

## MY REWARD

### Matthew 28:19-20

*<sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...*

I became acquainted with Tim Mastenbrook and his dedication to missions in Haiti many years ago. A little over five years ago my wife, Kisha, enrolled our family in his Karate class so that we might participate together in a healthy activity. Over the years I have gotten to know Tim and have learned a great deal more about Haiti and their struggles. (When you have regular sparring practice, you get to know a guy when pretty well when he's repeatedly punching you in the nose, jaw, stomach, ribs... I do consider Tim to be a good friend and an excellent mentor, even though he does beat me up from time to time. By the way, husbands, if you want to find out what kind of a job you are doing at home, engage in a Karate sparring match with your wife and you'll find out really quickly if you need to step it up a notch). The money generated in Tim's school is used to support the work of the Limbe church of Christ in Haiti, and Tim gives us regular updates on his brother Pierre there as well as at the Center for Biblical Training, which he helped establish near Cap-Haitien. Over time, the more I learned about Tim's mission work in Haiti the more I began to develop an interest in going there myself. So last fall when Mark Walker told me he was planning to go this February I decided the time had come for me as well.

Admittedly, I was a little nervous about going. It was a huge unknown. I'd never been on a mission trip before. Tim began sending me information and a to-do list: Typhoid vaccine...check; Mosquito spray...check; Malaria pills...check; Imodium (with and exclamation point?!)...check! I had also learned from various talks with Tim that Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world, if not the poorest. I've heard it categorized as a fourth world country. Then the more I researched on my own and reviewed the information that Tim was providing, I began to realize how terrible a struggle the Haitian people actually endure.

- Haiti's population is thought to be right at 9 million people
- It is 90% Catholic, but half practice Voodoo. Both are nationally recognized religions.
- The life expectancy is 57.5 years.

To help prepare me for the journey, Tim suggested that Kisha and I watch a 1986 documentary by Jacques Cousteau called "Waters of Sorrow". It is aptly named, and as you watch you find yourself becoming troubled by what you are seeing. Cousteau offers a sobering glimpse into Haiti's poverty and living conditions. Seeing it did provide me with a readiness that I'm grateful to have received.

Feb 6<sup>th</sup> finally came. I'd prepared well and I'd done my research, so I was ready. Or so I thought. During the week I was in Haiti I kept a journal, so that I could try

and capture some of what I was feeling while I was there. I'd like to share a portion of my very first entry, which I made about 3 hours after we arrived at the CBT.

1:26pm –

*The poverty is as prevalent as I'd imagined; probably worse. Upon leaving the airport I was struck by the number of Haitians standing around looking for hand-outs, work or something? On the drive to the CBT there were **tons** of people, jammed together, doing mostly...nothing. Cap-Haitian looks exactly like the Cousteau documentary on Port-Au-Prince...*

It is impossible to express to you in words or in pictures what it is like. I couldn't even determine for myself what I was feeling. But, thankfully, we got to work right away and I was able to stop thinking and divert my attention to what we were there to do.

For the rest of the week we spent our time on various benevolence projects. We visited 23 congregations and orphanages; delivering 80 sacks beans and 43 sacks of rice at a total weight of 6 1/3 tons. We distributed 93 boxes of clothing. In meeting all of the preachers we identified many other needs ranging from building repairs to numerous issues facing the individual church members. We visited many individual's homes in the community and gave out countless gallon size bags of beans and rice to the needy on the street. I had the privilege of sitting on a few meetings where different brothers individually presented their most pressing personal needs, which was very special to me. The most difficult part for me in all of that was that we simply never had enough food, clothing or money to cover all that needed to be done. The needs are simply too great.

As the week progressed I noticed a cruel irony. Here I am on this island in the Caribbean, and it is a beautiful place. I saw magnificent landscapes and breathtaking views. On the way to Limbe, we stopped for lunch. From up high on a mountain we had a gorgeous view of a huge bay; the ocean as far as you could see off to the left, towering emerald mountains in the background, and a lush, green valley below. The only thing I can compare it to is the many pictures that I've seen of Hawaii. And there were many other places in Haiti just like it; places that in most parts of the world would be filled with sailboats and Cruise ships, golf courses; vigorously sought after vacation spots. Yet among these beautiful sites are millions of Haitian people in desperate need.

- I met numerous women and men who were sick and in pain, none of them having any possible means by which to get medical attention.
- There were a countless number of children who were only partially clothed, and many others who wore no clothing at all.
- We visited an elderly man at his home. We were told that he was very ill. As we walked up we found him resting quietly in a chair outside his home. As his daughters and grandchildren came out through the doorway, we noticed a recently purchased casket sitting just inside the door. He was just sitting there waiting to die.

- We visited a man and wife and their 8 children; he had asked us for our help because the house they were living in that only had half a roof. His government had made him leave his prior home so that they could use the land.
- We visited Azile, which is the home of 35 people with various physical deformities and mental illnesses, basically outcasts of society. The living conditions there were unimaginable. As we carried in the rice and beans the director of the facility told our team that this was the first food they had received for three months. We learned that Azile received some government support, but for some unknown reason the government had stopped sending food. Many of us fought back tears and put on smiles as we served them as best we could.
- On one of our visits into town, we were driving on the road that ran along the shoreline. Off in the distance, I noticed pigs and dogs searching through a vast pile of garbage looking for food. Picture a beach, maybe 2-300 yards long, but instead of pretty white sand, it was trash. Then we noticed a very thin woman, also looking for a morsel to eat. There were other people around, but none were paying any attention to her. Tim stopped the car and we called her over to us. Wearing a tattered little thin top and skirt, she hurried barefoot across the trash to our car. I have no idea how old she was, but she looked about 70 to me. We gave her \$5 and all the food we had: a pack of Lance crackers and a snack size pack of Chips a Hoy. She patted her heart, offered a toothless smile, and weakly said, "Merci, Merci!! God Bless you!!"

But the things that I saw that remain with me the most was in the Haitian people themselves. I saw hope and love and kindness. I saw faith and courage and perseverance.

- Our group had the pleasure of interacting with many of the CBT graduates and current students. These preachers are all very brave men who are *strong* in Christ. I was awed at their love of God and their commitment to His work. Through them God is blessing the people of Haiti and the church is thriving and growing there. Because of their efforts in doing God's work many people in their communities are coming to Christ and are committing their lives to Him. Most of the church buildings have serious structural issues. Sometimes there *is* no building in which to meet. But as we know, the church is not a building.
- We visited numerous Christian schools, where children are receiving excellent educations, providing hope for a better future. They are being taught by kind, serving teachers who often continue to work even though, much too often, the money to pay their salaries is not there.
- Many of the preachers and CBT students accompanied us as we visited their home congregations. And even though there was never enough to meet everyone's needs, they and their church members were always humble and thankful. They were grateful for what God had provided them; never unhappy for what had not been given. On these visits we were

always met with the utmost love and kindness, which included warm hugs from our Christian brothers and sisters, and if we were lucky, hugs and kisses from the children.

- We met a remarkable woman named Tabitha. She has taken it upon herself to bring into her home 11 orphaned children; raising them as her own alongside her own children. She had requested that we visit to see if we might be able to help her obtain some more beds so that many of the children didn't have to sleep on the ground. The beds she had already slept 3-4 children per bed already.

### **Galatians 5:22-23**

*<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

I have never seen a better example than what I saw in the people of Haiti.

Materially, Haitians are much, much poorer than we are. Everyday they struggle for the basic necessities of life; food, water, shelter, and medicine. I certainly have a new appreciation for how blessed I am. On the other hand, spiritually, our brothers and sisters in Haiti are abundantly rich, and I can say that at least as far as I am concerned, I have some catching up to do.

I did lose some things while I was in Haiti. A pot hole in the road no longer bothers me. I am content with the square footage of my house. I no longer gripe that what I have to eat isn't exactly what I have a taste for at the moment. **My concerns for the many things of this world that stand in the way of my relationship with God are evaporating. My relationship with my family is even more important. Excuses that stand in the way of my service to my fellow man are gone.** Before we left for Haiti, Tim offered to me this insight. He said, "On this trip God will work through you and many Haitian people will be blessed, but when it's over you will find that you are the one who has been truly blessed." How right he was!

Perhaps your view of this type of work is as mine once was; that mission work is for special people and that they will take care of it. "Tim handles the Haiti mission work" as I used to think. But guess what? If you are a follower of Christ, it is for you, as it is for me. This week in Haiti was the most rewarding experience I've ever had. And you should know that the blessings that God has for people in need are more than Tim or I or any one of us can do alone. Our prayers and financial support have been and always will be needed so that God's work can be done in places like Haiti. But if you really want to make a difference in a place like Haiti, GO THERE! Experience what their lives are like every day. Walk with them, love them and serve them by *being* there. What could be more Christ-like that that?

**-David Moore**

2/27/09