

Zambia Newsletter

September 2003

Dear Friends,

Lorie and I have just returned from our four-week trip to India. It was a most profitable trip, but it was also long and quite exhausting. We left on August 4th and returned on Sept 4th (one full month).

Because we took a southern route to India (flying South African Airways through Africa), we decided to stop in Africa on our way to India in order to visit some Preacher Training Schools and to learn more about leadership training efforts going on in other parts of Africa. Our trip took us first to Zambia and then to visit two schools in Ghana. I was most impressed with growth and health of the church in Ghana. This is a country where the church has grown dramatically over the past 20 years despite having very few foreign missionaries to assist them. I was amazed to find two churches that number more than 1200 members each! Unfortunately, the church in Zambia has not experienced this sort of growth. It is for this reason that a new effort is currently being launched in order to start a new school in Lusaka for leadership training. Zambia does not have a school dedicated to leadership/ministry training and this is a major reason why the church has not grown in Zambia like it has in other African countries.

Lorie and I then flew on to India. There to meet us was our old friend, K.G. Kumar, who we have known since we attended Freed-Hardeman College together in the 1970's. Upon his return to India in 1978, Kumar started a Preacher Training School in Kakinada that today has more than 200 students enrolled. Kumar has been asking us to come teach in his school for many years now, but we have not been able to do so because of our involvement in the school in Nigeria. But, because of the security problems this year in Nigeria, Lorie and I decided that this would be a great time for us to accept Kumar's invitation to India.

We arrived in Vishakhapatnam early on Sunday morning (after an all-night flight from Africa via Bombay over a 36 hour period). We went immediately to visit one of the churches in town where I preached to a congregation of about 100 meeting in the preacher's home. We then traveled 5 hours south to Kakinada where Kumar lives. This city sits on the Indian ocean, halfway between Madras and Calcutta (east India). I cannot begin to describe how hot and humid it was. Africa was mild compared to this! Fortunately, our bedroom had an Air Conditioner which enabled us to sleep at night. But, I must confess it was not easy to leave the comfort of our bedroom each morning!

Our classes began the next morning (Monday). I taught 1-2 Corinthians in English to a class of 66 students. Kumar also instructed all the teachers of the school to attend my class when not teaching themselves. Thus, I had a class of about 75 men. The students in the English program come from many different parts of India and surrounding countries. This included seven students from Burma and two from Nepal. I taught three hours in the mornings and two hours in the afternoon (5 hours each day). On Saturdays and Sundays we went out from Kakinada about an hour drive to preach at churches in the surrounding areas. And, although my primary purpose in going to India was for leadership training, there were several who were baptized as a result of these preaching appointments.

Lorie, on the other hand, was busy teaching a group of 62 female students. Some of these women were wives of some of the preachers attending the school. Because most of these women were not proficient in English, Kumar's wife served as Lorie's translator. Lorie taught on a wide variety of topics relevant to the concerns/needs of women and women's ministry (e.g. teaching children, temptations that women face, characteristics of the Christian women/wife, etc). Lorie's class was entitled, "Far Above Rubies." Based on the feedback we received, it appears that Lorie's class was of particular significance for Christian women in India. She did an excellent job.

India is significantly different from Africa. Although I lived in Pakistan as a teenager (while my Dad served as a missionary there), I was surprised at how different India is from Pakistan and Africa. Perhaps the thing that

surprised me the most was the strength of Hinduism and the overt worship of gods (idols) in Hindu temples. I guess I was under the misconception that Christianity was grown in India like it is in Africa. This is not the case. African Traditional Religion does not involve the worship of idols and it is rather kept covert and secret. Most Africans are embarrassed to be seen practicing their pagan ways. Just the opposite is the case in India. Hindus are quite bold in their worship of idols and are not intimidated at all by the presence of Christian monotheists. In fact, Christianity in India is regarded to be the religion of the "untouchables" (lowest class of people). I was amazed to see well-to-do, educated, civilized Indians standing in front of idols and worshipping them (idols with elephant heads, three-faced monkeys, etc).

I was also surprised to find that the caste system is still as strong as ever and that women are still treated as sub-human beings. There are five castes: priestly, royal, merchant, common, and untouchable. It was quite obvious who was of what caste just by the way people dressed and spoke to one another. Those of the lower castes greet those of higher position with the utmost reverence and humility. And, those of higher caste speak to those of a lower caste with harshness and contempt/disrespect. Money is not nearly as important as one's caste.

This same attitude is demonstrated in the way men treat women (as though they were servants and slaves). Relations between men and women are strictly reserved and monitored. In worship, for example, the men sit on one side of the building and the women sit on the other side. There is no courting (dating) and contact between men and women is strictly taboo (even among husbands and wives). Marriages are arranged by the family. "Love marriages" (as they are called) are very rare and taboo. In fact, I read in the Newspaper on the day we arrived about the murder of a couple who had married from different castes (love marriage). The brothers of the girl killed them both. The article stated that this was the third such murder in the last month.

Perhaps the most difficult part of our trip involved the food and the long flights. Indians eat curry and rice (filled with hot spices) twice a day. I have always loved curry and rice, but my stomach rebelled after about a week and I was in much pain for the rest of the trip. The lining of my stomach just could not handle those hot spices. In fact, Lorie and I were both quite sick the week after our return as we tried to readjust ourselves. The other thing that was most difficult was the distance we had to travel to/from India. We did not stop off in Africa on our way home (flew straight home) and, thus, our trip home took us 72 hours! One flight (from Johannesburg to Atlanta) lasted 22 hours! Our legs became so swollen that our shoes wouldn't hardly fit.

This was the hardest and longest trip I have ever made. Nevertheless, it was a most profitable trip and I believe we accomplished a lot of good in both Africa and India. I also learned a great deal about 1-2 Corinthians by teaching it in the Indian context. I was amazed at how directly the issues of 1 Cor apply to the situation in India (worship of idols, sexual immorality, following leaders because of their position/caste, doubts about the resurrection due to belief in reincarnation, etc). This was a most rewarding and insightful experience (biblically and personally).

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