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GOD'S WORD FOR ISAN NEWSLETTER

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"REDEPTIVE ANALOGIES, OR ETERNITY IN THEIR HEARTS" (Hidden Ministry Gemstones Unearthed From Within Non Judeo-Christian Societies)

By Ron Myers

Greetings In the Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

HEALTH CONCERNS: As I wrote in our last newsletter, it was recently discovered that I had developed an advanced case of osteoarthritis in my left hip joint, and in need of a total hip replacement as soon as possible. This was according to Dr. Roger Freeman, a respected orthopedic surgeon here in San Diego. I underwent the surgery early morning, May 1st. Dr. Freeman told me afterwards that the procedure went very well, adding that he was able to reconnect all the interrelated tissue (*ligaments and muscles*), which isn't always the case, I was told. Healing is progressing well; the pain and discomfort have pretty much subsided, and I have now graduated from a walker to a cane. Thank you for your prayers and financial partnership.

Also, according to two separate neurology tests, I still have a Sciatica-related problem in my lower back, which considerably weakens my leg muscles, endurance, and stability. With my hip problem now taken care of, my neurosurgeon will be better able to address the problem. Previous to this, I was forced to get around using a cane, and later two canes. My goal was to complete the final review process on the Isan New Testament and publish it by the end of this year. However, it wasn't to be, interrupted by the need for a total hip replacement.

Discovering how bad things had become, I was unable to return to Thailand in that deteriorating condition—the operation had become a necessity and not an option to be postponed. The biggest setback I see is the delay of the final review process and publishing of the Isan New Testament, which must be postponed while I heal enough to resume normal activities. This, I believe, is according to God's wise timeline, so I am at rest with His plan.

EXPLORING EFFECTIVE MINISTRY CONCEPTS: This month, I want to share with you some beliefs contained within the Thai, Lao, and Khmer cultures that we were able to utilize in "getting their ear" while presenting the Gospel. Don Richardson, formerly of *Unevangelized Fields Mission*, wrote of compelling redemptive analogies in his book *Eternity in Their Hearts*. There are hidden gems that God has placed within primitive cultures around the globe, as a bridge in helping them to understand the Gospel (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*). In fact, in his book, *Peace Child*, Don describes how the Stone Age *Sawi* tribe where he ministered—with a societal theme based on treachery and betrayal—failed to understand the implications of the Gospel message until he incorporated the redemptive analogy of the *Peace Child* into his preaching.

Before that, the Sawi people celebrated Judas as the hero in his betrayal of Jesus. That was until Don accidentally discovered their belief of a sacred *peace child*... an innocent child that brought peace between warring tribes when offered by one chief to the other as a gift. The child, by his very presence, maintained tranquility. Anyone who caused harm to the peace child was considered bad, not a hero. When Don incorporated this concept into his preaching, people repented in droves and received Christ as their Peace Child, gifted to them by a gracious and holy God.

There are redemptive analogies and other gems missionaries have discovered in Southeast Asian societies, not unlike the *Peace Child*. These are valuable springboards that can be used as a launching point to deliver the Gospel message. One must be careful, though, not to over-emphasize a redemptive analogy. Too great a focus on legends and stories can put them on an equal footing with scripture in the minds of the hearers, which may result in syncretism. The goal is to find culturally relevant ways of piquing their interest, like the example of Paul's *unknown god* approach to the educated heathen on Mars Hill (*Acts 17*).

An interesting situation happened to Adoniram Judson (1788–1850), Baptist missionary to Burma. Judson's efforts in trying to reach the self-satisfied Burmese were fruitless. However, Judson's personal assistant, a Karen tribal man, had heard him deliver the Gospel time and again. The man then took the Gospel to his own hill-tribe people. The Karen were open to the message and accepted Christ *en masse*, to the surprise of Judson. Judson's assistant explained that his people had a long-standing legend that a white man would come one day, bringing a book and a message. "*Receive him and his message*" was the legend's admonition. Judson then concentrated his efforts on the Karen people. Strong Karen Baptist churches are still in existence in Burma today, two centuries later, along with the scriptures that Judson had translated for them... all due to the initiative of that one lowly Karen man.

Continuing on, an amazing document was discovered a few years ago in a Buddhist temple in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand. No one is quite sure where it originated, but it appears genuine—despite unfounded allegations by Buddhist monks that Christians planted it there. Among other things, it contains a message from the Lord Buddha himself, telling followers not to worship him, but to do good and seek the truth for themselves. Also, to look for *The One Who Will Come*, recognizable by the wounds in His side, hands and feet. His name is "Pra' Sri-ahn," meaning the *Merciful One*. Copies of this document have been circulated throughout Thailand and Laos for years. I and other missionaries have even used it as a tool to preach Christ with some degree of success.

In fact, while witnessing to an elderly couple during the early years of my ministry, I used their term, "Pra' Sri-ahn" (the *Merciful One*) in referring to Christ. They later told me they had abandoned Buddhism years before, and had continually called out in faith for *Pra' Sri-ahn* to deliver them from the enslaving power of evil spirits. Now fully understanding that the *Pra' Sri-ahn* they sought was actually Christ by Name (*Acts 4:12*), they immediately prayed out to receive Him that day; whereupon He delivered them instantly from sin and the demons. What a great testimony. They have now passed on and are with the Lord.

The cultural gem I now use is the people's love for *Nature*. I discuss the *Intelligent Design* aspects of Creation, which they all adore, yet are unaware of the *Intelligent Designer*. I then introduce the Living God and culminate with the Gospel. It works very well, proven in their open response and sincere interest!

In conclusion, one must *never* change the changeless truths of the Gospel message, but personalize one's delivery in such a way that the sealed doors of people's hearts open wide enough to allow the glorious light of the Gospel message to flood in and take root. That's where these analogies and other gems prove invaluable in Buddhist societies. The important thing is getting them to the point of truly *listening* first, so they will actually *hear* the Gospel and believe.

By God's Enabling Grace and for His Eternal Glory,

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