

5th Report (August 6 – August 19)

Because I was without power the entire week and had another meal where something wasn't quite right, I was unable to write my report last week. So as I sit down today to write one for the past two weeks, I find it difficult to remember specific details. The topics haven't varied much since the same issues are being faced throughout the churches here. But here is an account of my work.

Ntchisi

We began the week visiting two different congregations in Ntchisi, where we stayed two days at each church. We used a rest house (motel) there (3 rooms with breakfast and dinner for \$30 a day). The man who cooked and took care of the place, was very interested in the church. We sat down and had some good talks over the four days that we stayed there. He told us he would be attending services that Sunday and called us later to let us know he had attended and was very happy with the services.

Kasungu

After Ntchisi, we drove 3 hours to Kasungu. These congregations are a long way off the paved roads and the dust and potholes are just something you get used to. The church had assembled in one of the classrooms at the local school. We arrived a little late, but had several good classes before the day was finished. That night we stayed in the nice home of one of the members. They brought a meal and Billiat (a translator) chose a piece of chicken. He tried with all his might to pull the chicken apart and could not get it to budge. It was a local chicken and probably an old rooster with tough muscles. He wisely gave up on the chicken and decided on eggs. The next day was the first day of the week and they wanted four classes and then ended with the Lord's supper. This created the situation I like the least in Malawi: driving at night. This had the added component of being on dirt roads that were seldom used. We were on driving roads I would have thought were bicycle paths. Going through dry river beds with steep banks, driving with grass taller than the car on both sides of the road, and finding small roads going off to the left and right. After two and a half hours, I was so happy to arrive at our next center.

Various Villages

One of the teachers unlocked a school classroom for us to spend the night in. It was dusty and had not been used for a while. After bringing us a bamboo mat to put our sleeping pads on, we learned there wouldn't be any food that night, so we ate some raw groundnuts (peanuts) and water. There would be no water for washing, but they did bring a small container of hot water for coffee. Sometimes we get a great house, good food and a bath, and sometimes we don't. We never know until we get there. We spent two nights in that classroom. They did send two small girls (about 5 years old) to clean out the classroom. We had three classes on Monday and again on Tuesday. We had another long drive to the next church, again arriving after dark. I actually began to enjoy driving these dirt roads at night. There is a beauty to the terrain and vegetation at night where you can only see what the car lights reveal. After we arrived we were in a school teacher's house, and they had a bedroom set aside just for me.

Unfortunately, something in the food or water had not been properly prepared, and I became sick. I was able to get through the second day of classes, but had to take my day off to go to a clinic and get checked. I got my third Malaria test that once again came back negative. I was given an antibiotic and advised that if the fever continued I should get a second test. Since the fever continued late into the night, and I was going into the villages for the next few days, I got my fourth malaria test (which also came back negative). But it made me late for our classes that day. We were still able to have three classes on both Saturday and Sunday. This time they also had me do the Lord's supper, so I was the only speaker the entire day.

Church History

I have been asked several times to teach on church history. Since I only have an hour, I used a different approach I wanted to share with you. I begin with all the prophecies regarding the false teaching and falling away that would occur after the apostles had died. I begin with Paul's summary of the future of the church.

*Now the Spirit expressly says **that in latter times some will depart from the faith**, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot*

iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 1 Tim 4:1-4

This passage allows us to search through the history of the church and find these details. The difficulty of pinpointing exactly when these things would occur is solved in another passage.

*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day (second coming akh) will not come unless **the falling away comes first**, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. ... For the mystery of lawlessness is **already at work**; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 2Th. 2:3-4, 7-12*

Clearly, the circumstances that would lead to this falling away were already working when Paul wrote the Thessalonians about 52 A.D.. Paul later told Timothy that this would not come from outside the church but within. They would turn aside from the truth because of their own desires into fables.

*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.** 2 Tim 4:1-5*

All this is confirmed in Paul's words to the elders at Ephesus, where he warned them that it would be from them that this would all begin. It would be after his departure (death), that they would seek to draw away the disciples after themselves.

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also **from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.** 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Acts 20:28-31*

Peter also speaks of the scope of this falling away.

*But there were also false prophets among the people, even as **there will be false teachers among you**, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And **many will follow their destructive ways**, because of whom **the way of truth will be blasphemed.** 3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; 2 Peter 2:1-3*

With this framework, it is then easy to chart how the pure church of Christ under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit through the apostles fell away into fables and destructive doctrines. We just need to search for the false teachers who in the midst of the disciples would begin teaching things that moved the church from its foundation on the Scriptures to the fables of men.