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A LESSON FROM KENYA

September 2013

Dear Friends,

A few days ago, Kathy and I returned from one of the most life-changing trips imaginable. From Sunday, August 11 through Wednesday, August 21, we were ministering in Migori and Kisumu, Kenya. I preached 29 times in 11 days! Even though the elevation where we were is about 4,980 feet above sea level (compared to about 750 feet in Dayton where we live) God sustained us and we did not suffer the effects of lower oxygen levels at such a high altitude.

There were salvations and many filled with the Holy Spirit. A glorious wave of God's love swept through the services in Migori, with both pastors and lay people being reconciled to each other after being divided for long periods because of unforgiveness.

The services in Migori were held under a tent measuring approximately 20 by 35 feet. Over 20 pastors attended and we had wonderful fellowship with them. God enabled us to establish strong connections, laying a solid foundation for future ministry and the work He wants to complete in that region. Each day more and more people attended, some having traveled many miles to arrive (keep in mind that most of the people in that area have no means of transportation other than walking unless they can find a ride with a person who has a car or motorcycle). By the end of the week the crowd swelled way beyond the reaches of the tent.

There was no running water and no electricity other than that supplied by a small, gas-powered generator not much larger than a lawn mower engine. The first two nights there was only one 60-watt light bulb under the tent. But these challenges did nothing to hinder the flow of God's glory.

During the Tuesday afternoon service in Migori a powerful storm blew in. Rain poured for about 45 minutes while I was preaching, and I didn't know the tent was leaking behind me. When the service was over, I looked down and my right pant leg was splattered with rich, brown mud. Kathy suggested we let it dry, then try to brush it off later. I arose the next morning and went to try and clean the pants, but the mud had miraculously disappeared! There was absolutely no mud on those pants whatsoever!

One afternoon, our host pastor and driver arrived at the lodge where we were staying to take us to the service. Kathy and I were shocked at what we saw: there, in the back end of the car, was a live chicken! She asked why the chicken was there; they looked at us with a smile and replied, "You'll find out later." Sure enough, that evening we discovered the fate of our feathered friend. It was the first time I had ever met my dinner before eating it.

The services in Kisumu were marked by a very unusual (to us) event. Next door to the compound where the services were held, a large tent had been erected in the back yard

of a home. Extremely loud music was blaring from the tent. Our hosts at the ministry explained what was happening.

When a person dies, the family holds a funeral at their home. A tent is erected, a disc jockey and/or live musicians are brought in and for seven days, 24-hours a day, a dance party is held (not everyone in Kenya follows this tradition). Food and alcoholic beverages are free. The idea is that the party will help people not to grieve over the death of the friend or family member. At the end of the seven days, the body of the deceased is brought from the morgue, a hole is dug in the back yard in which the body is placed, and the funeral ends. Apparently, some people go from funeral to funeral just for the free food and liquor.

Between the loud music and revelry of the crowd, sometimes it was a bit of a challenge to sleep. But one thing totally captured my attention. In the mornings, sometime between 5:00 and 6:00 o'clock, the music shifted from high-energy dance music to praise and worship! In fact, one morning about 6:00, I was awakened by the sound of the crowd as they flowed into spontaneous, free worship. It crescendoed to an incredible level, going on for about 45 minutes, and was as powerful as anything I have ever heard in any church. Our hosts shared that many Christians attend these funerals, hence the odd mix of musical styles combined with both partying and praise.

While ministering in Kisumu we met Ellen, a lady who's ministry is established in an area known for witchcraft. She has made a powerful impact in that region with the gospel, but it has not come without a price. Witch doctors in the area have more than once tried to poison her. Additionally, a hit-man was hired to hunt her down and kill her, actually standing outside the gate of her compound trying to find a way in to commit the murder.

The entire trip was definitely God-ordained. Tremendous inroads were established spiritually for the furtherance of the gospel. But one of the things that stood out the most to me proved to be a tangible manifestation of God's promises.

Twenty-five years ago, a young lady, Jennie, and her two children were led of God to move to Kisumu. Arriving there, they found a very backward, third-world area bound by lack and hardship. Their living quarters consisted of a mud hut with virtually no furniture. What food they could get was cooked over an open fire and their lives were filled with daily challenges few reading this letter have ever faced.

To the world it would have seemed that they had nothing. But they had what the world does not understand: a mandate and a commission from God. Personifying the concept of living by faith, Jennie set out to obey what God had called her to do. Day by day she shared the gospel with the people around her. As people accepted Jesus, she would disciple them in the Word of God and teach them what it means to live as a Christian.

There was no list of churches or large missions foundations sending money to pay all the expenses. But incredibly, money began coming in, very often from sources she did not know and even from people who are not Believers. Her ministry, called Disciples of Mercy, began to grow and expand. It's impact in the community continually increased.

More finances came in and the ministry was able to buy property. Then buildings were constructed. To make a long story short, Disciples of Mercy is now a driving force in

Kisumu, presently owning roughly 37 acres, and negotiating for more land. The compound is gated and extremely safe. There are numerous buildings, such as:

- a school for all ages of children
- a cafeteria
- a children's church
- a ministry training center
- a vocational training center
- a medical clinic so well equipped that even minor surgeries can be performed
- several offices and meeting rooms
- a church sanctuary that can easily hold over 300 people
- living quarters for certain staff and visiting ministers

The ministry has 260 people on staff. It also has extension locations outside of Kisumu and conducts college classes that reach into prisons. They have their own chickens and cows, selling the milk from the cows to the community (in fact, it was the first time I ever had milk that went straight from the cow, to the refrigerator and then to my glass). All of this has been accomplished by never losing focus on God's plan. There have been times when it didn't look like there would be enough money to pay the bills...then all of a sudden, there in the mail are the checks needed to cover the expenses.

There is so much more that could be shared about the incredible work taking place at Disciples of Mercy. Because of the wide-range of ministry they are doing and the number of people being impacted, Jennie and her staff refer to Disciples of Mercy as "a nation within a nation."

Here is what I found so intriguing in this story about Disciples of Mercy. Kisumu had seen very little progress over the years and decades prior to the arrival of Jennie and her children. But once Disciples of Mercy was established, the growth and development of Kisumu parallels the growth of the ministry. Located on the shores of Lake Victoria, Kisumu has long been a destination point for Westerners looking to go on safaris. But the advancements in that city over the past 25 years are staggering:

- Kisumu is now the third largest city in all of Kenya
- construction teams have been brought in to redevelop, expand and pave roadways (while there, we saw these extensive projects taking place)
- shopping centers and a large mall have been built
- its little airport has been rebuilt into the third largest international airport in Kenya, capable of handling 2 million passengers annually, with construction ongoing for further expansion

This does not mean that Kisumu now rivals modern cities in the western world, for there are still many people living in third-world conditions. But there is **NO WAY** it can be denied that the development of Kisumu is directly proportionate to the growth, expansion and development of Disciples of Mercy.

I meditated on all of this while there in Kisumu and since returning home, during which the Lord revealed to me what has happened by bringing to mind these verses:

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance. (Psalm 33:12)

*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.
(Proverbs 14:34)*

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

Disciples of Mercy - a nation within a nation - is submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Seeking and fulfilling the will of God is the priority. Impacting lives for God's Kingdom is the goal. Manipulating people for money is not tolerated; God is seen as the sole provider. Righteous living is an expectation; compromise unto sin is not met with a "feel good" sermon of concession.

The result is that God's promises are manifesting daily in what some would call a miraculous fashion. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18), and His Word will never return void, always accomplishing His intended purpose (Isaiah 55:11). God's commanded blessings in the verses above are clearly evident in Disciples of Mercy. That ministry has been consistently blessed when surrounded by poverty and adversity. It has been exalted - lifted up - as a beacon of hope to the people of Kisumu and the nation of Kenya. All things are being added to that ministry. It is an example of what happens when the Kingdom of God and His righteousness are a priority.

The divine blessings being released unto Disciples of Mercy are flowing beyond the walls of that ministry into the city of Kisumu. That region is experiencing a massive transformation, along with an economic upsurge as jobs are being created and many people are seeing their standard of living improve. None of this is a coincidence.

After God explained all this to me, He asked, *"Now that you understand what is happening in Kisumu and why it is happening, what do you think would happen in the life of a Christian if he were as dedicated to Me as is Disciples of Mercy? Do you not think the principles revealed in My Word will work for individuals as well as ministries?"*

Talk about a reality check! As I have thought about this, I am seeing more clearly than ever that living according to God's word will **AUTOMATICALLY** cause His blessings to be released! This is a cause-and-effect principle; divine, spiritual laws that **CANNOT** be altered. They are **GUARANTEED** to work because of the source of their institution: Almighty God. He has given us an oath that if we truly seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, all these things will be *added* unto us! This means we will **INCREASE** from where we are and what we presently have to higher levels in Him. But He must become first place in our lives.

I encourage you to think long and hard about this. If total submission to God can produce blessings in third-world conditions, then those blessings will be produced in any country under any conditions. The key is how surrendered we are to His Lordship in every area of life.

If you would like to hear the sermons I preached in both Migori and Kisumu, please use the order form at the end of this letter. You will receive an MP3 CD of the sermons which will include five bonus tracks of praise and worship recorded live during the services.

May the joy of the Lord be your strength, and may His peace fill your life!

In His Grace,

Jim

*****SPECIAL NOTE TO MY FRIENDS IN KENYA*****

Many of you requested an MP3 CD of the sermons I preached while ministering in Migori and Kisumu. However, some only provided me with an email address. In order to mail the MP3 CD to you, we need your mailing address. Please provide that address in an email to: PastorJimGCC@gmail.com. Additionally, these sermons will soon be available at our website (www.jmmgrace.com) for listening or download at no charge.

Also, many of you requested information about our school, Grace Ministries Bible College. However, we are having difficulty reading some of the addresses provided. Please send your correct mailing address to PastorJimGCC@gmail.com, or visit our website (www.jmmgrace.com) and access the information online.

One more thing... We have tried so hard to read the names and addresses provided, but some are extremely difficult to discern. If any of your friends express concern because we never contacted them, please let them know we probably had difficulty reading the information they provided. Ask them to send an email to PastorJimGCC@gmail with their address, or they can write to the address on the first page of this letter (and remind them to print very clearly).

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