

Hope Provided Through Unusual Means



By Rolaant McKenzie

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Sometimes good news can be presented in an unusual way that reaches the hearts and minds of people, causing them to pause, consider, and receive a hope that transforms their lives and the lives of many others.

Amistad is a 1997 American historical drama film, a true story based on the events that took place in 1839 aboard the Spanish slave ship *La Amistad* and their aftermath. Mende tribesmen, who were abducted from Sierra Leone and being transported off the coast of Cuba to a port for sale, managed to break free of their shackles and gain control of the ship. The ship was later captured off the coast of Long Island, New York, by a U.S. Revenue-Marine vessel, and the Africans were held in custody for trial. They were charged with mutiny because some of their captors were killed as they took over the ship. It would also be determined in court to whom they would belong as property.

In a poignant scene, as the Africans waited in jail for the resumption of their trial, one of them named Yamba discovered a Bible and started looking through it with a fellow inmate, Cinqué (Sengbe Pieh (c. 1814 – c. 1879)), who led the uprising on the ship. They cannot speak or read English, but the pictures of New Testament events made quite an impression on them.

Yamba shows Cinqué a picture of Jesus in a manger and says that when He was born, everything changed. Cinqué noticed the glow around Jesus' head as he saw a picture of Him riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Yamba said that everywhere He goes, He is followed by the sun. He goes on to show pictures of Jesus healing people, protecting a woman from being stoned, being given children to bless, and even walking across the sea.

Then Yamba pointed out a dark turn of events when he showed a picture of Jesus captured, His hands tied, accused of a crime, and standing beside Pontius Pilate before a mob howling for His death. He noted that whatever He did must have been serious enough to kill Him for it. Then Yamba showed Cinqué how they killed Him by hanging Him on a cross.

But Yamba said that this was not the end. He showed Jesus' body being taken down from the cross, taken into a cave, and wrapped in a cloth as the Mende people do. He told Cinqué that they thought He was dead, but He appeared before His people again and spoke to them. Then Yamba showed a picture of Jesus rising to the sky. The last picture he showed Cinqué was Jesus in the glory of heaven surrounded by the angels, and he said that this is where the soul goes when you die on earth. Clearly moved by the scene and with hope in his eyes, he quietly added that it did not look so bad.

In 1841, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a federal district court ruling that Cinqué, Yamba, and the rest of the captive Africans acted properly as free men to escape their kidnapping and illegal confinement, including the use of force. They were ordered to be set free. Christian abolitionists arranged for temporary housing until funds could be raised to return them home. The following year, along with some Christian missionaries, they set sail for Sierra Leone.

More than 150 years later, Cinqué's great-great-grandson, Samuel Pieh, was a Mende language coach for the film. He said that Cinqué became a key figure in Sierra Leone who helped

spread Christianity in the country.

Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who would grant them the power to be His witnesses in Jerusalem and to the farthest reaches of the earth (Acts 1:1-8). On the Day of Pentecost, when they were gathered together, the Holy Spirit came upon them in a dramatic way. Through a mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire that rested on each of them, they started speaking in other languages they did not know. Devout Jews from every nation coming to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast of thanksgiving for the firstfruits of the harvest gathered together and heard them in their own language testifying to the mighty works of God.

Peter took this moment to address the crowd, telling them about the Lord Jesus, the Messiah whom many of them previously rejected and condemned to death on a cross. Convicted in their hearts at his message, they asked him what they should do. Peter gave them a message of hope. He urged them to repent and receive the mercy, forgiveness, peace with God, and indwelling Holy Spirit that comes only through faith in Jesus. As a result, three thousand who heard the gospel message in their own tongue believed and were baptized, and the Church of Jesus Christ was born (Acts 2:1-41).

A high court official for the queen of Ethiopia, a convert to Judaism, was returning home on his chariot from worshipping in Jerusalem. He was reading aloud God's word from a scroll of the prophet Isaiah but was not understanding what it meant (Isaiah 53:7-8). Philip, who had been preaching the gospel in Samaria, was directed by God to go through a desert road to Gaza to meet him and talk to him about Jesus, the fulfillment of what the Ethiopian official was reading. This divine appointment resulted in him believing in Jesus and being baptized and proclaiming His message of hope, forgiveness, and peace with God through Him in Ethiopia (Acts 8:25-40).

God's word assures us that whoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved, and He often uses preachers of the gospel to proclaim this message (Romans 10:12-17). But God also uses unusual means to bring people to faith in Jesus.

God captured the attention of Jews of many nations and languages by arranging for them to hear the gospel in their own native tongue on the Day of Pentecost, causing thousands to believe in Jesus. In a divinely appointed meeting, Philip was used by God to help an Ethiopian government official seeking to understand God's word come to faith in Jesus. God moved someone to leave a Bible in the jail where Cinqué and Yamba were being held, and though they could not read the words, they learned about Jesus through the illustrations and found hope in Him. In my case, someone I never met shared the gospel message with me over the Internet, and God used that divine encounter to forever transform my life by bringing repentance, forgiveness, hope, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

"Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

If you have received this message of hope, the gospel, do not keep it to yourself. Remember the love and grace the Lord bestowed on you when He sent people and circumstances into your life to share it. For example, if you eat at a restaurant or have repairs done in your home, be gracious and give a good tip with a gospel tract to the server or repairman. You may be the unusual means through whom hope and salvation in Jesus

Christ comes to that person and beyond.

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