

LIU LA NAMIKANGO

Namikango Mission

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It is hard to believe that another year is beginning to close. This year has been different in so many ways. The Coronavirus has altered the entire world and the way we do everything. For us missionaries, we became stuck in the United States for many months, unable to return to Malawi or Namikango because air travel completely shut down. Last year at this time it was strange to see someone wearing a face mask, and now it is as normal as anything else. Even the simple act of greeting each other has changed, as we try to keep safe and healthy by not touching other people's hands.

As you look back on this year, I am sure you can think of a dozen other ways your life has been completely changed, whether because of Covid or other issues. If you could go back in time to visit yourself in December 2019, your old self would have trouble believing all the stories you brought from 2020! The world has changed in dramatic ways, and it continues to change in dramatic ways. Even if you are living in a very remote village, your family can feel the affects of these changes as new issues approach and retreat. It seems like each week there is a new issue affecting us.

At the beginning of each year in January, Namikango's Education Team sits down to decide what biblical theme we will teach on for the year. In January 2020 the team decided that the theme, "Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus" from Hebrews was a good theme. We did not know at the time just how fitting this theme would be for this year. All through

2020 the world has faced many issues. Big issues like the Coronavirus and presidential elections, other issues like sicknesses and deaths, and a multitude of other issues have presented themselves to each one of us. But the one thing that has remained constant through everything is the love of the Father.

Jesus describes God as the Father, the one who cares about his children and listens to them. The Father who provides for his children and heals them. The Father who chases after his children to bring them back home. Jesus claims that his mission is to reveal the true nature of God as the Father of us all. No matter what issues come before us, no matter if they are very small or as large as a worldwide pandemic, the Father is our rock and source of strength. I hope that you have fixed your eyes on the Father this year, not on the storms around you. Because in the Father you will find hope, peace, strength, and joy.

-Eric Gephart

Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

Beloved, the theme we will be sharing this year is to fix our eyes on Jesus. This time around we want to use the words we have read from the Bible saying, ‘fixing our eyes on Jesus.’ It is good to fix our eyes on Jesus.

Fixing means a person is gazing on something attentively without thinking of anything else, and his eyes and thoughts are on that thing only. It is a gazing of desiring and loving that thing. If it is a beast or something frightening, gazing at it is a means protecting oneself. You look at it to see how it has positioned itself. Is it looking at me? If it moves from here where is it going? Is there a place where I can run to save myself; and many other questions one asks in his heart?

In our lesson we will be answering questions like, why are we supposed to fix our eyes on Jesus, and who is supposed to look at Jesus? And what are the benefits of fixing your eyes on Jesus?

“When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, ‘Look at us!’ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk’ (Acts 3:3–6).

Another thing we are seeing is that there is a certainty of hope. When Peter told the cripple to look at them, he looked at them with hope of receiving money. Dear friends, when you look at Jesus what do you expect from him? Our crippled friend expected to receive money when he looked at Peter and John but he received something greater, his healing. All of us have something we need for Jesus to help us. Maybe we don’t come before Jesus with our great need but just small things only.

When Peter told him, ‘look at us,’ he wanted the words of Jesus of Nazareth to be clear to him and rouse faith in the sick person. Had it been he looked away or somewhere else, Peter’s message could not have been his. The presence of

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Peter and John in this place was the presence of Jesus for the sick to get healed and for all the people to see that he was healed in the name of Jesus.

In the Old Testament, in Numbers 21:6-9 we also see a story helping us in our lesson. “Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, ‘We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.’ So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.”

Many who were bitten and looked at the bronze snake lived. There were many who got bitten but did not look at the bronze snake and they died instantly. In our hymn book we have hymn number 18 which says, ‘there is life for a look at the Crucified One’ (Jesus). David in Psalms 27:4-5 says, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.”

By thinking about what David is saying in these two verses, first, we are seeing that he is

asking for him to be near God to be gazing upon his beauty and God's goodness. This is also an interesting part. Maybe if it was us, we could have asked God to help us with our financial problems or sickness. For David, he had an opportunity to ask God to help him defeat his enemies so that his kingdom to be popular all over the world. Look beloved, David is saying, he just wants to be gazing on God's beauty. He is not asking for any other.

Second, he is showing us that a day of trouble will come but God will be hiding him in his temple. All those who look upon Jesus have a refuge or somewhere to run to when things are not going on well. Beloved, where do you look for answers for your needs? Hebrews 13:5, 6 says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

So, we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Wealth is good, but for someone who is fixing his eyes on Jesus wealth is not more important than Jesus. He is contented with what he has been given by God in his life; even a few things are enough for him. God is his helper all the times. He is not worried or being filled with fear because he knows that God is caring for his need and in all the problems. Anxiety can be submitted to Jesus (1 Peter 5:7).

A person who is fixing his eyes on Jesus is always contented with the presence of Jesus in his life and all the other things are added by Jesus (Matthew 6:33). It is unfortunate that many people worship and desire to be saved but they do not fix their eyes on Jesus when talking about their salvation. The goodness of looking at Jesus in life is that we find all things both spiritual and physical. We need to look at Jesus with faith. As John 3:36 says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Faith is like a rope or radar, even like a bridge which connects us to good things of God. If we can focus on Jesus this is possible by faith. According to the scriptures, we cannot please God without faith. We cannot look at Jesus without

faith. It is like an ID which takes us to God to receive eternal life. For those who are without faith or those that have chosen not to look up to Jesus the scriptures are saying, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (John 3:18-21).

People who love righteousness and look to Jesus hate evil and they do not even like to come near it because are walking in light by their faith in Jesus Christ. People who do not love God cannot look to Jesus because they see nothing and it is like empty stories that waste time because they do not have faith. Many of these are the ones who say there is no God and that Jesus is not the Son of God. When we are sick or meet with any problem they run to witch doctors and charms. Some depend on their dead ancestral spirits to give them luck and change their tough situations. They are always afraid when their situations are not good. They are not stable in their hearts.

The dangerous thing is that they just move about all the time, but the wrath of God is upon them. They may seem to be in good health, they even do well in business, but when their day of trouble comes they will have nowhere to run to. A chance is there for those who would like to change and begin a new life of looking at Jesus and fully depend on him. We cannot be looking at Jesus and then be doing what we want. When we look to Jesus it is him who rules our life. He guides our walk and our desires. We do what he wants us to do, not what we want to do all the times. When we fix our eyes to Jesus our life is in his hands and cares and protects it (1 Peter 5:7). Even if our problems are not solved immediately, we still need to consult Jesus. Those who wait upon Jesus do not lose heart easily. They know that their Lord is alive and aware of what they are passing through.

Finally, everyone who looks to Jesus rejoices and is content all the time and the peace of Christ rules them (Philippians 4:4–7). Paul is advising the Philippian church saying, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

A person who fixes his eyes to Jesus is amazing because on top of asking for his needs, he also has time to thank God even during the time when things are not going on well. This is what causes him to have peace which guards and rules his heart in Christ. Beloved, do not remove your eyes and thoughts on Jesus. Gaze upon Jesus for you to have eternal life.

-Symon Katete

HIV/AIDS and the Church Ministry

Malawi’s HIV prevalence is one of the highest in the world, with 9.2% of the adult population (aged 15-49) living with HIV of which is the productive age both physically and spiritually. In 2018, an estimated one million Malawians were living with HIV and 13,000 Malawians died from AIDS-related illnesses of which most of them believed in God and some were Christians. The Malawian HIV epidemic plays a critical role in the country’s life expectancy of 61 years for men and 67 for women. Over the last decade, impressive efforts to reduce the HIV epidemic have been made at both national and local levels. In 2018, 90% of people living with HIV in Malawi were aware of their status, of whom 87% were on treatment. Of these people, 89% were virally suppressed, meaning the country is awfully close to reaching the UNAIDS 90-90-90

targets. This equates to 78% of all people living with HIV in Malawi on antiretroviral treatment (ART) and 69% of all people living with HIV virally suppressed. Among children (0-14 years) treatment coverage is lower at only 61% of HIV-positive children accessing ART. New infections have dramatically declined from 66,000 new infections in 2005, to 38,000 in 2018 which is still a huge number. An impressive prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programme in Malawi has also driven down new HIV infections among children (ages 0-14). In 2018 there were 3,500 new pediatric infections, compared with 15,000 in 2010. Malawi’s HIV epidemic is generalized, which means it affects the general population as well as certain high-risk groups. Unprotected heterosexual sex between married or co-habiting partners accounts for most all new HIV infections (67% in 2015), although unprotected casual heterosexual sex also accounts for a significant proportion of transmission (12% of new cases in 2015). Beyond this, several population groups such as adolescent girls and young women, sex workers and men who have sex with men are particularly vulnerable to HIV. This signifies that the church has a major role to play in dealing with HIV as many of the infected and affected are its members. Imagine 3500 pediatrics getting infected just because the church kept quiet. It is time for the Church of Christ to play a role.

Namikango Mission through its Community Health Education program (CHE) is working hard in helping churches have knowledge about HIV/ AIDS and how we can deal with it spiritually. We believe that only the church can deal fully with this pandemic as the church teaches moral being, love, faithfulness, and fairness. Namikango invites all interested congregations to call for a full HIV/ AIDS and the church seminar which takes four days. In this year 2020 so far 17 congregations have been trained in HIV/AIDS and the church seminars totaling to about 120 representatives who are now responsible for sensitizing fellow church member on HIV/AIDS and the role of the church and its members in

helping the HIV/AIDS. The seminars focus on, understanding HIV/AIDS phenomenon, impact of HIV/AIDS on the church and evangelism, the role of the church on the phenomenon and the how to have a happy marriage. So far people have appreciated to connection between effective HIV prevention and spiritual faithfulness as the seminar only emphasize of biblical ways of HIV prevention and AIDS care. As per research from various institutions, the Christians are the most vulnerable and most affected because the church for so long remained silent letting its people to get information from non-Christian parties which in the end lead to more spread and contraption of the virus. Furthermore, Christians have mostly stigmatized the people leaving with HIV with a thought that all that have such virus got it through sinful and promiscuous behaviors.

This year, despite all our effort to reach as many people as possible with the HIV/AIDS spiritual information and prevention strategies, the program is facing a challenge which has affected all nations worldwide. We are in the middle of war, fighting covid19 which in view seems not to be going away anytime soon. Preventive measure is being implemented to help fight the Covid19 pandemic. We also should not forget the veteran pandemic which has taken a lot people to the grave. It is very easy and possible to forget that in the churches there are people leaving with HIV that need care support in this Covid19 era, brethren as we pray for God's intervention on Covid19 we should remember also to pray and fight strongly against HIV/AIDS. This is not only our fight its yours too, you can play a role in organizing a seminar with your congregation and invite our facilitators to help you with the teachings. Those wishing to know more about the seminar arrangements and requirements simply call 0882 790 391 and we will guide you. God bless you.

-Faith Somanje

Falless Kolopa have Seen the Blessings of God through VSL

On Thursday 30th July 2020, I had an opportunity to visit one of the VSL groups called Chisomo from one of the Churches of Christ called Kadzuwa in Dzaone, T/A Chikowi in Zomba. On this day the group was sharing money they had been saving for 9 months. As I was approaching where this group met, I heard songs of joy. These were members rejoicing that the time had come for them to receive the money they have been saving for a long time. After the meeting was over, I had a chat with one of them, Falles Kolopa who is one of the members of Chisomo.

"I am getting out of darkness of poverty which surrounded me for many years now. My family and I have been in deep poverty, but through VSL, we have seen the blessings of God" Falles narrated her story with so much joy.

Mrs Falles kolopa, managed to save K40, 000 and on this day she received K83, 000. My interest was on how Falles was to use the K83, 000 which she got. When she was asked, she answered joyfully saying, 'I will buy 3 goats, bags of fertilizer and the remaining amount will be used for other things for my family'. My purpose for joining the VSL group which was started by Namikango Mission was to see my family live a happy life. The goats that I am expecting to buy once multiplied, will help in paying school fees for my kids, but also help me to sort out different problems in my family.

I was very excited to hear how Falles planned to use her money. My question was, is Falles going to fulfill her plans? I was thinking that she was just saying all these things in order to please me because it is easy when someone has money to just talk about a lot of things but accomplish nothing. Falles assured me about those plans and told me that she will let me know once the goats have been bought. We agreed to meet the next Sunday on 2nd August that I should go to Kadzuwa church where she congregates in order for me to see for myself what she was going to buy by this day.

On 2nd August 2020 in the morning, I left for Dzaone as we had agreed. After the service of worship I went to her house and the entire family was waiting for me. As I was approaching, I saw two goats tied near her house. Upon arrival, they told me that they have managed to buy two goats and the other one will be bought soon. I was happy to see that her plans were being fulfilled and their lives had started to change.

The other thing was that Chisomo group helped Kadzuwa church with money amounting to 7000 to be used in affairs of the church. Pastor Byson, Chiotcha and preacher Chimwaza all of them together thanked the group because of this help and encouraged others who were not in the group that they can start changing their lives and be helping in advancing the Lord's work.

The story of Falles Kolopa is one example among many which is showing how women and men are benefiting from the Village Savings and Loans which Namikango Mission started. Many are testifying that since they joined the VSL, they have accumulated property and businesses which they did not have before. They are now managing saving money in a group which in the past was difficult. As a group, are able to help the needy but also able to help in the affairs of their churches.

By looking at all the benefits that the VSL groups are bringing to churches and different villages here in Malawi, I am pleading with you brothers and sisters that you too can start this in your area so that you can benefit. Time has now come for us to liberate ourselves from deep poverty which has surrounded many in our country without depending on help from somewhere else.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity by reminding our dear readers that there is a pandemic all over the world including Malawi called Covid19. This pandemic has affected all the affairs of government and most of all, the affairs of the church. As we have already seen that church meetings are now being restricted and only few individuals are allowed to attend per service unlike in the past when we had no pandemic. Therefore, it is our responsibility as a church to see that we are taking part in following preventive measures set by health officials in order

to fight against this pandemic. Some of the measures are like washing hands regularly with soap, putting on mask, observing social distance, avoiding shaking hands when greeting and many more. We as a church it is our duty to sound the trumpet when there is a pandemic such as this one. Scriptures from 2 Chronicles 7:14 are encouraging us in this way, *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

Psalm 46:1 says, *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble."*

In all these scriptures, we Christians have been shown the responsibility that we have which can help to change things. David has shown us where we can run to in a crisis like this one and he said that we need to run to God who is our ever present help in tough times. He is also saying that we need to help as a church in dealing with this pandemic by praying hard, praying for those who are sick and those who are not sick for them not to get this disease.

COVID 19 is not a joke; even believers are getting it and dying. Let's take a role in dealing with this pandemic.

-Styford Blazio

Announcements

Education

- Namikango's Discipleship Training Institute (DTI) will open next year. The opening date will be communicated soon.
- Application forms for DTI are available and both married and singles are encouraged to apply. Any interested person can contact the Admission Office through, 0885 11 43 13 or email:stanley@namikangomission.org

Outreach

- Namikango has organized a leadership training which will be conducted at Kamuzu Road Church of Christ on 31 October, 2020. All church leaders from Salima and surrounding districts are invited.

The Sick

- Sis. Chidothi from Mwembere village, Traditional Authority Chikowi Zomba is sick and she needs our prayers.

The Deceased

- We regret to inform you that Brother Pichesi Jana the old preacher from Namiwawa in Zomba, died on 10 September and he was buried on 11 at Chinangwa village Traditional authority Mwambo Zomba.