

IT IS I, LORD!

An inspiring testimony of a missionary

Here I am, Lord! Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night!
I will go, Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart!

This song was the musing of my heart as I lay on a mat in the village of Gombieni. “Here I am, Lord. I’m lying on this hard packed mud floor and gazing up into Your beautiful, star-lit sky. Here I am, Lord, mud walls all around and grass roof overhead. Here I am in a place that is very different than the country in which I was born. I’m among a different people with a different language, with different food and a different culture. Here I am, Lord, why? Why is this inexperienced and needy young man here in this place? I wonder, Lord, and yet I know why I am here. I’m here for You. It’s not for my pleasure or comfort, Lord, it’s only for You. But yet I wonder why You sent me here?” The chorus of the song ran through my head again, “Is it I, Lord?” Could it be that You are calling me to work for you? Do I hear Your voice this calm and peaceful night?”

As I was meditating on all of this, there was something stirring in my heart. Down inside, I knew the

answer to all these questions. I didn’t need to ask “why”. I didn’t need to sing the song with the challenge it places before us. In fact, I found that I couldn’t sing it the way it was written for it to truly be an expression of my heart. There was a question mark in the song that wasn’t really there for me personally. The change I needed to make wasn’t big, but it was a profound one. Instead of a question, “Is it I, Lord?” my heart responded with this affirmation: “Here I am Lord. It IS I!”

The night before that star-speckled one gave birth to these thoughts, I had preached in a village called Kobilsung. I slept there, then arose early and biked on to Tiamdo. There again we had a meeting and then it was back to the trail and on into the bush a little farther. We arrived in Gombieni, a village approximately two and a half hours from home, about 2:30 in the afternoon.

Gombieni is a fairly new village, which means there hasn’t been a church there very long. Several national brothers had visited there first, possibly a year or so ago. Between Pastor Boboli, Daniel, and other church leaders, they have only had someone bring the gospel to them a few times. I was with Tija, my interpreter, and we had the privilege to again bring God’s Word to that place.

Upon entering the village, we asked the way to the leader’s house. It wasn’t difficult to find. Gombieni is a small village with only five or six compounds and in a matter of minutes we pulled up to the right *kinaboom*, the Konkomba social gathering place. It is a simple raised platform made of logs lying close together shaded with old *zana* mats and supported by a



log frame. As soon as we arrived, a young man got up and quickly walked over to me and kindly parked my bike nearby, a typical gesture of respect and welcome. We exchanged greetings, informed them that we were there to have a service, then sat back to relax until evening.

The villagers were very glad for our coming. Besides their words of welcome, they showed their thankful hearts by giving us generous amounts of food. Not long after we arrived, they brought us beans (with spoons!) and yams and stew. Beans are a more expensive food so this was a humbling honor. Several hours later they brought us fufu and later that evening, after the service, it was tizet and meat! Their appreciation of our coming and their hunger for God's Word was shown through their generosity. It is truly a beautiful thing. Thank God for the hunger and openness! Napping, reading, meditating, praying, eating, and talking easily filled the waiting time. I also used that time to disciple and fellowship with my interpreter.

As I sat there waiting for those few hours, I was able to watch village life. Children were playing all around. Pigs, guinea fowl, chickens, dogs, goats, and sheep were all running here and there. People were walking and riding past, going their different ways and doing their respective things. There were some women with huge loads on their heads, and others with children on their backs cooking over open fires. In the nearest compound, next to one of the huts, were some forked sticks planted in the ground. Where the branches divide there is a place to set a calabash. Maybe tonight, maybe every Friday night, maybe every five days, whatever the taboos require, the father of the house will kill a chicken and put some feathers

and blood in this calabash. They will sacrifice to a god they don't know. This is life in a Konkomba village, life as it has been for centuries.

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"Here I am Lord. It IS!"

Later, after they had fed us a few times and several hours had gone by, one of the leaders came and sat down near me. As I started talking and asking questions, I realized that they were having some temptations and persecutions. He told me this story:

After some of the people in the village had chosen to follow God, they began meeting regularly. Around that time, an unbelieving sister-in-law of one of the Christians started having some complications in her pregnancy. Somehow they got her out to a hospital but the baby died soon after birth. The mother also died and the family went to the soothsayer for answers. He pointed at the Christians as the cause of their problems (a common accusation as more and more of God's Word penetrates the darkness). Often someone in the village, usually family or the fetish man, will get angry when one of their people makes the choice to burn their idols and juju to follow Christ. In an effort to discourage them, it's not uncommon to try to blame every problem on the new believer. In this way the church was being shaken by these gusts that Satan was blowing at them.



As I sat there and listened I praised God for allowing me to come at that particular time. It is not that they wouldn't have made it if I had not come, but God knew that some of His young children were facing some fiery darts and He sent someone to help and encourage them. Yes, it was "only I", but it was not "I" whom I was relying on anyway! God only needed a willing vessel. "Here I am, Lord. IT IS I!"

It was dark outside by the time everyone had gathered, but it was not dark in our hearts. The love and warmth of God's Son was shining. The believers had stood strong through the trial and the Son was even now able to burst forth with radiant light on those Konkomba hearts. He was arising with a little more strength and pouring down His glorious love upon them. I shared with them that night about Christ and the trials that He went through and how He stood strong. I used the story of Stephen as another example. I encouraged them to continue on even if it was not easy. I told them, "The Christian life is like riding a bicycle. When you are going down the hill,



is it easy or is it not easy? When you are going up the hill, is it easy or is it not easy? That is how it is with our life. Sometimes it is uphill and it is very difficult. Sometimes it is downhill and

it is easy. Do you stop riding when it is difficult? No, you do not stop riding. You have to use force!"

Late that night after the service as I lay there thinking about everything that had happened, my heart lifted to God. No, I did not need to look up into the face of my blessed Lord Jesus and ask, "Is it I?" I knew! "Here I am, Lord. IT IS I! I surrender afresh to pour out my life as a living sacrifice for the glory and honor of my King!"

But I am just one man, and this was only one village. Within a ten-mile radius of Gombieni are probably hundreds of villages that have never heard the gospel. Some of them have begged us to come and tell them God's Word, but we are too busy already. Knowing this and knowing God's desire for the gospel to be preached, do we need to look up to God and ask, "Is it I?" Has He not already told us to go?

As I read His Word, God continues to open my eyes to this fact. We have the Great Commission and even before and beyond those last words of our Lord we have His heartbeat of redemption through the whole Bible. It is at the core of His being to bring all mankind back to Himself. He has done His part of this task. Have we done ours? He has given His Spirit, His power, and has promised to always be with us. The task, through His presence and power, is ours to finish. "Here I am Lord. IT IS I, Lord!"

Stand with me now at a different time, in a different place. It is market day and I am in the middle of the rush of it. Many people are going, coming, buying, and selling. On this side a little stand, on that side things hanging over the path. Here a lady sitting on the ground with her goods and wares around her, and there another woman using a little table, and yet another one carrying her saleable items on her head. Squirring through the crowd and threading between legs, children are running and playing with friends, talking and laughing all the while. It's noisy and busy. It's market day. It's a day to make some money so you can purchase the things you need. It is a social time to visit with people from other villages. I am in the midst of it all attempting to buy a shirt.

A man walks up to me and greets me. After asking and answering all the proper questions, he makes his request. "Could you come to our village and preach?" I express my desire to come, and tell him I do not know when that will be possible. We have so many villages already. "But please," he pleads, "be sure to come."

Stand again with me a few weeks later as I am fulfilling that market day request and preaching in that village. It is a cool, brisk night. The stars and the moon are out and we are gathered under that big open heaven. We are seated in a circle under a tree. After singing for a little while, the leader prays and then asks me to get up and preach. I share my heart for quite awhile and am about to close when they say to me, "You are not quitting yet are you?" Actually, I was. Did they want me to continue to preach some more? "Oh yes! Share more of God's Word with us." Who would say they had no more notes at a time like that! Would I preach? Gladly! Even after I finished for the second time, they asked question after question before they let me sit down. Again my soul lifted in gladness and surrender to my Lord, "Here I am, Lord! IT IS I! I am hearing You calling in the night once again." How else

could I answer? Can I do anything but surrender my life to Him to be poured out for others?

He is waiting for those who will rise up and fill the gap. Ezekiel saw this gap (Ez. 22:30) and he saw the waiting heart of God. God was longingly looking for a man to rise to the challenge and fill the need. But oh, the awfulness of that last statement, “but I found none”. As I sit in Gombieni, stand in the market place, or answer questions under a night sky, I ponder that He is still waiting for someone to rise up and willingly offer their services. In Ezekiel’s day, He didn’t find a willing one and the gap remained unbridged.

There is still a gap between the lost world and the glorious plan of God through Christ and God’s people are the bridge. The commission has already been given. God is in a waiting, expectant mode. Does a fisherman sit on the edge of the lake, fishing rod in hand, hook in the water, and ponder whether he wants a fish or not? No! As soon as the fisherman detects the slightest tug on the line, he jumps to attention. Similarly, when someone responds to the call, someone who is willing to bridge the gap, the God of Heaven takes notice.

2 Chron. 16:9 says the same thing but in a different way: “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.” God is looking everywhere to show Himself strong. He wants His Name to be lifted up among all the nations of the earth. But all nations are not yet worshipping Him. Why? Is God falling short? No! He WILL show Himself strong, but He will do it through men! The prob-

lem lies with man, with us, with me. God is looking, looking, looking, and I know He doesn’t overlook. Are we volunteering? Jesus told His disciples, “The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. Pray!” (Luke 10:2) We don’t need to pray that God would use men because we know He will! Jesus was instructing us to pray for willing, useable men. Are you willing?



Brothers and sisters, with Gombieni and the thousands of other villages without a witness for Christ in our minds, does He want us to ask Him, “Is it I?” Or is He the one that is waiting for us to say, “Here I am Lord, IT IS I”? It seems clear to me that God is waiting for us. The people are waiting because God is waiting because we are waiting. We don’t need to wait for a gunshot to begin the “race”. That gunshot sounded centuries ago! We just need to get GOING! Because God is a God of patience and love and grace, if we become still enough, if we are quiet enough before Him, we will hear the echoes of that gunshot still resounding through the ages. Oh let us cry out to God, “Here I am Lord, IT IS I!”

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