

Echoes of Grace

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Alaskan

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Down the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon, over a dangerous section at the mouth of the river where the big rush of water from the river meets the incoming ocean waves, and out onto the great Pacific Ocean steamed the *Alaskan*. The weather was fair and the barometer steady as the ship turned south. The voyage of several hundred miles to San Francisco, California, where the ship was to be refitted, had a peaceful beginning.

The *Alaskan* was a ship called a “side wheeler.” It had masts for sailing, but it also had two giant paddle wheels on both sides midships for its main type of propulsion. The paddle wheels were driven by a big steam engine. The boat was long, had low sides, had many portholes in the numerous passenger cabins, and had a shallow draft. It was designed for transporting people and goods up and down the Columbia River or the protected inland waters of Puget Sound.

The *Alaskan* was designed for a specific purpose — carrying passengers and freight on inland seas. It was not designed to travel the open ocean, especially not the rough seas of the Pacific Northwest. You, too, were designed for a purpose, and that purpose is to know and love God. You were not designed to go through life without Him. Your heart was designed to find its rest in Him, your mouth to proclaim His goodness, and your mind to understand His truths; your soul was created to love all things that He loves and to hunger and thirst after righteousness. The reason there is so much emptiness and bitterness in the world today is because so many people are attempting to make the passage through life without God.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and when people don't give God the place He deserves in their hearts, the empty vacuum of their life fills up pretty fast with sin. Sinners might experience a period of "smooth sailing" in their lives, but sooner rather than later they run into storms.

After steaming several hours down the coast, a giant storm blew in. Big waves and high winds battered the *Alaskan*. The storm tossed and turned the *Alaskan* so much that its paddle wheels were often out of the water and the ship could make very little headway. The superstructure of the ship — the part of the ship built above decks — was smashed by a wave and much of it washed overboard. Water ran down into the hold of the ship through cracks in the damaged ship. Crew members desperately



stuffed mattresses into cracks to stem the water rushing in. They thought if they could just buy some precious time, the storm might let up and they could make it to a safe harbor. But despite their best attempts, the mattresses didn't stop the water from pouring in.

Do you know that going through this life without a relationship with God is full of pain and travail? The Bible says, **"The way of transgressors is hard"** (Proverbs 13:15). Multitudes of troubled souls who are alive today can attest to that fact. They realize something is wrong, but instead of coming to the Lord Jesus who can give them true relief, they try to apply quick fixes to keep the pain and emptiness out of their lives. They try to stuff all sorts of things like alcohol, immorality, drug use, greed, vanity and other similar things into the cracks in their lives, only to find that none of these things can keep out the inrush of emptiness and pain. Listen, there is a better way. That way is to repent of your sins and place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not a quick fix, because it requires a change in the depths of the heart.

The captain of the *Alaskan* knew the ship was in danger because the hold was filling up with water. The four lifeboats were lowered over the side and most of the crew members got into them. The lifeboats were connected one to another and to the *Alaskan* by a tow line. Five of the crew, including the captain, the chief engineer and the steward, remained onboard in a brave attempt to keep the *Alaskan* afloat. Just as the crew abandoned the ship, the captain saw what appeared to be a tugboat pulling a barge behind it, attached by a long cable. The sight of the distant tug gave the captain a little ray of hope. He loaded his flare gun and shot two green flares high into the air. When they exploded, they illuminated the stormy clouds with a green light for several seconds. The flares were the universal signal that a ship was in distress. However, the tug, pulling a heavy barge, could only proceed very slowly. Men were working on the barge, and cutting it loose would have almost certainly meant their death. The tugboat captain changed course and headed towards the flares, but it would be hours before he could get there. Along the sparsely populated coast, it is doubtful anyone else saw the distress signal.

Are you in distress because of sin? Are you wondering if there is anyone in the world you can turn to for help? Then wonder no more. There is One who will always hear. Call out to the “Sinner’s Friend” — the One who gave His

life on the cross that He might save you. Thank God there has never been a sinner in the history of the world who has ever sent up a heartfelt prayer to God for salvation who wasn't heard. There has never been a sinner who was willing to turn away from their sins that He didn't see and pardon. The moment there is the spark of genuine faith in the heart, the Lord Jesus will draw near to save them.

The men were in a dangerous predicament. They were far from shore in a raging sea, with winds and currents overpowering them, and no hope of immediate help. Danger was everywhere, and they didn't have many choices remaining.

Perhaps you feel like you are running out of options or choices in life, too. When people run headlong into sin, their choices in life become limited. Sin exercises a narrowing, debilitating influence over the lives of those who are taken up by it. It limits their spiritual vision, making them dull of heart or even spiritually blind. In their blindness they may have great difficulty seeing the possibility that God loves them and is ready to receive them, if they turn back to Him. Please know that as long as you are alive, you may turn to the Saviour of sinners and make Him your choice. No matter how godless the life a person may have lived, if they fall at the Saviour's feet, He will receive them to Himself.

Life is so uncertain. Don't put off the decision to accept Christ until a more favorable moment. If

you wait, it may become forever too late. Once this life is over, the opportunity to choose Christ will be forever closed. At death, God will confirm each person in the decision they made in this life, to either believe in or reject His Son. Those who have believed on Jesus Christ will go on loving Him for all eternity in heaven. Those who have rejected the message of His grace will be confirmed in the terrible hardness of their hearts and sent away to the outer darkness of hell.

For several hours the ship took a terrible beating in the storm. When it looked like it must sink at any moment, the captain cut the line to the lifeboats and let them drift away. There now was no way for the men onboard to get off the ship. About an hour and a half later, the *Alaskan* sunk to the bottom of the sea. Three of the four lifeboats made it to safety. The fourth one perished at sea. Of the five men who remained on board, three of


them survived by clinging to floating debris for over 30 hours, until the tugboat searching for survivors found them. News accounts later reported 21 men died in the disaster.

The ill-fated *Alaskan* now sits in a watery grave at the bottom of the Pacific, along with many other ships that will never be raised or refitted

for action. These ships may not be raised, but not so every person who has lived and died since the dawn of time. They will be raised again. Bodies will be made anew, and souls and bodies will be reunited. The righteous will be raised to a state of incorruptibility. They will be raised in their bodies to enjoy the glories of heaven forever. The Lord Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"** (John 11:25). What a wonderful refitting of our mortal bodies the resurrection will be for all those who believe! They need refitting because our current mortal bodies couldn't handle the joys of heaven.

Not so the wicked and those who have rejected God's grace. They too will be raised again. Their bodies and souls will be reunited to stand before God for judgment. Because they refused God's offer of grace, they will be banned for all eternity from His presence.

God doesn't want any to perish but all to come to Him and receive the gift of eternal life. Only by coming to Christ will your heart ever find the rest it craves. Don't go through life a stranger to His love and grace, but come to Him by faith, He who said, **"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"** (Hebrews 13:5). When you safely reach the shores of heaven, you will never be sorry you did!

A good weather forecast fooled the crew of the *Alaskan*. But we've received *Advance Warning* of a coming storm. Read on for the details. 



ADVANCE WARNING

If you are in the path of a tornado, you want to know about it as soon as possible so that you can seek appropriate shelter. Fortunately, meteorologists have gotten better at predicting these destructive storms that drop down from the sky and create swaths of destruction. In 1980, tornadoes were reported four minutes *after* they touched down, on the average. In 2013, due to Doppler Radar and high-powered computers, tornadoes were usually identified 13 minutes *before* they touched the ground. This difference of just 17 minutes is crucial. The ability to give more of an advanced warning has saved many lives.

If you live in the central or eastern United States, chances are you have first-hand, personal knowledge of these storms, and you respect and fear them.

What if you had advance warning right now that a dangerous tornado was headed your way? What would you do? The reasonable course of action would be to take steps to assure your safety. Well, there is a different type of tornado or whirlwind headed in your direction, and the reasonable thing to do is to seek safety. A storm of judgment, so fierce that it is compared to a whirlwind, is headed towards souls who have never repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. If they don't humble themselves and take warning from God's Word, this tornado is sure to disrupt their lives, obliterating everything they hold dear.

Jeremiah 30:23 reads, **"Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked."**

And Romans 1:18 reads, **"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."**

God may let those who distance themselves from Him through sin and unbelief go on for a time, as if all is well, in the hope that they come to their senses and return to Him. But sooner or



later, if they go on in their sins, His anger, fury and wrath will fall on them. It will certainly catch up to them. **"Anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil"** (Romans 2:9). Talking about the future the Bible says, **"These shall go away into everlasting punishment"** (Matthew 25:46).

The thing to do is not to act as if this storm will never arrive, but rather to seek shelter now. The lowest part of a basement is a good place to take shelter from a tornado. But the only place to take shelter from the judgment to come is the Saviour of sinners. This is because no fault nor sin was ever found in Him. Yet, to save lost souls, He became sin for them and paid its awful debt while He hung on the cross. Because of His suffering on the cross, all who come to Him by faith will receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. **"The wages of sin is death;**

but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

The Bible gives advance warning about the judgment that, like a whirlwind, will fall on sinners. Will you seek shelter in the Lord Jesus that you might be saved?

We really don't know when our "storm" is coming. Being prepared, as *Sudden Death* shows, is essential. ◀

Sudden Death

Manning Village is on the windward side of St. Vincent, and, as a result of torrential rains in December of 2013, a landslide roared down the mountain, crushing homes. Joy, who I know very well, loves the Lord, along with her two sons. She, her two boys and her husband lived in Manning Village in a home clinging to the side of the mountain. The night of the storm she and the two boys were in the front of their small house as the rain came down in torrents and lightning flashed continually for several

hours. Joy's husband was in the bedroom at the back of the house facing the mountain. Suddenly there was a great rumble as dirt, trees and rock came cascading down on their home. Several days later I visited Joy, who was by that time staying with her sister in a nearby village. She told us that the back of the home was completely flattened, and her husband probably died instantly. The saddest part of the story is that her husband wasn't saved. He certainly had heard the gospel from his wife and sons. I with others had visited that family on a number of occasions and always left some gospel tracts. There were gospel verse texts hanging on the wall, but as far as we know Joy's husband had no time for Christ. It's essential that you are like Joy and not her husband.

"Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12). ◀



E X C H A N G E

**WHAT SHALL A
MAN GIVE IN
EXCHANGE FOR
HIS SOUL?**

MARK 8:36

ECHOES OF GRACE

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*“God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while
we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).*

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