

A Different View on Tanzania

DUFFIELD PARISH MAGAZINE 2009

You might just think of Tanzania as a holiday destination due to its superb game parks, Serengeti and Ngorongoro, or as the country which has the highest mountain in Africa, Kilimanjaro, or for its beautiful white beaches and rich culture of music, rhythm and dance. You might think of it as a country of grinding poverty where the average wage is less than 1 dollar per day. Or as a country which is 200 times poorer than the UK and where only 13% of children stay on in secondary school education. Or as a country where unemployment is high, where most people have only 2 meals per day and where there are regular droughts. At present it appears to be a country where poverty will never be overcome.

But how should Christians from the UK view the Tanzanian people? Sure they are unfortunate to live in such a poor region of the world but is that it? Do we just register their difficulties and plight and then conveniently forget about them as we continue to live our comfortable lifestyles? Do we give a bit of money to Christian Aid or some other charity once a year?

The Bible has much to say about the responsibilities of people who are well off to those who are poor and needy, some of whom will be fellow Christians. Take a look at Matthew 25 v 31-46 and see that indifference to the needs of the poor can have dire consequences. Perhaps we don't think we have any spare money now or are concerned about the future, particularly as a result of the credit crunch. But most of us do have an abundance of wealth, and with a review of the way we spend our money - holidays, cars, home furnishings, leisure activities, we could help those who are in such desperate need. However, the help we give to the poor shouldn't just be restricted to donating money but should equally be in the areas of prayer and campaigning for justice. I like the saying "When man works, man works but when man prays, God works". Yes, it is a staggering thought that, in some cases, God has limited himself to working in response to our prayers.

For all their material poverty the church in Tanzania is thriving due in part to the sacrificial lives of missionaries in the past (1940's-60's) and the prayers that have been made for the Tanzanian people. Now there is a dynamic pulsating church which has a pronounced influence on life at all levels. Being a follower of Jesus is not something they limit to certain days of the week or to particular areas of their life but is something that impacts on their thoughts, words and actions. In Tanzania, the Holy Spirit is active as people become Christians and miracles, such as healing and delivery from demons, are common.