

10. MANANGA THE WOOD AND WATER BOY

Mama waved her arm toward the east. “And yesterday, when I biked over to one of those villages over there,” she said, “I was going over to care for that chief’s wife, you know. But when I told him I had good news to tell everyone, well, the drum bangers grabbed their drums and started beating out the message telling everyone to come, and do you know that *three hundred* people came and listened to me? Kongi, we have an open door for the gospel!”

As she spoke, Kongi himself opened the door to the goat shed to let out all the goats for the morning, as he had been doing here in Ippy every morning for more than two years. He stood straight and tall, almost as tall as Mama now, watching them go bounding up over the hill. “It is good, Mama,” he said. “They will soon believe in Jesus. I am learning too, from the teaching I get from your man every day.”

“God is so good, Kongi.” Mama shifted little Marian from one hip to the other. “We will see a harvest here. The fields are ripe.”

“Mama!” came another voice. “Your water is all here.” It was Mananga, the wood and water boy.

“Thank you!” Mama called. “Yes, you can go.”

Mananga bounded away like the goats, heading for the chapel service that Mr. Laird taught every morning promptly at six o’clock. Kongi hurried to finish caring for the animals so he could run after him.

An hour later, right behind Kongi, Mananga was back. Mama had used some of the water for baths, so he quickly grabbed the buckets and ran almost half a mile back to the



stream to fill them again. Then he chopped wood for Mama to make the fire to boil the water she needed for drinking and cooking. In the afternoon, during the hottest part of the day, he rested while the family rested. But then he got back to work. On and on Mananga worked, chopping wood, carrying water, until five o'clock in the afternoon.

At five o'clock the drums beat the one-hour-till-dark warning. "Good-bye, Mama! I am going now!" Mananga called.

Mama sent Lawrence out to drop a coin in his hand. "Good-bye! Thank you!" she called back. She was busy with her children and her supper and barely noticed the wood and water boy as he ran off.

Life was getting established in a routine here in Ippy. The Lairds had become accepted as welcome members of the community. Mr. Laird had hired over a hundred men to help him make bricks and build a large brick chapel building so that by the time the rainy season came they would be able to sit in a strong, dry shelter. As they anticipated the coming of the rains, they prayed for spiritual rain in the hearts of the people, to help the Word of God take root and grow.

Now, after almost six months, the chapel would be finished in a few days.

So one Sunday, all five of the Lairds and Kongi joined the hundreds of Bandas who had come for the dedication. After the singing and the preaching and the prayer, Mr. Laird raised his voice. "Tomorrow," he said, "we will have a special meeting, a new kind of class. It will be only for any of you who have understood our words and trusted in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ for salvation. If you have really repented of your sins and believed in Jesus as your Savior, we want you to come to this class. We will teach you more about how to live the Christian life and walk the Jesus road."

A low murmur passed through the crowd as people whispered to each other. Mama wished she could hear them. Had they understood her husband's words? Would anyone return the next day?

The next morning the two missionaries and their children walked down the hill, both of them eager to know how many Africans thought they had really trusted in Jesus.

But when they arrived at the chapel, they stopped in confusion. It was full! There were just as many people there as had attended the dedication service the day before!

"They didn't understand," Mama murmured.

"No, I guess not," said Mr. Laird.

"Who are those people? They're not Bandas." Mama

nodded toward fourteen very tall men sitting in the front row. Each one was several inches taller than the tallest of the Banda people.

“I don’t know,” whispered Mr. Laird. “I’ve never seen them before. This is very strange.”

He walked to the front, while Mama stood to the side with the children and watched. “My friends,” he said, “This class is only for people who have put all their trust in the complete righteousness of Jesus Christ and want to know how to walk the Jesus road. Maybe some of you made a mistake. We will stand and sing a song, and if you haven’t trusted in Jesus and want to walk in His way, you can leave.”

What can wash away my sin, they sang. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. They sang with their eyes closed and their hands raised.

Then, after the song, they sat down again. All of them were still there.

Mr. Laird cleared his throat, trying to figure out what to do. He finally decided to sit down and talk with each person one by one to hear their testimonies. Mama joined him as he began with the tall men in the front row.

“Greetings, my friends,” he said.

“Greetings,” they replied. “We are from the Sara tribe.”

“Welcome.” Mr. Laird shifted uncomfortably. “What has brought you here today?”

“This class you have offered,” said one. “We have trusted in Jesus Christ. We want to walk the Jesus road.”

Another man closed his eyes and said, “You are saved by grace, through faith. It does not come from yourselves, but it is God’s gift. It is not of your own works, or you would boast.” Then he added, “That is from the book of Ephesians.”

Mama was astonished. Where had they learned Bible verses? “Perhaps another mission work came to their village,” she whispered.

Mr. Laird nodded. “What mission are you from?”

“Mission?” they asked. “Mission?”

“Well, uh, where is your village?”

“On the other side of the woods behind your house.”

“That’s at least three miles by the road,” Mama said.

“How did you learn about Jesus?” Mr. Laird finally asked.

“Mananga has taught us!” All the men nodded vigorously.

Mananga? The wood and water boy?

“Yes, Mananga comes every night and teaches us about the love of Jesus.”

Every night?

Mama hurried back up the hill to her house. There was Mananga. He had left the meeting and was chopping

wood to light Mama's fire, singing a little song under his breath.

True riches of life, true riches of life,

In Jesus you will find true riches of life.

"Mananga!" Mama called. "Come here."

"Yes, Mama?" The teenage boy came quickly and stood smiling.

"Mananga." She looked at him as if she were seeing him for the first time.

"Yes, Mama?"

"Have you been going to the Saras' village?"

"Yes, Mama."

"When do you go?"

"Every night when the drums beat."

"But, but, you can't get there and back before dark!"

"Oh, I get there just as the sun is dropping," Mananga explained. "I tell them about the great love of Jesus, and they are eager to hear. Many, many are coming to listen to my good words. I teach for maybe two hours each night. Then we visit for a while, and I come home about midnight."

"You come home at midnight?" The story seemed stranger and stranger. "I wonder how you have so much strength to work during the day, but I wonder more about your safety. What about all the lions and leopards and hyenas and

poisonous snakes that are out at night? You know that wild animals have killed people here, not even that long ago!”

Mananga gazed at Mama, and for a moment he didn't answer. When he did, he sounded as if he were talking respectfully to a small child.

“Mama, why did you come to our land?”

“Well, you know. To tell you the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. To offer your people freedom from the slavery of sin.”

“And Mama, did you know that we ... we were people-eaters?”



“Yes. Yes, of course we knew that.”

“Did you know about the leopard men?”

Mama had seen one of those men. Now that cannibalism was against the law of the French government, some men dressed as leopards at night to steal goats and sheep, and yes, even babies.

“Yes, I knew.”

“But were you afraid to come?”

“No.” Mama answered truthfully. “By the time we got here, I was not afraid. I knew God would protect us. He has promised to keep us safe, as long as He has work for us to do.” Suddenly her face flushed red as she realized what she was saying.

But Mananga spoke anyway. “Ah, Mama. You can trust the true God to keep you safe among the people-eating tribes. And just the same, I can trust the true God to keep me safe among the people-eating animals. Your God is my God now. And the good news of the love of Jesus Christ must go out to all the people, all around. Not just when it seems safe, but all the time. The good news must go out.”

See Thinking Further for Chapter 10 on page 150.