

I am finishing up my first week in Malawi. It was a long but uneventful flight, but I could only sleep about 4 hours over the two nights. Needless to say, I was exhausted when I got off the plane.

When I arrived at the airport, no one was waiting. So I went to the phone counter and had a card for the Airtel network installed in my phone. They take out the Verizon card and replace it with the network(Airtel) here. So while I am in Malawi I have a Malawi phone number, but can still keep all my apps and all your phone numbers. Even after finishing the phone no one was there. I called the first man, and he had forgotten. I called the second man and he thought I didn't need him to come. I was thinking of taking a taxi when the third man arrived. We drove into Lilongwe for supplies(water and mosquito net). I never know what kind of place I will be staying from day to day. Sometimes they are primitive and sometimes they are very nice. This year, while I am in Lilongwe, I will be staying in a brand new home.

There was a major problem with my scheduling since the two people coordinating had not communicated with each other and I had not checked with them. They both thought I would work with them the final three weeks of my trip, so I was double booked for the last three weeks with nothing for the first three. In Malawi such things are common and we soon had it all sorted out and resolved.

On Wednesday we went to the bank and I got 2,000,000 in Malawi Kwacha in exchange for \$4000. The exchange rate this year is 480 MK to \$1.00. We then went into the capital city of Lilongwe to purchase the things I will take to the congregations. At the end of the day we had 10 cases of raisins(300 packets), 2 cases of songbooks(120) and 12 cases of Bibles(268). We will be purchasing many more Bibles in the weeks to come, but this was enough to begin.

Thursday we drove to the first congregation(first set of pictures with the concrete pews). I am always a little nervous the first day, wondering if I can remember how to teach here. The illustrations and content are very different since those living here do not understand many of the things we do in America. When you live on \$200 a year and have none of the appliances or blessings we enjoy in America, the illustrations have to be much more basic. I even asked the translators for help.

I taught two lessons since we arrived late. They had requested my lesson on the family and a class on the relationship of elders, deacons, evangelists and Christians.

Family relationships in Malawi as in most of the African continent are based far more on tradition than Scripture. The women do all the work in the home as well as in the field while most men do very little. The children are left to raise themselves with very little teaching and guidance. What little they receive will come from the mother as the fathers are not involved. This has led to a high level of adultery, divorce, polygamy, and unruly children.

Because the family is the foundation of the spiritual life of God's people, I have begun to focus on these relationships to help the brethren make significant changes. I use a combination of exhortation, humor, reproving and even rebuking to keep their interest and force them to see themselves clearly.

The theme of the lesson is simple. The relationship between Jesus and his church is the basis of the relationship between a husband and wife(Eph. 5:22-26). As Jesus sacrificed himself for the church, the husband is to make sacrifices for his wife and as the church is to respect and serve Jesus, the wife is to respect and serve her husband.

Since they all agree with these initial truths, it is then easy to begin making applications. While Jesus made many sacrifices for the church, the Malawi husband makes none for his wife. In the course of the day the wife walks to the borehole or river to collect a five gallon bucket of water and carries it home on her head. She goes out into the fields to gather wood and bring it home. She heats the water for bathing on the fire, cooks the food, washes the clothes, sweeps the yard with a small hand broom and cleans the home. She cares for the children and does all the other chores. The husband does nothing to help in any of these things. Since there is an 80% unemployment rate, few of the men in the villages have a job. The extent their work comes in preparing the ground for planting and later in harvesting the maize they grow each year for food. Yet even then the wife, after doing all her chores, is expected to spend the day working beside her husband, often carrying the baby on her back. So while the husband works 3 to 4 months each year, and does little for the rest of the year the wife works hard every day and even harder during the time of planting and harvesting.

When the men see these truths, they are often embarrassed, while the wives are happy that this has finally been

pointed out to them. I remind them that before their independence this is how they were treated by the colonists. While they have been freed and are now happy, their wives are still enslaved by them. At that point, I begin to use other Scriptures to show them what God expects of them. Peter commanded husbands to dwell with their wives in harmony with this knowledge of the Scriptures. Therefore they must change and live with their wives treating them as Jesus did the church. They are to honor their wives as they do a weaker vessel. This too I carefully illustrate. The shovel they work with is a strong vessel and the thermos flask with the glass insulating lining is a weak vessel. While they can just throw the shovel on the ground after a hard days work, they must carefully place the flask on a table and protect it from falling.

In the same way Peter commanded we treat our wives like the thermos and not like the shovel. Yet the Malawi husband after working all day in the field does not care about his wife's condition but expects her to continue to work while he rests. She gathers more water, heats water for the bath, cooks the food, and takes care of the children. I then tell them they treat their wives more like a shovel than the flask. So I encourage them to be kind, gentle and concerned for the well being of their wives. I then apply Peter's words that God is carefully watching how they treat their wives and their prayers will be hindered if they reject or rebel against these things.

I generally conclude with some questions. Will you go home and repent to your wife? Will you apologize to her and ask her forgiveness? Will you ask her what you can do to make her life easier and better share the burdens of life together? Will you spend more time at home?

The lesson is always well received and I have had many reports that it has done great good in many homes. It has had such an impact that I am asked to preach it everywhere I go.

The next morning we had a long drive out into the villages. I had forgotten how much one is jostled around as they drive on these un-maintained dirt roads. As the road is continually changing from sand to clay to dirt, there are deep potholes, eroded areas and ridges of dirt that create a real uncomfortable feeling as you travel. That with the dust, the bicycles darting out into your way and the large semi trucks you come upon on a single lane road always make for an interesting and stressful drive. But after a little over an hour and a half, we arrived at the congregation(second congregation where they are sitting on the floor).

Here I was allowed to teach three lessons. The first "introducing the church of Christ," then "giving on the first day of the week" and lastly "the family." We finished up about four and after the long drive home arrived about 5:30. We have to get up early in the morning as it is a much longer drive.

Thanks for your prayers and for taking the time to read about my efforts,

Your friend and brother

Alan