



Guatemala Crusades *by Gene and Jean Easley*

POCHUTA

The village of Pochuta was a mountain town in the western part of Guatemala. It was a very difficult-to-reach village of mostly indigenous people from one of the twelve principal tribes of Guatemala. The only access to the town was over a dirt and rock road that was barely passable for our car. It took us an hour and a half to go the last fifteen miles from the main highway to the village. Most dirt roads in Guatemala are bad, especially during the rainy season, and the huge rocks imbedded in this one made the jolts from hitting bottom even worse.

The people in that area had faced many trials because of the civil unrest. Guerilla strongholds were sprinkled around the countryside near town. We were not aware of the danger abreast, however, as we walked through the streets of Pochuta, sat at the tables of our host families, and visited local businesses during the days of our meeting.

The pastor of a small church decided to hold a three-day crusade in his town, which he said had never been done before to his knowledge. He asked Bro. Easley to preach the crusade, and the pastor was able to secure a large theater building in the heart of town for the meetings. He told Bro. Easley he was a little concerned about filling the building because his church membership only numbered 16 adults plus children. So, the pastor had done much praying for the services and the attendance.



Much to our delight and amazement, each night of the crusade the building was filled as word spread about the American preacher and the meetings. The conditions were primitive...the seating for about 300 consisted of hard benches, and the only lighting was a string of bulbs down the middle of the rather large auditorium. The platform was made of sifting sand, which filled our shoes as we walked on it.

Nevertheless, the people continued to come until the children were ushered to the front altar area to sit on the floor making more room on the seats for adults as well as the standing area in the aisles. The whole building was wall-to-wall with people, and we could see several young men hanging from the double door entranceway. There were several hundred, in addition to those who were seated, standing in the aisles. A crowd gathered, also, in the street in front of the building. Someone estimated that there were another 200 to 300 people on the outside of the building looking in. Many of these people had never heard the Gospel before.

There was good response to the preaching and singing...many answered the altar calls each night, and many were prayed for...for healing and for answering the call of God. We were so moved by the great turnout for the meetings.



On the last day of the meeting, we were given a tour of the town by the pastor, and as we walked the length and breadth of it, he related to us an incident that had recently taken place there. He said at the north end of town, "It was on this road last week where the guerillas wiped out the army

garrison." It was probably a good thing he had left the telling of that story until the final day!

During the last evening's service, the rains came in heavily and stayed and stayed and stayed. We were in a high village, but we knew that the road, though it had been dry upon our arrival, would deteriorate quickly with the rains. We also now knew that the village was a hotbed for guerilla activity and likely surrounded by combatants. As I lay abed that night, I prayed for the rain to stop, for the sake of the road and for our safety, as we were to leave the village with only our interpreter as a guide and helper early, early the next morning.

Before dawn, we said goodbye to our new friends and pulled out of the village of Pochuta. We desired to reach the paved road in good time and without meeting strangers. However, it was not to be. The streams had washed out the road in one place, and as we attempted our crossing, the car slid and sank to the bottom of the shallow stream. No amount of gunning the engine would release the car, which had by now high-centered.

Behind us, however, was gathering a line of buses, pickups, and cars--also all wanting to hurry to the highway. With our car stuck there, there was probably no choice but for them to give us a hand! A courageous bus driver took the wheel and, after the men had placed rocks under the tires and attached us to the chain of a big pickup, they drove our wagon out of the riverbed and up the other side! Praise God! Without further delay, we made tracks for the highway and home. Never did we see the camouflage uniforms or banditos, but we were so grateful to those early morning rescuers from the ravages of Mother Nature. We were also rejoicing over the many, many people of that little village who heard the Gospel for the first time!



El Porvenir

Early in our missionary career, we preached in a farming village in a southeast department (state) of Guatemala in the town of El Porvenir. We shall not soon forget the beautiful strains of Gospel choruses from the little squeezebox accordions as they came down from the church wall for the worship services. The people seemed to literally come out of the woods, as the small white church was so remotely placed on the back road among the high trees.

One service there and its results are so memorable to us. Bro. Easley preached that night on the White Throne Judgment. He emphasized the question, "Is your name written in the Lamb's book of life?" He stated the question again and again, saying to the people that it was imperative that they know whether their names were written there. He said, "You must know it, without a doubt, that your name is written in the Lamb's book of life!"

What none of us knew was that the loudspeakers on the front of the church, which announce services and summon the people from their hidden farms and forested trails, were still sending the whole service, music and preaching included, through the countryside all around that community with great force. Normally, the pastor would have turned off the loudspeakers before the service began. But that evening, he forgot. Even people who had not walked the road to the church heard the message about the Great White Throne!

The pastor told us later that the next day he began to have people come to him and ask him, "How can we be sure that our names are written in the Lamb's book of life?" He was, of course, happy to help guide the people to the Lord. He told us that several of the people that came to him did give their hearts to the Lord! So, El Porvenir--both churched and un-churchd--heard the call that night to be ready. Praise God!



Guatemala City

Another pastor was in Guatemala City, preaching in a church that had at one time been a non-Pentecostal church. Some of the people had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, however, and wanted the church to be Pentecostal. So they joined the Prince of Peace movement in Guatemala. Other congregants, however, were not so happy to entertain Pentecost. Unbeknown to us, the service we were

to preach there was during a time of real conflict among the two groups of believers as to whether they would accept the Pentecostal experience fully or not.

When the service proceeded, the message the Lord laid on Bro. Easley's heart was regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and he gave his own testimony of a great revival in First Assembly of God Church in Tucson, AZ, when he was stationed in the Air Force there in 1965. There was a great anointing on the service that day as Bro. Easley preached, and at the conclusion of the service, the people were lifting their hands and crying and worshipping in a wonderful way. It was when we had lunch at the pastor's home afterward that we first understood that that was not the normal conduct of his people.

Pastor Flores said that there had recently been a great deal of resistance by some of the people to the Pentecostal message, but they had been praying for a breakthrough to come regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That morning, he said, the very ones who had been the most resistant were the ones with hands lifted, tears streaming down their faces, and getting through to God. He was thanking the Lord for the great breakthrough that had come in answer to their prayers.

JALAPA

In a 1985 campaign Bro. Easley preached on a high plateau in the City of Jalapa, Guatemala (about 60 miles east of Guatemala City and over the mountains). The testimony of the young man who pastored the Prince of Peace Church in that community has always been a blessing to us. He began pastoring the church when he was fifteen years old. When he was 16 years of age in 1976, the church was almost totally destroyed by the devastating Guatemala earthquake. The destruction from that earthquake was far reaching with some 23,000 killed and one million Guatemalans left homeless. This young preacher, as a 16-year-old boy, rebuilt the church from the great destruction, and when we preached there in 1985 had a thriving congregation.

Though his family was very poor and lived in a small, very primitive dwelling behind the church, the pastor willingly sacrificed for the Gospel. The family had very few personal belongings, and the furnishings they did have were meager— an open fire on which to cook, no sanitation or running water and, certainly, no hot water. Yet, in spite of his limited resources, this young man very happily paid for a daily radio program and was quick to relate how God was touching the lives of his community. People were being healed, saved, and delivered, he said, through the broadcast of his program.

One day, while we were ministering in his church at a ministers' conference, the young pastor invited Bro. Easley to preach on the program. As they walked several blocks to the station, the pastor related his excitement about what God was doing through it. People were coming to his church after hearing the program, and many were being saved and healed. This young pastor, and many others like him, was more than willing to make tremendous personal sacrifices to see the Gospel spread among his people.



Asequia

This story concerns the healing miracle in Asequia. Bro. Easley preached a three-day campaign in the little farming village of Asequia in 1985 for Pastor Adan Ramiriz, and this was the first out-of-doors crusade that we preached in Guatemala. The open-air meeting was held in front of a business in an open area; the church put up a platform and strung lights around the perimeter, and brought out chairs and benches and blankets for the people to sit on. The music was loud and long and it seemed it took a long time for the leaders to put Bro. Easley on the platform to preach.



After the preaching, praying, and shaking hands with the people had concluded, a mother came up with her sick infant for prayer. With the mother was a girl about 8 or 9 years of age. We laid hands on the baby and asked for the Lord to heal him. We did not know that this family lived next door to the church of the pastor for whom we were holding the crusade.



The next morning, bright and early, the little girl appeared at the church compound where we had spent the night and wanted us to go home with her. Our Spanish was not too good, but we understood her gestures to take us along well enough, and at her much pleading, we went. When we got there, she brought the baby out and said that he was now completely well and praised the Lord for healing him! We did too! She wanted to say thank you for praying for her brother by presenting us with a little white

confectionery made and sold by the poor in Guatemala. She was so thrilled with the baby's healing, as was her mother, that we have never forgotten the little girl's reaction to it. All these years later, we still remember the look of marvel on her face and her sweet kiss on ours.

El Rodeo

The purpose of our trip to El Rodeo was that it was near the home of one of our former Bible school students who had arranged for us to preach a "vigilia" (Watch Night) service. Because the drive was so rough, we had to leave our car at the home of our friend's brother at the base of the mountain and ride a four-wheel drive up to the village. Our Oldsmobile was too wide and too low for the little mountain road.

On the way to his family's home, our friend had related to us that the four-wheel drive in which we would be riding had contributed to his brother's backsliding for a time. In Guatemala, very few of the country's poor ever hope to own a car or truck. When the young man, who had worked very hard for it, was finally able to acquire the vehicle (which, by the way, was a 1950 Land Rover with a crank starter), he was so proud that he quit serving the Lord for a time.

We left our vehicle in his yard and loaded the truck with things we would need for our overnight stay. The trip from the town to the road where the ascent began up the side of the mountain was a difficult one even when we were still on the pavement. That old truck did not have a sign of a spring or a shock left on it. Even on the paved highway where there were no potholes, the truck would hit bottom with such a jolt that it would shake our bones and teeth! Bro. Easley said later that as he sat there thinking about that backsliding story and that old truck, he wondered why anyone would backslide over a truck like that!

The ascent up the mountain was on a winding, dirt road, only just a little wider than the truck. Unfortunately, we could not look down at the terrain below as we went higher and higher. We climbed and wound our way up, up, up to the spot where the Watch Night service would be held. On the mountain, we just had time to freshen up before the service began, during the course of which Bro. Easley was asked to fill in for several other speakers who didn't make it!

When the meeting concluded long after midnight, we were given accommodation in the home of the assistant pastors...sleeping fully dressed in the same room with the whole family. There was no running water of any kind, no bathroom, and no electricity. At sunrise, the family headed for the river to bathe, while we took sponge baths. That morning, the pastor commented on the scratching sounds during the night, saying that the rats had been busy! All night, I had thought that the noise was chickens looking for worms! I was very naïve, obviously, but relieved to have the night behind us.

The decent down the mountain was an ordeal not only because of the truck's condition, but we also learned that the wooden block in the back of the truck was to be used as a braking mechanism. Whenever a stop was needed (to permit other vehicles to pass in the one available lane), one man was assigned to jump out of the back of the pickup and lodge the block quickly under the wheel. That was the brake! We all wanted to walk down the mountain, especially I, but the trip was several miles long.

When we finally arrived at the bottom, needless to say, the old Land Rover was a hero for getting us safely back to our own car. This story has become a favorite of ours and used in ministry opportunities to show the ease with which "things" cause the human heart to fall into idolatry. It was a valuable lesson learned that the enemy uses anything he can to divert our minds from living a Godly life. Today, we seldom see a four-wheel drive without being reminded of a man who backslid over an old 1950 Land Rover.