

The primary target for the revival was the younger generation, so the worship was loud and vigorous. It was accompanied by an incredible light show complete with a smoky haze that swirled around the lights, giving an otherworldly glow to the event.

After two up-tempo numbers, the worship leader brought the energy down a level.

“Lord, we’re here to worship you,” he prayed as the band dropped into a mellow praise tune. “It’s not about the show, not about the lights and the drums. It’s not about entertaining. It’s about expressing our appreciation for you.”

The praise song was slow and sweet with a complicated, beautiful melody. The lights pulsed harder, the guitars continued to throb and the drums pounded out a beat that called hearts to join it. Rachel was standing beside Greg, so she knew he was disturbed about something. As the second slow praise song tapered off, she wasn’t surprised when Greg stepped toward the stage.

“Try wait,” his deep voice filled the auditorium even before the sound man turned on his cordless lapel microphone. “I don’t know about you, but I’ve got a problem. You said it’s not about the lights and the drums, but I’m not convinced.” A large shadow appeared at the foot of the stairs to the stage. “Now don’t get me wrong, I love the lights and drums. My dad’s a drummer so I really like the drums. But I’m not feeling like we’ve really gotten down to it being about God, not the ‘show.’” The big man was standing on the stage, towering over the worship team but somehow looking very apologetic. “If you don’t mind, I’d like for you to help me out a bit.”

“Uh, we don’t mind,” the worship leader looked up at the speaker in awe.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Pastor Dan walked up on the stage too. “This wasn’t the way we had planned this, but I would like to introduce you to our speaker for this evening, Pastor Greg Shepherd from The Ohana Project.”

Greg frowned slightly. “I guess you gotta do that so they don’t think I’m one lolo bum comin’ off the street an’ bustin’ up the show.”

“You could say that.”

“Am I messin’ things up for your people?”

“No, no. We were warned.”

“Warned?” Greg’s frown was a little more serious.

“That you tend to be a little unorthodox.”

“Oh, I’m pretty orthodox,” Greg arched his eyebrows. “That does, after all, primarily mean ‘one who sticks real close to the Truth.’ I’m guessing you wouldn’t have invited me here tonight if I wasn’t, so how about we say I’m outta the box?”

“That’ll work.”

“Good. Now tell me who ‘warned’ you about me!” Greg glared at someone down on the floor. “Would that be my loving sister?”

“She would be the one,” the pastor laughed slightly, “but she did it lovingly, with great affection.”

“Well, there’s that at least.” Greg shook his head and smiled fondly at Rachel, then he turned back to the pastor. “But seriously, if I’m messin’ things up for you, I’ll sit back down and stay there until you call me up for real.”

“No! This is good,” Pastor Dan motioned with his hand for Greg to go ahead. “You were saying you needed some help.”

“Yeah, see the problem is that while I really, really liked the show,” Greg turned back toward the worship leader, “I was having a hard time singing with you. I’m not a very good singer,” Greg frowned toward the floor when he heard a bark of laughter, “so it’s hard for me to worship with you when you do all those whirly, curly doodads with the music.” The worship leader nodded thoughtfully. Greg turned toward the band.

“So I’d like to try –” Greg suddenly saw the JumboTron filled with a profile shot of himself. He jumped back in surprise. “Great balls of fire! No one told me you were doin’ that!”

As laughter rippled through the auditorium, Greg frowned at the pastor then down at the floor. Suddenly his frown deepened and he smacked his forehead with the heel of his hand.

“Auwe! I’m so lolo! Here I’m complaining about the worship team not being about you but about the show an’ I’m worried about a giant-sized Greg up on the screen,” Greg looked up at the ceiling. “Thank you, Jesus, for teachin’ this lolo to get more into you. Next time, how about I get it before I’m standin’ in front of ten thousand people? You do your part an’ I’ll try to do mine, okay?”

Greg looked back down at the bemused faces around him on the stage. “Now, here’s the deal. I got this idea for makin’ this about God, an’ I wanna see if we can make it work. You game?”

“Sure!” the worship leader said as the pastor nodded.

“There’s this great old song,” Greg said, “called ‘Amazing Grace.’ You all know it?” The worship team nodded enthusiastically. “Does the techie have *all* the verses on slides so the worshipers can sing with?” Greg looked toward

the back of the auditorium where he guessed the tech booth was. After a few seconds, the lights flashed an affirmative.

“Good, then here’s what I wanna try,” Greg looked out at the audience. “Let’s start singing this with just the voices, maybe the keyboard with the melody for those of us who can’t carry a tune in a bucket, but no guitars, no drums, no lights to start. Then as the worshipers find their collective voice of praise, bring in the guitars, the drums, the lights to lift up the worship, bring it higher, but still follow the voices, don’t overwhelm them. Can we do that?” Greg looked at the worship team who agreed verbally and with enthusiastic nods and thumbs up. Greg looked toward the audience again.

“Are you game?” The response wasn’t as enthusiastic, but Greg grinned anyway. He looked up at the booth. “Bring the house lights down, please, on the stage too. Let’s get the words up on that screen and let’s see if we can’t really make this about God.”

Greg walked off the stage and the worship leader began to sing “Amazing Grace” with only the keyboard behind him. On the second line, the rest of the worship team joined him. The third line, the voices from the audience began to be heard. By the beginning of the second verse, thousands of voices were raised to glorify the Lord in worship. The instruments slowly began to join the worshipping voices and it did indeed take the worship up a notch. When the lights began to throb again, this time they seemed to be visual music. They suggested the Son still brightly shining after ten thousand years.

As the last verse drew to a close, Greg once again walked up onto the stage.

“Some of you here tonight feel the emotion of this worship event, but you don’t really understand what’s going on. I hope I can help you get a better idea before this night’s over. See, there’s nothing wrong with the lights and the drums. They’re very dramatic, and God loves drama. You see it right from the beginning. I mean that literally.” Greg was intent on his audience, so he didn’t see the vocalists slip off the stage.

““In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,”” Greg quoted loudly, dramatically. ““Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep.”” Suddenly the lights in the auditorium dimmed. Greg smiled appreciatively and continued. ““And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”” The keyboard played a few notes that hovered expectantly. ““And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.”” Suddenly a bright light filled the darkened auditorium.

The audience gasped in appreciation. As Greg continued to dramatically recite the creation story, the lights, the keyboard, the drums and the guitar took the drama a little higher. One could almost hear and see water moving, leaves rustling, stars twinkling, birds singing, lions growling and the man and the woman opening their eyes for the first time.

Greg stopped his recitation when God said mankind was very good.

“The creation story reads like a drama because it is! Many of us want to read science into the drama, but that’s wrong. At the time it was written, there was no science to refute, but there were religious dramas of the creation. In particular, we know that there were Mesopotamian and Sumerian creation myths that are very similar to Genesis in many ways. Because of those similarities, some people have tried to prove the biblical account of creation is a myth, just like the other creation stories of the day. But that’s sheer foolishness. It’s no more valid than the attempt to find science in Genesis.

“Here’s the thing. If we believe God created us, if he knit us together in our mother’s womb, then we have to know that he really knows us, knows how to best communicate with us. He always has. When it came time to do it, God told the real story of creation in a way that his chosen people could understand.”

As it became obvious that Greg had truly begun his message, the instrumentalists unobtrusively made their way off the stage. The big man spoke without notes and with great drama. He gave the camera crew quite a workout trying to keep up with him.

“This particular story was first told to a people who had lived in captivity for countless generations. They’d been told they were created to be slaves for a pantheon of gods. Their sole purpose was to take over the grunt work that the gods were tired of doing.

“Then a man comes walking out of the desert and he says, ‘Hey brah, I AM who I AM sent me. We’re makin’ tracks, hittin’ the desert so that we can hang out with I AM and worship him.’ And everyone says, ‘You so lolo! We’re not goin’ nowhere. We’re stayin’ right here an’ doin’ exactly what the gods created us to do, be slaves.’

“So Moses says, ‘No no no!’” Greg waved his hands frantically. ““You got it all wrong! We were made by one God to be his children. All these stories you been hearing about the gods up there doin’ it and makin’ babies that became the sea, the land and stuff, that’s just stories. Let me tell you what really happened.’

“So he talks story in a way they understand in their day. Moses tells the children of Israel that Yahweh, the I AM, formed all of creation, not by working with a bunch of punk gods, but by simply speaking everything into existence. The sky and land didn’t come about because some god chopped up another god. No stars became stars when some god started wandering around looking for a lost god. Creation was deliberately and lovingly spoken into existence by Yahweh for one purpose, to provide a home for the best part of all creation, the people he wanted to make his ohana, his family.

“That’s the reason why it was so important to tell this story in this way to those people. See, they’d been taught that they were afterthoughts of creation, made to be slaves for the gods and their descendants. But the I AM wanted

them to know the truth. They were created to love and be loved, to be in eternal fellowship with their Creator. So God dramatically told them the truth about creation as well as the truth about themselves.”

Greg shook his head and grinned ruefully at the congregation. “But the children of Israel heard just enough to become dangerous to themselves. Just like us today, they started getting demanding, wanting to shape the Creator rather than being shaped by him. ‘Why?’ they whined over and over. ‘Why did you take us out of Egypt? We had plenty food there. Life was good back there.’ God proved himself to them over and over again, but the people still whined. ‘Why? Why? Why?’

“It’s been the same throughout history. Job had all these wonderful things and God allowed Satan to take them away. Job sat down and pouted, demanding that God tell him ‘why?’ What had he done to deserve such treatment? When God finally showed himself, he said, ‘What do you know, little man? Where were you when I formed the earth, when I set creation in motion? How can you even think you have the right to judge me?’

“See, here’s the thing; created things only exist for the pleasure of the Creator. If my grandma makes a quilt, it’s intended for one of two things – to be an attractive decoration or to warm people on cold nights. It’s not supposed to be a dishrag or a doormat. It can’t decide to be something other than a quilt.

“A potter makes two pots. One has a smooth rim and the other has a tiny tip in the rim. He knows that one is a sugar pot and the other a cream pitcher. They have similar but distinctly different purposes which are defined by their creator.”

Greg stared at his audience with a thoughtful frown. “What right do we have to dictate the conditions of our existence to the Creator? We’re finite creatures who see only what’s past and what’s happening now, and even that we see imperfectly. He, our Creator, sees everything all at once because he exists outside of time and space.

“He sees an impending disaster down the road but all you see is that your car won’t start. You sit there turning the key, banging your head on the steering wheel, whining, ‘Why me God?’ And he’s up there going, ‘So you can live, my child.’

“Too often we ask the wrong questions of our Creator. We see what we perceive as a flaw, a problem, something gone awry, and we want to know why. But do we understand enough to comprehend his answer?” Greg shrugged with both hands palm up in front of him.

“Sometimes the flaw we saw isn’t really a flaw, but an intentional part of the design. Artists will sometimes draw an optical illusion. You’ve probably seen some. There’s something not quite right but when you see the flip side of the picture, you can see that what you thought was a flaw is actually a very clever deliberate design.

“That child with the learning disability isn’t flawed, he’s just designed differently. That freakishly tall girl isn’t really a freak, she’s just different. The platypus wasn’t made up of leftover pieces of other animals, he really was intentionally designed to be the goofiest looking creature on the planet. Why? Probably so he could comfort some of us goofy looking people!

“Our Creator is the only one with the right to define ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ In the creation story, we heard God say over and over ‘It was good.’ Then he creates man and says, ‘It’s very good!’ He puts Adam and Eve in the garden and says, ‘Sex is really good. Have lots of it and make lots of babies. And all these trees, you can chow down on the fruit. There’s just the one tree that it would be bad to eat from.’

“So then the devil comes in and brings up the doubt.” Greg ‘snuck’ across the stage, then smiled slyly at an imaginary person. “‘Did God really say?’ he hisses to Eve. She falls for his line, and mankind has been falling for it ever since.

“God told Adam and Eve, ‘What you did is bad, so you’ve gotta leave my presence for a while, but I’ve got a plan to make it all right. After that, we’re gonna be together for eternity. So you hang in there and trust me, okay?’

“Eventually God came to earth and suffered for us, so that we could be redeemed, brought back into fellowship with him, but the devil is still hissing, ‘Did God really say?’

“We doubt that God can really love us because we’re so messed up. But God said he came to make us new creatures. Second Corinthians 5:17 tells us ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!’ What we have to understand is that since God created us in the first place, he surely knows how to ‘re-create’ us after we’ve sinned. If he says he’s done that, re-created us into new, pure spiritual beings, then we have no right to question him, no matter how much the devil hisses in our ear, ‘Did God really say?’

“We have to know what God said. Three times in Acts chapter ten, God said to Peter, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ He was specifically talking about the food laws of the Old Testament, but we need to see it in its context with the story in Acts and the rest of the New Testament. When we look at the greater context we know that the ‘what God has made clean’ vision was a statement about the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection through which he restored all things to himself.”

Greg paced excitedly, practically bouncing in his enthusiasm. “Jesus’ sacrifice spiritually restored not just Israel to God, but the Gentiles too. Though God used the animals in his vision to Peter, by immediately sending the Gentiles to ask Peter to fellowship with them, he underscored the fact that the restoration wasn’t just about clean and unclean food. See, Jews were forbidden from eating with unclean Gentiles, but now God said he had made them clean.

In fact, the whole of mankind was now able to enter fellowship with God, not just the Jews. In that singular event that split history, God transformed the creation that had fallen under the curse of sin. It wasn't a total transformation yet, but it was the most important transformation.

"The Creator determined the means of spiritually restoring mankind to himself. Remember, all of creation was made to be the home of the most beloved part of God's creation, mankind. So that's where the restoration started, with the beloved. Sure sin, death and all manner of evil were still loose in creation, wreaking havoc, but the important part was done. People were able to intimately fellowship with their Creator again.

"The blood of the Lamb of God covered all the sins of all mankind. The blood of the Lamb took away all those sins and re-created us to be able to fellowship with God again. That Lamb said that when we accept the forgiveness that he freely offers, God himself will come and live in us.

"How can the Lamb say that? Because the Lamb is the Word, the one who existed with God before the creation of the earth. He is the one through whom all creation was spoken into existence. The Word that became flesh and dwelt among us was the very Word who created us.

"He is the Creator and he is the Re-creator. He lives in us and tells us what is good and right.

"Here's our choice." Greg raised his right hand, palm up, level to the floor. "We can believe the Creator knows what he's talking about and we can understand that his grace is free and we can accept it and be re-created into new spiritual beings." He raised his left hand. "Or we can continue in disbelief, trying to make our own way, trying to be our own little gods.

"Only one way is going to work. From my experience, I know the way of belief really does work. I am a new creation. I am clean. Flawed still as I proved tonight, but clean. Sure I sin, but I know, even when I don't feel it, that God readily forgives every sin I repent of. He casts it into the sea of forgetfulness and remembers it no more.

"I do not have the right to remember the guilt and shame of what God has forgiven me for. Sure I remember the event because that's the only way I can reach some of you, but the guilt and shame are long gone.

"I cannot deny my cleanness, and once you accept the blood of the Lamb as your covering, neither can you! When the devil hisses in your ear, 'Did God really say?' You pull back and you give him the one-two punch 'You better believe it fool!'" Greg swung his right fist then followed it with a left. "'Now get back to hell where you belong!'

"Believe, people! Believe the I AM is your Creator and your Re-creator. And when you believe, live like it really means something, because it does! You are re-created to be free and yet bound eternally with your Creator who will never leave you. It's the only way to live. It's the way you were created to live!

“Oh, Creator God! We cannot worship you enough! You are our very reason for existing and we thank you for sticking with us through all our foolishness. Re-create us into creatures who glorify you, ready to celebrate our God and Savior way beyond ten thousand years in heaven!”

The worship team had quickly made their way back out onto the stage when it was obvious Greg was praying. Even before the echo of his voice died in the auditorium, they began to lead the audience in “Amazing Grace” again. This time they truly worshiped with the people.