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The Hardest Part of Harvesting: Part 1
Mark 6:14-29
Mark Series @ Lazy Mountain Bible Church
Sunday, March 14, 2009

Introduction

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No one knew how old Nika's Parents were when they had Nika, their first and only child. In the upper Amazon region tribes did not keep track of years or dates. They only spoke in relation to big events of the past—like the day the ground shook and changed the course of the river, or the Great Fire, or Great Flood. In any case, everyone knew that Nika's parents Shamaka and Yana had been alive during each of these, and that made them old indeed.

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Shamaka, was the most respected and feared Shaman of the forest people, the Yanomami, who dwelt in the northern forest regions of the Amazon. But even though Shamaka was the greatest shaman, and his wife Yana most respected of the tribes wives—they did not have a child, until in their old age, Nika was born to them.

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This is how Nika's birth came about. Yana was very ill. Even Shamaka was unable to quell her fever with his potions and incantations. Yana lay in her hammock, fever burning. Until an event that would be remembered and spoken of by the tribe in the same breath as the day the ground shook, or the great flood. Silently, in the early afternoon when all of tribe were resting in their grass huts to escape the Amazon's heat, a small canoe arrived. It was paddled by two men from a forest tribe from far down the river—and in the canoe were two people, a man and a woman—but their skin and hair was of a color and texture that the Shamaka and his tribe had never seen. And unlike their tribe both of the strangers wore garments that stretched from their feet to the head. Even their feet were covered completely, and they had a head covering unlike Shamaka had ever seen.

Normally, the arrival of such an unexpected visitors, would be met at the river banks by all the warriors ready with spears and bows. But it was the tradition of the Forest people to warily wait to see the intent of the visitors—were they there for trade? To suggest a match for the daughter of a tribal chief? To trade?

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The strange clothed people embarked from the canoe, and sensing Shamaka was the leader approached. With the help of the two forest warriors who had paddled the canoe speaking as interpreters, the two clothed strangers asked if there were any sickness in the tribe. Shamaka's tribe was stunned. Should they reveal to complete strangers that their most revered woman of the tribe, Shamaka's wife was raging with fever?

After a long silence, Shamaka gestured for the couple to approach. He told them through interpreters about the fever, and then allowed them to go to Yana's hammock.

Then the couple did something Shamaka did not expect. They took out a book, a black leather bound book. Shamaka had never seen such a thing. And then the couple got on their knees and spoke words that Shamaka did not understand. He looked at the two forest warriors who had paddled, and they said that the new couple was appealing, in prayer to their God. With the book open, and looking at it, and praying, the couple cried out to their God. Then the couple rose, and the clothed woman laid her hand upon Yana's forehead and prayed again. After a moment, the fever lifted completely. Shamaka put his hand upon his wife's forehead and looked at his other tribal members and told them the fever was gone.

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Yana got up. And with strength in her legs like she had not had before stood up straight. There was a hush racing through the tribe. Shamaka asked the visiting warriors, what was this power? They told him the same thing had happened in their tribe, and that this man and woman who dressed so strangely, that their God was more powerful than all the forest gods they worshipped. And that they had begun to abandon the forest spirits, and instead worship this couple's God.

Shamaka then turned to the couple and asked if he might be taught the ways of this God and the couple went to the canoe, and took out a hand crank player. They turned the crank and Shamaka heard the words of the Bible come from the speaker in his own language. The tribe drew close to the strange machine which seemed to speak. And the couple began to teach and explain the way of Christ to them as they listened to the words of the Bible.

Shamaka invited the couple and the men who brought them to stay with them for a time so they could learn about this powerful god.

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After many days, the couple diligently taught around the fires, as the people cranked the box and listened to the words of the Scriptures. And after some time, Shamaka rose and said to all his tribe that he and Yana had decided to become believers and followers of this God. And to show their allegiance, they would allow this couple to baptize them in the river as they had read Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist. There was a hush in the tribe. For the tribe knew what was in the river. Small palm size fish, with the teeth of a razor. The people fished and traveled, and used the river, but never did any dare to get in the river—they knew the devastation these fish could bring in just seconds. Many of the tribe had slipped or fallen in the river, only to die or be severely wounded by these fish, the people called them piranhas.

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So the tribe watched in abject horror as the light skinned couple walked into the river to baptize Shamaka and Yana—then Shamaka and Yana went into the river and were baptized. That day the whole tribe turned to Christ and were baptized. That evening they brought their idols and incantation instruments with which they sought the favor of the forest Gods, and threw them into the fire.

After a time, the couple announced they must go to other tribes along the river and share the news of the Great God Jesus. In their time with the tribe they had heard from many of the sorrow in the heart of Yana and Shamaka that they were without children from their own flesh. And now being of great years, they despaired of ever having children. So on the morrow in which the couple left, a service of worship was held and toward the end, the fair skinned couple, prayed to their God, using the language of the Forest people that they had learned, and asked their Great God the Father if it be in his will to grant a child to Yana and Shamaka. There was a great solemn hush as goodbyes were whispered. And the couple left in the canoe with their two forest tribesmen.

Shamaka lay with his wife Yana, and soon it became apparent to the whole tribe that Yana was with child. In 9 moons, Nika was born.

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Nika grew up, and as he grew, Shamaka and Yana faithfully told the story to their son of the couple who arrived and prayed to the great God Jesus, and Yana was healed. Shamaka had warriors take turns and each night they would turn the crank on the machine, and listen to the Bible in their own language.

Nika grew up in wisdom and knowledge and the way of the Lord, and as he grew, and his parents grew older, the tribe began to look to Nika as their teacher. Nika memorized, as did much of the tribe the stories in the Bible.

And it came to pass that Shamaka and then Yana passed from this life. They were buried beside each other on the outskirts of the village the first Christians to die and go to be with the savior from the Northern Forest people.

After some time had passed, one night the people were listening to the book of Acts on the machine. And they came to the passage where Paul and Barnabas were sent out. And the people knew of other forest people far in the west, in the swamps of the Amazon. And they prayed, and the Holy Spirit set apart Nika to go to the Forest tribes of the west to share with them the news of the great God Jesus.

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So the next morning, Nika started up river. They took the Bible machine, since now his tribe knew so much of the Bible by heart. And they set out.

After some weeks of paddling up the rivers and through the swamps..

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... they sensed that they were being followed by warriors from the western tribes who darted behind the trees of the dense forest as Nika and his man paddled slowly up stream.

Then one night when Nika camped he listened as the warriors of western forest tribes began to chant. Nika decided to let the Bible do the talking, and so he began to crank the machine. The forest went silent, as the sound of the Bible in the language of the Forest people resounded through the trees.

This went on for several nights. Nika knew the warriors were listening, so he decided to camp there and continue to play the Bible in their own language through the crank machine.

Eventually, the warriors appeared.

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At first they sat at the edges of Nika's small camp, close to the protection of the woods. Then Nika offered some game he had cooked, and they drew closer. Finally, after about a week the warriors spoke and invited Nika to their tribal camp.

Upon arriving at the camp, Nika was introduced in a very formal grand ceremony to their chief, Wahaka.

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Nika played the Bible for chief Wahaka and the gathering by cranking the machine. Just like in his tribe people were amazed to see and hear a box speaking in their own tongue. Chief Wahaka, invited Nika was to stay for a time with his tribe.

While there Nika watched the warriors come and go over the days he learned that Chief Wahaka was planning on leading raiding parties against other tribes in the region. Their plan was to replenish their supply of young women of marrying age to become the wives of Wahaka's warriors. They planned to first kill all the males from the other tribes, and take their wives and children as their own.

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As Nike listened to their plans, he became increasingly concerned about the brutality Chief Wahaka's tribe planned. He urged them to listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and turn from the forest God's to Jesus.

At this the tenor in the tribe began to change. It was the custom in the forest tribes that an invited guest could stay as long as he pleased, even to the point of being invited to sleep with the Chiefs many wives if he so chose. Nika declined which the Chief took as personal affront. Then one night, as Nika played the Bible for them, he began to teach, and insisted that the Bible taught that it was not right to murder and raid another tribe and take their wives and children as their own. At this chief Wahaka abruptly rose and left the fire ring, followed by his warriors. From that point on Nika began to feel the pressure of the Chief's displeasure, no longer being invited to eat at the Chief's fire ring. But each night, Nika taught the Gospel of Christ. Until one night as Nika insisted that the Great God Christ would certainly not condone raiding the other tribes and killing their males and taking their females as their wives, one of the chief warriors of the tribe whose name was Kakaquom, rose, and rebuked the teaching of Nika, and rallied the other warriors against Nika. Chief Wahaka, to quell the uprising, and against the tradition of hospitality of the Forest Tribes had his warriors take Nika and confine him to one of his huts.

The next day, the war parties left to begin their raiding, while Chief Wahaka stayed behind with a small band of warriors to guard the women against a

counter attack. At night he would bring Nika from his hut to play the Book machine, but would not allow him to talk.

After several weeks passed, Nika, confined by day in his hut, heard the warriors return. They were chanting, and dancing, and telling their stories of conquest, and displaying the females they had brought back.

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Kakaquom even captured two different forest tribes chiefs and took their wives for himself. These greatly please the whole tribe, and that night a victory celebration was held. They warriors chewed coco leaves and got wilder and wilder. It was the tradition of the tribe, that the chief offered the greatest warrior whatever he wanted as a prize, land, weapons, or even up to requesting one of the chiefs girls as his own wife. But Kakaquom surprised the whole tribe and especially Chief Wahaka when instead of these traditional requests: he asked that Nika be brought out that he might kill him before the whole tribe. His plan was in so doing to ride the tribe of this prophet of the Great God Jesus, and return the tribe to the worship of the Forest God's who condoned and blessed the raiding and warring.

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Chief Wahaka, unable to refuse because of custom, reluctantly ordered that Nika be brought from his captivity and placed before the whole tribe. Nika was not aware of this custom of the Western Forest Tribes, and never saw the hatchet that took his life. With Nika's death, the first native pastor and missionary to the Forest Tribes died.

Questions we have for God.

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Why does God allow his servants, those who love him, and serve him to die such grizzly and pointless deaths?

Why did God allow Nika to die such a pointless death, so that another man could feel justified in taking another man's wife?

Or in 1945, why did God allow pastor and teacher Dietrich Bonhoeffer die, executed in his cell by a bullet to the head from an SS guard, just weeks before he would have been liberated by the allies in World War II?

Why, in the first century, would he have let Peter, Peter the apostle, be crucified upside down at the whim of the immoral Roman Caesar: Nero?

Why doesn't God step in as he did with Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego's case, and rescue them from the fires.

Perhaps you recognize Nika's story as a parable of the what happened to John the Baptist in Mark 6:16. There we read:

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The Death of John the Baptist

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." ¹⁷ For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

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¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²² For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." ²³ And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom."

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²⁴ And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." ²⁵ And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. ²⁷ And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison ²⁸ and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. ¹

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Why would God allow John the Baptist to die such a pointless death?

This is John the Baptist, of whom Jesus said in Matthew 17:

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¹¹ Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” ¹³ Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist. ²

Or in Matthew 11:

Jesus' Tribute to John

7 And as these were going *away*, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? **8** “But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft *clothing*? Behold, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ palaces. **9** “But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. **10** “This is the one about whom it is written,
‘BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE,
WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.’

11 “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ³

If Jesus, the son of God said there was none greater born on earth than John the Baptist, why would God allow his life to go so cheaply -- His head given as the prize for a teenage girls dance?

We can simply shrug our heads and say, “I don’t know” or we can seek to more deeply understand God so we can more fully understand how we are to live here on this earth.

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Essential reference points if we are to live well here on earth.

We need to remember, we are not our own, we are bought at a price.

We are but a mist

This is not our home, this is our mission field.

We are soldier saints called to lay down our life for the cause.

Beheaded in Revelation – they will be honored
Greater Love

Begin with the end in mind.

You can't begin to understand how to live here on earth until you have wrestled with the decision, what on earth is worth dying for.

Remember even the son of God asked, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me." There are purposes of God we cannot fully understand.