

Exodus

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The Call to Stand on Holy Ground

The Exodus Series, Part 1 of 4

1. **The Call to Stand on Holy Ground**
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September 1, 1996

Exodus 3:1-10

Most of the people you meet each day, good bad or indifferent, live by their wits in this dog-eat-dog world and never think about God at all. If they ever do consciously think of God they probably think in terms of restrictions and oughts and shoulds. But at the same time most of the people we meet each day at some time or other have stopped and asked themselves the question, "Is this what life is all about?" For when we live by our wits or not, life is full of hard places.

If we were to be brutally honest, it isn't just the most of the people we meet that are frustrated with life at times— and who do not think of God most of the time. People LIKE YOU AND ME who should know better, or who may have been taught better, or even people who in earlier times at a youth camp somewhere or a revival meeting or a VBS made a commitment to God find that they can live a whole day a whole week a whole month without ever looking to God, and then one day ask that same question, "Is this what life is all about? Isn't there more than this?"

THIS IS WHERE THE EXODUS STORY COMES IN....

In the most modern, progressive, intelligent civilization the world had known to that time— a nation that had already produced man-made wonders like the great pyramids of Giza that were evidence of knowledge of celestial orbits— in that nation were several hundred thousand men, women and children who were descendants of the Hebrew Patriarchs. Four hundred years earlier Jacob had taken his tribe in a time

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of famine into Egypt, following his son Joseph who was viceroy of the entire land. They had been honored guests of the Pharaoh. At that time there were a total of 72 Hebrews.

But in the intervening 400 years governments had changed, and generations had passed and now the Egyptians had brutally dominated the Hebrews. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were reduced to living by their wits in the absence of God— or so they thought. But from time to time they raised their heads and hearts and voices and said, "O God! Is this all there is to life?" And so far as they knew — nothing! Nothing happened! Day followed day, and nothing happened.

WHAT A GREAT STORY THIS IS!!

Just as these people were praying almost in despair— several hundred miles to the southeast there was a solitary shepherd on the backside of the desert near a mountain called Horeb. He looked like any other shepherd, perhaps. He was a shepherd with a very interesting life story. He had been a prince. He tried being a hero. He became a fugitive. I have no idea what was going through this man's mind as he stood, a tiny isolated little speck of humanity in a vast dry wasteland south of the Negev. But Moses was about to have an encounter with God.

GOD MEETS ONE LONE MAN IN THE MIDDLE OF A BARREN DESERT—

The man, Moses, saw a fire. It was a fire that burned and burned and burned. Moses turned aside to see it. (Significant!) The scripture says (4) "When the LORD saw that (Moses) turned aside..." then Moses was confronted with Almighty God. Moses was drawn, but he was also almost in terror. It was electrifying.

After more than 3,000 years this story has tremendous significance. For it tells in language deeper than words can express, to those who will listen, something about what happens when we come into living contact with God.

THE WONDER OF GOD REACHING TO A HUMAN BEING

[All Moses could do was "draw near"...not generate the experience; also extreme reverence of Jews for this name "YHWH" and LORD in our OT...]

Rudolph Otto, a respected German scholar, used three Latin adjectives to describe encounters with God in the Bible in general, and this Burning Bush story in particular. Those three words are *tremendum*, and *mysterium*, and *fascinans*.

Tremendum: Otto used the word *tremendum* to express three aspects of a divine-human encounter. First, he said was (1) A sense of awe. It is, in his words, "a quite specific kind of emotional response, wholly distinct from that of being afraid, though it so far resembles it that the analogy of fear may be used to throw light upon its nature." The Scripture says "Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look at God." Later, when God had brought all the people to this place again they, too, were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance.

But there is more. *Tremendum* means also (2) an overpowering, a majesty— a majestic distance— realizing the infinite difference between the ineffable God and our mortal humanity. The prophet Habakkuk said: "I hear, and I tremble within; my lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters my bones, and my steps tremble beneath me." Daniel said, "My strength left me, and my complexion grew pale, and I retained no strength." Both these men stated later that they felt greatly beloved and yet they were shaken physically and mentally and spiritually.

Finally *tremendum* has elements of what can only be described as (3) sheer "energy." The "energy" is sometimes represented in fantastic ways— Ezekiel's wheels within wheels— the four living creatures of Revelation— even the picture of the living Savior in Revelation chapter one— (words like Psalm 29: 5 - 9)

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, And Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire, The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voices of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, "Glory!")

"Awe" like Abram in Genesis 15 when "a horror" came over him as God passed between the pieces of the sacrifice "Overpowering" like Habakkuk who says, "I hear,

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and I tremble within; my lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters my bones, and my steps tremble beneath me." Energy beyond any human-generated excitement!

[THAT IS A LONG WAY FROM BODY SURFING AT A JESUS ROCK CONCERT]

But AWE is not all when God asks us to turn aside: [Another word:]

Mysterium: Encounters with God can never be really described. And they cannot be duplicated or summoned up at will. Ezekiel is never ever willing to say he saw God or even God's glory— but he IS willing to say he saw something LIKE the glory of God:

And above the dome over their heads there was something LIKE a throne, in appearance LIKE a sapphire, and seated above the likeness of the throne was something that SEEMED like a human form..." and so on.

When the Bible tells about people coming into contact with God it never confuses this great I AM THAT I AM with the physical setting nor does it give any glory to the humans involved. God is not in the whirlwinds or the fire or in the burning bush or even in the mountain or the tablets of stone. Moses does not fast and pray until God has to do as Moses says. There is always mystery involved when the great God reaches out to communicate with people.

One might say God has a big problem. How does he get near to us without on the one hand consuming us with his energy, and on the other hand convince us that He really is interested in us if we will listen and respond in humility and faith. There will always be mystery.

[Finally— and wonderfully— there is another aspect:]

Fascinans: The final adjective Rudolph Otto uses to describe encounters with God is fascinans, or the root word for "fascination." There is a tremendous attraction within the human heart for the holiness of God. For God is white hot passionate caring LOVE. To think that someone just simply downright LOVES you is just about the most fascinating thing in the world.

"Love" of some kind or other is the dynamic that drives most of the dramas and novels of the world— the concept of loving and being loved. But no love can compare with the purity and intensity of the LOVE that emanates from an encounter with God.

Awe. Mystery. Great fascination! Moses is awed. He covers his face. He certainly does not understand. But what is this— this I AM THAT I AM finally saying to Moses?

THIS GREAT GOD CARES ABOUT PEOPLE

He is saying, to Moses,

"I have been listening to a bunch of people who are living by their wits, and who haven't really ever thought much of Me, except that I am "absent" from their lives. I have been hearing them ask 'Is this all there is to life?' And I have even heard some of them cry poor, broken prayers like, "O God, if there IS a God— like I have heard about in fairy tales and myths and stories about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob— why don't you show up here and help me? ' Well, Moses, I AM is going to show up! And GUESS WHO is going to introduce ME and begin the process of answering their prayers??"

God went on to say that the proof that He was really God would be that right here— right at the base of this mountain— one day you will be standing with those very people who are praying to Me right now— and together you will worship. And then, and then only, the fire disappeared. It did not "go out." It simply was gone, and there stood Moses all alone in the vast expanse of desert.

THERE IS A CONNECTION, OF COURSE, BETWEEN THE PEOPLE IN EGYPT ASKING "IS THIS ALL THERE IS TO LIFE?" AND THE BURNING BUSH EXPERIENCE OF MOSES— DO YOU THINK THERE MIGHT BE A CONNECTION OF GENUINE WORSHIP AND GOD'S LOVE FOR PEOPLE "OUT THERE"??

A lot of things happened in the next few months to Moses and to Egypt and the people who were slaves but were to become the people of God. Great miracles took place, and God nearly destroyed Egypt getting the people out and away from their old masters. But the bottom line is this: one man met God— Almighty God— and obeyed Him. When this one man invited the slaves in Egypt to follow God they

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believed him, they responded to the promises of this God. And one day the living descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stood at the Mountain of God, and they saw the fire and they experienced tremendum, and they experienced mysterium, and yet at the same time they knew fascinans.

When WE think of the Exodus we think of the details of the journey— the parting of the sea, the manna, the water from the rock— and that is only natural.

But really Exodus is about a God of fire and holiness and mystery who calls people to look up and believe and to walk with Him and trust Him and find they have never been so free and so happy. Exodus is about being drawn out of life that goes around in circles into a life that ascends in spirals that never, ever, ever end. Exodus is about an invitation to fellowship with the eternal God, the I AM THAT I AM.

THE WONDER OF EXODUS IS THAT GOD WANTS TO COME NEAR HIS PEOPLE AND NEVER, NEVER LEAVE THEM AGAIN!

So— who are we? and where is God? Are we saying "Is THIS all?" Can we ever see God inviting us to come nearer to Him? Will we take time to "turn aside"??

THE MESSAGE OF EXODUS IS THAT ORDINARY PEOPLE CAN EXPERIENCE THE TREMENDUM AND THE MYSTERIUM AND CERTAINLY THE FASCINANS OF COMING INTO GOD'S PRESENCE— AND THAT ORDINARY PEOPLE CAN WALK WITH GOD AND NEVER NEED TO LEAVE HIS FELLOWSHIP EVER AGAIN.

Prayer - 133 *I Love You Lord* — [Alleluia! Alleluia!]

Pathway to Salvation

The Exodus Series, Part 2 of 4

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September 8, 1996

Exodus 12:1-14

Matthew 18:15-20

The Exodus Begins

A CHALLENGE TO BELIEVE

As the story of Exodus began, the descendants of Jacob were living by their wits as best they could, surviving as virtual slaves in an alien culture. From time to time they cried out to God, "Is this all there is?" Then one day word went around the Hebrew quarters that a Bedouin shepherd had appeared claiming to be Moses, one of their own, a descendent of the patriarch Levi. This sunburned shepherd said that he had a message from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Deep in their hearts a spark of hope kindled. They wanted to believe, but believing is always a challenge. That spark of hope, when it is genuine, is beyond words of merely human persuasion. Revelation and faith never explain the mystery of God. Over the next days and weeks they became convinced that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whom they now began to know as Yahweh, really had heard their prayers of despair. They decided to follow Moses as he followed God.

God's directions then became more specific. The word came that they were to begin to prepare to leave Egypt forever. They would be leaving in a time of crisis. They would be leaving in a hurry, probably in the early morning hours just about dawn, on

a day sometime in the near future. They were told to pack up, and be ready at a moment's notice. In preparation for their final meal they were to get a supply of unleavened bread. They were to bring a yearling lamb into the houses. They would be told the night before that this was the night.

Four days after these preparations had been made the word went out: this is the night! Kill the lambs, and roast them. Cook the first batch of unleavened bread. Families— eat together and don't go out until morning— this is it! Passover was under way. Exodus had begun.

The path of salvation begins with OBEDIENCE BEFORE THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WORD - "when I see the blood I will pass over you"

It took courage for them to come together and decide that they would believe the God of their great fathers. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It took faith for them to obey orders even when they could not grasp the significance of what they were doing. That faith was expressed in simple obedience.

God's directions given through Moses and Aaron went beyond what they could understand. The idea of eating meat for strength, and unleavened bread that would not spoil along the way would seem to make sense. But they were to sprinkle the blood of the lamb on the sides and top of the door to their homes. It would be a sign and symbol of obedience. That did not "make sense." They simply obeyed!

The significance of the blood was different from all other blood sacrifices of pagan religions, even though blood sacrifice is common; this was somehow very different. The Passover represented great respect for life itself; blood, representing life, became very sacred to God's people. The Passover demanded obedience in this mystery of respect for life. That obedience was the sprinkling of the blood on the lintels and doorposts of those who believed. It may not "make sense." But 4,000 years later our Jewish neighbors remember the Passover with reverence.

I think I hear echoes of this incredulity at times, 4,000 years later, when people trying to simplify the mystery of the Cross of Christ. We can understand the need for the good and kind things Jesus taught, but why do we need to speak of the Body and

Blood of Jesus? We have managed to find fault with all the old theories of atonement, (ransom, substitution, redemption, etc.) even though each of them probably has some facet of truth from the scriptures. Some evangelical Christians have pretty much ended up where the liberals were nearly 100 years ago. Jesus is to them an example and a martyr.

A Holy Mystery is exactly what we are challenged to embrace when we come seeking the freedom from sin we call the God-life. Paul writes "While we were still dead in our sin, Christ died for us!" Peter tells us that as a lamb without blemish, Jesus shed his precious blood so that we might have eternal life. And Jesus Himself said (John 6) unless we eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, we have no part in Him. It is in Christ's DEATH that our life begins! That was exactly when multitudes left him. (see John 6:66.)

Sophisticates tell us they have gone beyond the message of the cross. But the mystery we celebrate is Jesus Christ has died! Jesus Christ is risen! Jesus Christ is coming again! The CROSS, the Lamb of God, is at the very HEART of our salvation! Thank God if you can believe! If you can and will, you are SAVED!!

The path to salvation continues with

THE DISCIPLINE OF A COMMUNITY OF HOPE

- "having loins girded; your shoes on— eat it in haste.."

The slaves were on their way— but they had not yet arrived. They had a long, hard journey ahead of them. They were not a nation, a people— but God was bringing them together. In the same way when we have come to the Cross and our sins are forgiven and we are baptized we have eternal life, and we have also begun a long journey. To believe God is to begin the discipline of the community of hope.

It is God's plan that every born again Christian have a place in the community of hope. Another word for Christian is "disciple." And that sounds like discipline. Paul says, "Lay aside every hindrance— and the sin that does so easily best— and run with discipline the race that is set before US— looking unto Jesus!"

The first major stop on the Exodus journey as the slaves began to become God's own holy nation was at the mountain where God had first met Moses. There they received holy commandments for living— Ten Commandments that have never been repealed. I will not go into detail in this sermon about the commandments. The epistle lesson reminds us, however, that God's people live by disciplines of obedience to God, and of caring and respect for personality. The commandments and ordinances and rules of God are not harsh and arbitrary. God saves us, and as we meet at the foot of the cross we realize we are not alone. We gladly embrace the discipline of the people of hope.

But mere discipline is not quite enough. God's way is not just keeping rules, and doing right and not doing wrong. The path of salvation intends that we all come to ...

FAITHFULNESS EMERGING AS GENUINE LOVE

To band together in mutual need is one thing— to become one in heart and spirit is quite another. The end God has in mind is not simply to get the people out of Egypt— or even to get the Egypt out of the people— and finally, not even to get the people over into Canaan where they each have a house and vine and fig tree— where the milk and honey flows— but the bottom line is LOVE! WE ARE NOT THE CHURCH GOD INTENDS US TO BE UNTIL WE "AGREE" IN LOVE!

Our God is a God of fierce, passionate, white-hot LOVE! He wants his people to love Him. He wants them to know He loves them! He wants them to love each other and show the world how life can be lived.

This kind of love didn't fully happen there in the desert— and really is hasn't happened too many times in the Christian era, either. But where people press through the mystery of obedience, into the discipline of a community of hope— they come into the challenge of seeing their faithfulness emerging as genuine love.

The Gospel lesson says that when just two people AGREE in prayer God will answer with power. What sort of AGREEMENT do you suppose this can be? What does it mean? There is power, Jesus would have us to know, when people forget their selfish agendas and unite to seek the whole will of God. Promises that underscore the power

of prayer are easily twisted and misunderstood. "Ask what YOU will—" "Ask in MY name..." "If two of you AGREE..." What do these promises mean?

To agree to follow Jesus— to set aside selfishness— is to risk finding out what the promises mean! It is risking the awe and the mystery and the fascination of having God move in and show us how we should live.

In his book *The Acting Person*, the man who once was Cardinal Karyl Wojtyla gave two authentic and two inauthentic ways people act and react in community. He called the two authentic ways solidarity, which i would call "agreeing," and opposition. The two inauthentic ways are conforming (which i would call "going along passively" and non-involvement. We can betray love by saying "yes" when we should say a loving "no!" We can betray love by refusing to take an active part in the redemptive community. But when as many as two people really AGREE that they are going to follow Jesus, then things must happen, good things— eternal things.

These are milestones along the pathway of salvation: deliverance from sin, to taking part in the community of hope, to learning to agree in love to seek and do God's will, God wants us to be His body, His people, the CHURCH! I close with the "text" of this Exodus story, 1 Peter 2:9,10:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who once had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Prayer

Hymn 452 *When I See the Blood* (v1,2,4)

Crossing the Red Sea

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Crossing the Red Sea

September 15, 1996

Exodus 14:19-31; Matthew 18:21-35

The night of the Passover had come and gone. The slaves were streaming out of Egypt on their way to the birth of a new nation, to becoming the people of God. They were free, at least for the time being. They had been set free in what can only be called a miraculous way. Now they were being directed by a miracle, following a visible pillar of cloud by day that became a glowing fire by night.

You would think that with freedom, and with the sense of doing God's will, life would immediately be much better. In fact, life almost immediately became much more challenging. Living by faith is not for the faint of heart.

There is a certain bogus security in being a prisoner and a slave. Life within the walls of a prison is probably somewhat predictable. But now even that wispy security was gone. God's special people couldn't simply live by their wits any longer. They were learning to follow God's word, and live by faith. So— shortly after the miracle of Passover the people who were being called out by God found themselves facing a life-threatening crisis. They were being introduced to grace.

Pharaoh was in a rage. After the first awful shock and panic of the loss of his first-born son his pain and sorrow turned to bitter hatred. He assembled his armies and began pursuit. He intended to round up his former slaves and punish them. They would now have a slavery worse than they had had before.

Crossing the Red Sea

Pharaoh had all the weapons of war, the slaves had none. The refugee-like columns of Israel were marching themselves right up against the barrier of the waters of a sea. The position of the Israelites was without any visible way out. Behind was slavery. Ahead was impossible. What good could the Passover be if they were going to simply be killed or recaptured?

But then a way appeared. It was the way of grace. The obstacle they faced, once it was behind them, became a barrier between them and the country that had enslaved them. The Red Sea actually was only the first of many, many challenges the people of God faced. And every time they could fail and die in unbelief, or, they could look for the way of grace.

It is a real "stretch" to connect the Red Sea crossing of Exodus to today's gospel lesson from Matthew 18 on forgiveness. But we, too, [like the Israelites] are learning to live by faith, learning to trust the God of grace. We are called into the life of faith by the love of God. We believe the story of the Cross and begin to follow Christ. Then we find that this life of faith is a pathway of challenges. This world does not surrender its prisoners easily. We can surrender and go back— or we can do the impossible and go straight ahead. There are challenges that can only be met by walking straight ahead in God's way of grace .

One of the BIG obstacles we face as Christians AFTER we have started out by faith along the path of salvation is how to handle the matter of forgiveness. Forgiveness is of the essence of grace. It is God's way of dealing with us, and with our sins. That is what we usually think of as the heart of "being saved:" OUR sins are forgiven.

But then we discover that God is expecting us to treat OTHERS the way He has treated us. We discover that God wants us to forgive ourselves, and forgive our parents, and forgive our enemies, and simply move away from condemnation and guilt forever. Jesus knew it would be an ongoing struggle, for he taught us to pray "Forgive us whatever we do wrong...as we forgive all those who do any wrong to us!" [and then Jesus commented on that part of the prayer: "If you do not forgive, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.."]

The way of grace is revealed particularly in this matter of forgiveness. Several factors in the nature of grace present themselves:

1. GRACE IS OF GOD: THE SLAVES—are powerless until God sends them Moses; WE are powerless to save ourselves. Then God speaks through His Word, by His Spirit— we believe and are saved. Then we begin to discover:
2. GRACE IS RELATIONAL. Grace begins with trust toward God. But grace continues in the community of hope. We begin to learn to trust and love each other as well. The Exodus narrative is not as explicit just at this point; it is later. But in the Epistle lesson today (Romans 14:7) Paul says flat out: "No one lives to himself, no one dies to himself." We live to the Lord and for one another.

Just how important is this lesson of relational grace?

Bitterness, hidden resentments, unresolved conflicts can keep Christians from knowing God's perfect freedom and grace just as certainly as the Red Sea could keep the Hebrew children from getting away from raging Pharaoh. Not to forgive acts as a block to receiving grace. A clenched fist can not receive God's free gift. But there is more about the nature of grace:

3. GRACE IS 'NOT FAIR.' That is great when it comes to your sins and mine: we don't want what we deserve. But when we begin to think about forgiving people who have done US wrong it often is another story. Grace is "not fair"—it "goes beyond."

Peter's question "How many times should I forgive??" seems to indicate that Peter was thinking about the high cost of being generous in forgiving. Seven times may be generous for Peter, and for us as well, but God isn't into keeping score. Peter's question also gives insight into God's kind of forgiveness: God's grace is extravagant. God challenges His people to live beyond bitterness and revenge and hatred as well.

How does God help us deal with the challenges of spirit that come after we have begun this way of faith? Especially, how does God help us forgive, and ask forgiveness, and relate in honesty to Him, and to ourselves, and to one

another? Believe me, it takes as great a miracle as parting the Red Sea! But that miracle is available.

Reprieve to story: God did not abandon the people of faith— he (1) went behind them and kept them safe until they could get moving; He (2) went before them to show them the way through the waters. The "obstacle" that seemed to be absolutely impassable now became a barrier to the old way of life.

That is the way obedience works: seeking and finding and giving forgiveness from the heart releases grace.

One last thing about the nature of grace:

4. GRACE IS PRESENT HERE AND NOW

These scripture words are far more than just an interesting history story. Some of you are like the people who were learning to know God and walk by faith. You are face to face with the Red Sea of the need for forgiveness. You ask: Can God really forgive me? or, perhaps, "How can I believe and receive the freedom I want to know in my life while I find it hard to let go of the bitterness and forgive someone who has made life hard for me?"

Prayer - Then #84 - into #85 *Grace Greater than our Sin/ Amazing Grace*

Angels in the Treetops

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September 22, 1996

Exodus 16:2-15; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

In January of 1956 I loaded up a U-Haul and drove to the place where I was to begin my pastoral ministry. Cherry Valley is a tiny crossroad community, not even a village, in northeastern Ohio. I was twenty-five years old. As I began to learn the wonders of the pastorate, I was blissfully unaware of many problems and pitfalls. Amazing grace kept me safe sometimes in dangers I remember, and no doubt many times when I didn't have sense enough to recognize real danger. I did things backwards, I'm sure. I remember times when I was dreadfully afraid, and many times when I probably did the wrong thing.

But people in the community were saved. God blessed in many ways. God has been good to me, and given Helen and me four loving sons, and twelve wonderful grandchildren, and I have served churches where the congregations have treated me with love beyond what I deserve.

In that very same month, January 1956, a small group of young Christians just a little older than I were launching a new ministry as well. These were people with top-notch college and seminary educations, the kind who go to the very top in any field they enter. The one thing that distinguished this group was that they had totally dedicated their ambition to God.

This particular group had come together because they believed God wanted them to take the gospel of Christ to a tribe in South America where the life expectancy was

barely 30 years of age, and where revenge and murder was the accepted way of life. Five wonderful, bright young Christian families believed God was leading them to take His Good News to these primitive people. They prepared in the best imaginable ways. It was as sophisticated and yet as dedicated a missionary endeavor as you could imagine, using aircraft and radio contacts. And then in their very first contact with the dangerous tribe all five men were killed.

Why have I put these two beginnings side by side? Am I comparing myself to those great martyrs? No— there is no comparison in my mind. I wouldn't change places with them, and I know they wouldn't change places with me. I have the CONTRAST in mind. Grace does not seem to treat us all alike, as the gospel lesson makes clear. But again today (as last week) we see several insights into the nature of God's grace:

[Last week speaking particularly about FORGIVENESS, we said:

1. GRACE IS OF GOD - HE ACTS
2. GRACE IS RELATIONAL - WE RESPOND TO GOD AND TO OTHERS
3. GRACE IS NOT 'FAIR' - IT IS LIFE-CHANGING

GRACE IS GOD'S BUSINESS, ON HIS TERMS

Our gospel lesson tells of contrasts in work and working conditions: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who hired people in the morning who worked all day in the sun— he hired them at nine, and noon, and three in the afternoon, and again he hired an hour before quitting time— and they all got a day's wage. The all-day workers cried foul. Humanly speaking, as the only way we can speak, it was unfair.

How God assigns, how God rewards, what God calls vital and important is finally His business. Our business is to follow the pillar of fire, the "Presence," where it leads. Our challenge is to believe, to trust that God will care for us.

GRACE IS GOOD, BUT IT DOESN'T MOVE TO OUR EXPECTATIONS

Exodus passage: underscores the very human traits of grumbling when things don't go as expected. What outside forces could NOT do— destroy the Exodus mission— internal dissension and bad will almost did do. The biggest headache Moses had was ...grumbling, complaining, murmuring—

The people experienced some hunger ... and expressed their discontent. They made unfair comparisons. They remembered best times of slavery— Still on the journey, the Exodus no one starved... but some died from snakebite. Grace may be present and unrecognized, even despised; grace can be blacked out, even apparently defeated. The miracle of manna is how God chose to feed his people. It required both faith and obedience. That lesson is echoed every time we pray the Lord's Prayer: "Give us THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD! Faith and obedience connect with God's grace! We have provision for today to be what God would have us be today.

GRACE IS NOT FAIR. IT IS UNDESERVED. IT IS GOOD.

When the five missionary martyrs died Life magazine carried pictures of red eyed widows, and corpses beginning to bloat in jungle heat. The reporters did make mention of the amazing calm of the women and children, and their lack of hatred and revenge spirit. But it was a sad, sad story. To a pure materialist there is no question that these people were deluded in the matter of life investment and spiritual reality. What a waste for people to study language and sociology, and to take expensive equipment into the moldy hot jungles only to be killed on their first encounter with their target tribe, and have their airplane torn apart.

The Christian world saw things somewhat differently from the start. It was not too long before the very same warriors who had killed the missionaries testified that the missionaries' God had conquered them, not with punishing power and vengeance, but with forgiveness and life-changing love.

But just recently the whole story has emerged. In the latest *Christianity Today* is an article by Steve Saint, who was a baby when his father, Nate Saint, was killed by the people he was trying to reach with the love of Jesus. I read to you:

"Why didn't he flee into the jungle?" Mincaye emphatically asked me. "If he would have fled, surely he would have lived. Instead, he just waited for Kimo to wade out and spear him."

Dawa, one of the three women, told me she had hidden in the bush through the attack, hearing but not seeing the killing of the five men. She told me she had been hit by gun pellets in the wrist and just above the knee. (The obviously came from random warning shots fired to scare the attacker, because Dawa was hiding on the far side of the narrow river and the men could not have known of her presence.) She also told me that after the killing she saw COWODI (Auca word for foreigners) above the trees, singing. She didn't know what this kind of music was until later she heard records of Aunt Rachel's and became familiar with the sound of a choir.

Mincaye and Kimo confirmed that they heard the singing and saw what Dawa seems to describe as angels along the ridge above Palm Beach. Dyuwi verified hearing the strange music, though he describes what he saw more like lights, moving around and shining, a sky full of jungle beetles similar to fireflies with a light that is brighter and doesn't blink. Apparently all the participants saw this bright multitude in the sky and felt they should be scared, because they knew it was something supernatural. Their only familiarity with the spiritual world was one of fear. Dawa has said that this supernatural experience was what drew her to God when she later heard of him from Dayuma. CT 9/16/96 26,7

Maybe that is something of what Paul meant when he wrote: Philippians 1:20, 27-29 For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. ... Only live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is the evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear I still have.

Did you get that one sentence? the end where Paul wrote: For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—

We don't know where God's grace will lead us when we start out. AND THAT IS GOD'S BUSINESS! DO WE DARE TO FOLLOW? Steve Saint closed the article he wrote about his martyr father with this short paragraph:

God took five common young men of uncommon commitment and used them for his own glory. They never had the privilege they so enthusiastically pursued to tell the Huaroni of the God they loved and served. But for every Huaroni who today follows God's trail there are a thousand COWODI who follow God's trail more resolutely because of their example.

This success withheld from them in life God multiplied and continues to multiply as a memorial to their obedience and his faithfulness. CT 9/16/96 27

GRACE IS LOVE, IT IS HERE FOR US NOW IF WE WILL RECEIVE IT

If you decide to take the way of depending on God you may have forty years of ministry, or you may have a disaster so far as a humanist observer could see. Grace is not fair. Thank God it is not fair. But I feel sorry for the people who have no invisible means of support.

Prayer

Hymn # 443 *I Know Whom I Have Believed*

