

Ringing the Bell - Samuel

by Harmon Schmelzenbach

A young Swazi warrior's conversion to Christianity represents the power of faith to transform lives and bring people to God.

Duration: 1:17:10

Scripture: Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares his personal testimony of how he was saved in a small mud church in Africa. He emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit and how it transformed his life. The preacher also talks about the importance of relying on God's help and not fearing what man can do. He concludes by sharing a story of a young warrior who witnessed the reality of God's power and testified about it to his village.

Transcript

I have a confession to make. I'm not really a missionary. I'm actually a national worker in disguise as a missionary.

Think about it. It was at a log altar in a little mud church under a thatched roof, with no furniture at all except some goatskins on the floor where I was saved. It was around a campfire, with the sparks flying way up into the night sky, and the preachers singing and shouting, and lions roaring on the other side of the river about four miles away, under the preaching of an African by the name of Daniel Mketi, that the Lord took complete control of my life, and the Holy Spirit moved in, and pointed me in the course that I was to follow.

A national worker, a product of the African church, disguised as a missionary. I'd like to tell you a story this evening. These words taken out of the 13th chapter of Hebrews.

For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I shall not fear what man shall do unto me. As the missionary brought his message to a close that Sunday night, in the little stone church up on the mountainside, and he opened the altar for anybody who wanted to come down and pray, a tall, proud, young Swazi warrior stood to his feet in the shadows at the back of the church, and in a deep voice he called, Missionary, I accept this Jesus that you speak of. And the missionary beckoned to him, Come on down and let's talk to Jesus.

And the young man marched forward, laid his big shield down, his spears dropped to his knees, bowed his shaggy head humbly at the feet of Jesus, and Jesus came that night and reached across that log, and lifted the load of sin and superstition and darkness that had bound this young man. He came to his feet. The tears were running down his dark cheeks.

He stood there in front of the crowd, and he tried to wipe these tears away, but they just seemed to come faster than he could get rid of them. And finally, when it came around to his turn to testify, he thought he owed the crowd an apology. I must tell you, he said, there's no pain, it doesn't hurt anywhere.

You can't hurt a Swazi warrior enough to make him cry, and yet these tears, it's just this thing that the missionary has told us about, this God has come in, and he fills me with peace and joy, and there's no law in our tribe that forbids a man to cry for joy, sir. And then the tears flowed freely down his cheeks as he testified to what Jesus had done in his life. He left the service.

He walked six miles down the mountain back to his village. The next day at dawn, when the sun came up, this young warrior was waiting outside of his father's hut. His father was the chief of the entire area, and when at last the old chief got up, this young boy was there.

Father, I would speak to the tribe today. As the eldest son of the chief, heir to the chieftainship, he had the right to speak to the people, but the people had gone their various ways for the day. Some had gone to draw water, others to herd the cattle, to plow the gardens.

The father got some of the herd boys together, and he sent them to go round up the people. It was about noon when the entire village was gathered together again, nearly a thousand people, and the father turned to his eldest son. What is it that you would say to the people? And the proud young warrior stood to his feet.

Father, first of all I must tell you, I have broken the laws that you laid down for our tribe. I have disobeyed you. I went up there to the mission station where we were forbidden to go, up on the mountain.

But father, that god that that missionary preaches about when he passes through our village, he is alive. He is real. I know, for last night, I too spoke with his god.

He started to testify. The old chief watched in amazement. Then fear flickered in his eyes.

He turned and he beckoned to one of the young warriors that was seated behind him, a young half-brother to the man that was testifying. Listen, he whispered to him, I don't know what's happened, but go get the witch doctor and bring him back with you. Up over the mountain, bashed the boy to go get the witch doctor.

In a little while, he was back with the witch doctor. They sat down at the back of the crowd. I don't know who had ever told this young warrior anything about the doctrines of Christianity, about such things as making restitution.

But she knew that if he was ever going to get down on his knees and face God in prayer, there were some things in his life he was simply going to have to straighten out. Father, you remember that calf that disappeared three years ago down by the river, that we said a crocodile, yes, yes, I remember it. You remember the goats that disappeared, that we said a leopard was, yes, I know about them.

Well, Father, I'm the one that did it. There were others involved, but I'm the one that instigated it. God has forgiven me these things now.

I seek your forgiveness. I want to repay you for them. I need time.

You witch doctor watched in amazement. He'd never seen anything like this before. Truly, this young son of yours has fallen under the terrible spell of that missionary.

The entire village must be re-doctored again. They set about the great ceremony of re-doctoring the village. One of the boys was sent to go get a black goat, a goat without a blemish or a mark on it.

Its throat was cut. The blood was caught in a little wooden dish. They passed it around to every member of the village.

Each person had to dip their finger in it and touch it to their tongue as a sign of allegiance to the spirits to which it had been offered. The meat was cut up. It was put into a pot.

Herbs and concoctions were poured onto the fire, poured into the meat. On with the ceremony they went. They took up the pegs on top of the huts.

They re-doctored them against lightning. They took up the pegs at the corners of the gardens. They re-doctored them against famine and drought.

They took ashes from the fire. They sprinkled them on all the many footpaths leading into the chief's village. Any witch coming that way would come up against this invisible barrier that they had laid down.

Finally, in the late afternoon, the meat was cooked. Now came the greatest part of the ceremony. Every person in the village had to eat a tiny piece of this meat.

By eating a bite of it, they believed that the spirits to which it had been offered would gain entrance to them and could permeate and protect them from the inside. Around to each member of the village they came. They reached this proud young warrior.

He leapt back. No, no, I can't do that. I no longer worship these spirits.

I no longer fear these witches. I can't do these things. Father, it seems that somehow I've managed to disgrace the tribe.

Better that you send me away. The old chief whirled on his eldest son. All right, he shouted.

Get out. Leave. You're vanquished from this Swazi nation.

And as the young man turned to leave, the witch doctor whirled around. No, he can't go. Wherever he goes, the witches will gain entrance to this village through him.

He must eat this meat. The father turned to four of the young warriors that were standing there, all of them half-brothers to this young man. Grab him, he shouted.

They pinned their elder brother's arms behind his back. They tried to force him to eat the meat. He clenched his teeth.

They flung him to the ground. They tried to pry open his mouth and force the meat in. Until at last, in a fit of rage, the old chief turned on one of the boys.

Get the shambok, he shouted. It's a criminal offense in Africa to use a shambok on a man. A raw, hippopotamus-hide bullwhip, 12 to 14 feet long.

The shambok was brought. One of the boys ran, and he was back in a minute with four wooden pegs. He pounded them into the ground.

They strapped their elder brother down with rawhide thongs. Then the old chief stepped forward, and he brought that great lash whistling down across his elder son. Blow upon blow, and each time the whip fell and rose again.

It ripped through the flesh to the bone, leaving an open wound. Blow upon blow, until at last the whip severed down belly on his unconscious form. The old chief stepped back.

Water was brought. As consciousness started to come back to him, the witch doctor was there. Just one bite, just one bite.

Not a tear dimmed his eye down. I won't do it. I can't do it.

Turn him over, the chief shouted. They rolled him over in the gravel and strapped him down again. And then as the chief stepped up, the second eldest boy, a young warrior in his early twenties, took the whip from him.

You're old. You're tired. Let me have it awhile.

And with all the jealousy of his position in the tribe and the strength of his youth, he brought that great lash down across his elder brother. Blow upon blow, his chest, his face, his limbs, until once more the whip simply feathered down belly on his unconscious form. The quick tropical twilight faded.

Darkness fell like a heavy blanket across Africa. The old chief turned to the witch doctor. Leave him there.

He'll have changed his mind about the scar of his by tomorrow. Stay with us tonight. Protect us from the evil spirits.

We'll carry on with the ceremony tomorrow. He turned to the people. Get to your huts, he shouted.

The people scattered instantly to their huts. No campfires were built that night. Ten, eleven o'clock that night, in one of the little tiny low doorways to a little grass beehive shaped hut, cautiously a tiny face peered out into the darkness.

It was the eight year old sister to the young man who lay on the ground. She studied every shadow in the village and when at last she was certain that nothing moved, she ducked through the doorway, leapt to her feet, slithered like a shadow across through the moonlight to where her elder brother lay. She dropped to her hands and knees.

Quickly she severed the thongs around his wrists and his ankles. She splashed water from the broken piece of a pot into his face and his consciousness came back to him and he sat up and he saw what was. Through thick swollen lips he whispered to her, If they need me, tell them I'll be at the mission station.

No, no, I can't tell them. If I tell them anything, they'll know I had something to do with it and I'll get the beating you were to get tomorrow. She whirled around, dashed back across the yard, dropped to her hands and knees and slipped through into the darkened hut beyond.

He crawled over against the edge of the stockade pulled himself upright, took a long walking stick out of the poles. Leaning heavily on it, he staggered into the twelve foot elephant grass at the edge of the village. Dawn broke the next day and into the yard at the mission station staggered this proud young Swazi warrior.

At first the missionary didn't even recognize him. Then when he realized who he was, he started to scold him. You're a Christian now.

We don't go to these big buildings. Look, the people have beaten you to within an inch of your life. It's a miracle you're alive.

We don't do these things when we... No, missionary, no. It didn't happen that way. They sat him down right there in the shade of the thorn tree.

The missionary shouted for water and disinfectant in a big white basin and all through the long morning hours he washed away the caked gravel and the blood and tried to patch him up as best as he could and the warrior sat there in total stoical silence until at last the missionary had done everything he could and he went to stand up and the young man reached out and stopped him and in a voice that the missionary could barely hear he said, missionary, last night as I climbed this mountain many, many times I had to sit down on the rocks in the darkness and get my strength. You know, missionary, as I sat there alone in the darkness I looked down deep inside of me here. He was still there, missionary.

He was still there. He didn't desert me when they beat me. They didn't drive him out.

Tell me something, missionary. Can they ever drive him out? Will he ever leave me? No. You're the only one who can drive him out.

As long as you walk by his side and you keep your hands firmly in his he'll walk with you every step of the way through life right to the gates of eternity. Nothing can keep him away. Oh, missionary, I've got to go back and tell my tribe about the love that this God has for us.

They carried him into their home. It wasn't much of a home. I remember it as a boy.

It was 22 feet long and 16 feet wide made of rusted sheets of corrugated iron standing upright. It was one large room with two wires across the middle of it and four burlap curtains that you pulled to form the four walls of the house inside. And just as you went through the door right in front of you there were three large round river rocks and the fire burned between them and that was the kitchen.

They carried him into the kitchen. They laid down some skin blankets and he curled up there and the missionary brewed broth and tried to nurse him back to health and for three days his life hung in the balance. And then the fourth day when they came out into the kitchen area he was sitting up.

And the fifth day when they came out he had managed to crawl across the floor. He had opened the door and he was sitting outside in the sunlight propped up against the wall of the house. The sixth day he was on his feet and by the end of the week he was in and out of the kitchen.

By the end of the second week he was a nuisance. He was everywhere. And then one morning he burst into the kitchen.

The missionary and his wife and some of the Africans were seated on the floor on grass mats eating their hard cornmeal porridge that would be their meal that day as they visited the villages. Missionary, missionary, he said I want you to start teaching me how to look into this little black book you carry around and have it talk to me the same way that it speaks to you. The missionary tried to explain to him we're too busy.

We don't have the time to teach you how to read. Missionary, let us help with the work around this place. There are many of us young people that have now fled to the mission.

We can help you. They had an immediate council of war right there in the kitchen. Chores were assigned everybody.

It fell a lot of this young warrior to wash the dishes in the kitchen for everybody on the mission station and to gather firewood for the fire. Others did various other chores. Early in the morning they'd all be finished with their work down to the little stone church they would go.

You could hear them all over the mission station as the missionary's wife taught them how to read. It had only been just a few years before when she had been sitting here on these benches and chairs studying and praying just as you girls are. Now, deep in the heart of Africa it was lifting the name of Jesus.

You could hear those young people all over the mission station as they learned the alphabet for the first time in their lives. Everybody would recite it in unison. A, B, C, D. Down the line.

Then they learned to count. One, two, three, four. Down the line.

Finally one day he became the proud owner of his own little black book. Back to the kitchen he came to wash the dishes. He propped it up in front of the dish pan.

Just a few tin plates and knives and forks but you never saw dishes get washed the good in all your life. He was there by the hour doing those dishes. He'd get to washing dishes and then pretty soon it would slow up.

He'd get to sounding away letter by letter. He'd sound, there was a verse. That was a verse.

He'd say it over to himself. Then he'd say it over again. Then he'd get blessed doing dishes in the kitchen.

He'd line the missionary's kids up. Call them in from the yard where they were playing. Two little boys, barefooted, no shirts, little short pants, two little oxen made of clay in their hands.

He'd line them up in the kitchen in front of him. He'd say that verse to them. He'd make them stand there and repeat it after him.

Then he'd say it over to them again. And then they'd have to repeat it after him again, over and over. My dad used to tell me that most of the scripture that he knew from memory, he learned when he was seven years old standing there in the kitchen and saying them over and over and over again so that he could escape and go outside to play.

I don't know how much he ever learns to read. I do know this. I was there in his old age when he was blind many, many years later.

And every year at camp meeting, they'd call him in and it was the event of the camp. They'd bring him up onto the platform and he'd stand there in front of the crowd, totally blind. And he'd reach back in his memory into the Old Testament somewhere and he'd quote a verse.

And before you could find it, he'd quote the next one and the next one and the next one and then he'd take off and he'd pace up and down on the platform. Never pause. Never hesitate.

As fast as you could follow in with the eye. One book after the next. Down through an hour, two hours, three hours.

Never hesitate. Never pause. Gotta put it down inside you, missionary, so that no matter what happens, I'm always ready to tell my people about this love that he has for us.

He finally served his two years of probation. The day came for him to be baptized. As he went down to be baptized, he had another request.

I don't want to be baptized under my heathen name. My heathen name still has awful memories for me. What do you want to be called, they asked him.

I read back here, missionary, where God spoke many times to a young man. I want him to call me by a familiar name when he speaks to me. From today on, baptize me by the Christian name of Samuel.

They took him and they baptized him by the name of Samuel. I never met a single missionary that ever accurately remembered his heathen name. His name from that day on was Samuel.

Filled with one great consuming desire to get back and start preaching to his own tribe, he met and married a fine Christian girl there on the mission station. Impatiently, they waited for an assignment. By this time, in the history of our work in that part of Africa, the missionary had received a commission from God to start opening up the fever country that lay between the mountains of Swaziland and the Indian Ocean.

Weeks and weeks at a time, he'd ride his horse down from the mission station out of the mountains into the fever belt. He'd get permission from the chief down there. Then back up to the mission station he'd come, take a young couple and they'd go build a church.

He'd go off in another direction on horseback, get permission from another chief, come back, take another young couple. Samuel waited impatiently. Knowing Samuel's impatience, one Saturday afternoon, the missionary came galloping his horse back into the mission.

Never got out of the saddle. As he rode into the mission, he started to shout, Samuel, Samuel! Samuel was out of the kitchen like a shot wadding up his little apron as he slid up to the horse and grabbed the bridle. Is it me? Did you call me missionary? Yes, Samuel, yes.

I've got a place for you to preach. It's way down across the bush felt. It's 45 miles over there on the other side of the Kamadi River on the slopes of the Obongo Mountains.

It's in old Chief Msutuga's country. Chief Msutuga? Samuel's eyes grew wide with alarm. But missionary, don't you know who Chief Msutuga is? He's an uncle to the king of Swaziland, Zabuza.

He's world famous in our world for his terrible temper. Every day, missionary, he flies into a rage and anybody within range of his spears is just simply stabbed to death. I know who he is, Samuel.

I have camped in his village for three months. I've seen over 200 men put to death in that time. But yesterday, when the sun touched the tops of the horns of the cattle, Chief Msutuga called me to him and he gave me permission to start a church in his country.

What must we do about it, Samuel? Missionary, if Chief Msutuga gave you permission, God must have made him do it. We'll go, missionary. Monday morning saw them at the crack of dawn.

Their little pack donkey loaded down with everything they owned in the world. Two grass sleeping mats rolled up on each side of the donkey. A little four-gallon kerosene tin made into a homemade trunk with some articles of clothes and an old gray tattered army blanket and an axe.

Down the winding trails into the bushveld. Thirty-five, forty miles over there on the slopes of the Upombo Mountains. They cut back the long grass.

They drove poles into the ground. They rolled reeds. They took mud and they plastered it.

They left a little square at the back to serve as an open doorway and then they left a little square over here in this mud wall and another one over on this side over here to serve as windows. They put a thatched roof over it. They laid a log in the front to serve as an altar.

That was the only stick of furniture in the church. Then they knelt all by themselves out there in that blistered baked yard under that tropical sun. Just the three of them.

Samuel, his wife and the missionary and they had a dedication service. There it is, Samuel. There's your church.

There's all of Africa before you. The name of Jesus has never been spoken on the Upombo Mountains. See what you can do about it.

And Samuel and his little wife set about the tremendous task of carrying the name of Jesus to the mountainsides of Africa from village to village preaching and praying with the people from mountainside to mountainside down by the river where the women balanced their big clay pots on their heads as they drew water high up against the cliffs where the herdsmen sat in the shade of the mountain in the late afternoon and watched the flocks below them preaching and praying with the people. One by one he started to win them. Each one wrestled individually out of darkness.

Two, three, four, five, six, nearly a year had gone by. And then one Sunday night when Samuel brought his message to a close in the little mud church and he opened the altar for anybody who wanted to come down and pray among those who stood up and walked down to the front was one of Chief Msutuga's wives. Samuel and his wife knelt with her.

They helped her pray. Back to the old chief up there she went. I'm a Christian now chief and I won't do the things I used to do.

I won't grind your stuff for you anymore. I won't cook your beer for you anymore. I won't participate in your demon heathen dances anymore.

I'm a Christian and my life is going to reflect it from today on. The next day Chief Msutuga stormed down into the outstation. He was beside himself.

He was up and down in the yard there screaming at the top of his lungs saying, Oh, I don't care what you do in this country but you leave my village out of it. Do you understand me? Yes, chief. Yes, chief.

But chief, this is God's house. Only God is permitted to turn somebody away from God's house. If you feel the way you do about your village, better you keep your people up there.

Don't let them come down here at all. All right, the chief shouted. All right, that's what I'll do.

That's just one. There's still 27 other wives. I'll just forget about that one.

Back to his wives he stormed. Samuel carried on with the building of the church. They continued to grow.

12, 15, 20, 25. Six months had gone by. The heavy rains had come.

They were plowing. And then one Sunday night at the close of the Sunday night service when the altar was opened, among those who came down to pray, a second of Chief Msutuga's wives was among them. Samuel and his wife helped her pray.

Back to the old chief up there she went. I'm a Christian now, chief, and I won't do the things I used to do. I won't grind your snuff for you anymore.

I won't cook your beer for you. I won't participate in your heathen dances anymore. I'm a Christian and I won't... That night, Chief Msutuga and six of his councilmen stormed into the outstation.

He was beside himself. Said, no, I told you to leave my village out of it. Yes, chief.

Yes, chief. But, chief, you promised that you would keep your people up there and not let them come down here. Now it seems that you're not able to control your wives and you want to blame me for it.

All right, the chief shouted. All right, we'll forget about her. That's just two.

There's still 25 other wives. I'll just forget about those two. Back to his wives, he stormed.

Samuel carried on with the building of the church. They continued to grow. 30, 35, 40, 50, 60.

The little mud church was packed to capacity. Samuel's wife had a brand new baby, their first. They had been there now almost two years.

And then one Sunday night, at the close of the Sunday night service, among those who stood up and came down to pray, a third of Chief of Suduga's wives was among them. Back to the old chief up there she went. That night, Chief of Suduga and a regiment of his warriors swarmed down on the outstation.

Samuel grabbed his wife and baby. They took refuge inside the open door of the church. The chief was beside himself, froth flicking from the corners of his mouth.

He was incoherent. For 20 minutes, he wore himself out until finally he slowed down to where they could understand him. He was screaming at the top of his lungs, Get out of my country! It's finished, this business of God.

Get out of my country! I'll be merciful with you, Samuel, because you're blood kin of mine. Because both of us are related to the king of Swaziland. I'll give you exactly one week to clear out of my country.

Next Sunday, if you're still here, I'll be up here on this mountainside with my warriors. And if you ring that bell to call these people together, I'll come down this mountainside. We'll pack you and your wife and your baby into this church.

We'll set fire to this place. We'll see if this God of yours can walk through fire. Get out of my country! Words swept like wildfire in the villages.

Chief of Sutuga had read the ultimatum to Samuel. Monday. Tuesday.

From village to village, Samuel and his wife went. Wednesday. He knew it would be useless to walk two days over the mountains back to the mission station.

The missionary wouldn't be there. He'd be way down in the fever country somewhere trying to get permission to open up another church. And he'd walk two days back over the mountains still not having received the advice that he was seeking.

Every day, every night, they spent on their knees. Wednesday. Thursday.

They stayed with the work that God had given them to do. Friday. Wherever they went preaching and praying with the people, the people stood at a distance now in sullen, silent little groups.

Nobody wanted to get too close to them. Saturday dawned bright and hot and early. She tied the baby on her back with a goatskin in African fashion and following her husband down the footpaths as she did every day of his ministry, preaching and praying with the people.

From village to village, they went. All week, they had fasted. Almost every night, all night, they had prayed.

They found their way back at the end of Saturday to the little mud church. By the time they could reach there, the quick tropical twilight had faded. Darkness had fallen and a moon hung in the sky.

They stood under the stark black and white shadows of moonlight, the little church just a few feet away. And Samuel's wife asked him, Samuel, all week you've prayed and God has not spoken. Do you want me to fix something and get the baby ready so we can flee? Listen, he said.

Go fix something and take the baby and flee to the mission station. You can cross the Kamadi River by dawn. They'll never catch up to you by then.

Oh no, Samuel, no. God put us into this work together and God intended for us to stay in it together. And I'm not leaving until God tells both of us that he wants us to leave.

I'm going back over to the church, he told her. And I'm going to stay there again tonight until God answers me. He watched his wife as she walked through the moonlight.

He saw her drop onto her hands and knees and crawl through the low 18 inch high doorway to her little grass beehive shaped parsonage to put her baby to bed on a goatskin on the floor. And Samuel turned and he walked through the moonlight over to the back of his little mud church. He stepped inside the open doorway.

There were no lights to flick on in that building that night. No benches to stumble over. Just moonlight streaming through the square of an open window on this side of the church and splashed across the log that served as an altar.

He found his way down to the front of his little mud church and he lifted his face before the throne of God and he poured out his heart. Tell me what to do Lord. What do you want me to do? Do you want me to stay here? And Lord, if I stay here and I ring that bell tomorrow, what's going to happen to this flock when I die? Tell me what to do Lord.

What must I do? Must I take my wife and baby and flee to the mission station? And Lord, if I flee, what's going to happen to this flock? Tell me what to do Lord. What must I do? Outside, a great tropical moon started to climb high over the top of that little thatched roof that rose hour after hour as Samuel stood before the throne of God. What must I do Lord? What do you want me to do? Until at last, that huge moon started to slide down the far side of that thatched roof and eventually, the moonlight poured through the open square on the opposite side of his church and the Sabbath was coming quickly and in those early dark hours, suddenly Samuel heard something beside him.

He stopped mid-sentence in his prayer. His eyes came open. He turned to look.

He didn't know when she had slipped in to back him up with her prayer but there she knelt and he could see the reflection of the moonlight on the tears on her cheeks as she prayed and the minute she heard her husband stop praying, she too stopped and she turned her face to him. Her eyes came open and in a soft, low voice, she said, Samuel, why do you stop praying? Has God told you what he wants you to do? For a long instant, Samuel was silent and then she saw him as he started to nod his head, just a dark shadow against the darker shadows and in a deep, low voice, he said, just this moment, he's told me what he wants me to do. These are the words that he has brought back to me.

For he has said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper. I shall not fear what man shall do unto me. Jesus must have walked into the open doorway of that little mud church that day because they had an old-fashioned camp meeting, just the three of them, up and down, shouting and praising God.

Samuel had his commission. Ring that bell for me, the Lord had told him. Ring it, Samuel, if you must ring it, right to the gates of eternity this morning.

I'll walk every step of the way with you, but I require it of you. Ring that bell. In the early gray light of dawn, Samuel hung around in the shadows at the back of his church, found the big 18-inch iron bolt with which he pounded the old plow shear that hung from a wire out in the thorn tree that was the bell for the church.

He dusted the sand off that bolt. No, he wasn't going to ring it yet, but he sure wasn't going to be late when the time came to ring it. Up and down in front of his church he paced, back and forth, already in the early gray light of dawn.

Thousands and thousands of people had started to gather. They stood in silent little clusters on the huge granite rocks, looking down over the elephant grass towards the outstation below. Samuel never saw them.

He just paced back and forth, up and down, back and forth. He didn't have a watch, but he knew that when the sun would climb into a certain place in the branches of the thorn tree, it would be time for the morning service. He happened to glance up the valley.

There sat Chief of Suduga, his regiment of warriors behind him. The wind of the dawn, the early morning breeze ruffling the white ostrich feathers in their hair. The red light of the rising sun flashing from their spears.

Chief of Suduga was muttering to himself, that man intends to ring that bell, and I'm going to make an example of him that will never be forgotten in the history of Africa. We'll see about this God of his today. Up and down, back and forth, and way up there in the fork of the thorn tree, inch by inch, that tropical sun started to climb into place.

Higher and higher it went, until at last it clicked into place. Samuel spit on his hand. He clasped that bolt.

He sailed through the air. He landed under that bell, and with every ounce of strength in his body, he brought that bolt crashing down on that bell. A sigh like the wind escaped from thousands of throats as the people stood to their feet and they looked down across the mountains.

Chief of Suduga could hardly believe his ears. He whirled around, shouting the order. His regiment leapt to its feet.

As the bell started to swing, Samuel followed it from one side to the other. His feet never seemed to hit the ground anymore. The dust froze in a great cloud around him.

Back and forth he followed it. The perspiration soaked him silver in the sunlight. That day, as they swept down the mountainside, their Zulu war cries rolling down the valley ahead of them.

Totally disciplined, an entire regiment, their spears above their heads, their huge seven-foot war shields. They swept down that mountain. Samuel never saw them coming.

He had one thought. Ring that bell at the mission station. Forty-five miles away, Saturday afternoon, the day before, as Samuel had expected, the missionary had been gone for many, many weeks.

But on that afternoon, almost unconscious from malaria, Joseph Mkwanz, his district evangelist, was riding on the horse holding him upright. They walked slowly into the mission station. Missionary's wife and the children and all the Africans on the place came running out and they helped him down off of the horse and carried him into the house.

Missionary's wife crushed up ten grams of quinine and forced them down his throat and fed him some broth. And within two hours, the coma was broken and he was able to sit up and gather some strength and talk to them and by dusk that night, he was feeling halfway back to himself. That night, they retired early.

But as was his custom, before retiring for the night, he dropped to his knees in the darkness beside his pallet, all across the mountains. The next day was the Sabbath day and those little African pastors would be standing in their pulpits preaching against the awful darkness of Africa's night. One by one, the

missionary took each one of them and their wives and he put them up there before God in prayer and he got God's blessing for them, put them back into their pulpits, took the next young couple, put them up there before God, got their blessing, took the next one, he took little old Samuel and his wife that night, put them up there before God and instantly, Samuel came straight back to him.

He took him a second time in prayer, put him up there before God. Samuel came straight back. Must be the fever.

It must be that I'm just tired. I'll feel better in the morning. He rolled into bed to try to sleep.

Outside, a great tropical moon started to climb. Hour after hour, high over the top of that little thatched roof, the moon rose and the missionary lay tossing restlessly back and forth. Samuel kept coming back.

Samuel. Just about midnight, he slipped quietly out of bed, scooped up his riding clothes, tiptoed past the burlap curtain into the kitchen area where the dying embers of the fire on the floor still cast some light. He pulled on his riding garb and he was just slipping on his big old western boots when the curtain rustled behind him and his wife stepped out with a candle.

What's the problem? What's the matter? Where are you going? Something's the matter with Samuel. I've got to go see what's the matter. There's only one horse still left, the stallion.

Do you think you can control him? I'll have to try, he told her. You go get him and I'll fix you something to take along the way. Almost one o'clock that morning, the missionary's wife and two little sons stood outside the kitchen door in the bright tropical moonlight.

They watched him as he piled up onto the back of that great big gray Arabian stallion. They saw that huge horse as it reared. They watched it as it tried to dislodge him.

Then as he got a grip on it and they pounded across the mission yard at a big gallop. There was no time now to take the long way to ford the Comadi River where it was shallow, where there was no danger of the crocodiles. Barely time for the shortcut and God alone held back the instant death that lurks beneath those waters that night as the missionary and his horse swam the 200 yard wide Comadi River.

They clambered up the muddy banks on the other side. Then out through the reed beds and across 35 miles of lion country that lay towards the Obumbo. That horse seemed to catch the urgency of his mission.

Long ago it had wrestled the bit away from the missionary. It had it between its teeth, its breath coming in great even sobs. It ran like it had never run before.

The missionary lay as low as he could behind the saddle horn to keep from being swept off by thorn branches in the darkness. The froth streamed back across the horse's flank. Mile after mile slipped by.

Dogs ran barking into darkened villages. And the old men got up in the night and stood outside in the pale moonlight and pulled their leopard skin blankets up around their thin shoulders and listened to the sound of a horse way in the distance running like it had never run before. He saw the first white pencil line of light etched on the horizon behind him.

He saw the first golden rays of sun. Then he was into the foothills and the horse was starting to follow the trails higher and higher and higher up the mountain sides. And way up there in a great fork of a tree that golden tropical sun clicked into place.

Samuel sailed through the air. He landed under that pill. And as he brought that boat down, the missionary heard it a thousand yards away down by the spring.

He came pounding up through the cornfields into the churchyard. He reined the horse to a stop. He'd seen creatures ring bells all of his life.

But he'd never seen a man doing what this man was doing. Samuel! Samuel never heard him. He had his commission ring that bell.

He was pounding that bell with all of his might. But Samuel's little wife heard him. She whirled around the baby clasped to her.

There sat the missionary on his horse. She pointed up the mountainside. Something would have to be done immediately.

Up the mountain to meet them he went. The chief flew past him. Get out of here missionary.

You'll get killed today. The missionary stood in the stirrups of his saddle. And he raised his hands.

And for just an instant total confusion swept the regiment of warriors. They staggered to a stop. They'd heard that God had done some miraculous things for this missionary.

They didn't know but maybe he'd do something now. That was all the time he needed. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life.

In Swazi it goes like this. . He started to preach. He started to pour out for them the wonderful age old story of love.

On the mountainside the little great clusters of people watched. Then down the mountain Soon they came, a living river of humanity. They packed the crowd around him hour after hour as the horse stood there.

He preached as the sun beat down. He told them the entire story of Jesus. It was late afternoon when he brought his message to a close.

That's the peace and the joy and the love that we've come to tell you about. Instantly, a tall councilman was on his feet. Missionary, nobody has ever told me this story before.

I refuse to have any part to the burning of that church down there. I'll stand alone in my tribe. He turned and marched over and stood by himself.

Instantly, the missionary saw his opportunity. Those of you that have the courage to say what this man has just said, move over there and stand behind him. Slowly, like an old man coming to his feet, they watched a miracle unfold.

Thousands of people started to move. Every last person moved over and stood behind the councilman. Fear filled the eyes of Chifam Sutuga.

Missionary, no man has ever made my tribe disobey me before on pain of instant death. It can't be you. It has to be your God.

And if it's your God, I too am afraid to touch that church. I'll stand with my tribe. He marched over and stood once more in front of his people.

The missionary wheeled his horse around. Let's tell Samuel, he shouted. They pounded down there into the outstation.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. You know what Samuel was doing? You should. All day he had pounded that bell.

God told him, ring that bell. Samuel, they want to hear you preach. Samuel preached as if his heart would break.

And at the close of that great day, the first regiment of Swazi warriors ever came marching forward, dropped to their knees, laid their shields and their spears down, bowed their white ostrich blooms and their shaggy heads humbly at the feet of Chief. Chifam Sutuga had something to say to the tribe. My people, I told this man that bell would never ring again and God corrected me.

Samuel, from this day on in my country till the end of all time, never again will that bell ever be threatened. Do you understand me? And old Samuel grabbed that big old boat and he whaled that bell a half a dozen more times. But the truth of the matter is that in the next six years, on four occasions, Chifam Sutuga and his entire army swept down on Samuel's church.

Each time, they tore the church down right to the ground so that they could rebuild it for him bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger to house the multitudes that were one under the anointed ministry of that African preacher. And on the mountain sides up there, he was planting outstations. And then he was walking a great two-week circuit and then a three-week circuit.

And finally, he was gone all month preaching in two and three dozen churches before he was... And then the young men came out from under his ministry that filled those churches. And a district was born across the mountains until one day, out of the dawn, came a runner. Chosen for his speed, the man had covered 45 miles in darkness that night and the Kamadi River at full flood.

He staggered into Samuel's village at dawn. He whispered something in Samuel's ear. Then on up over the mountain to Chifam Sutuga's village.

He whispered something in Chifam Sutuga's ear. Then collapsed to the ground. Samuel grabbed his wife and baby and they took off down the trail that the runner had just come.

Chifam Sutuga shouted for a councilman. Take charge of the affairs of the tribe. I'll be gone for ten days.

Chief, chief, where can we reach you? This man tells me that my missionary's God is calling him home. He'll answer his God instantly. I must get there before he has time to speak with his God.

You can reach me at the mission station. Chifam Sutuga caught up to Samuel and his wife. They walked right through the day and cleared through the following night.

And at dawn, 24 hours later, they staggered into the mission station up on the mountains there, 45 miles away. A huge group of Africans sat outside the mission home quietly, waiting word from within. Chifam Sutuga was royalty.

It was disrespect for him not to greet the tribe. He pushed his way through them silently up to the door. Missionary's wife opened it.

Yes, chief. Chief, can I help you? They tell me that my missionary's God is calling him home. I must speak to him before he answers his God.

You're too late, chief. He's in a coma. He's been in and out of this coma all morning.

He doesn't know anybody right now. Let me see him, the chief pled. They pulled aside the burlap curtain and the old chief stepped forward.

And he stood there, looking on that hot, fevery form as the missionary threw himself restlessly back and forth. And Chifam Sutuga reached down and grabbed his hand between his two enormous black hands. And the tears welled up in his eyes.

And the missionary flung himself restlessly back across the cot. And for an instant, the coma broke again. His eyes came open.

And then a puzzled look crossed his face. And in a very low voice, he said, Chifam Sutuga, is it really you I see standing here? Missionary, missionary, listen very carefully to me. We know that your God will grant you anything you ask of him.

Explain to him that we, the people of Africa, beg that you be allowed to stay. He'll let you stay, missionary. You can stay a while longer with us.

No, chief, no. Long ago, I asked him to give me just six more churches in the fever belt. He's given me 29 more churches since that day.

Therefore, I have no more words to speak with my God. I understand, missionary. I too am a man of honor.

Go in peace. But as you leave Africa forever today, know this one thing. Samuel's arms will never grow tired ringing that bell.

We'll lift them up. That bell, missionary, it will ring on every mountainside in Africa until Jesus comes back. Chief Msoudouga turned and walked silently out of the mission house, sat all by himself at the edge of the mission station under a thorn tree, refused to speak to anybody.

As a candle flares up at the moment it dies out completely, in the last hours of that afternoon, the 29th of May, Wednesday, the missionary rallied his strength. They carried him out into the yard on a cot and the Africans clustered as close as they could around and stood in absolute total silence. And he sat up and he lifted his hands and for 20 minutes he brought his last message and farewell to them.

And God's chariot came and took him home to his reward. And they bore his body just 50 feet away and there in the shadows of the eucalyptus trees, beside the graves of four of his children, they laid him to rest on the mountainsides of Swaziland. But as he rose from their midst that day, they seemed to catch up the mantle that he had slung behind.

Missionaries and Africans, they turned, they scattered, determined that bell would ring on every mountainside in Africa until Jesus comes back someday. Until today, hundreds of thousands of Africans

have met the master on the mountainsides and the numbers just keep growing. Samuel continued to preach until one day the British government conscripted 100,000 Swazi warriors to go into North Africa as a buffer to help fight back the German invasion under Rommel.

And when those 100,000 men were asked who they wanted to lead them as their chaplain, as their spiritual leader, their vote came back unanimously. Give us Samuel! He took his big pulpit Bible, called his wife up to the platform of his huge church. Feed my Lord's people until I come back.

I'm a soldier now. Stuffed his small Bible in his coat pockets, squared his shoulders, turned on his heel and marched out of the green mountainsides of Swaziland, 7,000 miles across Africa into the burning sands of Libya and up there for three years in the front line trenches ministering to his nation until one day at the Battle of Tripoli, out of the sun, there came a scream of a bomb and a blinding flash and a great chunk of white hot iron sliced its way across Samuel's face, instantly blinding him completely in one eye and almost totally in the other one. Suddenly the years that he had left behind him caught up to him overnight, rolled across his head, turned his hair white, almost completely blind, broken in health, back to Swaziland.

His big Bible was waiting for him. God's chariot had taken his little wife on. Missionaries tried to reason with him.

We'll take care of you, Samuel. You can retire now. You don't understand, missionary.

Long before you were ever born in that wonderful land of God that they call America, out here in the darkness of Africa, I promised him that I would ring it forever. Forever hasn't come yet. If I'm too old to be of any use anymore, I found the people hiding in the caves on the mountain.

Their fingers were gone. Their noses were eaten away. Let me go to those people and tell them about a God who can heal them of a leprosy of the soul.

They set him free to wander the mountainsides, from cave to cave, to hunt up the leper. The rest of the story is legend. Samuel's work among the lepers grew to such size we had to station a full-time missionary up there.

Miss Elizabeth Cole, a registered nurse from Montana, riding horseback to keep up with him. It continued to grow. We eventually organized a fantastic leper colony.

And then the United Nations moved in and it just continued to grow. And then finally we had to put a senior medical missionary, Dr. David Hines and his wife from Scotland, in the leper colony up there. And then they found a cure for Hansen's disease.

Too old to be of any use anymore. I said goodbye to him not so long ago, back at the mission station where he had first met God. He was standing no further than that piano from me.

I was talking to a group of preachers. My father was there. He was just getting ready to leave for America for the last time.

Dad walked up to me and he bumped me on the shoulder. He said, Harman, did you notice who Samuel's talking to? I turned to look. Samuel had been ordained in the ministry in 1935.

Standing next to him was the District Superintendent of Northern Swaziland. One of our greatest preachers. A man by the name of Simon Zlamini.

He was a... Simon? Simon Zlamini? Why he was the boy that had dashed up over the mountainside to go get the witch doctor, to come and doctor their village. Years gone by. And next to him stood Titus Zlamini with his big bushy beard.

One of our great holiness evangelists in Africa. Tremendous preacher. Titus, he was the boy that had run and got that black goat without a blemish or a mark on it to sacrifice to the spirits that day.

And next to him stood Jacob Zlamini, the pastor of one of our greatest churches. 1,600 members in that church on the mountainside of Swaziland. He was the boy that had pounded those pigs into the ground.

Had tied his elder brother down with rawhide thongs. And next to them stood Philemon Zlamini, the superintendent of the new pioneer area in Zululand. He was the boy that had wrenched the whip away from his father's hands.

Had laid those faint white scars across Samuel's face and chest. Once more a united family through the blood of Jesus Christ. These were great leaders of the church of Africa.

As I listened to them talk, they were talking of the camp meetings, the preacher's conventions, the retreats of the new fields to be opened. Samuel was no longer a part of this work like he once had been. I could see on his face that he was a little bit left out.

In fact, unnoticed by his brothers, I saw him turn. He felt the wall of the tabernacle, got his bearings, and he took off. I watched him go down there at the end of the tabernacle.

He stepped out into open space. Fifty feet from the tabernacle, he walked up to a little white picket fence. He pushed open the gate and stepped inside, and Dad and I took off like a shot.

We caught up to him. He had passed the four little graves that lie there, and he was standing there beside the grave of that first missionary. He was praying, Lord, the work is secure.

Let me rest now. I'm old. I'm no use anymore.

Just let me rest now, Lord. Let me get up there in heaven and sit down with my missionary and his wife and tell him of all that's happened in the church these many years that they've been gone. Let me go now, Lord.

Dad threw an arm up over his shoulder and startled. Samuel turned, recognized that it was my father, called him by his African name. He said, Vusikama, did you hear what I prayed? Yes, Samuel.

Samuel, when you're gone, who are we going to send all these young new missionaries from America to to teach them how to stand firm and ring the bell when there's nothing left to do except stand firm? For a long moment, Samuel stood in silence. And then I saw a faint smile creep up around the corner of his mouth. He turned back to my father and he said, Missionary, you were just a little boy, about 11 years old, way back there when I rang that bell.

You've never forgotten, have you? No, Samuel. None of us will ever forget. You know, missionaries, I stood there in the open door of the church and I looked at that bell hanging there.

I promised him that I would ring it forever. Thank you for reminding me. Forever hasn't come yet.

He turned and marched past us into the closing service of that great convention. And that last night, my dad was the speaker. He preached exactly the same message you have just heard.

The story of Samuel Zlaminy in Swaziland. At the close of the service, over 500 African preachers came to their feet. Samuel, we'll hold up your arms.

They'll never grow tired. We'll ring that bell with you until Jesus comes back. It'll ring in every corner of Africa.

They marched past him and shook his hand. At last, the big 2,000 candle power kerosene lanterns had started to go out for lack of pressure. And finally, the multitude was gone.

And old Samuel turned and he shuffled over to where I stood, his bare feet sliding on the cold concrete. He reached out and took my hand, called me by my African name. He said, sit behind.

They tell me that in a few days you're going to the great land of America. That you'll be speaking from one side of America to the other. I want you to do me a favor as you travel America.

I want you to thank those wonderful Christians for the sacrifice that they have made. That we, living out here in the darkness, might hear the name of Jesus. Tell the missionary, we appreciate their sons and their daughters that lie buried in our soil.

One of these days, we're all going to get to heaven. And on that last day, you can tell them I'm going to ask for the personal privilege of thanking them myself. He turned, he got almost to the door and then he remembered something.

Shouted back at me through the darkness. Oh, and another thing you can tell them. Tell them they can depend on it.

We're still ringing the bell out here. Tell them to hold the ropes all over the land over there. But in the darkness on the other side, we're still ringing the bell.

We'll see you when you get back, my child, he called. But it was not to be. My phone rang in Nairobi, Kenya.

I flew 4,000 miles. The tabernacle was packed. The coffin lay at the front.

At the close of the service, the Swazi government had asked for the privilege of carrying the coffin to the grave. I turned it over to a four-star general. Outside, hundreds of vehicles were drawn up.

An entire regiment stood at attention. Four men, soldiers, dressed in immaculate white uniform, with their guns upside down and the bells facing downward off of the left shoulder, marched forward. They unrolled that beautiful red, gold, and blue Swazi flag with a big black and white cowhide shield in the middle of it.

They unrolled it over the coffin. An order was shouted, and the six men effortlessly lifted the coffin to their shoulders. In a slow half-step, they marched solemnly the length of the tabernacle.

All of us stood up and we poured outside. It was almost dusk. The mist was coming down the mountain.

Way up back at the mission, above the mist, somebody blew taps on a trumpet. Instantly, hundreds and hundreds of rifles came to the shoulders of soldiers. And on order, volley after volley after volley was fired into the oncoming night.

And then they turned, and they marched the length of the tabernacle. They pushed open a little white picket fence, and just 15 feet beyond my grandfather's grave, they laid Samuel to rest on the mountainsides of Swaziland. Ninety-eight years old, still preaching right up to the end.

He had never wavered in his walk with Jesus across the length of the 20th century. Those, my friends, are the men and women that you pray for, that have been won, that are ringing the bell on the other side. And one of these days, we're all going to be up there in heaven.

It won't be very long for most of us, if not all of us. On that last day, as soon as you get inside the gates of heaven, get over to the right-hand side and stop and look back and watch as the crowd from Africa comes. They're going to come up out of the ages of time and sweep through those great white gates.

And out ahead of that crowd, you're going to spot a tall, proud, young Swazi warrior running. And you'll recognize him instantly, because in his hand, he's going to be carrying a big 18-inch, rusted-bent iron bolt. He'll shoot right past you, straight on up, right to the foot of the throne.

And he's going to lay it down at the feet of Jesus in exchange for a crown of pure gold. And when he turns to walk down the ranks of the beloved and thank them for the gospel, I'm going to fall into place beside him to interpret for you. If you want to speak a little Swazi, they're still ringing the bell out there.

God bless you. Praise the Lord. I tell you, I was wanting to leap from my chair, find an 18-inch bolt, and ring a bell.

Anybody here tonight want to ring a bell? Anybody here willing to step in rank with blind Samuel and say, God, I'll be faithful. I'll be faithful to ring the bell wherever you put me. Let's stand together.

If you want to slip out of your seat and just stand here at the altar, kneel or stand, it makes no difference. Phil, if you'd just play something. Anybody want to be faithful to just ring a bell? And I've got a feeling if our heart is totally open, God may even zero in on us right now tonight and say, son or daughter, open your hand.

There's a job to be done. There's a job to be done. Father, we thank you tonight for this wonderful truth.

Our spirit leaped within us at the faithfulness of God, the faithfulness of His people. Our spirit was stirred within us, stirred to action. Oh, God, as we look at these young men and young women and as we listen to the story about the young man from Texas and the young girl from Baltimore who hand in hand and arm in arm raised up a generation of Christians in Africa.

Lord, do it again. Do it again. Do it again.

Lay your hand on a young woman here tonight. Lay your hand on a young man here tonight. So stir their heart that they will pull away from the pack of the average and say, oh, God, give us a place of service.

Put a bolt in our hand and let us ring a bell forever so we too can lay it down at the Master's feet. Oh, God, make it so tonight. Bless this truth.

Let it ring in our ears for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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