

Myanmar Christian tells conference how God is changing lives after cyclone disaster

July 13, 2008

DALLAS-A Christian leader from Myanmar (Burma) told a missions conference in Dallas July 11 that despite the sobering reality of disaster, poverty and oppression, the gospel of Jesus Christ is changing people's lives in his country.

The "Renewing Your Passion" conference sponsored by [Gospel for Asia](#) drew more than 1,000 people from around the world who support the work of GFA's 16,500 native missionaries in 11 South Asian countries. The organization, based in Carrollton, worked closely with Texas Baptist Men distributing aid in Sri Lanka after the deadly tsunami in 2004.

A group of Texas Baptist Men met with Sri Lankan leaders attending the conference, and heard how well-cleaning equipment TBM left there [is still being used](#) by the GFA teams they trained.

Narayan Sharma of Nepal told a Gospel for Asia missions conference how recent radical changes in his country have opened new opportunities for the gospel.

The GFA mission leader from Myanmar, who cannot be named for security reasons, said the cyclone that slammed into the country in May only exacerbated an already tragic situation. The country has been under

military rule since 1962.

“Once my country was known as the paradise of South Asia. But today it is full of problems and suffering,” he said.

Even before the cyclone struck, there were more than 150,000 in refugee camps at the border of Myanmar and China. Grinding poverty has dropped the average life expectancy to just 56 years. In neighboring Thailand, the life expectancy is 71 years.

The cyclone took an estimated 350,000 lives. More than 100,000 are still missing.

More than 1.6 million homes were destroyed and 1.3 million acres of fertile crop land were damaged as the cyclone swept across an area known as “the rice bowl of Myanmar.”

“In some affected areas, the dead are more than the living,” the leader noted.

There was no way to bury the vast number of dead, so their corpses still litter the waterways and landscape, he said.

After the cyclone struck, a Texas Baptist Men disaster relief team went to Thailand with hopes of entering Myanmar to help, but only a trickle of aid was allowed into the country. Although a Baptist World Alliance aid group was able to enter to assess needs, the TBM group [opted to train Burmese Christians in Thailand instead](#) when they found entry blocked.

Getting aid into Myanmar

Gospel for Asia teams, however, were able to get emergency food and supplies into Myanmar after the cyclone. The missionary leader himself was on the crew of volunteers who helped serve food to survivors who took refuge at the GFA Bible College in Yangon (Rangoon). He and every other

missionary who served with him were "letting their lives preach the sermons" during those days, he said.

The people in the majority Buddhist country were stunned at this Christian response, he said. Two families who went without food for seven days after the storm articulated their thoughts about Jesus to the missionaries who brought them aid.

"Buddha did nothing while we were suffering. But your Jesus loves us," the missionary reported. "Now every Sunday they are coming to church and worshipping the Lord."

"In the midst of suffering, poverty and difficulty, the Lord is doing great things in Myanmar," he said. "Missionaries are bringing the Good News, and because of their faithfulness, there are 482 of our churches in Myanmar."

Opportunities in Nepal

Another speaker, Narayan Sharma, Gospel for Asia's Nepal country leader, told how recent radical changes in his country have opened new opportunities for the gospel.

Fifty years ago, he said, Nepal was the world's only official Hindu kingdom. Nepal's king was considered to be a god. Anyone who dared preach the gospel in the country was reviled and accused of promoting a foreign religion.

Radio stations regularly carried reports of Christians being arrested and imprisoned for their faith. Sharma recounted a time when he himself was arrested and put into a dungeon-like prison cell because he was sharing the gospel.

"In all this darkness, there was no imagination that the country would ever

be open," Sharma said.

Then things began to radically change. A few months ago, the people voted in a new legislative assembly, and only weeks ago the king stepped down from the throne. The newly elected officials have promised to allow freedom of religion. And now Christian programs are aired over the same government-owned radio stations that used to carry reports of believers being arrested.

"The Bible says that after the night, joy comes in the morning, and morning has come to Nepal!" Sharma told the crowd.