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“If you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman. They for their part may turn to you, but as for you, you must not turn to them.” said God to Jeremiah as part of his on-the-job training for ministry. (Jer.15:19) This remains just as powerful a statement about the key to effective Christian ministry today. Jeremiah had already indicated that he knew where ‘the precious’ would come from, “Thy words were found and I ate them, and thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart.” (15:16)

Among the avalanche of information and propaganda which threatens to bury us every day through the news media, internet, the entertainment industry and even books in 2003, there are some valuable gems in a mountain of rubbish. They are of value because they are what God said in His word, now quoted or more often paraphrased into a modern language and context. Digging them out is the challenge. Even in the more modest flood of ideas that flows from pulpits, Christian books and radio or TV stations, there needs to be a careful filtration process which sorts what is really of God from our own ideas. The reputation of the speaker or writer is no guarantee that every word is precious. The only guarantee is to check what we hear or read with God and His word for ourselves. Only then will we become His spokesmen.

Jeremiah was God’s spokesman for 53 increasingly difficult years. He began during the reign of Josiah, a fine believer, continued through the last four idolatrous kings of Judah and ended his ministry as a hostage in Egypt, where according to Jewish tradition, apparently confirmed by Hebrews 11:37, he was sawn in two after being placed in a hollow log. The pressure on him to turn to the world around him was enormous but he continued to ‘extract the precious from the worthless’ and suffer for it. Just a few turned to him. He must humanly have been immensely lonely at times, but he refused to deviate from the truth. Nothing has changed.

In the last two months we have lost two good friends whom many of you may have met. Hawi Lian, known to most of us as Palian, was from Myanmar where he had sought to be a faithful witness of Christ, first in the service of a corrupt government, then as an evangelist. He came to Bible School, then stayed on in Auckland to pastor Burmese people because he was a wanted man back home. His wife and six children escaped to India. He had been able to bring four of the children here before he suffered a stroke.

Truman Bakrid from India led a very effective ministry in his country helping to strengthen other struggling ministries. Several times he stayed with us and taught our students. We all loved his humble but compelling message. For the last few years he has represented us in India, helping to work out which potential students would benefit from coming to the Lodge. We greatly valued his wisdom and friendship. He

died just a few weeks ago during surgery leaving a daughter 19 yrs and son 21 yrs who have already lost their mother four years ago.

Two of our regular lecturing team have recently had serious health problems. Frank Hutchinson is recovering from major surgery but hopes to be back in a few more weeks. Radha Poonan has taught at the Lodge for over 20 years. Because of an increasingly difficult illness he is taking a break from lecturing at least until the end of the year. We deeply appreciate his faithfulness in contributing so effectively to the lives of so many students and hope very much for his recovery.

For the first time in our history we have had to say no to more students until the end of the year. With over 200 we realised we could not care adequately for them if we grew further. Not only the lecture hall but the tutors and the office team were overwhelmed. What continues to be so exciting however is not just the number but the spiritual hunger of those who are coming. NZQA finally came to audit us in May. On the whole it went well although there is a list of bureaucratic requirements we have to meet. For the first time we believe those who came acknowledged what we are seeking to do and we were able to agree on a way of meeting their expectations which does not compromise our calling.

A team of 12 students leaves tomorrow for outreach in Fiji in the area of Muanicula, led by Solo and Akanisi Tuibua who have been based at the Lodge for about 5 years and who come from the village next to our property.

Barbara is over at Precept headquarters in Chattanooga, USA, for a further period of training which should help the continuing growth of Precept in NZ, through which many of our students and some outsiders are learning to extract the precious from the worthless for themselves. A team led by Chris Pairama have taken on the administration of Precept to free Barbara to concentrate on training leaders.

John Wandera in Uganda has faced major difficulties. One of the churches he leads was burned down by arsonists. He fell off his bike and suffered a knee injury. Children in the area he works have been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army so much of the population lives in fear.

Alfred Nsofwa in Zambia also works with orphans, trains pastors and leads a group of churches. They have been reaching out into Congo and Rwanda where the situation continues to be dangerous and unstable.

Talking of being unstable and living dangerously, our family have just returned from a skiing camp on Mt Ruapehu which Nick led. There were 29 of us and a marvellous sense of God's presence and provision. Chris and I are rather proud of our Olympic style skiing style – still on the beginners' slopes. We are already planning for Water Weeks in January. Nick continues to pass units well and is now half way through his BA. In a couple of weeks we celebrate his 21st. Time flies! His magazine, Incite, has a new edition, hot off the photocopier. Do let him know on magillaguerilla@xtra.co.nz. if you want one. Pete is also developing real leadership potential – usually in the right direction...

Keep extracting the precious from the worthless. Love in Christ, Tony and Chris

