

NYLSTROOM NEWS

March 2006

Nylstroom

I have been studying with Willie Vandeventer for many months. He is the husband of our sister Tina and is seriously ill with cancer. Finally, much to everyone's special joy, Willie obeyed the gospel. We praise God for the power of His Word. We are also thankful for various men, especially Steve Buys, who often, with the help of his good wife, traveled up to Nylstroom and presented quality lessons so that Willie did not lose interest during times of our absence. (Steve is a quadriplegic and so his wife must do the driving. Many of you prayed for him when he was shot in the neck two years ago by hijackers and will be happy to know that he is as well as he can be and working very hard at preaching the gospel.)

We make a schedule of work several months in advance so that all the necessary arrangements can be worked out. Different congregations invite us to come and work with them and we try our best to do this without neglecting the few Christians in Nylstroom nor our own health. Our times at home are actually more tiring than our times of travel because there are so many things to see to in order to make the trips possible. We also need to keep preparing lessons and typing translations and printing material so that we can leave the brethren with useful information that will be of help after we leave.

Johannesburg (Ivory Park)

During our last time at home the brethren at Ivory Park asked to borrow our tent to hold a gospel meeting to make the church known in the new area where they are meeting. The meeting was well-organized and good topics were chosen. My topic was on the prophecy in Gen.49:10-11. Excepting myself, all the lessons were presented by men with ordinary secular jobs who take turns preaching at the local congregations they attend (congregations with no supported preachers). It was really a great encouragement to listen to these men preach such well-organized and effective lessons. Unfortunately the brother who spoke on the Holy Spirit did not have a good understanding of the topic. I would really like to use this incident as an encouragement to my African brethren, many of whom are now earning good salaries, that they begin supporting their own worthy men so that these men can spend the time necessary to enable them to study the Bible in depth and do the work of a preacher full time.

Zimbabwe

We are now on our way home after two weeks in Zimbabwe. We visited congregations in nine different areas. At each place, members of other congregations had walked several miles to attend. I mainly spoke about maintaining the purity of the local congregation (1 Cor. 5) and then my next lesson was on personal purity (sexual purity) (1 Cor.6). This raised a lot of questions and debates. It seems that some have been baptized, and the brethren have subsequently found out they are polygamists. (A few of these were in attendance at a number of places.) I of course taught about how such people must repent or be withdrawn from, but I also stressed that before baptism there should be preaching about repentance, particularly of sexual sins. At one place the church was just beginning and the kraal head attended to see what this "church of Christ" was all about.

The kraal head had many questions and favorable comments and subsequently attended every session. I was hoping he would repent, but he has more than one wife. He did authorize the use of a very nice piece of property for the local congregation. On this property they will build a small building with the natural material available to them – mud bricks, thatched roof, etc. Notice the nice shade tree!

One of the questions that the kraal head had was that he could not understand why men were not free change burial in baptism to sprinkling. I replied, "How would you like it if your people changed one of your laws?" Then one of the other men piped up and said, "Yes. What if we made a new law that you must put on a skirt and take up a hoe and go clean the mielie fields!" Everyone roared with laughter – especially the women (who typically have that job!)

Our prayers have really been answered. Good rains have continued to fall in Zimbabwe from one end of the country to the other, except for along the southern border which has always been a dry area. It is so wonderful to see the people munching away on mielies, enjoying the fruit of their labors. The damage to the roads was not so enjoyable. Due to horrible potholes, it took me 1 ½ hours to drive the 30 miles from West Nicholson to Matabo. The city streets of Bulawayo are a nightmare of potholes. It is so sad that the government is in such a state that they cannot repair even the major roads. At other places it was quite a strain to slither through mud, wondering if we would be able to get out. One time we did not get out. We had to depend on the animals which the good Lord has provided for us. An experienced African brother once advised me to ask for oxen if we ever got stuck. The oxen (& several men) successfully got us out.

On the surface, and for the most part, the work in Zimbabwe is so rewarding because the brethren are willing to sit for long hours soaking up the word of God. However, the more you spend time getting to really know the people, the more apparent become the rocks beneath the surface. In a way, it is good to see the rocks because it means that enough loyalty to God and trust in us has been created that the brethren allow us to see what is really bothering them. But it does cause a lot of pain. This trip we were particularly grieved to hear about the sexual impurity of a brother with whom we had worked closely and whom we felt was a strong Christian. On top of that, we heard at the beginning of our trip that another brother, with whom I also work closely, had taken a second wife. Bigboy Dube offered to go with me to try to help this brother repent. When confronted, the brother said he felt he was not really taking a second wife because, before he became a Christian, his brothers-in-law had taken his first wife back to their home because of his bad manner of life. Not for the first time, I showed him Mt.19 and 1 Cor.7. He then said he would remove all his possessions from the hut of the second wife that very day and move back into the small house where his grown children (by the first wife) stay. He confessed his sin to one of the local brethren who was with us and agreed to confess it publicly the very next Sunday. Sadly we received a call that this brother had instead tried to excuse his behaviour to the brethren. This resulted in the brethren immediately refusing to allow him to preach. We pray this brother will repent – for his own sake and because he is so needed. We are due to return there in 10 days.

We thank God for our continued good health and even for the challenges that come our way, especially since we have been given His Word which is the means to deal with those challenges. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 is a passage that glows ever brighter as the days go by. Thank you for your continued support and prayers.

Les Maydell PO Box 2744 Nylstroom 0510 Rep. of South Africa Tel. 011 27 14 717 4100



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