

Report 1  
19<sup>th</sup> May

This was our first full day in Thailand. Things are going well. We got up around 7:15am, and had breakfast at the place we are staying. It's a café with lodging. The Thai people are very friendly and, surprise, surprise, Sophia is a first-rate attraction.

I then went off to the church building with Nico Van Zyl (one of the missionaries out here). I was scheduled to take the first two sessions of the pastoral training. Only one of the men for training spoke a little English; the rest spoke none, as far as I know. So, the teaching was through translation.



The teaching for the week was on Christ and salvation. I taught on Christ as prophet and Christ as priest. The teaching was on a 'basics' level, for these pastors (and prospective pastors) are poorly theologically educated. It was a joy to be able to be a part of training men whose churches are in such dire need of solid preaching and informed pastoral care. Also, men who have the opportunity to give the gospel, in some cases perhaps, to the unreached.

Nico is a South African who has been here for two years. He is very keen to finish learning Thai. He is a live-wire and is eager to start a Thai-speaking church.

The other missionary is Matthew. He has been here for 4 years, and his Thai is good enough to start preaching. He is also eager to reach the Thai people and is serious about his theology.



Isabel spent the day with their wives: Roxanne and Danielle. She had lunch with them, and with their children: Nicolas, Judah, and Gabriel. She was discussing opportunities in the region, as well as the cultural and linguistic challenges. She was encouraged not only with the kindness and amenability of the ladies but also with the general situation here.

We then went for some dinner with Nico and Roxanne and Nicolas and got some essentials for our room (most notably, real milk and tea!)

Little Sophia is doing well, despite all the change.

Report 2  
20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> May

We have known the Lord's blessing in many ways through our time here so far. I will report on our movements over the last two and a half days.

### **Wednesday**

I led the first two pastoral training sessions. They were on atonement and redemption. I had a better rapport with the students than I did last time. They are reticent to interact, but have grown a little. It seems so important to get some response to see how much they are comprehending, especially when teaching through translation.

It was a particular blessing to be able to drill in the truths of redemption:

1. Who are redeemed? God's people, from every tribe, tongue and nation.
2. What are they redeemed from? Sins committed, from the hand of the foe (the Devil), their own hostile minds, from an empty life.
3. What is the price paid for their redemption? The precious life and blood of Christ.
4. How do they receive that redemption? Through faith.
5. What are they redeemed unto? To selflessness, to good works, to glorify God.

I went through these five questions a number of times; by the end, some of them could give full answers to each question. They asked for it to be written on the whiteboard at the end in their own language, which was done for them by someone else (obviously – speaking in tongues does not extend to writing), and then they took pictures. To be able to relate such essential and blessed truth to pastors and some prospective pastors was a privilege.

Nico and Matthew taught sessions until 3:00pm, and then the pastoral training days ended. They taught well and clearly. We hope and pray that the pastors will be blessed by the training.

There are so many opportunities, here! To give one example. There was one man at the pastoral training who spoke a little English. He pastors a church 2 or so hours from Chiang Rai. He gives some very basic pastoral training every Sunday night to the other men present at the training week. But he himself is coming to this basic pastoral training and learning, showing that he is in great need of being taught. Ideally, someone would go to his church to see the situation and to guide and teach and help him. But, the men here simply do not have the time because of all their other ministerial commitments and responsibilities.

Wednesday evening we had dinner with Nico, Roxanne and Nicolas. Roxanne cooked chicken pot pie, which was pleasantly familiar and tasty. As a family, they have been here for two years and are progressing with their Thai. Roxanne is excited to start teaching at a school near here (CRICS) for the nursery class in August.

We then went on to the prayer meeting at the church building. It was an encouragement to pray with the church, which is still understandably small, about Thailand. They also offered up a number of prayers for us as well as the Christians in England.

## Thursday

In the morning, we went with Nico to CRICS (Chiang Rai International Christian School). Isabel had arranged a tour of the school with a double motive: to see if it may be suitable for her to work in, and if it may be suitable for our child to attend. The campus was well-equipped and spacious considering their enrolment of 208. There seemed to be a pleasant and friendly atmosphere.

This day we moved out of our accommodation and into the church building, where the pastors were staying previously. They have kindly set things up very nicely here for us. Both the missionary families have been very kind and welcoming to us; we are most grateful.

Thursday evening, we had dinner with Matthew and Danielle Jenson and their two sons, Gabriel and Judah. They served a range of Thai foods, which were delicious. We discussed many things with them about theology and about Thailand. They have been in Thailand for four years, and they have fluency in Thai. Matt is now able to start to preach in Thai; because of this the church is seeking to start a Thai service about once a month.

We slept well at the church building Thursday night.

## Friday

Today, we have visited two of the Buddhist temples in Chiang Rai (there are many, many

Buddhist temples – we have been told there are about 1 for every neighbourhood). We visited the blue temple and a white temple. The blue temple is quite famous, and a number of tourists come from Chiang Mai (a bigger city about 2-3 hours away) for a day-trip and bow down to Buddha, having photos taken for



their Instagram and to show to their yoga classes. They are impressive places, but are shrines to false gods (though, technically, Buddhism doesn't believe in any god); there is works righteousness all over them: see some of the signs in the pictures about buying things for the monks and having blessings in return. This place is in great darkness: Buddhism has a vice-like grip over the people. Even amongst the churches that there are, many of them are not true churches at all. The gospel is in dire need: it is needed amongst the false churches that they may be reformed into beacons of light to Jesus Christ, and it is needed amongst the few true churches, that they may grow in truth and knowledge, and it is needed amongst the vast swathe of those enveloped in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief.

Please pray for the work here in Chiang Rai, that impacts not only Chiang Rai, but places further afield in Thailand, as well as other countries which border near here.

Report 3  
23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> May

**Saturday**

On Saturday, we visited the largest Buddhist temple in Chiang Rai: it is called the White Temple. It is more of a tourist attraction than anything else, consisting almost entirely of tourists exploring, rather than Thais practising religion.



The intention is that you walk through the centre structure (which is surrounded by a moat) for the religious experience. First, you walk across the bridge, which is lined on both sides by many hands reaching up from the depths; these intend to represent those reaching up from hell. Then you pass into the Temple, which represents the leaving of the cycle of birth and rebirth and entering into Nirvana. Nirvana is a confusing concept, but at its heart seems to be ‘cessation of everything’. The Buddhist would not equate this to ‘nothingness’, but the question remains: if the cessation of everything is not nothingness, then what is it?

**Sunday**

Sunday was a blessed day. It was a joy to worship with fellow believers in such a familiar manner, even though we were nearly 6000 miles from England. A few of the members of the church are away at present, and so attendance was lower than usual; including ourselves, there were about 12. At 9:15am, we had the Bible hour. Nico was teaching on chapter 13 of the 1689 Confession, ‘Of Sanctification’; we were well-reminded of the ‘irreconcilable war’ that wages in us between the flesh and the Spirit but were encouraged by the truth that sanctification is a work of God, and he shall complete what he has started.

Worship began at 10:45am. We were familiar with two of the hymns that were sung: ‘Praise my soul the King of heaven’ and ‘Before the throne of God above’. The sermon was an overview of Genesis; the first sermon in a new series through Genesis. Nico preached well,

drawing our attention to the remarkable richness of Genesis in explaining the origins of the world, of sin, and even of salvation, it being so filled with types and pictures of Jesus Christ.

We fellowshiped with the brothers and sisters and were heartened by their commitment and love of the Lord.

### **Monday and Tuesday**

From Monday afternoon to Tuesday afternoon, we were travelling back to our home in Sheffield. Unfortunately, Isabel had become unwell on Sunday evening with a flu that both Matt and Nico had suffered with. This made the prospect of the long journey rather bleak. However, the Lord was very merciful: Isabel began to feel better just before the second flight (from Bangkok), and on the long flight from Bangkok to London, the baby slept very well, enabling us to also get some rest.

All was very smooth with the travel, until we started to use English public transport to get from London to Sheffield. For the 6380-mile journey from Chiang Rai to London, on two separate flights, Thai airways were fully able to run the flights effectively and get us to our destination well in time, without any real stress. However, for the 170-mile journey from London to Sheffield, the English rail service was not so effective. Every train we boarded was late, and so we missed multiple transfers.

Nevertheless, we made it.

### **Conclusion**

We have been so grateful to the Lord for his guidance and blessing on this trip. God has kept us all, relatively speaking, healthy on our trip; we are especially grateful for how he has protected Sophia. Our visit was a greatly blessed one: we have been encouraged in many ways by the missionaries already present, the families in the church, the stable situation of the area, the remarkable placement of Chiang Rai in relation to other nations and the innumerable opportunities for service.

We shall be prayerfully considering the Lord's will over the coming days and weeks.