

"Can Your God Give Us Rain"

By Virgil Robinson

Claude Tarr carefully read the letter he held in his hand. It told him that he was to take the "gospel wagon" and a tent and hold meetings among the Kaffir tribe of South Africa. Barry Burton was to go with him. He liked the idea at once. It meant that he would go from village to village, setting up the tent, inviting the people to come, showing pictures, and telling the story of the Man who died for sinners. Barry Burton, who would be with him, had been trained as a nurse and could help the sick. There was sure to be plenty of them! Claude wrote back and accepted the assignment.

The two missionaries worked their way steadily eastward, and came to the little settlement of Butterworth. About five miles away they found a man by the name of Jele who had quite a good house, for an African, and who was well known all over the country.

"Who are you?" he asked the missionaries.

"We are Seventh-day Adventist teachers," the missionaries replied. "We are traveling through the country, telling the gospel story. Are you a Christian?"

"Yes," Mr. Jele replied, "but I do not belong to your church. I have heard of Seventh-day Adventists, and I would like to know what you believe. Why not pitch your tent here and hold some meetings."

"We will be very glad to do that," Mr. Tarr replied. The missionaries unpacked the wagon and set up the tent. They arranged some chairs, but they knew that most of the people would either sit on the ground or stand up. Between two poles near the front of the tent, they stretched a sheet on which to show pictures. The organ was unpacked and set up nearby. A table and two chairs were arranged alongside the screen. Everything was ready for the meeting.

"Where do most of the people live around here?" the missionaries asked Mr. Jele.

"You will have to go down the hill and across the valley. Most of the huts are over on the other side. You will find the people rather discouraged, and they may not wish to come over, but you may try."

"Why are they discouraged?"

"Can't you see? There has been no rain for months, and everything is dying."

The two missionaries set out to invite the people. One went one way and the other went in a different direction. Each carried a small hand bell.

Walking up to a hut, Mr. Tarr would ring his little bell. The father would usually come out to see what was wanted.

"Come to our meeting tonight, over the valley in the tent by Mr. Jele's house," Mr. Tarr would say. "There will be singing and some pictures. You will enjoy it."

The missionaries spent all afternoon this way. As the sun was setting, they returned to the wagon. "I think we will have a good congregation," Mr. Tarr said. "There is no work that these people can do as long as this drought lasts. They can't even have beer drinks, for they have no grain to spare to make the beer." "Did you tell them that I am prepared to treat the sick?" Brother Burton asked.

Yes, I did. Some of them seemed very happy to hear it."

When it was nearly dark enough for pictures, the missionaries began to ring their bells, and the people began to come from all directions. Most of them were heathen, but one or two were Christians and had Bibles. The missionaries were especially pleased to see the village headman coming, accompanied by two of his wives.

The tent filled until there was no more room. The missionaries rolled up the sides and the people sat around the edges. Brother Tarr pumped away on the organ, and Brother Burton led the people in singing such songs as they knew. Then the missionaries were ready to begin the meeting. But to their astonishment they saw the gray-headed old headman making his way to the front.

"Now what is he going to say?" Barry Burton wondered.

"We are very glad that you have come," the headman began, speaking in the Kaffir language, which Brother Tarr understood perfectly. "You are Christians, and we have heard many missionaries speak. There is one thing that troubles us, however, and we think you should do something about it. You cannot have failed to notice that our whole country is in need of rain. None has fallen for nearly a year. Our

streams are dried up. Our cattle and sheep are dying for lack of grass. Our granaries are empty, and we have no hope of raising any food until rain falls."

The headman stopped and looked around among his people, who nodded their heads in agreement. He went on with his plea.

"We have prayed to our gods many times, we have sacrificed sheep and goats, but thus far our gods have not answered. We have almost decided that they do not care for us any longer. Now you come and say there is a great God in heaven, and that we are all His children, for He made us. You say He has all power and can do anything. Now, we do not have any more faith in your God than in our own. But we would ask you kindly and respectfully to pray to your God tonight to send us rain soon, or we shall all be dead. If He can send rain, then we will believe in Him."

The headman looked again around the circle of his people. They were all nodding their heads. He sat down.

The two missionaries looked at each other.

"This is a challenge," Mr. Burton whispered to Brother Tarr as he stepped to the edge of the tent, watching carefully to see that he did not put his foot on anyone.

"What do you see, Brother Burton?" Brother Tarr asked.

"The moon is shining brightly, the stars are in their places, and there isn't a cloud in the sky."

"So much the better," Brother Tarr remarked. "The glory to God's name will be all the greater if He chooses to answer our prayer."

"God will not disappoint us," Barry Burton replied. "Of that I am confident."

Mr. Tarr opened the Word of God and spoke for a few minutes on the conditions under which God answers prayer.

"Now my brothers," he said, "I want you all to kneel down, and I shall ask my God to send us rain."

As quietly as they could in that crowded tent, the people knelt while the young missionary pleaded with God to honor His promises and send the rain the people needed so much. When he had finished, the people resumed their seats and Brother Tarr began his evening talk.

Fifteen minutes later there was a faint sound of thunder in the distance. The people looked at one another in amazement, but Brother Tarr went right on, although he heard it also, and it sent a thrill through him. Brother Burton had not for one moment ceased to pray to God to send the rain, and to send it soon.

More and more frequently the thunder came. Vivid streaks of lightning flashed across the sky. Then rain began to fall, softly at first, then harder and harder, until it was coming down in torrents. The noise was so great that the speaker could not be heard, and he had to stop talking. He tried playing the organ, but even that could not be heard above the noise of the storm.

No one was sitting down now. The water was pouring through the tent in large streams. The organ was placed up on chairs to keep it dry. Higher and higher rose the streams until they were inches deep. For more than an hour the storm continued.

Then little by little the rain diminished. The lightning faded and the thunder could be heard farther and farther away as the storm passed on.

"There is a God in heaven," Claude Tarr exclaimed joyfully, and tonight you have seen how He answers the prayers of His children."

The old headman stood up. He looked around at the happy faces of his people. Why shouldn't they be happy? Tomorrow they would be plowing. The grass would soon be green on the hills. He hardly knew what to say. He cleared his throat. He shook his head in wonder.

"Yes, it is true," he began. "The God whom you worship has great power, and it can be seen that He loves His children. We want to know more about this God. Please stay here and teach us more."

"Come back tomorrow night," Mr. Tarr said, "and we will tell you much more about the good God whom we worship. He will hear your prayers too, but there are things He expects you to do."

The meeting was dismissed, and the people started to go across the valley to their homes. Soon they came back to the tent. They could go home. The river had come up and was so deep they dared not try to swim it in the darkness. So they made their way to the homes of people living on this side of the valley. A few slept in the tent.

Is it any wonder that many of the people in that area decided to become Christians and worship the God who loves them, and who heard their prayers and sent them rain? They learned also of course that He had shown His love for them in a far greater way when He sent Jesus to die for their sins.

A little while later, the land where the tent was pitched was purchased for a Seventh-day Adventist mission. If you go to Butterworth and ask for the Bethel College, they will tell you how to reach the mission, which has become a large school.

Claude Tarr and Barry Burton never forgot how the God of Elijah heard their prayers one night, and the rain came.

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