

Starbucks by Any Other Name...

By Ron Myers

Greetings Once Again In the Name Of The Lord Jesus Christ,

Weird title, don't you think? What bearing does coffee have on the Gospel? None, actually, except for the analogous comparison I'm about to make.

A while ago, after fulfilling my responsibilities as a guest teacher at Bangkok Bible College and Seminary, I asked my host if there was anywhere nearby I could get a good-tasting cup of brewed coffee. (Freshly brewed coffee had recently come into vogue in Thailand, superseding instant coffee.) He responded in the affirmative, saying that a mobile coffee truck often parked on the street just outside of the school. It was there that day. To my surprise, I noticed that the mobile unit sported a "Starbucks" logo. I didn't realize Starbucks had mobile units, I pondered. Ordering a dark house brew, I paid my money and got my coffee. While enjoying a rich and flavorful *cuppa*, I began to study the sign. Suddenly, I did a double take... "What's this!" I blurted out in surprise. The sign actually read *Star Wars*, not *Starbucks*. Cute! Leave it to the Thai, I thought, smiling.



Genuinely good coffee is always aromatic and flavorful, no matter what its name, as I found out that day in Bangkok... be it *Starbucks*, *Star Wars*, *Mr. Donut*, or whatever. However, if the producer mixes *chicory* in with the coffee as a supplemental filler, it takes on a bitter taste, as any discerning coffee connoisseur will tell you, both taking away from the genuine coffee essence and adding another. I'm sure you've heard this analogy; take a glass of sparkling-pure drinking water, then add a drop of poison... Bingo! Not so good any more. The pure has become adulterated and dangerous to consume, due to the added impurities... poison!

This brings me to the *core* of what I want to convey. How important do you think it is to maintain the pure, unadulterated purity of the Gospel message... just the way Christ conveyed it directly from His heart to the Apostle Paul's? Or, is it alright if we change a few things? Adapt a few things? Remove a few things? Or, maybe add a few things? What did Paul say about that sort of thing? He gave specific, dire warnings to the Galatians, that even if he, or an angel, or whoever else came and taught a modified or perverted version of the Gospel he had originally proclaimed, may that one meet a dreadful accursed fate.

Taking away from or adding to the simple yet profound Gospel message is a violation not to be tampered with. (Compare "add" or "take away" in Revelation 22:18-19.) Unfortunately, we see many today who behave like the Judiazers of Paul's day, going around trying to add requirements to the simplicity of the Gospel; or, in some cases, take away from the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is becoming increasingly prevalent in Thailand. All too many Thai who identify with Christianity have been fed a modified version of the Gospel, not entirely unlike what Paul was dealing with among the Galatians. If one takes their smiling countenance at face value, you might get the idea they are well grounded in their faith, trusting soundly in the finished work of Christ on their behalf. However, if you pose a few key questions to them, you soon find out that many of them have a faith that is mixed with works of various sorts. A girl once told me at a meeting I happened to attend, that: "To believe in Jesus is good, but one must also do good in order to be saved." (There are, however, many Thai who are solid in their faith, having been properly grounded in Grace from the beginning.)

I have learned that trying to straighten these types out from their faulty understanding by mere dialogs or friendly debates never really works—tossing in a few "proof texts" or "key verses" here and there, as we might do using a Western-styled approach. Their minds are not changed, due to a lack of key knowledge. Meaning, they need an initial grounding in the Word wherein to draw upon. This is why they so urgently need systematic, foundational teaching. That entails taking the time and effort to review Redemption's story, starting at Creation through to Christ's return. This includes the believers' immovable inheritance and standing *in Christ alone*—being kept by the power of God unto the day of Christ's return (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Once they understand, and get a more-complete grasp of the Salvation given so fully and freely *In-Christ*, a wonderful thing happens... they grow spiritually by *leaps and bounds*, cease striving to keep themselves saved, and automatically have a desire to serve the Lord, proclaiming the Gospel to their fellow countrymen! Otherwise, an activity or work-based mentality prevails and Christian growth to maturity is stifled. Paul prayed consistently for the believers, not that they would receive more, but that the eyes of their understanding might be opened, that they might know what they already possess in Christ, and to walk in the fullness of the knowledge of these wonderful truths.

What is the Gospel message about? Embracing a works-oriented piety (based in a series of self-imposed dos and don'ts) is not the Gospel. No matter what you call it, it's merely man-made religion (or *Church-ianity*). Biblically-based Christianity is trusting in the gracious Love and Forgiveness of God, apart from works, personified in the Name, Person, and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am friends with a young Thai doctor who related to me his interest in the claims of Christ. In his quest, he attended a church service in Bangkok with one of his peers. In his zeal, this man instructed the doctor that, to become a Christian (receive Christ), he must first refrain from various religious practices... to which my friend, not yet properly enlightened, told me that he was startled and confused, and decided not to follow through with the man's admonition.

The message this person delivered to my doctor friend was a man-made rendition of the Gospel, i.e., "Refrain from certain behaviors and practice other behaviors." This approach may sound good, but it is not the Gospel. It is, however, a religious pep-talk of self-reform through good works! That is *not* to say that repentance is *not* a part of receiving Christ, because it is (Acts 20:21). However, in his zeal, the doctor's friend got it backwards. Thais who embrace this partial message typically try to practice a Christian-oriented religiosity, but are they truly saved? Thought: Religion is like painting an old car right over the rust and dirt. Like a cheap paint job, mere religion cannot save anyone... the dirt and rust remain! Whereas, the Gospel is like God engifting you with a shiny new car. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." (2 Corinthians 5:17)



I have been working with my doctor friend—he's now reading my *Considering Creation* booklet—and believe that when he is enlightened by the Holy Spirit to the point of conviction, he will repent and receive Christ into his heart and life. I'll be returning to Thailand soon and look forward to seeing him again then. Pastor Pitak and I will be continuing the final review on the completed Isan New Testament... due to go to print in a few short months!

In closing, Cheryl and I want to reaffirm our heartfelt appreciation to all of you who stand with us to reach these people.

By God's Grace and for His Glory,

Ron Myers
Ron and Cheryl Myers