

3rd Report (July 23 - 29)

Nchota-kota

There is a radio station in Nchota-kota that offers churches in the area a free half hour time slot each Sunday morning at 7:00. Since each week a different preacher is addressing the audience, many are listening as they prepare for their own services. This guaranteed a large audience of many different religious views. I carefully considered the best way to approach such an audience and decided on a lesson everyone could agree with, yet cause us all to think about our own lives.

We had to be at the radio station by 6:45 to get prepared for the program. Like everything else in Malawi nothing is simple. I had let one of my translators borrow the car the previous day and when we tried to start it, found it had no fuel. So we hurriedly tried to find another way to the station, arriving a little late and a little flustered. But I was soon sitting in the chair speaking into the microphone. Here is a summation of what I said:

The night before His crucifixion, John recorded Jesus' final words during the Passover meal (John 13-17). Jesus then ended all these words with a prayer. After praying for His apostles, He also prayed for us: "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.*" (Jn. 17:20-23). He was praying for every person who would ever believe in Him through the writings of the apostles (NT Scriptures), which means He was also praying for us. At that moment, at the end of His life, He shared with His Father and with us what He considered our greatest need. As He interceded to God on our behalf, He also made it clear that this was one of His greatest needs as well. As Jesus looked into the future and considered every threat we would face, He placed one above all others: Unity!

Jesus prayed that those who believe in Him "*all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*" The importance this had to Him was emphasized when He repeated it twice more: "*that they may be one just as We are one.*" and "*that they may be made perfect in one.*" Clearly He considered the inability of His disciples to agree on what the Scriptures teach and command to be our greatest weakness. A look at the religious world today confirms His concern.

In addition He expressed this intercession for us as a petition for Himself. He needs all His disciples to be united in order "*that the world may believe that you sent me,*" and "*that the world may know that you sent me.*" Jesus considered our ability to be united on the doctrines revealed by His apostles in the Scriptures as a powerful evidence that God had sent Him. If we were all united, it would help the world to "*believe*" and "*know*" God had sent Him.

Jesus knew that division would call into question the ability of His apostles to clearly reveal His word. No one disagrees on absolute truth. For example in Math, no one disagrees with $2+2=4$. In the same way, when Jesus speaks on any doctrine through the inspired Scriptures, no one should disagree or argue with it. Thus the more united those who believe in Him are, the greater the power to convince the world.

Yet even with His plea that division is a danger we must flee and His conviction that our being one would greatly help His cause, a look at the "disciples" in the various denominations today confirms His concern. Though they all claim to believe on Him through the word of God, they are divided on nearly every doctrine in the Scriptures. They can't agree on what one must do to be saved, how to worship God, how the church should be organized and what it was created to accomplish. They can't even agree on what is sin and what is righteousness. Added to that, no one seems to care. There are no attempts to restudy the Scriptures and find the absolute truth on each subject. Are we really willing to concede that the Holy Spirit failed to write a book clear enough for us to understand? That was the very thing Jesus said the world would conclude, yet few are concerned.

Jesus had already warned of the magnitude of this problem. He revealed that His "*disciples*" would stray so far from this unity that it would actually obscure the gate to heaven! There would be so many paths and gates converging together that "*wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction,*" and "*many who go in by it.*" This creates the exact opposite of what unity produces! Then He said, "*narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*" By ignoring His prayer, His so-called

“disciples” have created the very conditions He warned against. Sadly, the “many” who ignore His prayer and do not seek to unite on the Father’s will are going to hear “*I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*” (Mt. 7:13-14; 21-23).

How should all disciples who love Jesus and seek His will respond to this issue? Paul answers: “*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*” (1Cor. 1:10-13). If everyone would do this, in every community there would be one church. Everyone would agree with the truths revealed in Scripture. All human wisdom and tradition would be banished. There would be no denominations and the way leading to life would be easier to find.

With Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 2:9-13), and Paul’s assurance that by reading we can have the same understanding He did (Eph. 3:3-4), there will be no excuse. Only a lack of love for the truth can explain the magnitude of the divisions we see today (2Th. 2:9-12) among those who claim to believe in Jesus. The multitude of different churches today reveal the lack of interest in Jesus’ prayer for unity. The reason is not in the Scripture. It is how those who read the Scripture respond. As the Holy Spirit said through Peter, there are “*some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*” (2Pet. 3:16).

The very thing Paul condemned is what we have today: “*For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.”*”

The greatest dilemma faced by each “disciple” is recognizing which gate we entered and which path we are walking. Every person in every denomination believes it is not them, but everyone else that is the problem. It never occurs to them that they could be part of the problem. Yet it is evident that the vast majority are the problem. By definition the broad way is filled with many and the narrow way with few. So the chances of being wrong are much greater than being right. “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*” (Eph. 4:3-6). With only one right way and every other way being wrong, we need to love the truth more than we love being right. Before accepting any truth we hear we must be “*searching the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*” (Acts 17:11). We in the church of Christ are dedicated to finding and following the truth and invite all others to join with us in this quest.

After the sermon, the announcer interviewed me for a few minutes. He wanted to know why I chose this lesson. I told him about my own search for the truth and my confusion when faced with so many churches and doctrines. How I had found the truth and was now a preacher for the church of Christ. This lesson was presented to help anyone who was also confused to continue to seek and find the truth.

He also asked if there was a phone number anyone could call if they had any questions about the sermon. Both my translators gave their name and phone number. We soon received a call from a man who wanted to be baptized. A few other calls followed. Later that morning at services, I was asked to preach on the judgment day and five came forward to be baptized. Not sure if any of them had heard the radio sermon, but the brethren were very happy with it and felt it would do much good.

Lilongwe

We then drove back to Lilongwe to begin a two week-long preacher training class. The topics were very similar to the ones in Nchota-Kota. But with an extra week to work with, I am able to expand on the lessons and add a few more. We had about 25 in attendance and they have really enjoyed and benefitted from the lessons. After three weeks in Malawi, I feel that it has been a very productive trip and am looking forward to the remainder of my time here.

Thanks again for making all this possible.