



Looking beyond the next thirty days  
Steve Vinton, July 20, 2007

I love starting schools, I love holding town meetings, I love even teaching Math, but I really love speaking in chapel to our students.

With our family leaving this Sunday (tomorrow!) to begin our journey to America, I looked forward to this particular chapel this week with special relish. I also had to try to take care of a problem that was created the week before because we had one of our students, who is a pastor, give it his best at preaching, but his best didn't quite hit the mark. We have to give him a chance, and we want to give him a chance, it's part after all of helping him to grow and reach his full potential, but unfortunately sometimes in the process of doing that, a guy gets nervous, the message ends up being a little off, and everyone kind of cringes. What happened was that the kids got read the riot act last week as he tried not only to pound into them the great necessity to stop sinning, he evidently felt a need to add to the long list of sins he managed to find in the Bible a few more that he personally wished that God had gotten around to mentioning! [Hard to be too hard on him -- I'm afraid we're all guilty of that sometimes.] So how to balance making things right in the minds and hearts of our students without shaming him -- that was the challenge I had to struggle with! It would be easy to simply have chapel and preach clearly from the Bible and correct everything he said that was wrong -- but at what a horrible price of shaming him and what a horrible price all that would mean for his future.

Fortunately, I was able to tell them the story of how Godfrey and I travelled to the village of Kimala a week or two ago and saw the village and all of the children who had no place to go

to school. I shared with them that wonderful moment that I'll never forget when Godfrey leaned over during the town meeting and said to me, Mzee it would be a sin if we didn't build a school in this village. I stared at them for a good half minute to let it sink in. Where did it ever say that not building a school was a sin? And I then proceed with great fun to work through with them the truth that lists of sins were like the arithmetic that you learned in primary school -- you can't throw the list out, but you really miss the boat if you spend your whole life wallowing there. Don't lie! Don't steal! Don't commit adultery! That's primary school teaching. Time for us though to move on up and beyond that. Just as you add algebra and geometry when you get to secondary school and put it on top of those elementary teachings about arithmetic, we have to move on to the higher teaching about sin as well. Time to move on up to understanding that there are all kinds of good works that we're supposed to be doing that God has prepared from before the foundations of the world for us to do -- we need to be out there helping the poor, and the widows and orphans and the sick and the hungry -- and if we don't, well that's sin! If you get to the end of the day and collapse into your bed and say thank you Lord I finished the day without stealing or telling a lie or getting some girl pregnant but you can't point to any good deeds that God wanted you to do and purposed for you to do, nothing that you did on His behalf and in His name, then how wrong it is to say that you are without sin. Just as we add 8th and 9th grade math to the teachings of arithmetic in primary school, we have to move beyond that elementary teaching of "don't do this" to a greater understanding that not doing the will of God is fundamentally sin.

I told them that the challenge of the coming month was a big one! When I get back in four weeks from America and the Headmaster comes to talk with me, I don't want to hear that so and so was disrespectful to a teacher, or that this student cheated on a test, or that this kid got caught with a girl in the village and this student stole out of the local store. Of course I don't want to hear any of those things. But that's the elementary teaching about sin. What I really would love even more is if the village chief were to come and tell me about all of the wonderful things that you, my students, did while I was in America, helping to weed the fields of the widows in the village, sharing a little of your money to buy a pen for the kid in primary school who doesn't have one, sharing some of your beans with the kids in the house down the road from you who you know have no parents and whose lives are lot harder than your own. I want to hear that you've done good things!

And of course I had to get to the real point that our dear friend had missed the week before. All the not sinning in the world doesn't make a person right with God. And somehow in his hustle and bustle of trying to get everyone to lead a wonderfully moral life, he had failed to make that clear and the gospel had gotten hidden. There are tons of very moral people on this planet who don't know God. So I had to gently make that clear. And in fact I had to make sure that they understood that doing all of the good works in the world wouldn't cut it either. They could help every last widow in all five of these villages here and it still wouldn't be enough to somehow make them righteous before God. Somehow I had to get them to understand that not doing all of the naughty things and spending your whole life in doing good deeds, while really nice and wonderful, it still wouldn't make anyone righteous before

God. The clarity of the last ten verses of Romans chapter 3 is stunning!

And I loved sharing it with them! We don't start schools because somehow it will earn us favor with God anymore than we don't steal or lie because somehow that will earn us favor with God. It's that incredible exuberance of feeling the enormity of the grace of God that even though we've got no right to come anywhere near Him that He has decided to give us a pardon as a free gift, that with the enormity of that incredible reality, we simply are overwhelmed and therefore out of great gratitude and joy we want to do things that will thrill His heart! I loved watching the expressions on their faces change as it became clearer and clearer to more and more of them. Wow!

So off we are to America. We leave early Sunday morning to begin the trek across the country, we catch our flight early Tuesday morning, we land in Houston late Wednesday afternoon and then Thursday morning we begin the fun of being all day at Texas Children's Hospital for Jonathan's check-up. And then we've got a jam packed schedule in California, Wisconsin, Oklahoma and Texas for the next thirty days. Can't wait to see what happens in America. But I really can't wait to see what happens in Tanzania in the next thirty days as well. How many good deeds could our students do in these villages in 30 days? Can't wait to find out! But I'm already looking beyond the next thirty days. Knowing how years of doing good deeds back when they were students at Makuzani eventually welled up into Godfrey and Emmaneuli and Janerose and the rest of them doing good deeds after they finished school, I really can't wait to see what all of these students at Madisi are going to do with their lives as well ...