

ZAMBIA 2025

BY JOSH COOK



MINISTER FOCUS

DYNAMIC DUO

Thomas Sakala and Melvin Kalimanshila are two faithful evangelists with hearts for lost souls to be saved. They were our indispensable guides throughout Zambia.

PRISON WORK

SALVATION FOR ALL

Jesus opens doors and His gospel found fertile soil in the hearts of men and women. In six prisons on five days nearly 2,000 souls heard the saving message of Christ.

LIFE AND CULTURE

WELCOMING SPIRIT

Many warm, thoughtful, kind, and friendly Zambians greeted us. Whether in the hustle and bustle of the crowded Lusaka streets or in quiet and remote villages, we were welcomed.



GIVING TO THOSE IN NEED

Several of the members of the church had food, clothing, and medicine given to them as part of the twice-a-month benevolence work. Several families outside the church receive assistance, but especially the at-risk children.

After nearly 36 hours of travel from Nashville, TN, through New York, NY, across the Atlantic and Mediterranean, to Doha, Qatar, David Harper and I finally arrived in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia.

When we arrived in Lusaka, David and I had to have two of our bags cleared by customs agents—the ones with all the glasses, ties, books, gifts, etc. Thomas Sakala picked us up and drove us to his house. We met Peggy, his wife, his eldest son Moses, his youngest son Thomas, and his daughter Joy.

David and I each had our own room. The mattress was firm, and the weather was like a mild Michigan summer day (but with fewer hours of daylight). The shower only has cold water. So, each time one bathed, a tub of water had to be boiled in a pot over a charcoal fire outside. Peggy handled that work most of the time. They let me borrow a towel since I forgot to bring one. Each night the family had a group prayer.

Model Family

Thomas' family maintained a quiet and peaceable spirit. They are modest in not only dress but behavior, speech, and attitude. I'll admit it: my house is noisy—good, but noisy. It was a bit refreshing to dial down the volume in general and live at a much calmer pace for a while. During one of numerous discussions with Thomas and Peggy's sons, I learned that Moses' favorite book of the Bible is Proverbs (the same for me). Thomas, Jr.'s, favorite book of the Bible is Romans. What a highlight to be able to discuss these books with them during one afternoon in the back yard.

**Air travel:
July 14 - 15**

**Arriving in
Lusaka and
meeting the
Sakala family:
July 15 - 21**



David gave Moses, Thomas, and Joy a pack of playing cards (PanAm brand) on the evening of July 18. I looked up go-fish rules and taught them how to play. We all began to play in turns. The children really enjoyed them. The night before we left Chilanga (our last evening, July 20), I played more card games with the boys and taught Thomas, Jr., a new card trick (the one with the four piles of four cards turned face up). He really enjoyed learning these tricks. These are some of the best young people I know. They were always respectful and eager to help, even willing to go out of their way to make us feel at home and more comfortable during our stay in their home.

JULY 16: FIRST FULL DAY

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS AROUND LUSAKA WITH
THOMAS AND MELVIN

Thomas and Josh picked up Melvin alongside the main road into Lusaka. They first went to the Lusaka-Central Prison to meet the Chaplain and Warden for approval to preach in the prison the next day. Also, bars of soap, reading glasses, and other items were dropped off to support the members of the church inside. The Warden eventually called us to his office where Thomas, Melvin, the Chaplain and me conversed for about 5 minutes. He was very grateful for our teaching of the Bible. He said these men need to study and hear God's word because they need to focus. He asked me about the floods in Texas which he had seen on the news.



Prepare for first prison

After we left the prison, we drove to the bus station. This was by far the most congested part of town yet (and still). At the bus station men came up to Thomas while in the car and started offering pricing for taking packages to Livingstone. Thomas parked, got out, negotiated, and sent the packages with one young, eager man to be delivered ahead of our prison visits along our way toward Livingstone.





FELLOWSHIP AND FOOD

After leaving the prison, we met Machona and Kennedy for lunch at a big mall right across from the StayEasy hotel where Machona was lodging while in town from South Africa for a Christian conference. We shopped around in the Pick-in-Play grocery store and then grabbed some lunch at Zoran Cafe. I ordered the Fried Chicken Tenders with chili sauce. It was delicious!

At the prison, we entered and left our phones before stepping into the outer courtyard. We brought soap, reading glasses, and other supplies for the prisoners who are Christians. But all these items had to be logged in by name and number and then the Chaplain would make sure it is sent to the men. Some of the prisoners began to greet us as well.

Eventually we moved into the very center of the prison which is a massive open courtyard with a huge pavilion in the center. There was a band there playing music on instruments, which seemed religious in nature, while a choir sang. We saw nearly 800 men sitting under or around the Pavilion listening and waiting. This was the group I preached to. The message was on the hunter and the lion story, connecting Satan with the lion and the dangers of entertaining sin (1 Peter 5:8; 2 Tim 2:26; and then reading 1 Corinthians 15:1-5; finished with Jesus as the Lion of Judah, whose pride we also should belong. During the invitation, I emphasized that whether we have white skin or black skin, we all bleed red, the same blood from which God established all the nations--Acts 17:26).

Then we moved into cell #12 to address the members of the church and WBS students for another 15-20 minutes. David did all the talking for this gathering. He spoke about the great opportunities through WBS and Ocean Bridge. There were about 31 people in attendance. We left time for only a few questions because we were told we had to leave by 12:00 PM (noon).

**Preach, edify,
and teach at
Lusaka-Central
Prison, then eat
lunch with
Machona and
Kennedy:
July 17**

That evening, David shared his packets of beef stroganoff with me. I combined it with Peggy's Nshima (main staple food made from cornmeal). I helped Thomas activate his Wi-Fi device by putting in the password which was written on the bottom of the device. Then I could contact Christy, check email, and do WhatsApp.

*"and that they may come to their senses and
having been taken captive by him to do*

JULY 18:

MWEMBESHI MAXIMUM CORRECTIONAL CENTER

We picked up Melvin and drove to Mwembeshi Maximum Correctional Center. We unloaded soap, reading glasses, and other items. The Chaplain was gone for the day, so we met with Mary, the assistant. She was very kind. We waited in the Chaplain's office for about 10-15 minutes before being escorted through a series of gates into the massive, open space surrounded by walls. The area was so large; there were acres and acres of vegetable gardens being grown inside the walls. One of the buildings toward the center was the chapel (not far from a mosque).

As we entered the chapel, the prisoners were singing acapella. After a few more songs, many other prisoners from outside began to join the rest of the men in the chapel. The room filled with about 175 men. Mary, the assistant officer, was also there. David spoke to the men first, encouraging them and introducing ourselves. Next, he discussed WBS.

During my turn to preach I confessed that I had murdered two men (figuratively). One was the worst crime anyone could commit, a symbolic way of talking about my sin nailing Jesus to the cross. One was the best deed I ever did, a symbolic way of talking about being "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20; Galatians 5:24). Next, a contrast was made between two kinds of people who were saved in the New Testament. First, the sinners who have Christ's one act of righteousness to rid them of all their many sins (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Second, the so-called "righteous" men, like Paul under Judaism, who must give up all their righteous deeds, because of even a single sin, for Christ's one act of righteousness (Philippians 3:3-11) without any sin. Also, an illustration of two different sin/righteousness scales was used to help the point sink in.

After the sermon, David spoke a little bit more. Some of the Christian prisoners closed out the visit. Mary had some final words of gratitude for us coming to visit them, because, as she put it, they are forgotten out there—even the officers. She said the officers still feel like they are garbage for having this kind of job. People don't address them in a caring way or pay them any attention, she said. We greeted many prisoners on our way out of the facility. We drove by the 2nd Mwembeshi prison (medium) and saw a new women's prison built along the road of this enormous complex. It hasn't opened yet.



Distribute life's necessities and bring pure joy to at-risk children in two villages: July 19



HIGHLIGHTING BENEVOLENT LOVE

There were several children and a handful of women present. Two of the women were members of the church. Also, we got to meet Melvin Kalimanshila's son, Melvin, Jr. He regularly attends there at Makangwe. Sadly, we learned about a week after our trip that one of these precious little ones passed away. May our holy Father soothe and comfort them all!



Makangwe and Chipapa

Following the food distribution, we opened sacks full of coats of various sizes for boys and girls. Each child was ushered up to the pile where two women (Peggy was one) helped fit them to each child until everyone had a coat.

Then, while still in Makangwe, we walked about 2-3 kilometers to play with the kids and watch them play soccer (football) in a big open area where they had constructed two opposing soccer goals without a net. Thomas brought multiple balls for the kids to play with during our fun time. While the big kids played soccer on the big field, David and I did a kickball line for the little boys. Before long they too wished to play soccer like the big kids in an open area across a trail. When it was time to go, we gathered up the balls and walked back to the car parked by the church building. We left some frisbees, but they wanted the soccer balls instead!



MOTHER FIGURES = BLESSINGS!

In Chipapa we were not at a church building, but someone's home. Several of the women are looking after a few of these kids and their needs. Some of the children either do not have parents at home or parents who neglect or are unable to take care of their needs. At least one of the women is also a member of the church. God bless each one of these selfless servants.

JULY 20:

BIBLE CLASSES AND MORNING WORSHIP AT MAPEPE CHURCH OF CHRIST

For Sunday morning I taught the youth Bible class before worship. There were 23 in the class. The subject they have been discussing is dating. Thomas has been teaching it. I continued with more Bible passages and thoughts on the same subject matter. Thomas dropped me off at 8:45 AM and then went back to get Peggy, David, and Joy. The boys walked to church. Class started at 9:00 AM and ended at 9:55 AM.

During worship, which followed class, Thomas organized and delivered the program for worship. One brother led songs; another lead a prayer. David preached the sermon (usually 45 minutes). He preached from 10:15 to 11:10 AM. After the invitation song, I delivered the Lord's supper remarks (usually 25 minutes). I spoke from 11:15 to 11:30 AM then prayed for each emblem. Two other men helped pass them around. Afterwards, I offered a prayer for the collection. We sang another song, had a prayer, and then a brother named Vincent came to recite what we had just done, how many were in attendance, how much was contributed, etc. Then he asked David to say some closing words to the church and then I got up and said some by request as well. Melvin did the translation for David and me.

Following worship, we immediately gathered some chairs into one of the corners. Approximately a dozen men, "the leadership" is what Thomas and Melvin called them, met with David and me. None of them are elders. David asked if that was something they could do soon. He made sure to let them know it was their decision and that they should have 3 (no less). I asked if any of them had been elders or had been at a church with elders in the past. About 4 or 5 hands went up. We discussed the way you appoint men who are qualified and what that might look like when they are appointed. David recommended contacting Kennedy from the Lusaka-Central church of Christ where he serves as an elder. The meeting was about 15 minutes.

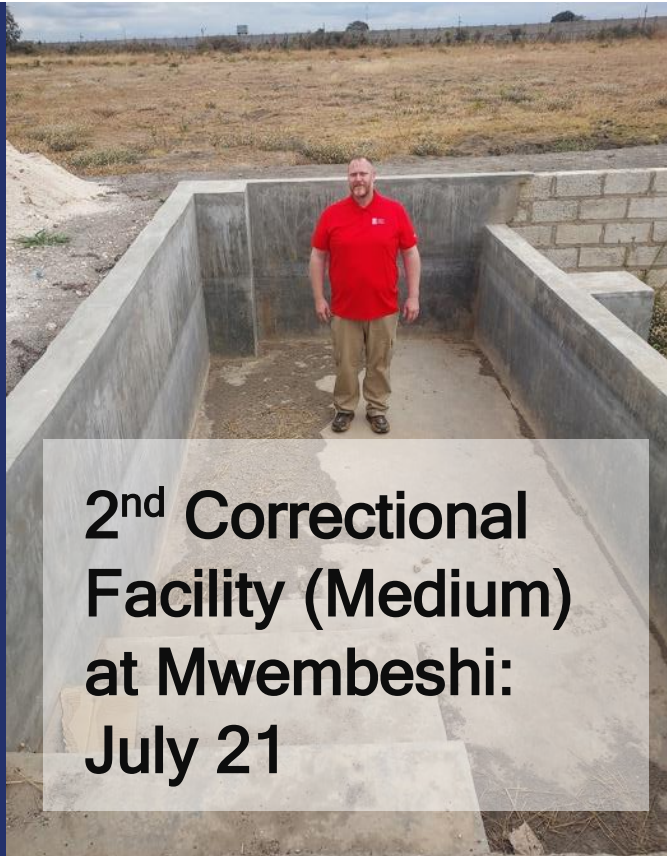


special lunch plans

Thomas, Peggy, Joy, David, and I traveled to Lusaka to treat the family to a special lunch at the mall. Once again, we ate at Zoran Cafe. David insisted Peggy do some shopping for some nice piece of clothing or shoes. She did, and so did Joy. Before leaving the mall, I ordered some pizza for the boys (Moses and Thomas, Jr.) and for David and me to eat for supper that evening. Rodgers Chuluu arrived at the Sakala's house late that evening.

*"And this I pray,
that your love
may abound still
more and more
in knowledge
and all
discernment, that
you may approve
the things that
are excellent,
that you may be
sincere and
without offense
till the day of
Christ"*

*(Philippians
1:9-10)*



2nd Correctional Facility (Medium) at Mwembeshi: July 21



New baptistry built by a concrete pond

When we arrived, Thomas called the Chaplain. He met us at the door and assigned some inmates to collect the soap, razor blades, Bibles, reading glasses, and radishes we brought to the brethren inside. Once the Christians take of these items, then what remains is disbursed to the rest of the population. We were led inside a receiving area and told to leave our cell phones. Then we walked to a nearby building where we waited on comfortable sofas until the Warden called us and the Chaplain inside. These meetings have been short and formal. We greet, discuss the program, esteem how God's word will help these men, and then receive a welcome to go to the chapel (where the prisoners are always waiting even as more may begin to enter the space). It seemed there were about 100 in attendance.

David led off with encouraging words and promoting WBS. I followed with the sermon. Melvin translated for us. I asked Thomas to come up and share instructions about the invitation. We had several who responded for prayers (13) and one who wished to be baptized. I took his confession, explained that what he was doing we could read about in Acts 8 with the Ethiopian Eunuch and Philip. I explained that though he wished to respond, he was not yet a Christian and would have to wait to be baptized per the prison arrangements.

When we got back to Lusaka, we drove downtown to the bank so Thomas could withdraw more of the money David sent from Concord Road for the second half of our trip in Livingstone. Along the way back, David bought some more BIG oranges (not the small ones). This was our last night at Thomas and Peggy's house. Their home is a very special place.

July 22 - 23:

MAZABUKA, CHOMA, AND LIVINGSTONE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES



MAZABUKA

SPIRITUAL BODY

This day's sermon asked and answered the question, "What will the spiritual body be like?" by expounding on 1 John 3:2; Philippians 3:21; John 5:29; and 1 Corinthians 15:35-49. There is much to look forward to when Jesus returns. For believers, it's transformative.



CHOMA

TRUE SUSTENANCE

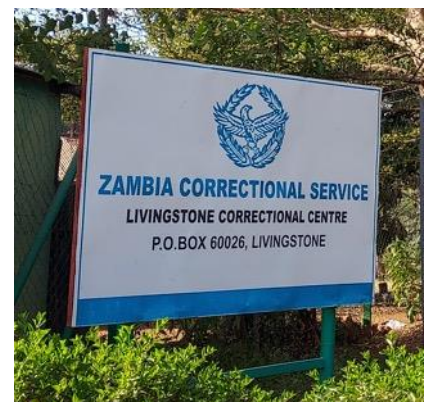
Since it was mealtime, the sermon was abbreviated. It compared physical food/drink with Jesus who is the bread of life (John 6:35). Jesus is also provider of water "welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). These are far more worthy to hunger and thirst after (Matthew 5:6).



LIVINGSTONE

3 FATHER+SON TALES

God is our Father. To bring home that key relationship of our lives, three illustrations were explored: (1) a Judge and his convicted felon son; (2) an estranged father seeks reconciliation through bulletin board; and (3) the father of Luke 15 and the prodigal son.





On this day we rose early to get packed and loaded for our trip to Livingstone. Not only luggage, but supplies for the prisoners were loaded as well. From Chilanga (where the Sakalas live) to Livingstone which is about 7 hours.

We said our goodbyes, had a prayer, and headed for Livingstone. The plan was to stop at two prisons along the way, which we were successful in doing. From Thomas' house to Mazabuka prison it was about an hour to 1.5-hour drive.

The first prison was in Mazabuka. The Chaplain met us at the gate. He directed us to the office of the Warden. This prison had a female Warden. I was told by the Chaplain that all 311 inmates, mostly males but some females, were in attendance. David spoke first and then I preached. As we had done in Mwembeshi medium security prison, after I preached and gave the plan of salvation, Thomas came and offered the invitation and directed those on how to respond. There were over 2 dozen who wanted prayers and 6 souls (men and women) who wished to be baptized into Christ. Their names were taken down on a sheet of paper for future follow up. Unfortunately, just like the other prisons, we could not baptize them right there and then. So, arrangements have to be made for a future date.

When the Chaplain and Warden spoke, they thanked us for our teaching, the soap, Bibles, reading glasses, etc. The Chaplain also asked us to consider buying materials for 9 metal posts and slanted shade cloth / rain cover for the only open space big enough to hold all the prisoners at once. David made a note and communicated that he would see what Concord Road could do.

From Mazabuka, we left with the Chaplain. He is a regional head over all the Chaplains in the Southern part of Zambia. Since we were headed to Choma next, we gave him a lift. He also lives in that area. Along the way we shared our snacks, water and conversed with him some. He had taken many phone calls during the trip, so it was still work

SEA SPICE

A fantastic place to eat lunch in Livingstone is Sea Spice. Fresh fish, shrimp, gumbo, and classic sides like fries easily made this restaurant one of the group's favorite places to dine out over the entire two-week period in Zambia. It was so nice, we ate there twice!

Departing
from Lusaka
and traveling
to Livingstone:
July 22 - 25

Air travel:
July 25 - 26



for him. Our travel time from Mazabuka to Choma was approximately 2.5-3 hours.

We arrived in Choma, let the Chaplain out at a gas station (petro station) where he had parked his car, and then followed him to the prison. The Choma prison was the dirtiest prison we had been to yet. We didn't even meet with the Warden first. Plus, we were pressed for time since we needed to get to Livingstone before dark. The messages were brief and to the point. David spoke first, then I preached, then Thomas gave the invitation. Two dozen or less men came forward seeking prayers. 10 men came forward to be baptized into Christ. As before, we hurriedly had their names recorded for future follow up and then we departed the prison.

In the parking lot, we transferred some packages Thomas had sent ahead (which the Regional Chaplain had picked up and stored in his car). The local Chaplain (a man in a purple shirt) had been studying through the World Bible School lessons and was still in the process of taking them. Perhaps he will become a New Testament Christian too.

We left Choma and headed straight for Livingstone. The journey was about 3 hours. We settled at our lodge and then went into the restaurant to eat the supper we ordered. I had a horrible steak that was tougher than my beef jerky.

As it was getting late, each of us went back to our individual rooms for the night. Each room had a bed, leather sitting chair, coffee table, armoire, mini fridge, small table, bathroom with toilet (missing seat and lid), sink, and shower. There was a TV, too. We unlocked our rooms from the outside and then locked them from the inside at night with the key as well.

“For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ Then they said to Him, ‘Lord, give us this bread always.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.’”

(John 6:33-35)



July 23:

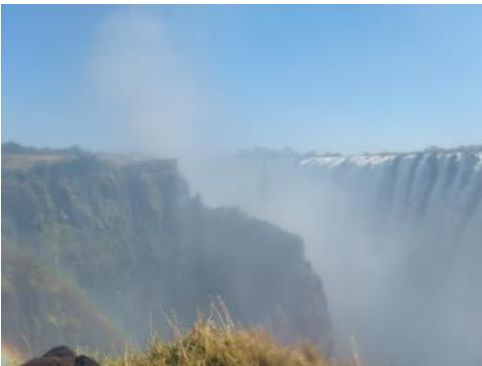
LIVINGSTONE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY AND LIVINGSTONE MUSEUM

By late morning our work in the last prison was done. We explored the town, surveyed merchants, and toured the Livingstone Museum. When we exited the museum, lo and behold, Thomas' sister Cynthia was there to greet us.



July 24:

VICTORIA FALLS



We toured Victoria Falls, hiked the trail above the falls, then David, Thomas, and I walked down to Boiling Pot and back up again. When touring the falls, raincoats were encouraged. And now having gone, I would say they are absolutely required. Some of the guys rented Crocs as well, but I had my flip flops. They gave us a plastic bag for our phones because of the intense mist coming off the falls on the little sliver of land jetting out and connected by a bridge called the Knife's edge. I got soaked. There are a few other trails on this island as well. I changed my shoes before we hiked and took photos.

On our way back into town we dropped off Rodgers Chuluu so he could visit some of his family. Thomas, Melvin, David, and I went back to Sea Spice for lunch. We made a quick purchase of milk at Shoprite then returned to the markets from the previous day. I bought three bracelets, two wire lions, one bowl, and three magnets as souvenirs for my family.

Twice during our stay at the lodge, we had the ladies in the kitchen boil the milk and put it into a pitcher for us to chill in my room's refrigerator to eat corn flakes with breakfast. After supper, David, Thomas, Melvin, and Rodgers met in David's room to go over logistics, timing, frequency, and plans for



the prison work in Zambia among the three men. After their meeting I joined them briefly to discuss timing for my drop-off at the airport the next day. Then we all called it a night and went back to our rooms to sleep.

July 25 - 26:

LAST DAY AND TRAVEL HOME

Early Friday, Thomas and Melvin encouraged me to lead one final devotional with them before the group dropped me off at

the airport in Livingstone. We talked about spiritual growth. My return flight from Livingstone to Johannesburg, South Africa, had a layover until late evening. Then I took the overnight flight to London on British Airways. The British Airways flight to London passed quickly because I dozed off. The window seat of the emergency exit row helped too (seat 20K). Once in London, I waited till late afternoon before taking the final flight back to Nashville, TN.

Glory to God:

WORK OVERVIEW AND ITS PROJECTED IMPACT

2,000 inmates heard the gospel; 700 wished to enroll in WBS; 100+ asked for prayer after the sermon; 30+ requested to be baptized; 100+/- at-risk children received flu medicine, nourishment, and clothing; 90+/- were exhorted during our time of worship at Mapepe church of Christ on Sunday.