

BaptistWay Bible Series for July

5: God's mission:

Redemption and reconciliation

June 24, 2009

Writer's note: During the week of this lesson writing, I am in Sierra Leone, West Africa, exploring the potential for [Buckner International](#) to be a part of a collaboration with several partners, including [Global Connection Partnership Network](#) and the [University of Texas at Arlington](#) in an initiative called Restore Hope. The collaboration seeks to help the people of Sierra Leone as they work to rebuild their country after a bloody civil war. The country's struggle to reconcile past enemies seems to be a fitting context for this lesson's focus, "Redemption and Reconciliation," so in a departure from previous lessons, I am writing this lesson first-person from Sierra Leone and using five on-site observers as biblical commentators.

A need for reconciliation with God, man

I'm waiting at a small Lebanese market in Sierra Leone, West Africa, in a U.S.-made SUV where a mix of American, British, Chinese and local patrons are buying groceries or in line to get a schwarma wrap from the deli. Next to me is Donald Conteh, a Baptist layman and teacher by trade who works as Global Connection Partnership Network's logistics coordinator.

A beggar walks by in a cowboy hat and sports jacket, asking passersby for change. His image is most notable because gauze covers his arms at the elbows, or where they should be. He is missing the lower half of both his arms.

"I know this man," Donald says from the driver's seat. "He was the first government soldier the rebels amputated at the start of the war."

The Sierra Leone civil war, which lasted from the early '90s to around 2003, made worldwide headlines for its atrocities. As Donald says when the fight reached the capital city, “bodies were laying in the streets all over Freetown.” Among tactics used by both sides was amputation of arms and legs to terrorize the opposition.

“The rebels cut off this man’s arms to send a message,” Donald says. “They left him alive and told him, ‘Go back and tell the government we are alive. We are ready to fight.’”

Others during our trip have had similar stories from a war that is still fresh. One man told of getting into a cab and recognizing the driver, who had killed the man’s best friend. One ministry leader we spoke to is spearheading a project to reunite young girls kidnapped and used as prostitutes with their families—or caring for them when their families won’t accept them. Burned-out buildings dot the countryside and attest to the destruction caused to the once-peaceful tropical nation.

In the wake of such evil, how do people find redemption in their relationships and reconciliation in their hearts? This question opens another theological query many of us may have pondered: God sees evil occur on a global scale from all of man. How can he offer redemption to us and reconciliation for us?

The three lessons in Unit Two focus on what God’s mission is about, and this first lesson is about the redemption and reconciliation he offers. The lessons show God is concerned about both our spiritual and physical needs and that this same fullness of concern is seen in Jesus, who embodies God’s mission. Sometimes Christians have emphasized one set of needs or the other—but not both. Let these lessons remind us of the fullness of God’s mission and lead us to think of ways we need to participate in all of it.

Living commentaries

To help explain how God's mission is to provide a way for all people to live fully in right relationship to him, I asked five people—a missionary couple, a coworker, and a Sierra Leonian pastor and layman—to act as my Bible commentaries, each reading one of the assigned passages and giving their interpretation of Scripture—in the context of the conflict and healing in Sierra Leone. Following are their observations:

Exodus 5:22—6:8; 15:1-2, 13

Gabe and Sada Herrera

God wants to make his name known. We don't always understand why God lets his people suffer. One might ask, "Why did God take so long to answer the cry of his people?" We don't know. He just tells us in this passage that he will make his name known. He tells the Israelites, he will rescue them, he will redeem them with and outstretched arm and he says, "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God."

The people of Sierra Leone are the same, just in a different time. They suffered a long civil war. The people are tired, broken and scarred. In their own way, they are crying out because the suffering here is great. Sierra Leone ("Salone" locally) men are in need of rescue, redemption and letting God take them as his own.

God already is working in his own time in Sierra Leone. There are many who have answered the call, believed and have been freed from bondage. But there are many who still have yet to experience spiritual freedom through God's redemption and reconciliation to him. This nation has a great capacity for forgiveness. The best is that God says in his unfailing love he will lead his redeemed and guide them to his dwelling. Although man fails, falls and forgets, God's love never fails.

Gabriel and Sada Herrera are missionaries to Sierra Leone sent through GCPN.

Isaiah 55:6-7

Phil Brinkmeyer

After an 11-year civil war where ungodly atrocities inflicted death and dismemberment of heart, soul and body, many in Sierra Leone may ask, “Where was God during this?” Many might feel he was non-existent or so far removed he couldn’t hear their cries for help.

You still see the scars of war. Missing limbs, wheelchairs. You hear it in their stories of memories of living nightmares and see it in their faded eyes and hopeless faces. Guilt is on both sides and, like the American Civil War, enemies are now again brothers and reconciliation continues to be made.

This week, during a gathering of orphan, helpless children, I saw a 4-year-old standing, diminutive, sweet, dirty—with both hands clasped, covering his eyes and nose—reciting the Lord’s Prayer. An orphan calling on his only father, his heavenly Father. He recognized hope is only in God. He knows where redemption is found.

Phil Brinkmeyer is director of ministry development in Africa and Europe for Buckner International.

Colossians 1:13-14

Arthur Williams

What does God say to me through this Scripture? Christ paid the price for me with his blood. He also releases me from the bondage of sin into the freedom of grace. That is, I will not make heaven, even if I have all the riches, all the connections or even all of the theological knowledge. No matter who I am, it is only through grace I can make heaven.

And this grace was given to me through Jesus, who is the first-born. With him I have confidence and authority. I will hold to his teachings, because he has all the (authority).

Arthur Williams is a bivocational carpenter and co-pastor at Faith Baptist Church in Wellington, Sierra Leone.

Hebrews 9:11-14

Donald Sidikie Conteh

In this passage, Christ is being compared with other sacrifices, but Christ being the best sacrifice, with blameless blood, chooses to be the best.

He came so that mankind could be saved. The purpose of the shedding of his blood is for all men to be set free from death and to receive eternal life. There is no blood precious like that of Jesus Christ, meaning that he is the only way to salvation (heaven).

Donald Conteh is logistics coordinator for GCPN and a member of Mayemi Baptist Church in Grafton, Sierra Leone.

Question to explore

- *In what ways are we participating in God's mission to offer redemption and reconciliation to people?*
- Just like God offers us redemption and reconciliation to him, how can we mirror that reconciliation to others?
- Is there any sin so bad that we cannot be redeemed to God and reconciled to him?