



Sri Lanka

A Pearl in Troubled Waters

On my desk was a paid ticket to Colombo, Sri Lanka. In front of me on the computer screen was an Australian government travel advisory. It recommended that Australian citizens reconsider any travel plans to visit Sri Lanka. Strife in the north and east, abductions, a vulnerable international airport, and general instability, were the reasons cited. What is a man to do? Wait on the Lord!

The Holy Spirit said that He had set before me an open door; go in faith (II Corinthians 5:7)! I am very glad I did! My recent visit to Sri Lanka (7th to 14th October) was my fifth, and what a joy it was. Of the five, four have occurred within a two years period. My first visit was in 1980. It was my first ministry trip and I made it with my new wife. We were delegates at Impetus '80 in Colombo, a conference for the third world church. The convener was Colton Wickramaratne, pastor of the People's Church and Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Ceylon. Impetus '80 became the launch of our public ministry and we have remained in full-time Christian service ever since. In 2005, I was privileged to return to the People's Church and report to them what had happened in the 25 years since Impetus '80.

On this latest visit, Teach All Nations Inc. was the guest of Calvary Church Mirihana in Colombo, My host was Pastor Ajith. My main purpose was to minister to pastors and the general congregation as a whole. This last journey was entirely based in Colombo, the capital city.

Sri Lanka has a long and proud history. The Sinhalese people, allegedly from Northern India, settled in what is now known as Sri Lanka in the 6th Century B.C. Buddhism, the main religion of the country, arrived around the 3rd Century B.C. Two great civilizations emerged afterwards. The first was based at Anuradhapura (200 BC to 1000 AD) and the second at Polonnaruwa (AD 1100-1200). Around the

14th Century the Tamil population was settled in the north of the country by rulers from South India.

As the 'pearl of the Indian Ocean' and the near neighbor of regional power India, in proximity to vital shipping lanes, Sri Lanka inevitably attracted the attention of the major empires. The 'heart of the pearl' was the city on Trincomalee on the east coast, with an outstanding natural port. The Portuguese came in the 16th Century but were replaced in the 17th Century by the Dutch (their descendants are called 'burghers'). The British, who coveted India, had their eyes on Sri Lanka as well, which was known by the name 'Ceylon'. They gained control in 1796, declared it a crown colony in 1802, and then united the country in 1815. Ceylon gained its independence from Britain on 4 February 1948 and changed its name to 'Sri Lanka' in 1972.

Long standing unrest between Tamil separatists, represented by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sinhalese majority exploded into open warfare in 1983. Over 60,000 people have perished in this on-going conflict. Norway helped to broker a cease-fire in early 2002, but negotiations broke down and violence flared again in 2006, though technically the cease-fire is still in effect.

The horrors of civil war over a period of two decades has taken over 60,000 lives. Nevertheless, at least half that number perished in a matter of minutes in the face of the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004. It was a terrible blow to the nation, with at least 440,000 people displaced, 6,000 missing, and 1.5 billion dollars of damage. Reconstruction continues to this day.



Sri Lanka (map courtesy of CIA World Factbook)

Sri Lanka has 21 million people, of which 74% are Sinhalese, 7% are Muslims, and Tamils 7%. Buddhism is the main religion of the country with 69% of the population belonging to it. Hindus claim 7% and Muslims 7.5% of all Sri Lankans. In the midst of this ethnic cocktail, the Christian church stands at 6%. Despite persecution from without and sectarianism within, the church in Sri Lanka is here to stay—and growing.

In times gone by, Sri Lanka's strategic value was found in Trincomalee. Today, its strategic significance has been transferred to its people. Gracious, hospitable, and armed with winning smiles, Sri Lankans are making their mark in their homeland and in the thriving Sri Lankan diaspora, with over 700,000 serving in the Middle East alone. The UK, Canada (Toronto), and Australia, also have strong Sri Lankan communities. They are also very well connected.

Despite the civil war, corruption, the tsunami, and religious tension, there is an unmistakable joy found in Sri Lankan believers that defies logic; it simply comes from the grace of God. They are more hungry for the things of God than in the comfortable western world--exceedingly grateful.

During this recent visit, my ministry activities included:

- Leaders Meetings: Victorious Christian Living, Leadership in Stressful Situations, character and integrity;
- Evangelistic Rally;
- Lanka Bible College faculty development meeting;
- Leadership meeting of 160 at the People's Church (6,000 strong—also had fellowship with Senior Pastor Dishan Wickramaratne & his parents Colton & Susanne);
- Baptism in the Spirit Rally;
- End Times and World Trends seminar

Ministry Highlights (including testimonies from previous recent visits)

- **Ovarian Problem Healed:** A word of knowledge was given for a woman who suffered from ovarian problems and faced surgery. After receiving prayer, she was completely healed and the doctor gave her a clean bill of health.
- **Depression Healed:** A young woman received a word of knowledge to 'cast out the spirit of oppression and you will soar.' Her depression was healed, she was completely transformed, and testified of 'new miracles.'
- **Intestinal Problem Healed:** A man received prayer for intestinal problems, identified by the word of knowledge, and said that the pain left immediately.
- **Strength Received:** A young married woman, who just found out that her 'Christian' husband had been unfaithful, received the Baptism in the Spirit and found strength to face the future with confidence.

- **Church Replanted** A young pastor came to the meeting in distress during my earlier visit; his non-Christian neighbors were persecuting his fledgling church. He received prayer and strength to replant a new church.
- **Evangelism and healing** Another man received prayer and prophecy in an earlier visit. From these, he did a 40 day fast and entered into a ministry of evangelism and testifies of many healings.
- **Come Holy Spirit, At Last** After waiting for 20 years, a woman joyfully received the Holy Spirit baptism at the rally; her daughter was also baptized on the same night.
- **Salvations:** Several people were saved during this visit. Perhaps the most thrilling were Ashley and Natalie, a young married ethnic Sri Lankan couple who live in Melbourne, Australia, and were visiting Colombo. They are being followed-up by a church in the City of Casey.
- **Unforgettable Last Meeting:** Thanks to Pastor Dulkith (he resembles my Arab cousins), who gave me the opportunity to be part of a memorable meeting—a ‘wild night’ in the Spirit. After preaching about faith, we saw people saved (including one man who came for the first time), baptism in the Spirit, healings, and then, for the first time in 17 years, I did impromptu baby dedications and prayers of blessings on the children.

Pastoral Testimonies

- *‘Yes we had a brilliant time with you-if I could describe it that way. The anointing for teaching, preaching, healing, prophesying was great. Every meeting was a blessed one. Praise the Lord.’*
- *‘We marveled at the depth of revelation in the Word preached and the accuracy of the prophetic word given.’*
- *‘Your visit has given us great blessing, encouragement, and direction for the ministry.’*

The Future

The Sri Lankan church is strong and expanding. They are experiencing great grace in the face of persecution and internal division. Evangelism and church planting are proceeding well. **The great need is for sound Bible teaching.** The hunger for the Word and thirst for the Spirit is almost unrivalled of any place I have seen.

In terms of global ministry, Sri Lanka is a pearl in its own right. It also serves as a great springboard to South Asia, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

Consider partnering with Teach All Nations Inc. in its **‘South Asia: One Hundred Pastors, One Hundred Churches’** outreach to equip 100 pastors to build 100 churches. Click onto: http://www.tan.org.au/support_us.asp

Your partnership will bring peace to troubled waters!



Ps. Dulcith, the 'Arab' Sri Lankan



Kameel Majdali with Sri Lankan Pastors after seminar



Pastor Roville & Marion, up and coming leaders in Sri Lanka



Host Pastor Ajith

(In addition to Ps Ajith, Ps Dishan, Ps Colton & Susanne, I want to thank my interpreter Ps Sugith, my beloved companion Suresh, my zealous intercessor Ps Dulkith, my travel agent Thushani, Amanda for my marvelous accommodation, and every pastor who came to the meetings).