

2nd Report (July 16 - 22)

Mponela

My last day in Mponela was a Sunday. It was a large crowd and I wanted to impress upon them the need for faithful submissive service to Christ. I spoke of the certainty of death and our need to make preparations for it. I wanted to impress upon them the full meaning of "*it's appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment*" (Heb. 9:27). While the judgment day will not occur until the Lord returns, judgment begins at the instant of death. Jesus spoke of two distinct destinations God has reserved for each man at the moment of his death. In His account of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31), Jesus discussed the death of an unrighteous rich man and a righteous beggar (Lazarus). After they died, the angels came to carry Lazarus to a place of comfort, while the ungodly and selfish rich man found himself in Hades being tormented.

Using the rich man and Abraham as spokesmen, Jesus revealed some important truths through their words. From the rich man's mouth we hear of his anguish in flame and desire for relief, along with a great concern that the conduct of his brothers would lead them to the same fate he was then enduring. Through Abraham's words we learn there is a gulf in Hades that separates those in torment from those in comfort, with no means to pass between them. Finally through Abraham we learn the truth that the power of God's word is the only thing that can lead people to repent and prepare for their judgment. If God's word can't change them, even someone returning from the dead would not. If they didn't hear Moses and the prophets, they would not change even if someone rose from the dead.

While some see this as a parable and others as an actual event, most of the facts revealed in it are verified in other places. While the rich man found "torment" in Hades, Jesus told the thief on the cross that they would both find Paradise ("*today you will be with me in Paradise*" (Lk. 23:43). That Paradise is also in Hades is verified by Peter when he quoted David's words ("*you will not leave my soul in Sheol*" (Ps 16:10). While David used Sheol, the Holy Spirit, proving David was not speaking of himself but of the Christ, changed the word Sheol to Hades (Acts 2:27-31). This conclusively proves that Hades and Sheol are one and the same and that Jesus' soul would not be left there revealed that he went there. Paul later revealed that he too was caught up into Paradise, which he said was in the third heaven (2Cor. 12:4). Hence Hades is in the third heaven, and there are two places in Hades (torment and Paradise). When Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus in glory (Lk 9:31), it is evident that Paradise is a place where those who die in favor with God are given glory. This is why Paul, who had seen all this could say that death is gain and to depart is very far better (Phil. 1:23).

It is a little more difficult to verify the angels carrying Lazarus. Yet Elijah's fiery chariot (1Kings 2:1-11), Michael the archangel disputing over the body of Moses (Jude 9), and angels being present in Jesus' tomb (Jn. 20:12) strongly infer their involvement. Since they are "*sent forth to do service to those who will inherit salvation*" (Heb. 1:14), it is close enough to prove Jesus' words about Lazarus were literal.

The last point about sending someone back from the dead to warn others being ineffective, both Lazarus and Jesus prove this to be true. After Jesus raised Lazarus, the only response from the Jewish leaders was to try and kill him (Jn. 12:10). Later they bribed the guards to testify the disciples stole the body when they were affirming His resurrection (Mt. 28:11-15).

After reviewing all these facts, I made applications. We have God's word and must allow it to lead us to repentance and a change of life. Nothing else has the power to do this so we must trust in it and follow it. We need to be ready for our "departure." While Paul knew his departure had come (2Tim. 4:6-8), that he had finished the course and would now receive the crown of righteousness, most of us will receive no warning. Thus we must be prepared at all times, because all who have loved His appearing will also receive this crown. Finally death can be a wonderful journey to paradise and glory or an agonizing moment of pain and anguish. The choice is our's and only God's word had the power to prepare us.

Nchoka-Kota

That night we drove three hours to Nchoka-Kota which is right next to the lakeshore. This is one of the hottest and most humid places in Malawi, so I requested we go there first, while it is still winter. While it was comfortable at night, we could already feel the warmth growing each day we were there. We held all day

classes with 38 elders from various congregations attending. From Tuesday through Saturday I was able to cover:

Church Organization and Autonomy

Authority and Work of the Elders in the Church

Qualities of Good Leadership

Giving

Church Discipline

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

It was fulfilling to watch these men descend into godly sorry, repentance, and a commitment to amend their ways. As I entered subjects, I knew they had never heard them before and would be convicted. The churches have not been taught much about church discipline and giving. As we discussed and made application of Mt. 18:15-18; I Cor. 5; and 2Th. 3:6, they could see their need to change their practices.

On Friday, they let me know that they had reserved half an hour on the radio for me to preach Sunday morning at 7:00 am. Since the radio reaches into districts of Nchota Kota, Salima and Nchisi, and it would be played just before people went to services, we knew it would reach many people. So I took the time to carefully consider how I would use those moments. I will let you know in my next report how things transpired.