with

the thief in paradise and was also in Hades, that the side Jesus called Abraham's bosom in Luke 16 is the same place he called paradise when He spoke to the thief.

The word "*paradise*" also has an interesting history. It is the same Greek word in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) that Jesus used. This is the word we translate "*garden*" in the *garden of Eden*. By using the same word did Jesus mean to imply that the *paradise* after our death is modeled after the original *paradise* in Eden? There is no way to know for certain, but it is interesting he chose this word.

Paul told the Corinthian that he was caught up to *paradise* and heard inexpressible words that it was not lawful to utter. He told us that paradise is in the third heaven. The first heaven is where the birds and clouds dwell. The second heaven is where the sun, moon, and stars exist and the third heaven is where God and the angelic hosts dwell. Therefore this paradise is not in this creation, but somewhere in the eternal realm where God dwells.

Although Paul could not tell us what he saw or heard, he later told us how he felt about death (Phil. 1:21-24). He stated that to die is gain. I use the concept of sowing seed and reaping. If we have more seed than we started with we had a gain and if we have less seed then we lost. Since Paul plainly stated that "*to die is gain.*" We will have more after death than we have now. He also stated that life after death is "*very far better.*" So the place that exists for the righteous to enter after death is far better than anything we have known in this life.

To corroborate this conclusion I then take them to Jesus' transfiguration in Luke 9. As Peter, James, and John are watching his face begin to shine like the sun and his clothing begin to glisten, Moses and Elijah appear to Him in glory. Although we don't know exactly what this glory was, it is clearly far better than what they possessed while living in this life. Not only did they have glory, but they had learned enough to know about Jesus' coming decease in Jerusalem. Since there was no Jerusalem before Moses entered the promised land, it is evident that Moses continued to serve God and to learn while in paradise.

More fascinating is that though many centuries separate the death of Moses and Elijah, they are now working together in God's eternal purpose and are allowed to return to earth to speak with Jesus. Also, since Elijah was carried to heaven in a fiery chariot and Elisha spoke of the horsemen he had seen, it is a close parallel to what happened to Lazarus. He too was taken to Abraham's bosom by the angels.

I then sum up what we learned so far. Jesus and the thief went to paradise the same day they died. Paul later went and stated that it was very far better and a gain from what we receive here. Jesus' spoke of the deaths of the rich man and Lazarus, confirming the comfort for the righteous and the punishment of the wicked. When Moses and Elijah returned to earth, it is clear that the realms are not so different and that life continued for them for they were still called "*two men.*" This was also inferred when Enoch was "*taken*" and when Samuel returned to speak with Saul with the knowledge that Saul "*would be with him*" after his next battle.

These conclusions help us better understand Jesus' words in John 8:51 that those who believe in Him will "*never see death*" and his words to Martha that those who believe in him "*shall never die.*" Both of these are simple truths after we accept what He said to the thief on the cross and what we see in Moses and Elijah. While those left behind see death, the Christian simply goes on a journey similar to the one Elijah and Lazarus took. One moment they are in this world struggling for life and preparing to die, but the moment of death itself is different for the one experiencing it. For them they fall asleep here and awaken to angels escorting them to Abraham's bosom and paradise.

If I have time I also include Jesus' words to the Sadducees that since God is the God of the living and He had told Moses at the burning bush He *is* the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it was obvious (a necessary inference), that these men were still alive. Again confirming that life continues in another realm. In this way Jesus "*brought life and immortality to light through the*

gospel.”

So death is like a journey on a plane. When one enters the plane the family and friends say goodbye and no longer see them. But they are on that plane traveling to a new place. When they leave the plane they are just as alive, but in a different place.