

Worship in a Foreign Land

“But the hour is coming, and now is here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.” (John 4:23, ESV)

It was Sunday. Thus, in a Christian’s heart, it was set aside as the day of worship. But this Lord’s day would even be more special because following worship, the Christians of Benin, West Africa would inaugurate the campus of the school that is training men to be preachers to their own, French-speaking people.

The worship service would not begin until 9:00 a.m., but they came—early. Some walked. Some, but not many, came in cars. Some rode in vans with others. Some rode motorcycles. They came bringing food for the midday meal. They came wearing their best: some in bright, traditional native dress; some in more contemporary, western attire. They made their way to the large tent-covered space at the middle of the campus. They waited patiently as the rest of the worshipers arrived and as the leaders made final preparations. As the temperatures climbed in the morning sun, no one complained.

At 9:00 a.m., the service began. The song leader was enthusiastic and the worshipers participated whole-heartedly. We Americans sang as best we could and were thrilled to know (through an interpreter) the simple, yet deep messages of the songs. Prayers were uttered and interpreted, and in them, God was praised and petitioned. A sermon was preached by an American. That sermon challenged the listeners to be active in taking the gospel to their friends and neighbors—to the other nations of the African continent. Following a solemn reminder of its significance, the Lord’s Supper was served. Christians from Africa and America communed as one body before the Lord and proclaimed the Lord’s death in anticipation of his second coming. Each Christian was given the opportunity to give a portion of his/her income to the Lord. A prayer concluded the service that included some 568 people.

As I reflect on that day, I remember . . . the enthusiasm and joy of the African Christians as they praised God and anticipated the wide-spread preaching of the gospel among their countrymen . . . the lack of concern about time and facilities . . . the thrill of my own participation . . . the joy of knowing that this was just a taste of heaven, when the followers of the Lord shall all be truly united.

—Lance Cordle