

## UPCOMING PLANS

The last trip I was able to make was in February of 2020, right when the Covid pandemic was beginning. At that time I was able to go to the northwestern Myanmar city of Kalaymyi. I was able to teach in the Bible school there which provided numerous fine students for our school in Northeast India. Since that time my travels have been restricted. It was somewhat providential since my wife needed me to care for her as her health declined.

In the coming months several trips will be made to check on the work we are doing as well as explore other opportunities for training preachers of the gospel. November 7 brother Jerry Sullins invited me to accompany him to a graduation of preaching students at the school in Zambia. We will depart from Atlanta at 6:00 that evening. After the graduation in Zambia he and I will separate as it is necessary for me to go to Uganda. Sunday, November 13 I will depart Zambia on a flight bound for Kenya where I will then fly on to Uganda, arriving slightly after 9:00 November 14.

Brother Jim started working in Uganda several years ago, but has not been able to travel to oversee the work. The country is one of the poorest on earth, and the people are receptive. It is imperative that we examine the work that has been done and make some decisions about the direction we will take going forward. I will only be in the country till early in the morning November 18. While there I will visit a new congregation in Buyende, the East Africa School of Biblical Studies and will meet with some of the men we have been working with. My hope is to be able to gain a greater understanding of what has been done, and make the necessary changes.

Please pray for me for this trip and for those coming next year.



As you can see from the map Uganda is on the northwestern edge of Lake Victoria. You will also note that the Nile river flows out of the lake at Jinja. The country has a population of just over 49 million souls,

Decembers newsletter will contain a report on the work accomplished while in Africa.

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Tara Church of Christ  
Scott Richards, Editor  
P.O. Box 1010  
Crossville, TN 38557

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# RICHARDS NEWSLETTER

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## GOD'S PRUNING

A number of years ago while having some trees removed near our house we also had an overgrown tree in the backyard trimmed. It resembled an overgrown bush more than a tree. The next spring we were surprised to find it full of beautiful blossoms. That year it produced hundreds of plums. The prior year it had produced no fruit and we did not even know it was a plum tree. Without pruning the tree produced no fruit, but afterward it was very fruitful. All of the dead and unfruitful branches had to be removed in order for the tree to produce its bounty once more.

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit” John 15:1-2. God’s people, the church of Christ, is subject to “God’s Pruning.” How God does the pruning is not always clear to us, but we know that He is working through the church to maximize the harvest.

The church plays a role in the pruning process. As we learn from the instructions to the church in Corinth (I Corinthians 5), the church must, on some occasions, exercise church discipline. It is to be done in a spirit of love and concern for the soul of the subject to be disciplined. God’s desire is for the wayward soul to repent and return to the faith. To the Thessalonian Christians Paul by inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote, “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (II Thessalonians 3:6). While we want the erring brother to repent as a result of withdrawal of fellowship, we can also see that it is a means of pruning off the dead and dying branches in order for the church to produce a more abundant harvest. **CONTINUED**

God's word also reveals that He works providentially to do His will. This is also true when His people need pruning. God can turn any event to His advantage and accomplish what is necessary.

When Elijah was fleeing for his life and was feeling isolated and rejected, God reminded him, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (I Kings 19:18). Elijah, in his despondency, could not see the faithful through the multitude of the unrighteous. God's pruning would come in the form of the conquering Assyrians. The dead branches would be removed, the faithful few would become more apparent by their worship and service of God. Their lives would serve as a beacon of God's light to both Jew and Gentile.

A similar pruning would happen to Judah about 130 years later when the Babylonians would conquer them as well. The result of that pruning prepared them to be the people through whom the Savior of the world would come. The brightness of God's love would then shine for all the world to see.

For the past several years the church in America has been shrinking. Young people, when leaving their parents home left the Lord's church as well. Congregations have become older, and many of them have closed their doors. Have we become apathetic to our mission of local evangelism? Perhaps the hearts of the people has become hard and unreceptive to the message of the cross. Some congregations view door knockings, gospel meetings and other efforts to reach the lost as unproductive, so they have stopped making any effort to evangelize at home. They will still support foreign mission work, but local efforts are almost totally abandoned. Has a time for pruning arrived, and could God use a pandemic to accomplish it?

Since early 2020 most congregations have put greater effort into streaming services. As a result many members are now comfortable with staying home and worshipping in their living rooms. I Corinthians 11:20 still says, "**When you come together in one place.**" Has God been pruning the dead and dying branches? If the pandemic has been used by God as a pruning event could a time of reaping be near? Only time will reveal if this is true. In the meantime we must be about the Father's business of training soul winners so they will be ready to go into the harvest fields. "Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:38).

*Scott Richards*

## **HARVEST FIELD REPORTS**



Brother Ramesh reports a new congregation has been established in the village of Aravakurichi near his home about 10km away. When we moved the English medium school south it afforded him the opportunity to evangelize the people in his home area. We rejoice that his efforts are bearing fruit.

Reporting from Odisha state brother Sumit Nayak states that three congregations have been established in spite of opposition from the denominational leaders and militant Hindu groups. He continues to hold Bible studies daily, and the SBS students are doing door knocking each Saturday. Pictured above is a ladies Bible study group which his wife and another sister are conducting regularly.



### **ANGIE GREEN GIRL'S SCHOOL**

At the school for girl's in Coimbatore the young ladies are given a strong education in Bible, and we are always impressed to see how well they do in the memory work. However, they also receive training in English, computer skills including basic typing, tailoring and embroidery. All of these are skills which are in demand in India and will be of use to the girls following their graduation. Pictures show the girls at the school in these vocational classes.



Above is a picture of one of the new converts in Northeast India.

The photo to the right is a man named Moses rising from the waters of baptism in Africa. He is from the village of Buyende. It seems fitting that he was baptized in the river Nile. Many other baptisms were reported. Some of those will be in next months newsletter. May God bless us as we strive to bring the light of the gospel to the lost of this world.



Last month we reported on the plight of the Bru people. Pictured are some of the relief supplies we provided these afflicted people.

Below is photo of a Banyan tree where a new congregation worships.