

## *Standing With Myanmar*

*(Preached by Cheryl Williams at FBC, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, Mark 9:30-37, using material supplied by Baptist Mission Australia, 'Stand With Myanmar' campaign)*

Welcoming others, putting others before self are themes, we find throughout the entire bible. The Hebrew bible is full of instructions about the need to care for the widow, the orphan and the stranger.

Jesus reminds the twelve that if they are serious about following him, if they truly want to be great, then they must not just know these things, they must live it out. This is how you have a relationship with God.

James adds to this by reminding us that to live the Christian life means acting on what Jesus has said, and to do so with gentleness, peace, compassion or mercy. Such living should be done without showing favoritism to any one person or group of people.

Today we join with Australian Baptists to pray for our brothers and sisters in Myanmar. Many in Myanmar who are Christian are actually Baptists. Many of our Victorian Baptist churches are Burmese.

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is in Southeast Asia. It has a population of about 54 million people and its land mass is about 10% the size of Australia. It is made up of tropical rainforests and mountains. It borders India, Bangladesh, China, Thailand and Laos.



It is divided into a number of states. We are particularly familiar with Kachin State and to a lesser extent Karen and Chin states.



As we know, 3½ years ago there was a military coup, and it seems that things have not improved since, although we don't hear much about it in the news anymore. The estimated death toll is about 50,000 people, more than 2.5 million have been displaced and just over 1 million have become refugees and asylum seekers.

The military junta burn villages and cities to the ground and engage in airstrikes every day. This has led to many fleeing their homes into the jungle or into adjoining countries. My Chin friend's family fled with nothing into Mizoram, India just days before their village was burnt to the ground. As a consequence, this family, like other families who find themselves in other countries, in refugee camps on the borders or if they able to remain in their towns are in great need of education, medical supplies, food, water and clothing. When my friend was able to go to India to see her quite ill parents earlier this year, she took my old blood glucose measuring equipment and I had to buy a supply of testing strips so her mother can monitor her diabetes. She also took suitcases of vitamins and clothing for her family and others who fled.

Many people live in refugee camps on the borders of Myanmar. Baptists for a long time have worked with Karen refugees on the Thai-Burma border, where schools and even a theological college have been set up. These are not safe places, there are attacks often and the Thai government has not embraced them as refugees. There is an uncertainty living there – never knowing when you might be attacked or forced to move. Not knowing how long you might be there – it might be 2 or 3 years or even ten years. I had a friend who went to the Thai-Burma border as volunteer to teach theology, when he came back, he showed me the bullet hole in his passport that had been in his pocket and led to him being hospitalized in Germany. Just an example of the everyday terror the people of Myanmar endure every day.

Such things cause huge anxiety for family members who now live in Australia, some of whom spent years in those refugee camps and had to flee without anything and leaving family behind.

*(Show Baptist Mission Australia video clip)*

How might we offer hope in this situation? How might we care for the people of Myanmar? How do we live out the teaching of Jesus, of Mark, of James, in the midst of this conflict that has continued for too long.

First, we can pray.

Pray for the leaders of churches in Myanmar – pray for strength as they lead in difficult times.

Pray for children and young people – that they might know love and be able to attend school.

Pray for the sick and vulnerable – that they may get the medicine and care they need.

Pray that political prisoners might be released.

Pray that refugees and displaced people might be safe.

Pray for peace and justice in Myanmar.

Pray for families here, who worry about their relatives.

Second, become advocates, using our voices to make a stand.

We can sign the petition today organized by Baptist Mission Australia and Baptist World Aid, which urges Senator Penny Wong to undertake new and important actions, I have it available today.

Or you can write to your local MP, telling them about your concerns.

Third, give financially.

Tax deductible gifts will go towards vital humanitarian support such as: support for children and schools, and income generating skills training.

Non-tax deductible gifts will go towards faith-based support initiatives including: trauma training for pastors, leadership training and church planting.

Gifts can be made directly to Baptist Mission Australia, or you can put your gift in the envelopes given out today and place it into our offering bowl and the church will send your gift on.

[Give – Stand With Myanmar](#)

May we be people who live out our faith wisely as James suggests. Might we pray, give and advocate for the people of Myanmar and peace within her borders with gentleness, generosity and compassion. ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all’, says Jesus. Amen.