

Q & A with Dr. Albert Reyes **Author, *The Jesus Agenda***

Q: Your new book is titled *The Jesus Agenda*. There are some conflicting ideas in our popular culture concerning what that would be. Based on your study of Scripture, what does the Jesus agenda look like?

A: *The Jesus Agenda* is the vision for Christ's ministry on earth as He outlined it in His first sermon recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Simply put, Jesus came to redeem the lost—not just for eternity in Heaven but from lives of darkness here on earth. This is the Jesus agenda - preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for the prisoners, recovering sight for the blind, releasing the oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor. I believe every redeemed person—that is, every Christian—is called to become an agent of redemption. The Jesus agenda is not for the few. It is the responsibility and privilege of every believer.

Q: What inspired you to write *The Jesus Agenda*?

A: Looking back over my own ministry roles, from pastoring in economically depressed areas, to expanding educational opportunities to Hispanics, to heading a global relief ministry, the Lord sent me to places where I would have ample opportunity to preach good news to the poor, to help set captives free, to help people find healing, to reverse situations of oppression, and to introduce the hope of the Lord's favor for their lives. I chose to write this book because I wanted to tell my story of redemption and encourage followers of Jesus to accept their commission as agents of redemption.

I first delivered this challenge in 2005 as I addressed the Baptist General Convention of Texas, comprised of 5,500 churches and 23 institutions (universities, hospital systems, human welfare agencies, and other affiliated ministries). My year as President of Texas Baptists came to a close, but the message of the Jesus Agenda continued to stir my spirit. Does the church that Jesus died for reflect the vision of His first sermon?

Today, I serve as President and CEO of Buckner International based in Dallas, Texas, a global multi-service ministry focused on making life better for vulnerable children, orphans, seniors and their families through redemptive transformation. Every day, I hear stories of redemption. I live with the conviction that I was blessed to bless others, saved to share with others, and redeemed for a purpose in God's story of redemption.

Q: Describe the qualities of an "agent of redemption."

A: An agent of redemption is a person of courage, compassion, and conviction on mission with Jesus to turn what was intended for harm into good. An agent of redemption has a personal calling to actively engage with people in his or her circle of influence to demonstrate a transformed life and to work, pray, and focus on the redemptive potential in everyone around him. They look at their family, neighborhood, community, state, nation, and world to ask, "How could this place look more like the Kingdom of God - right here, right now?" Then they take action. This person lives life in view of eternity.

Q: Who was *The Jesus Agenda* written to reach?

A: My first audience is the follower of Jesus who does not have an official leadership role or title in vocational ministry. I am writing to business leaders, lawyers, educators, engineers, teachers, professors, skilled-workers, homemakers, accountants, health professionals, middle and high school students, college students, graduate students, and service workers who long to make a difference and want to be on personal mission with God in the world. I want these readers to prayerfully consider this question. “How would your profession or vocational skills benefit the poor, those in prison, the physically challenged, and those who are oppressed in your community?”

The second audience I am addressing includes seminary students, bible college students, theological faculty and administrators, leaders in Christian higher education, pastoral leaders, missionaries, and vocational ministers. These people are the key to developing and unleashing agents of redemption in their ministries and circles of influence.

A third audience includes ministry leaders, mission leaders and strategists, mission executives, agency executives, and denominational leaders. I am hopeful that we will find our way toward collaboration for the sake of the Redeemer’s Kingdom.

Q: There are many great organizations aiming to mobilize “agents of change” to carry out the redemptive work of Jesus in the world—among them, Buckner International. Based on your experience, what are some obstacles that keep those organizations from making the greatest possible impact? How can those obstacles be overcome?

A: I am so thankful for the redemptive ministry taking place around the world, but my sense is that much of that work is done in silos and with very little to no coordination and collaboration on a global scale. This becomes a question of stewardship. More often than not, I have observed duplication rather than collaboration, resulting in less than excellent stewardship of Kingdom resources. One of the most challenging, yet rewarding, forms of Kingdom collaboration is when independent Christian or faith-based agencies collaborate for superior stewardship and transformation. When it makes sense to collaborate in complementary fashion, two agencies working together in the same community or city can make exponential impact by creating a seamless and comprehensive set of solutions for children and families in need. For several years we [Buckner] have enjoyed a collaborative relationship with International Justice Mission in Guatemala. We complement each other’s work and provide a comprehensive solution for girls engaged in human trafficking and sexual exploitation. At the writing of this book, I am in conversation with a Christian agency that works in the same country as Buckner does to discover how we might collaborate to benefit vulnerable children and their families. I am in conversation with a Christian university to explore ways we might engage students in global mission with Buckner to make a transformational impact and engage their students in projects that enhance their educational experience. I am also in conversation with a denominational family to explore ways we might engage congregations in global mission with Buckner. When undocumented workers are taken into custody of the Border Patrol on the Texas/ Mexico border, they are sent to Catholic Charities Refugee Center at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in McAllen for a shower, food, and clothing. Among the clothing is shoes collected through Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls®. I believe we can do more together for vulnerable children, orphans, and their families than we can do by ourselves.

Q: How does an agent of redemption reconcile the reality of life in the West with life in the developing world when it comes to matters of faith and action?

A: The advent of the internet, the ease of international travel, the abundance of financial resources, and the opportunity for incarnational presence places heavier responsibility on those of us in the West to serve “the least of these” in our global village. An agent of redemption is a person that keeps the memory of his or her redemption constantly in mind. This kind of person is also concerned about the story of redemption beyond the borders of the United States of America and throughout the global village. God’s heart is for the fatherless, the slave, the poor, and the oppressed. Jesus was crystal clear on this point, when we serve “the least of these,” we are serving Him.

Q: What keeps some Christians from fulfilling their God-given role as agents of redemption?

A: There are several reasons that Christians miss their place in Christ’s redemption ministry. One of the most common is simply underestimating their circle of influence. The truth is that anyone who interacts with people—no matter their profession, means, or background—has daily opportunities to act as an agent of redemption.

But there’s something else. Like many in my generation, I was raised believing that redemption was a one-sided coin; that the message of salvation was essentially a fire insurance policy from hell, even if a person was living in hell on earth. In this mindset, social ministry and evangelism were by nature mutually exclusive. But in my growth as a follower of Jesus, I’ve come to realize that the practical impact of the gospel and the gospel message of salvation cannot be separated. They are two sides of the same coin. Our God’s redemptive intent is comprehensive and holistic. Personal faith in Jesus as your redeemer goes far beyond solving the spiritual problem we have with sin. Redemption involves conforming everything about us into the purpose God has for our lives to bless us and those around us according to his plan in redemptive history for us and others around us.

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