

Three Strikes - You're Out! By Cindy Powell (A story from our April 2008 trip to Thailand)

"One, two, three times you will be struck down and the third time you will not arise!"

These were the words I heard being proclaimed from my own lips over and over again during a time of prayer and fasting prior to our most recent ministry trip to Thailand.

As a team we had set aside a particular day each week for the five weeks prior to our departure to specifically fast and pray for the fulfillment of God's purposes for our upcoming trip to Thailand. Our team had a real sense of destiny about this particular trip from the beginning. There were six of us and I believe each one of us was hand picked for God's own sovereign purpose—but what I am about to tell is my story.

Although this particular story is more about my part, I want to make it very clear that it takes many parts to make the whole. Even in the portion of the story that is closest to my heart, other members of our team played critical roles, as did many other intercessors and saints of God through the ages. Some of them have told their stories. Some will tell of them in days to come. But the only story I can tell is my own. It's quite a long story—for me it began some forty years ago—but this recent trip to Thailand has finally closed the loop.

This was a trip with two distinct tracks. One was the outward and much more "typical" short term mission track. We visited various ministries in various parts of the country and participated in various ways. It was quite an eclectic mix of things—from ministering to prostitutes on the streets and in the bars of Bangkok; to doing some health testing and training with a Tribal Children's Home in Chiang Mai; to participating in a large conference with the Karen Tribe believers in Maesot. Really, the only common denominator in these activities was that they all involved ministries our team had previously built relationships with. Of course, our love for Jesus and His love for all the people of Thailand was certainly another common bond!

So that was "track one" and God did many wonderful things on that track. There were amazing testimonies of His mighty hand of healing and deliverance, as well as many personal and specific touches of His tender love and mercy. But those are stories I will leave to others. "My story" is on the second track.

The second track involved praying for the nation itself. God has called me to pray—it's simply what I do. In many ways, it's why I breathe. But my calling sort of mirrors the paradox of this trip. On one hand, God has called me to minister to individuals one-on-one for the sole purpose of connecting their hearts with His and encouraging them toward His highest purposes for their lives. Simply praying His heart over people is my most frequent form of outward ministry and it is something I never tire of doing. But despite such a personal and intimate kind of outward ministry, what I am called to in intercession is on a much broader scale. Basically, I pray for nations. I take God at His Word when He says: "Ask and I will give you the nations for your inheritance" (Psalm 2:8, paraphrased). Really, the nations are Jesus' inheritance but God has put a burning desire in my heart to partner with Him in seeking the ultimate fulfillment of that desire. And, apart from Israel and my own country, there is no nation I pray for more than Thailand.

I've written before about my past connection to Thailand. I lived there for awhile as a child and my father was killed there. As a result, you could say I have a vested interest in the destiny of Thailand! My family and I have suffered greatly as a result of the demonic strongholds that have ruled in that nation. I say "have ruled"—past tense—intentionally, because I am absolutely convinced that a major stronghold in the nation has been broken.

Before we left, the more I prayed, the more I became convinced that shame is one of the primary strongholds binding and blinding the nation of Thailand. It is certainly what choked the life out of me as a child after I returned from Thailand. First, it was the shame of feeling that somehow I

had done something very wrong that caused this bad thing (my dad's death) to happen to me and my family. Then the shame was deepened by being the only child in my class at school without a father—rather than receiving sympathy, I was often teased or simply shunned. It went on from there and the circumstances that fed the shame just got uglier and uglier. Once a particular lie establishes its roots in your heart and mind, it seems that you actually begin to “attract” additional circumstances that cause the root of the lie to sink deeper and deeper into your very being. That was my story for many years—until Jesus spoke the Truth of His acceptance and love over me and His cleansing blood set me free. Now, many years later, I had the opportunity to partner with Him in setting a nation free from that very same stronghold.

We went on this trip with very specific instructions from the Lord to carry out a very specific “intercessory assignment.” He gave us Exodus 23:23-24 which, in v.23, talks about being led into the land of the enemy. It then goes on to say (in v.24) “Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones.” So demolish them we did—in the spirit through our prayers, and also in the natural through a very specific prophetic act that involved, quite literally, “breaking its sacred stones.” I don't know if any of us realized just how powerful that particular act of obedience would prove to be.

In an openly idolatrous nation, the “principalities and powers,” as the Bible refers to them, are often attached to specific national idols. In Thailand, the Grand Palace is the spiritual seat of the nation. We believed that this particular “principality” was “resident” in a specific temple at the Grand Palace. On our last trip, two years ago, we very tangibly felt its evil presence, but at that time had not been led to specifically pray against it. We knew this time was different and after completing the first part of our task in accordance with the word the Lord had given us, we were ready to move on to the Grand Palace where we thought we would “finish the job.” But God, who has quite a sense of humor, had a slightly different plan.

The King of Thailand's sister died in January and, at the time of our visit, the nation was still observing an extended period of mourning. As a result, we were advised to dress in black when we went to the Grand Palace in order to be respectful of the culture. We were quite the sight! Picture six middle age-ish women, flowing in black from head to toe—in the stifling heat, no less! But the Thai's loved us and kept saying, “Oh! You've come to pray!” We'd smile sweetly and say, “Yes! We've come to pray!” And pray we did. Amongst ourselves we were joking that we were going to a funeral, all right, but it wasn't for the princess. We had no idea just how true those words were.

We went to several areas of the Grand Palace grounds and prayed discretely as the Lord led us. Finally we felt it was time to go to the specific temple where we planned to pray and make a proclamation against this “entity.” We arrived all prepared for “battle” so imagine our surprise when we discovered that our old “friend” was already quite dead and gone! The temple looked exactly the same as it had at other times, but trust me—“in the spirit”—it was not the same at all! As we walked out of the building, marveling at the work God had already done, my friend Lynn remarked, “There's nothing there! It's just a hunk of glass!” And it was true...it was completely gone! The stronghold had already been torn down—we believe it happened when we stepped out in faith and “smashed its sacred stones” the day before—the Lord really had invited us to the Grand Palace to attend its “funeral” that day!

I realize this whole scenario may seem a bit “out there” for some to accept as true. Believe me, I understand! Quite frankly, it is a bit “out there” for me too. Personally, I don't want to put any focus on darkness—I much prefer living in the Light and I want to keep my eyes on Jesus—but as I do put my eyes on Him, sometimes He brings revelation that can't be ignored. The type of revelation He brought for this trip was, at times, a bit weird even for me. I've gotten quite accustomed to walking in unseen realms through the years, but honestly this whole thing still seemed a bit surreal! Because of that, I asked the Lord to confirm it to me in a way that was more tangible. In my spirit, I knew God had done something huge, but I wanted something concrete that I could hold on to. And you know what? He gave it to me! In fact, this is where the story gets really good!

We left Bangkok the day after our visit to the Grand Palace and, after a stop in Chiang Mai for a few days, ended our ministry time in Maesot. The Karen Tribe believers in Maesot and the surrounding villages were holding a large conference (2,000 + attendees) that was to begin the day we arrived. There are more Christians among the Karen than any other people group in or near Thailand. Their story of faith is amazing and a “God thing” to be sure. To summarize very quickly, despite living in an idolatrous culture, long before they had any specific knowledge of Jesus or of Scripture, the Karen people had a very biblical understanding of creation and of one true God. They even had a tradition passed down from generation to generation that one day a “white brother” would come with a book from God. (For a more detailed account of their story, check out Don Richardson’s book *Eternity in Their Hearts*.) Needless to say, by the time the first missionaries arrived, the Karen were ready and waiting to learn more about this God! Many have been whole heartedly following and serving Him ever since.

Unfortunately, the Karen are also one of the most persecuted people groups on the planet. They have been victims, for many years now, of genocide in their native Burma. Many of the Karen believers that have escaped the horrors of Burma are confined to refugee camps in Thailand—often living out their entire existence in the camps. Even the fortunate ones who have rights of citizenship in Thailand are often discriminated against because of their ethnicity. Most are also extremely poor. Yet despite these hardships, many have a glowing faith and trust in Jesus. They have learned to love those who have persecuted them and desire to see the good news of Jesus’ love and salvation spread throughout the land. We believe God has chosen these special people and set them apart to be His special messengers to take the gospel throughout Thailand and even throughout the surrounding nations.

When we arrived at the conference the first night, we were not involved in any ministry commitments—we were simply “guests” that evening. The main message was being given in Thai and then being translated into the Karen dialect—neither of which we understood. But God is such a good provider and without any fanfare or even real introductions a missionary, who just happened to speak fluent Thai and a smattering of Karen, noticed us and quietly slipped behind us and began to translate the entire message. I’m so glad he did!

The heart of the message was that it was now time for the Karen to join together to take the gospel throughout the nation. And get this—the specific verse the message was built around was Exodus 23:25! Of course, Exodus 23:25 just “happens” to be what follows Exodus 23:24! In fact, we learned that this was the theme verse for the entire conference: “So you will serve the Lord your God and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you” (NKJV). For the Karen, this verse was a commissioning—they will serve the Lord by spreading the good news of His love and salvation throughout the land—as well as a much needed promise of restoration and blessing. For me, it was the exact word of confirmation I needed to know that God really did tear down a huge barrier in the land and that the time for the gospel of the kingdom to spread like wildfire throughout Thailand is indeed close at hand. To top it all off, the last night we were there, God even gave us the privilege of being able to pray a blessing of commissioning and release over the believers gathered at the conference!

Coincidence? Well, considering the thousands upon thousands of verses in the Bible, I think it would actually take more “blind” faith to believe it was just a coincidence. Seems a whole lot more like a “God-incident” to me! The timing was no coincidence either. When I prayed the words at the beginning of this story, I believed that during this trip we would deal a “blow” to this particular principality but that it wouldn’t necessarily be the final blow. However as we were praying one day, another member of our team said she truly felt in her spirit that God was going to use our prayers to take it down. She was right.

When I asked the Lord why I had been praying about the “three strikes,” He showed me that it was a very personal thing. Since this was my third trip to Thailand—those were the three strikes that represented my little part in “demolishing” this enemy. Many through the years have prayed for the salvation of Thailand. The prayers our team prayed before and during this trip combined

together to be the final few drops that filled the bowl to overflowing so that this particular part of the answer was ready to spill over. I'm sure the Lord led me pray those specific words as a means of graciously enabling me to "see" the role He had given me as this little drama unfolded over the years.

It wasn't hard for me to grasp that there was significance in how the Lord allowed me participate with Him during this most recent trip. It was also even pretty easy to understand my role on our last trip. But I honestly didn't "get" how my first ministry trip to Thailand had much impact at all. It had been a very different type of trip and, for me, a very difficult trip. We had primarily spent our time outside of Bangkok and the trip itself had not been particularly focused on prayer. When I questioned the Lord about the significance of that first trip relative to the current events, Jesus very gently spoke to my heart and said simply, "You showed up." And I understood. I knew that in going back that first time I showed a willingness to take His love back to the land where my own heart had been broken. I guess it's not so hard to imagine that each time we choose to love despite our own pain—it does indeed deal a blow to the powers of darkness.

I left Thailand in 1968—almost exactly forty years ago. The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years before a new generation emerged that was ready to go in and actually possess the land. There are many other significant periods of "forty" in Scripture and they consistently represent times of trial and testing—times of trial and testing that are always followed by a period of restoration and, often, revival. I believe restoration is coming to the Karen. I believe revival is coming to Thailand. And, on a more personal level, I believe restoration—and revival—is coming to me and my own family.

Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs. -Isaiah 61:7

A battle has been won but the war isn't over. The Lord simply used us to help prepare the way. When the walls of Jericho came down, an opening was made into the Promised Land but the Israelites still had to go in and possess the land. The Karen, along with others God has called to join with them, still need to go in and possess the "land" in Thailand. But the way has been made and ... "This is what the Lord says: 'Keep justice and do what is right, for My salvation is close at hand and My righteousness will soon be revealed.'" -Isaiah 56:1

To that I say, "Yes and Amen!" One, two, three strikes ... and darkness is out. Instead of shame, double honor has been proclaimed over Thailand. Match point—Jesus! Time for all darkness to be swallowed up by His marvelous Light. In Thailand ... and in all the nations of the earth.

So, let Your kingdom come, Lord ... on earth as it is in heaven.