

Bontha Esudas Indian Mission

The churches of Christ in India greet you



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The People Living In Darkness have Seen a Great Light

A report of my journey to witness the work of Brother Esudas Bontha in Narasaraopet, Andhra Pradesh, India from June 7-9, 2013

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The purpose of this report is to bear witness to the things I have seen and heard of the mighty works of God being done through our brother Esudas Bontha and his family among the poorest people of the lowest caste of Indian society.

First let me introduce myself. My name is Sam Adams and I am 54 years old. I have been a Christian since 1980 and currently serve the Lord as an elder of the Rutherford church of Christ in Rutherfordton, NC. I have been actively involved in leading, supporting, managing and overseeing foreign mission work for around 25 years, primarily in Honduras and Cuba. My congregation currently provides the sole support for Anael Cardona, a full time evangelist and missionary in Manto, Olancho, Honduras. We also support several workers and preaching students in Chad and Congo, and we have been supporting Esudas Bontha's work in India for the past 3 years, including completing several church buildings and purchasing a bus for the school.

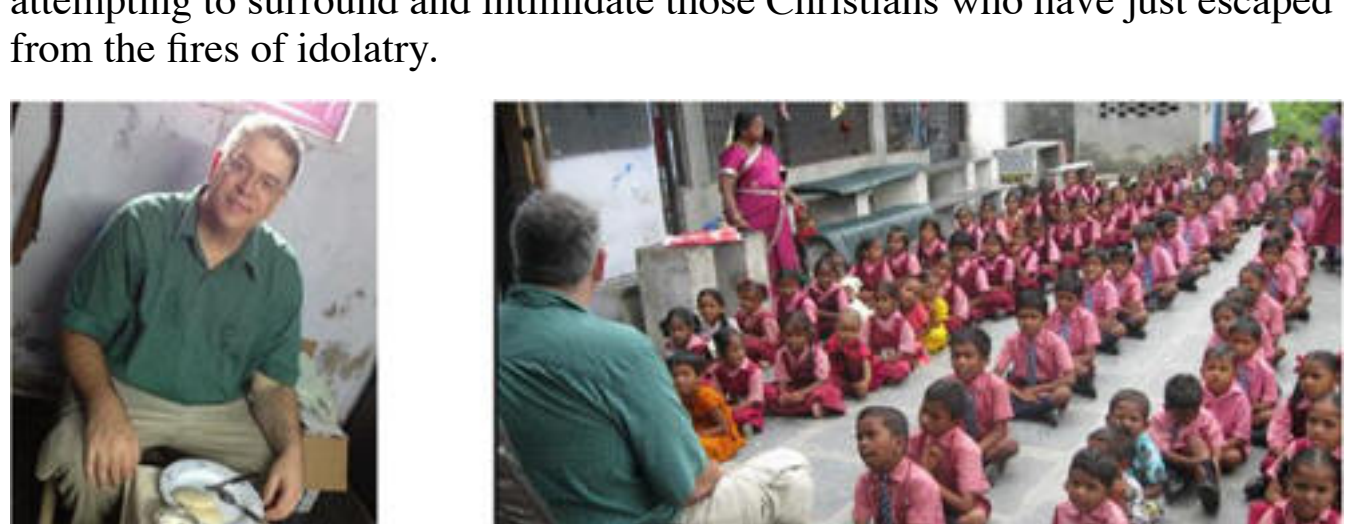
Professionally, I am a technical executive working for IBM Research as an IBM Distinguished Engineer, and it was because of this I had the opportunity to visit India in June of 2013. Since my business obligations required me to stay in India over the weekend of June 7-9, I decided to use my personal time to travel to Narasaraopet in Andhra Pradesh, about a 5-6 hour journey by car southeast from Hyderabad. I arrived in Hyderabad on the morning of Friday, June 7, as was met by Brother Bontha at the airport and delivered to him the PowerPoint projector I had brought for use in the school.



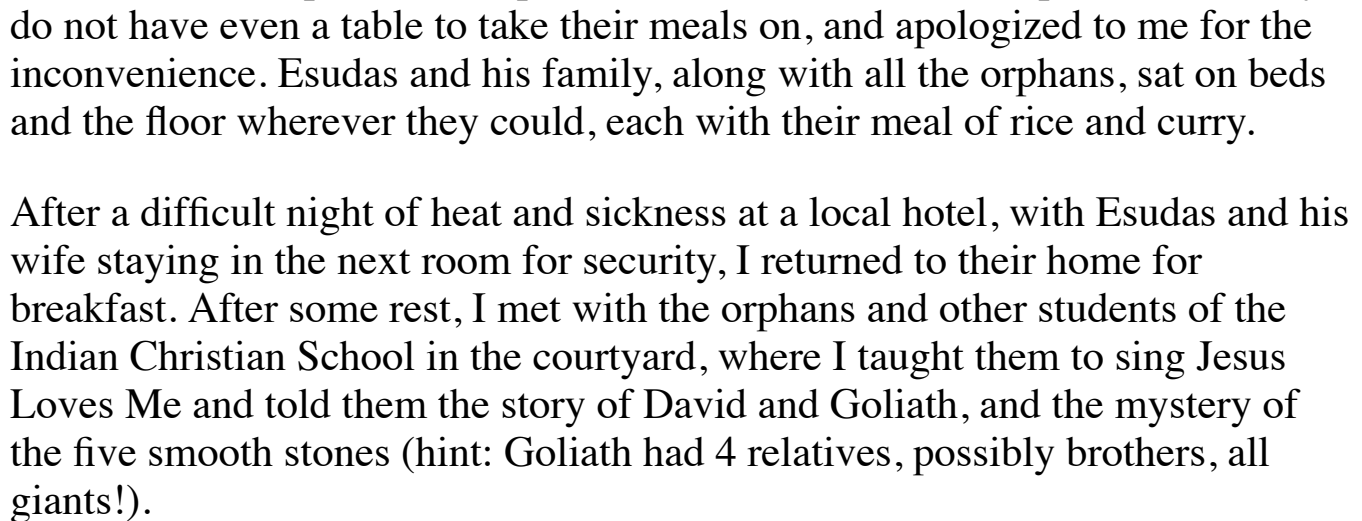
The next three days were packed with driving, preaching, teaching, driving, opening two new church buildings, driving, baptizing souls into Christ, debating and challenging 82 local preachers to be of one mind and teach the same thing, driving, teaching, Jesus Loves Me to 50 orphans, dealing with traveler's sickness and the 105 degree heat, worship and singing, much prayer, more driving, and visiting the future site for the Indian Christian School, for which I plead for your financial and spiritual support.



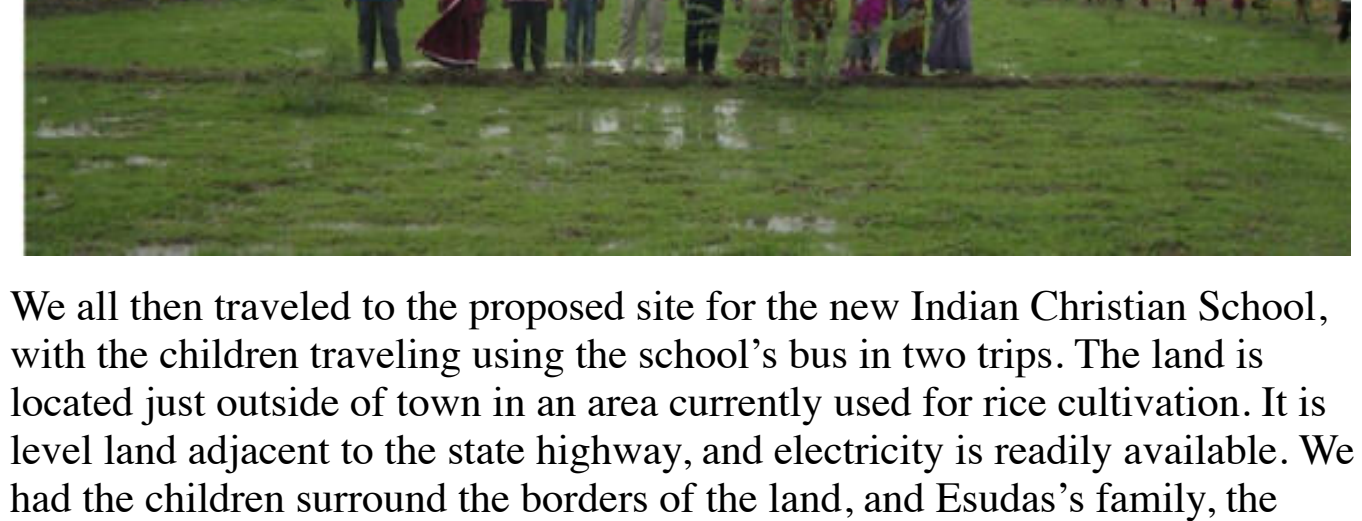
Our first stop on the way to Esudas' home in Narasaraopet was the village of Kanchargunta. This congregation is only 2 years old, and is located about as far from the main highway and you can be and still have a path to drive on. The occasion for this visit was for me to preach at the celebration for the opening of their first church building, which replaces a thatched shelter. The congregation here was started with the conversion of a man and his family, and through the work of Esudas and this man 10-20 Christians now meet here, along with about 20 Hindus who are regularly attending to hear the gospel. Most of these people are illiterate, and their hunger for the Word of God puts most of us to shame here in the US, where literacy is taken for granted and Bibles lay stacked on dusty shelves in our homes. The building itself is a simple concrete block building, raised about 3-4 feet on a concrete foundation to protect from flooding. A tent had been erected for protection from the intense heat, and a large meal of rice and curry had been prepared for the celebration.



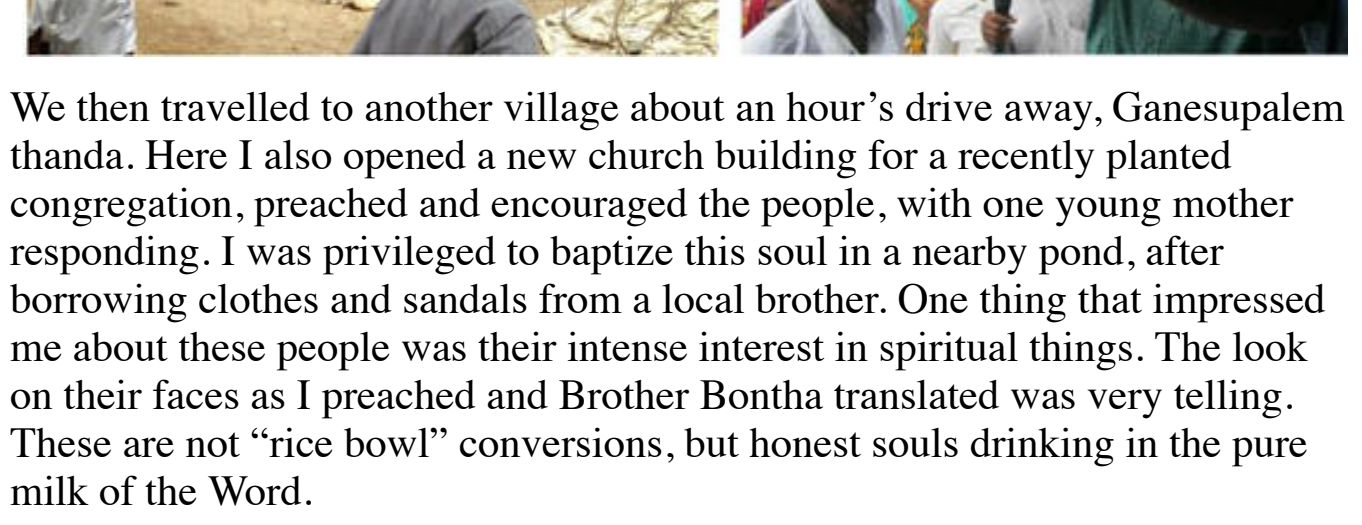
After prayer, I cut the ribbon and opened this facility for the work of the Lord, preaching and encouraging the people from Ephesians chapter 4, that even in the India, the land of many gods and many religions, there was truly only One God, One Lord, One Spirit, One Hope, One Baptism, One Faith, One Church, One Truth and One Way. There was one man who responded to the gospel call for baptism. One point of interest here was that in this village with fewer than 300 people within walking distance, the War against the Truth was in full swing. Not 50 yards from the new church building was a half completed Hindu temple, and I was shown a marker not 20 yards from the new church building where another Hindu temple was to be constructed in the near future, attempting to surround and intimidate those Christians who have just escaped from the fires of idolatry.



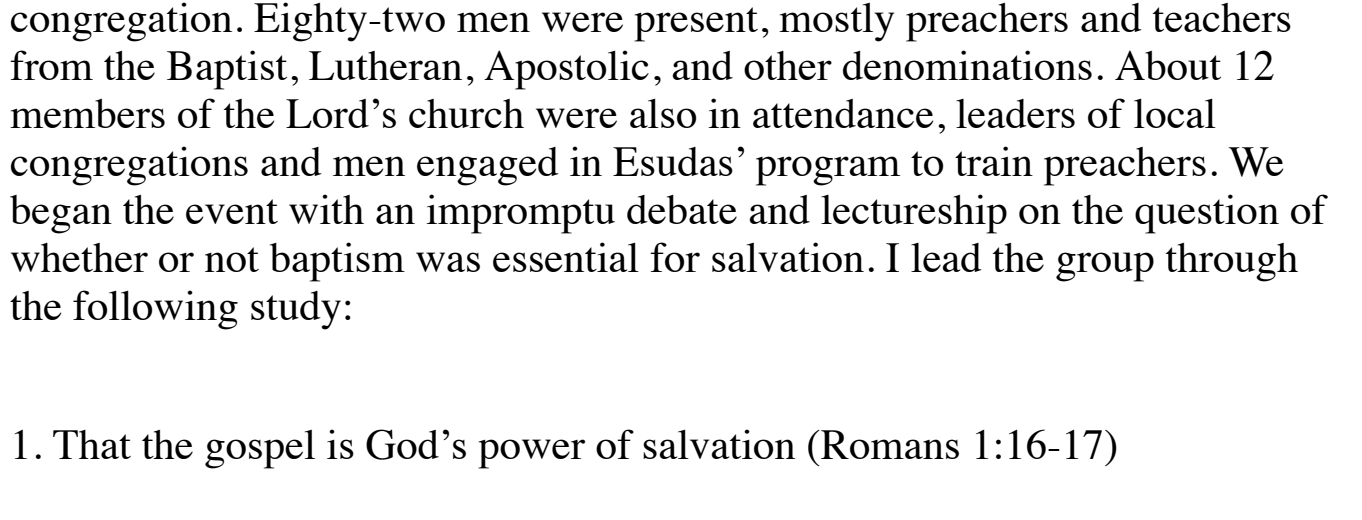
At this point I was too sick and overcome by the heat to continue to the two other locations we had planned to visit that day, so we proceeded to Brother Bontha's home, where his wife Vijaya, son and daughters live along with about 50 orphans that carpet his home to sleep every evening. Vijaya went to great lengths to make me as comfortable as possible. I should note here that when it came time for dinner, I was shown into the bedroom of Esudas and his wife, where there was a fan and a wall-mounted air conditioner. Vijaya then brought what appeared to be a small stool to where I was sitting and covered it with a towel and placed a simple meal before me. Esudas explained that they do not have even a table to take their meals on, and apologized to me for the inconvenience. Esudas and his family, along with all the orphans, sat on beds and the floor wherever they could, each with their meal of rice and curry.



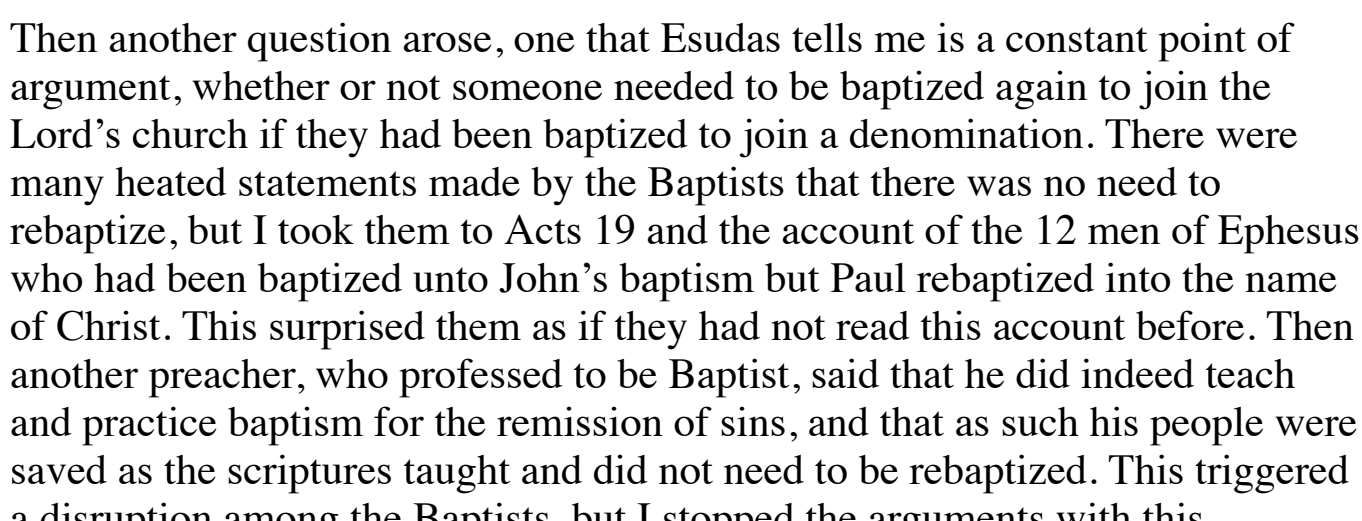
After a difficult night of heat and sickness at a local hotel, with Esudas and his wife staying in the next room for security, I returned to their home for breakfast. After some rest, I met with the orphans and other students of the Indian Christian School in the courtyard, where I taught them to sing Jesus Loves Me and told them the story of David and Goliath, and the mystery of the five smooth stones (hint: Goliath had 4 relatives, possibly brothers, all giants!).



We all then traveled to the proposed site for the new Indian Christian School, with the children traveling using the school's bus in two trips. The land is located just outside of town in an area currently used for rice cultivation. It is level land adjacent to the state highway, and electricity is readily available. We had the children surround the borders of the land, and Esudas's family, the schoolteachers and myself stood in the middle of the land for a photo. Also present was a Hindu man, a local police officer, who is working to help establish the school out of concern for the many poor children in this area. May God grant him time and opportunity to obey the Gospel.



We then travelled to another village about an hour's drive away, Ganesupalem thanda. Here I also opened a new church building for a recently planted congregation, preached and encouraged the people, with one young mother responding. I was privileged to baptize this soul in a nearby pond, after borrowing clothes and sandals from a local brother. One thing that impressed me about these people was their intense interest in spiritual things. The look on their faces as I preached and Brother Bontha translated was very telling. These are not "rice bowl" conversions, but honest souls drinking in the pure milk of the Word.



Our next appointment proved to be one of the highlights of my service in God's kingdom. Esudas had sent out a call to all the local preachers from every denomination to meet in a large open warehouse near the Mased manya congregation. Eighty-two men were present, mostly preachers and teachers from the Baptist, Lutheran, Apostolic, and other denominations. About 12 members of the Lord's church were also in attendance, leaders of local congregations and men engaged in Esudas' program to train preachers. We began the event with an impromptu debate and lectureship on the question of whether or not baptism was essential for salvation. I lead the group through the following study:

1. That the gospel is God's power of salvation (Romans 1:16-17)
2. That the saving gospel is the Death, Burial and Resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-5)
3. That we are saved through whole-hearted obedience to that form (pattern) of teaching (Romans 6:16-18)
4. That obedience to the gospel pattern is accomplished only in baptism (Romans 6:1-11)

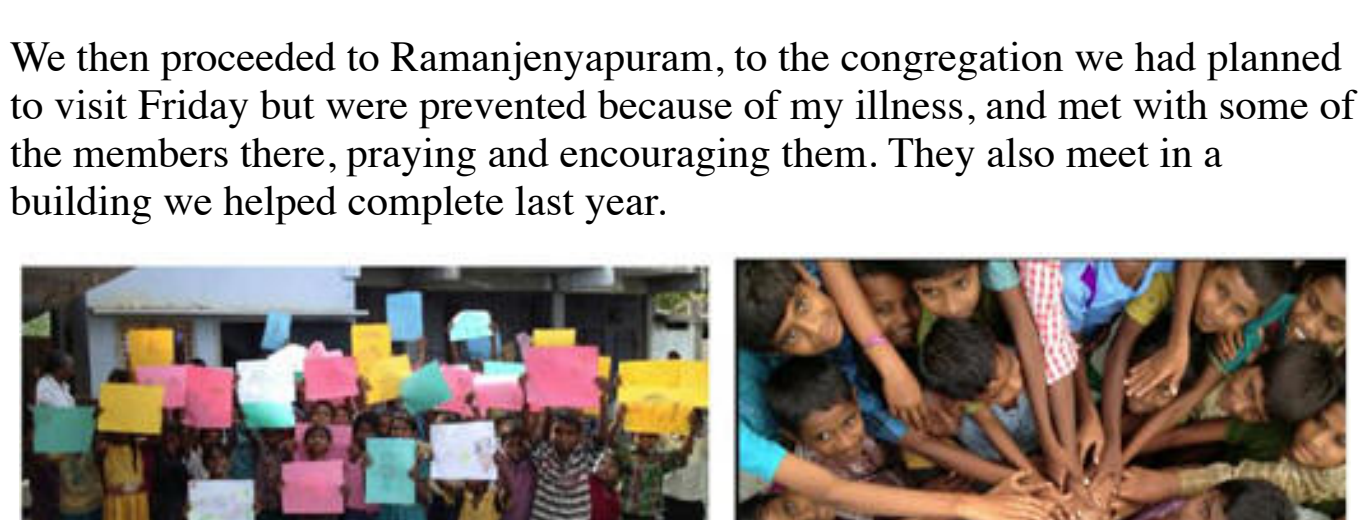
The main proponent of "faith-only" salvation without baptism was silenced by these scriptures, and proceeded to try to change the subject to his belief in modern-day miracles, but the group would not have it.

Then another question arose, one that Esudas tells me is a constant point of argument, whether or not someone needed to be baptized again to join the Lord's church if they had been baptized to join a denomination. There were many heated statements made by the Baptists that there was no need to be rebaptized, but I took them to Acts 19 and the account of the 12 men of Ephesus who had been baptized unto John's baptism but Paul rebaptized into the name of Christ. This surprised them as if they had not read this account before. Then another preacher, who professed to be Baptist, said that he did indeed teach and practice baptism for the remission of sins, and that as such his people were saved as the scriptures taught and did not need to be rebaptized. This triggered a disruption among the Baptists, but I stopped the arguments with this statement, that I, in fact, agreed with this man. The group was surprised, some applauding as if I was retracting my former stand. But I then proceeded to explain that if indeed a man was taught and baptized for the remission of sins, to be saved, and not because he was already saved, then his baptism was valid from the scriptures and that he did not need to be rebaptized. But, if he was taught that he was already a saved, forgiven man, by faith only or any other means, and that he if he was baptized to join a local body or denomination and not for salvation, then his baptism was not valid, he remained in his sins, and that he had yet to obey the gospel. There were many nods of acknowledgement among the crowd.

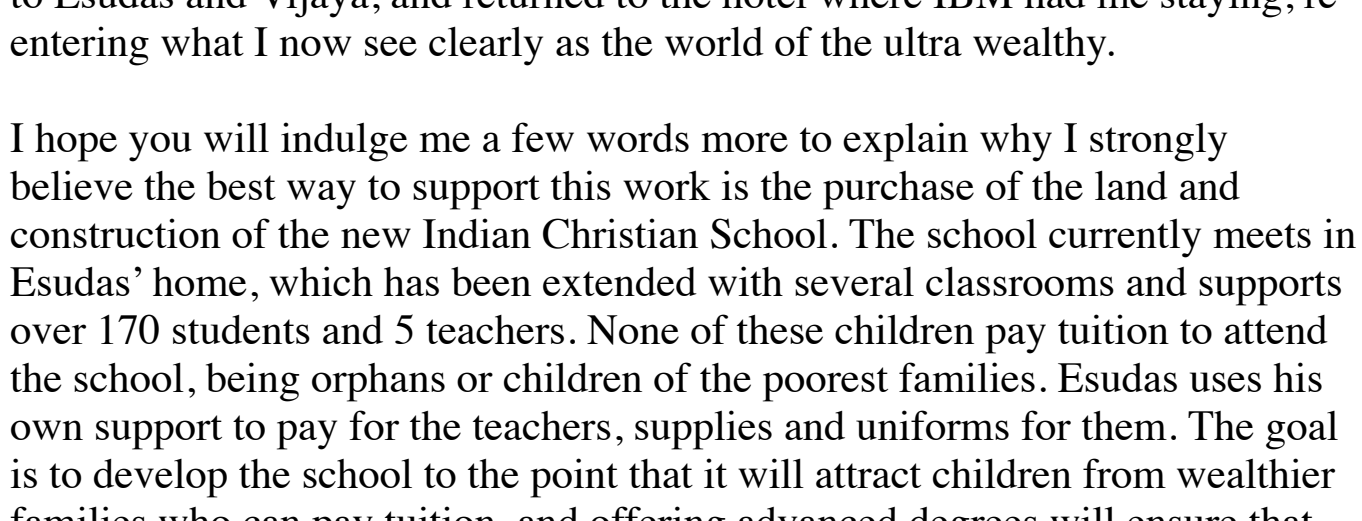
At this point we closed the debate and I preached to the assembled men. I first prayed and thanked God for all their desires to please Him and to study and obey His Will. Then I proceeded to challenge them all from the Word with the following lesson:

1. That the carnal mind is enmity against God (Romans 8:6-7)
2. That division, strife and following men was carnal (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)
3. That we are commanded to have no divisions, be of one mind and speak the same thing (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)
4. That our previous debate proved that they were carnal, walked as men and crippled the gospel of Christ because of their division.

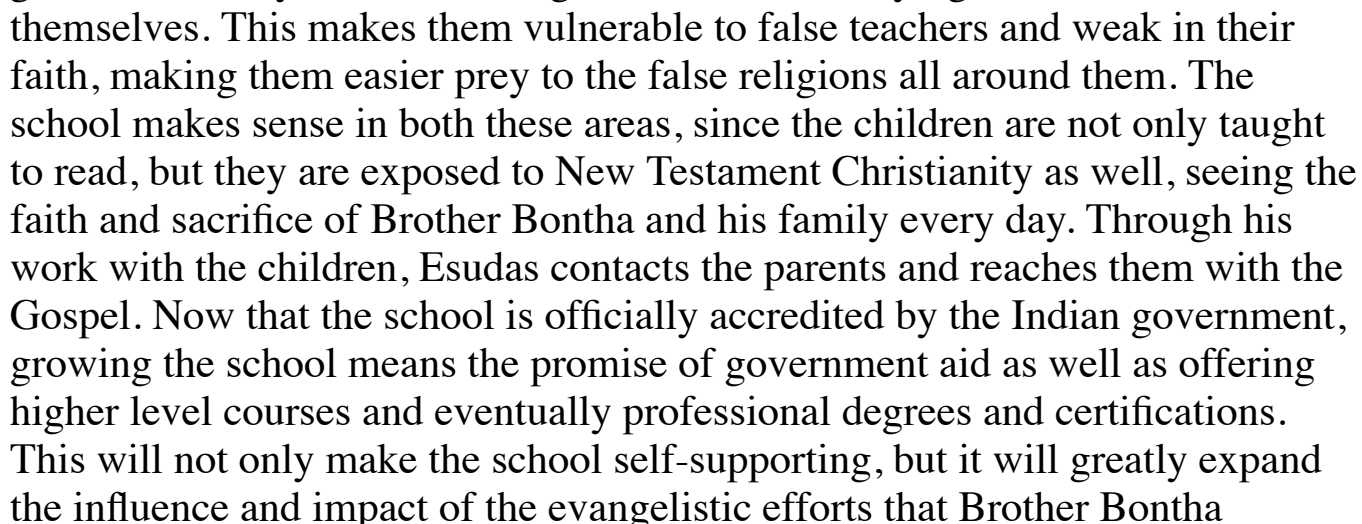
I then challenged them all to seek only God's truth and abandon the doctrines of men, to be of one mind and one voice for the cause of Christ. I closed the meeting with a prayer, and many men thanked me for the lesson, again as if that were the first time they had been confronted with those scriptures. Brother Bontha has told me since that several of the denominational preachers have requested him to come and preach to their congregations and share these thoughts. In my experience I have never seen such opportunity to confront division head-on, and with such an open-minded response. May God be glorified!



After a more restful night, we drove for an hour to worship with the brethren at the Subbaiahpalem church of Christ. I preached here again on the Oneness of God, Christ and the church, and we shared the Lord's Supper with these brethren, with Esudas' son presiding. After praying for many of the sick and distressed here, and naming a new baby girl (Hannah, after my daughter), we continued for another hour to the village of Makkenavaripalem, to the home of Vijaya's parents and the largest congregation in the area, where Esudas has his work as an evangelist many years ago.

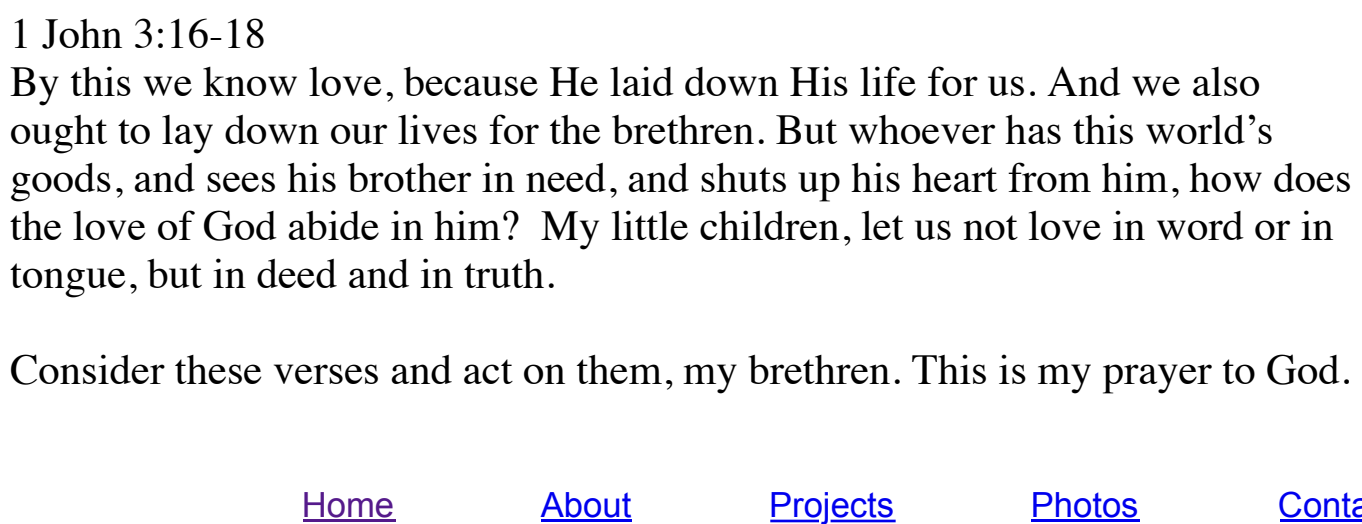


We met in the building we helped complete last year, with a large number of Christians as well as visitors, all eager to hear the word of God. After preaching and encouraging the people, I was honored to meet 4 older women, all "high caste" women, as Esudas would say, who had converted from Hinduism years ago. These sisters each made a special contribution and gave it to him, as Esudas said they do regularly, to help continue the preaching of the gospel here. I will always treasure those few rupees as a reminder of the power of the gospel in a pagan land and the fact that God's Word is always working out His Will for the salvation of mankind.



It is worth mentioning here that each of these congregations seems able to support its own upkeep to some degree, at least in existing facilities with some small support for preachers. Most of the preachers and teachers here work full-time in secular efforts to support themselves, and while the congregations are very poor by Western standards, they are willing givers of what they can share.

We then proceeded to Ramanjenyapuram, to the congregation we had planned to visit Friday but were prevented because of my illness, and met with some of the members there, praying and encouraging them. They also meet in a building we helped complete last year.



After returning to Esudas' home to prepare to leave, I shared with the orphans a collection of drawings made by the children of my congregation for them. I asked each of them to draw a picture for me to take back to America and share with my congregation, and they obliged me with a large stack of beautiful drawings. They I delivered to the children of my congregation on my return, with each child selecting a picture to take home and the rest to adorn our classrooms.

After another 5 hours of driving, we returned to Hyderabad and I said farewell to Esudas and Vijaya, and returned to the hotel where IBM had me staying, re-entering what I now see clearly as the world of the ultra wealthy.

I hope you will indulge me a few words more to explain why I strongly believe the best way to support this work is the purchase of a land and construction of the new Indian Christian School. The school currently meets in Esudas' home, which has been extended with several classrooms and supports over 170 students and 5 teachers. None of these children pay tuition to attend the school, being orphans or children of the poorest families. Esudas uses his own support to pay for the teachers, supplies and uniforms for them. The goal is to develop the school to the point that it will attract children from wealthier families who can pay tuition, to serve advanced degrees will ensure that trend. There are constant requests to offering more children, but the current facility will not allow it, and there is no room for expansion. Land is very expensive in India, a land roughly 1/3 the size of the US with nearly 1.5 billion of the population. In addition, because Esudas and his children he serves are Sudra people, the lowest and poorest racial caste in India, there is great reluctance by higher caste people to sell land for a lower caste school. In fact the only reason that the current land is available is because the Hindu doctor who owns it is willing to sell it so that "many people will be fed".

Without education, the Sudra people are doomed to an illiterate life of manual labor. Without literacy, they will hear and obey the gospel, but they cannot grow to maturity in Christ, being blocked from studying His Word for themselves. This makes them vulnerable to false teachers and weak in their faith, making them easier prey to the false religions all around them. The school makes sense in both these areas, as the children are not only taught to read, but they are exposed to New Testament Christianity as well, seeing the faith and sacrifice of Brother Bontha and his family every day. Through his work with the children, Esudas contacts the parents and reaches them with the Gospel. Now that the school is officially accredited by the Indian government, growing the school means the promise of government aid as well as offering higher level courses and eventually professional degrees and certifications. This will not only make the school self-supporting, but it will greatly expand the influence and impact of the evangelistic efforts that Brother Bontha constantly weaves into every daily activity.

It is very expensive to buy land in India. Even in this rural area, an acre of land costs up to \$90,000. Esudas recently raised over \$11,000 from many of you to use as security for starting the process of buying the land. He is willing to mortgage his own home for this effort, and believes that will add about \$40,000 to toward the goal. The problem with borrowing money in India is that the lowest available interest rates are around 18% APR. What is needed, and it is needed soon, is at least \$40,000 in support to complete the sale of the land. There is a deadline of August 11, 2013 to close this sale, or else the security deposit will be forfeited and the opportunity lost. More will prevent excessive amounts lost to interest payments.

I have seen and bear witness before Almighty God the honest and intense effort of Brother Esudas Bontha as he strives to lift his people from the darkness of sin and ignorance into the glorious light of Christ. I encourage you to visit him as I did, and guarantee that he will literally wear you out in the service of God. We, the citizens of the United States, are so incredibly wealthy and materially blessed that we are nearly blind to the reality of these people and most of those like them around the world. We are the ultra-rich. Even the poorest of us would be a wealthy man in Narasaraopet. Can we sit on our luxurious and high life this great work? It is in which as our ever bigger banis overflow with stuff while our brothers in Christ struggle mightily against ignorance and error in poverty and great need?

1 John 3:16-18
By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has his world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, who does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Consider these verses and act on them, my brethren. This is my prayer to God.

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