

## December, January, and February Prison Ministry

### December

In December we went to seven Thai prisons. In two of these prisons there were many Christians in our audience—in each place we had anywhere from 40-100 prisoners in attendance. For the Christians we shared messages to encourage them and challenge them to share the gospel with their fellow prisoners, and we also take questions to give them biblical answers. In three of these prisons the audience was mixed, with some Christians and some unbelievers, so we gave messages accordingly. And, in two of the audiences, almost no one was a believer.

In one of those, which was on Christmas day, we walked into a women's prison, with about 100 women sitting in the cafeteria. About five male prisoners were there singing some secular songs. I assumed we would be taken into a smaller room somewhere to meet with a small group of prisoners, but instead, the male prisoners were dismissed and I was given a microphone! I asked them, "what day is today?" Many answered correctly, that's it was Christmas day. Then, I asked them "who's birthday is it?" (I was planning to make a point that it's not the day to celebrate Santa Claus, but Jesus). But, then, someone in the back answered, "it's my birthday." That was unexpected and funny, but we invited her to the front to receive a free Christian book on her birthday. We always take many Christian books and sometimes full Bibles to give to the prisoners.

### January

In January we went to a men's and women's prison not too far from our house. It was our first time there. On the men's side about half of them were Christians, and about half not, so we mostly focused on the gospel, but did give some messages for the Christians also. On the women's side, only one woman of about 40 women was a Christian, so we just focused on the gospel, and that was encouraging for that one Christian woman also.

### February

We went to a women's prison where we previously had a 5-day seminar. This time had the same sized group, about 40 ladies, but only about half of them were from our 5-day seminar. They still showed good interest in the Bible and want us to keep coming back. We may go back at the end of April.

The next day we went to the Men's side of that prison where we also previously had a 5-day seminar. We had a smaller group there, of just about 25 men, but all of them except one man were from our 5-day seminar, and almost all of them raised their hands that they believe in Jesus now, whereas during our 5-day seminar, I think there were just 3-4 men who were Christians then. They had some good Bible questions, and I taught from Daniel and Matthew 5, with various songs, and Khae gave short messages, too.

## Dog Killed by Cobra

On the first day that we were traveling for the February trip, we heard from the man taking care of our dogs, that one of our dogs had died. We live in the countryside, so there are many poisonous snakes and scorpions there. At first he thought it was by human poisoning, because he couldn't find any snake bite marks, but then he noticed that two of the other dog's eyes were swollen, so it probably was a spitting cobra. The cobra is probably dead, too. The dogs did kill one cobra during our last prison trip in December too. The dog which died we bought for under 20 USD, and the pet shop told us she was a Jack Russel. When we brought her home she could barely stand up to eat her first meal at our house, not being well fed at the pet shop. Then, as she grew up, she didn't look like a Jack Russel, but much more like a short-haired Chihuahua. She was very energetic. We are thankful to our dogs for taking on the snakes. Sometimes I do also, and I have a bamboo stick and glasses (to protect my eyes) right at the door ready for that. We are sorry that Olive died, but are thankful it wasn't one of us, or the children we teach at our house each Saturday and Sunday.

## Back to February Prison Teachings

Then, we went to another women's prison, our second time there. Though we do confirm these meetings ahead of time, with letters of request, and messages, it's not too uncommon that there's a miscommunication, or they might forget we're coming. In this case they had a celebration of the Chinese New Year going on in the prison. It's not an official Thai holiday (if it's an official Thai holiday, we could not get in, and we also cannot get in on Saturdays or Sundays). But, nonetheless, they were celebrating this, so there was very loud drumming and music as the Chinese dragon (with people under the dragon costume) danced around. We still got some good messages in, but had to time the messages, to when the dragon noise subsided. It was still a good day of ministry. We also left some good Christian Thai books for their library, and one Burmese book, and four Cambodian language books, because they told us they have prisoners there from those nations also.

The next day, we went to the men's prison in the same city, which we've been to two times before. They gave us a new group again. This is pretty unique, since at most prisons we get the same group, or at least mostly familiar faces. But, this is good, too, because in the first two groups from our last times there, there were no believers so we can share the gospel each time, and this time, in a large group of about 70-80 men there were just 2 believers. One of those believers knows the Christian leaders in another prison that we also know, since he transferred from there. We had a good 2 hours sharing creation and gospel messages and songs with them.

The next day we went to a different women's prison. They had a group of 80 women assembled. About 95% of them were Christians and seemingly pretty strong, with many taking notes. I taught on the differences between OT and NT, as well as a message about being careful not to follow false teachers, giving examples, and a short message with 20

reasons that Jesus is God, giving them the verses to look up as homework. We also played various songs for them, and had a good 2 hours there.

The next prison was a men's prison with many believers. About 15 of the men were not Christians, but the rest were, and we've met with the Christian group two times before this. I taught a little about creation, for the unbelievers, and then about Matthew 5:3-12, the beatitudes, an evangelistic message. Then we had some songs, and I taught a message to beware of false teachers. Right now there's a very famous young Thai preacher on YouTube, named Champ, and about 1 year ago he started calling himself a prophet. He's associated with Bill Johnson's church and other false prophets. So, we talked about that, and they seemed to appreciate it.

Towards the end I asked the unbelievers who wants to get right with God today? Usually I don't ask for a show of hands, and I let them pray silently after me in their hearts. But, the Christian leader there, who is a young believer of about 5 years, asked them to stand up and come forward. About ten men came forward to pray. And, we were able to hand out some good books and tracts. It was a great day.

The next day, about 3 hours away (lots of driving on this trip—a total of 2555.2 kms), we went to another men's prison and met with about 100 men, most of whom are Christians, and had the opportunity once again to share similar messages as above. Praise be to Jesus!

#### Audio and Video Quality at Each Prison

Of the above prisons we went to from December to February, I would say about half of them have excellent audio-visual equipment and a quiet atmosphere for teaching, which is equal to and even better than university classrooms I've taught in (I say better, because the prisoners don't have cell phones to distract them). But, in the other half, the teaching environment ranges from pretty good, to challenging. The pretty good ones are where there's only a loud speaker, but no ability to show a song video or power point pictures. There we can still teach from the Bible without PPT, and let them listen to the songs with lyrics on the song sheets we hand out. The challenging ones, are some prisons where we have to compete with surrounding noise-- whether from a different group teaching on various topics, or the surrounding noise of a group doing push-ups and training, etc. But, in all of these cases, we're thankful for the opportunity to teach the Bible in prisons, and the message does get through.

#### Summary of a Two-Hour Evangelistic Prison Lesson

If you were handed a microphone and given 2 hours to speak with 50-100 unbelieving prisoners in Thailand, what would you say? We've had that opportunity many times now, thankfully. By God's help, we've prepared lessons to share the gospel with them, while also addressing various questions they have.

In each place the teachings may vary. If there are Christians present (in some prisons the majority of our group are Christians), then we will give different lessons to help them grow in discernment and in their love for God's Word.

But, here's a somewhat typical lesson when we have an audience of mostly unbelievers, in Thai of course: We begin with a Thai Creation song I wrote, addressing the differences between monkeys and people, and pointing out how amazing bird migration is, and about the worldwide flood (yes, all in one song). Then, I ask them some questions, unpacking some points made in the song.

The Thai education system does not typically have a lot of interaction between the teacher and students, but I do use this interactive method, asking questions, so my first question might be, "What's the difference between monkeys and people?" People will answer various things, such as "people have no tail," or "monkeys have fur," or "monkeys don't have language," etc. If someone answers the last one, I'll say that monkeys do have a very simple language, but "could you teach a monkey to speak Chinese?" Usually they will laugh at that, and I'll further say that monkeys don't write books. But, the main difference I'm getting at, which I tell them, is that monkeys don't have morality--they just follow instincts.

If a monkey does something wrong, there are no police monkeys, nor monkey courtrooms (maybe "kangaroo courts"—that joke would not be understood in Thai though—on the other hand, there are some good jokes I can make in Thai, which I cannot make in English), nor monkey prisons.

Then, I tell them that God made people special, different from all animals with the ability to choose good or evil, but we are held responsible for those choices. Yet, the good news is that God gives us the opportunity to start over and be reconciled with Him if we have gone astray (more on that later).

Next, I'll usually ask them, given 3 choices-- an AI computer, an airplane, and a bird, which one they think is the most HIGH TECH. I'll have them raise their hands for each choice, and then tell them that the bird is the correct answer, because... "Are there any factories for making airplanes?" "Yes." "Can people make AI computers?" "Yes." "Can the smartest people in the world make a single bird or fish or tree?" "No."

Therefore, impressive as AI is, it's still LOW TECH, and a bird is HIGH TECH! And, I give a few short examples of HIGH TECH birds. Then, I'll give an example of a pen. "If you were alone and found a pen on the road, do you think that pen has a Maker?" They say yes. I ask, how do you know, because we don't see the maker. Occasionally someone gets the right answer and says, "because it can't pop into existence by itself." Then I compare the

pen to the human body and ask them which one is more complex. They answer that the human body is. I confirm that, adding that even when we sleep, our heart keeps beating, and our lungs keep breathing, and I explain “irreducible complexity,” that all parts must be present and functioning at the beginning, not being gradually evolved.

The lights start to go on, regarding creation. Then, I’ll usually let them listen to my Amazing Fish song in Thai, which further reinforces creation points.

I also make some points about God being greater than AI, and the fact that even 50 years ago, God already knew about our present-day technology, and the fact that God knows the future, and the OT prophecies about Jesus demonstrating this.

Then, we have some original Christmas songs about the life of Jesus, which we play for them, with video (most prisons do give us either a large TV screen to use or a projector, but at some places we use just audio speakers). Only one time, in our many years doing this, the power went out, and we had to go “old-school,” teaching with just our voices, as well as singing with an acoustic guitar.

#### The 10 Commandments

At this point I’ll usually ask Khae to summarize the prodigal son story from Luke 15 for everyone, and then I have a song that goes with that.

Then, I tell them that before we can get right with God, we need to acknowledge and confess our sins, so I take them through all ten of the 10 Commandments, but tell them to answer quietly in their hearts as I explain each one, and ask them if they’ve broken that one. At the end I ask them to answer out loud, “did you pass or fail this test?” Many will answer candidly that they failed, or that they failed all 10!

Then, I explain more about Jesus, that He, being God our Creator, came to earth in a human body and kept the law perfectly, but was put on the cross by the jealous religious leaders. Jesus was willing to do this for us, knowing He would take our sins upon Himself, die, and then rise from the dead on the third day. In these explanations we also read various Bible verses. I explain that we need to put our faith in Jesus, not in our own abilities.

Then, I lead them to pray, asking everyone to close their eyes, and let them pray silently, because God who created our brains, knows what we are thinking, and will hear a sincere prayer from anyone who repents and puts their faith in Jesus. I don’t ask them to raise their hands, because in Thai culture it would be easy to get many to raise their hands outwardly, but perhaps not really being sincere or understanding. I’m interested in seeing them get started with God, whether I know or not who has really and sincerely prayed.

I usually give this invitation to pray about 2/3rds of the way through, because in prisons we need to be flexible, so I don't want to save it for the end, when we might not have time. Also, that gives us more time after they've prayed to give more teachings.

### Children's Ministry

We plan to have prison trips about 5 times per year, mostly just for two weeks each time. But, while we are at home in Chiang Mai, I go to pick up children in various locations, each Saturday and Sunday to teach at our home, and some parents bring their children by themselves. We teach them English, which their parents appreciate, and we also teach them the Bible, which their parents are OK with.

The children we teach are from various tribes—Lisu, Ba-O, Kayan, Karen, and Thai. The Kayan boys have Moms who have the long neck rings. They let the boys come study with us, but not the girls, because the girls stay in their villages with some long neck rings for the tourists to see them, and get money taking pictures with them, and helping to sell souvenirs. About 90% of the children we teach are boys. We have only a few girls who attend, though we welcome them. But, that is good also, because most Thai churches have a majority of women. So, we hope more men are raised up, by God's working, who know Jesus and follow Him. Here are some pictures of the children we teach Saturdays and Sundays.

### Mali and Jude

Mali and Jude are still active in reaching their own tribe, the Lahu people, as well as the Palaung tribe. They've told us about a young man from the Palaung tribe who wants to study at a Bible School, and we plan to help him with a scholarship for that.

### Matthew, the NT Chronicler

We've recently had some of my articles on the book of Matthew translated into Thai and are giving these out at Thai prisons and elsewhere. These articles show the amazing connection Matthew had to the Old Testament, as well as chiasms in the book of Matthew. If anyone would like to read these articles feel free to email me, and I'll send you a copy (it's 22 pages total, which includes 4 parts)...

(micahberekiah@gmail.com)

In other big news, Isaiah will graduate next month from his 3-year Bible School!

Thank you for your prayers and support.

Grace and Peace in Christ, Scott, Khae, Micahberekiah, and Isaiah.