

Martyrs for the Master

Missionary Month – September 2003 Christ Church of India

460 Cypress Ave, San Jose, CA 95117

Introduction

Praise the Lord!

When our pastor first asked me to present the story of a martyr under the title 'Martyrs for the Master', my immediate reaction, as if by instinct, were pictures of early martyrs who had lain down their lives for Christ, perhaps hundreds of years ago, in some faraway land. But when Pastor continued that he wanted me to prepare the story of someone closer to home, someone from India, the truth struck me. Although we understand that there have been hundreds and thousands of martyrs through the ages, we very often overlook the fact that some of them are possibly from our very own villages, towns and cities. But then again, martyrdom is not defined by location or time, but rather a torturous death by account of adherence to a cause, especially to one's faith in Jesus Christ. This torturous death, burning in it's fury, encircled and consumed an Australian missionary and his two little children on a cold January morning in our very own, India.

The name of this missionary was Dr. Graham Stewart Staines. He was born as the second child of William and Elizabeth Staines in Palm Wood, a little town about 120 Kms north of Brisbane, Australia. Elizabeth, Staines' mother, was a godly person. She had a great influence on the life of little Graham. When the evangelist Allen Cunninham preached at the local church at Palm Wood, a ten-year-old boy prayed to receive Jesus in his heart. Little did the evangelist know that little boy - Graham Staines - would go on to be a martyr for our Lord Jesus!

Let Us Go Somewhere Else - To The Nearby Villages

(Mark 1:38)

When Staines was fifteen years old, a visiting missionary made a slide presentation about people who suffered from leprosy. That is when he saw the photograph of Josia Soren, a boy of approximately his age, suffering from severe leprosy. Filled with sorrow and compassion for those suffering from leprosy, and because of his profound love for God, Staines decided to dedicate his life to serve God by serving leprosy patients. The specific call to serve the leprosy patients in India came two years later, as his devotional reading on Christ "Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages" (Mark 1:35-42) coincided with a missions meeting where the speaker challenged the attendees to serve the people with leprosy in the villages of Mayurbhanj - a town in Orissa.

Interestingly, his tryst with the village that he would later call his home began in the year 1956 when he started corresponding with his pen friend Shantanu Satpathy who lived in Baripada, a village in Orissa. After about 8 years of communicating back and forth, Staines decided to visit India to meet his friend Satpathy. On his 24th birthday - January 18, 1965, Graham Stewart Staines arrived in India. As Graham walked the streets of Baripada, his heart melted at the hapless plight of the people suffering from leprosy. What he saw gripped him. Lost and unwanted, these

destitute people wandered around like stray animals, totally dependent on charity. Needless to say, Staines decided to stay back and serve these untouchables of the community. Since then, Graham Stewart Staines never looked back. He made Orissa his home.

Graham showed a deep commitment to God and men and had a clear missionary vision. Graham felt deep in his heart that it was his divine call and commission to communicate the love of Christ to the untouchables of the community by serving them. He joined the Evangelical Missionary Society of Mayurbhanj in 1965 and started his work with leprosy patients. True to the words written by Paul to the Corinthians, to the local people, Staines became like a local villager, to win them for Christ. He learnt and became fluent in Oriya, Santhali and Ho, the languages spoken by the local villagers and tribals. As a matter of fact, even the government authorities banked on him for composing a song in the Santhali dialect, to popularize the polio immunization drive among the tribals. Graham wanted to totally identify himself with the people he ministered to. For this he would go to any length and give up any sort of comfort he was used to. He did not even have a telephone. He ate red rice, lentils and some boiled vegetables prepared by simple tribal folk.

It Is Not Good For The Man To Be Alone

(Genesis 2:18)

While Graham was working with the leprosy patients in Baripada, there was a tall, beautiful and soft-spoken lady who, involved in a youth mission, was headed to India as part of a global youth mission. Gladys Weatherhead of Ipswich, Queensland, Australia, as part of the mission, came to Baripada, and circumstantially, met Graham. Funny how they never had the chance to meet even when they were only a few kilometers apart back in Australia. She felt that God lead her to this man, Graham - whom quite a few Christian women had second thoughts about marrying, because of his work with leprosy patients. Graham married Gladys in 1983 in Australia, and returned to serve in India together. Gladys, who was trained as a nurse, was an apt and suitable helper for Graham. She would spend countless nights caring for the leprosy patients with Graham at the Mayurbhanj Leprosy Home. This sacrificial couple made their home in an old house within the mission compound in Baripada and chose a very simple lifestyle. In the years between 1985 and 1992, God blessed them with three children: Esther Joy, Philip Graham and Timothy Harold. Graham's marriage to Gladys wonderfully enhanced and complemented each other's work. They were one couple that never slowed down. They never got diverted. It was always "all systems go". In spite of all the work that he did, Graham always found time for everyone, especially his children. Graham's family-life also stands as a shining example.

Bade Dada

Graham was a multi-faceted, Christ-centered missionary. He was effectively involved in a wide range of ministries, including literacy, translation work, leprosy work, training disciples, church planting and social development work. His competence in Bible translation work is testified by the Ho language translation of the New Testament published in 1997. He also helped inspire a church-planting movement among the Ho tribe of Orissa. He was described as an excellent, interesting and compelling preacher. Official reports indicate some 30 out of 200 families in Monoharpur had become open followers of Christ over the past two decades.

Graham was full of life and good to be with. He made the leprosy mission a self-sufficient haven where patients were imparted a sense of dignity. He educated those who had been healed with skills that would make them independent in the society. Today, the mission's is the only local dairy providing pure milk, which was once stigmatized and scarcely used, simply because a leprosy mission was handling it. The Staines, and their children helped the leprosy patients live like human beings. The leprosy home accommodated about 80-100 patients and included a treatment center and a vocational training center where, the patients learned to weave saris, mats, towels and dhotis. Some of the finished products were sold in the market; but the bulk of it was given back to the patients. He was like a father to the inmates of the Leprosy Home. Graham found many of them a place at the Home itself when they had nowhere to go even after they were cured. The people around him fondly referred to him 'Bade Dada', which in Hindi means 'elder brother'.

**A Time Is Coming When Anyone Who Kills You
Will Think He Is Offering A Service To God**

(John 16:2,3)

Manoharpur is a remote village in the Kheonjhar jungle beyond three ravines and rough terrain. Every year, a jungle camp was organized in the village for the local Christians. For the past fourteen years, Graham had been going to this tiny village, about 150 Km from his home at Baripada. This time, Graham's sons Phillip and Timothy accompanied their father to the jungle camp in their old worn out station wagon. The year was 1999. The day: 22nd of January. That night, after a long day of distributing medicines and checking the local villagers for leprosy, Graham tucked in Philip and Timothy into makeshift beds and drew a straw-pad over the roof of the station wagon to shelter them from the icy winds. And then, he himself rested for the night. Drums were beating as a group of young tribals were enjoying a traditional dance. They were just about a 100 meters away from the Staine's station wagon. It was around 12:20 am on the 23rd of January 1999.

Rabindra Kumar Pal is one of those millions of Indians you would probably ignore as you would a zephyr on a hectic morning. But unknown to those who crossed his path, the 34 year old was silently stoking a rage within. Now better known as Dara Singh, Rabindra Kumar Pal approached Manoharpur at around 12:20 am, followed by an instigated mob wielding sticks and tridents. They came in screaming furiously running towards their only target – the Staine's station wagon. Dara Singh struck first, wielding his axe at the tyres. The others broke windows and prevented the Staines from escaping. Dara Singh then put straw under the vehicle and torched it. In seconds, the vehicle was on fire. Graham held his two boys close to him. The killers stood guard, threatened and prevented other villagers from saving Staines and his two children. The mob stood there shouting slogans and watched the three being roasted alive as the fire consumed the vehicle.

At 9:00 am, Gladys Staines was informed that her husband and two children were burnt alive at Manoharpur.

Father, Forgive Them

(Luke 23:34)

Graham Stewart Staines spent 34 years of his life serving the people with love, extending the grace of our Christ. I've heard people say that after years of marriage, you start to look like and behave like the person you're married to. That's what

happened when the Staines family was bonded with Christ. Gladys and her daughter Esther did what came naturally – they extended the grace of God to those who had brutally murdered a father and two little children.

The story of Graham Staines and his kids are not just for our information; it is for our inspiration. Listen to what Gladys Staines had to say: *It wasn't something I had thought about. But when I heard that the family was dead, I told Esther, my daughter: "We'll forgive those who killed them, won't we?" And she said: "Yes, Mommy, we will".*

Because He Lives

Mrs. Gladys Staines, sang this at the funeral of her two precious kids and her beloved husband looking at the coffin containing their charred remains...

"Because He lives, I can face tomorrow;
Because He lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living just because He lives"

Just because He lives...

Graham Stewart Staines became a martyr. Just because He lives...
Think about that.

Amen.