

3 ❧ The price was too high

Maliya and Davidi¹ were new young Christians who had gone through the Ndjoko Punda mission school and been baptized. When approached by the missionaries about entering the little two-year Bible school, they both readily accepted. By this time they had moved from their home villages to the station, where they lived in the dorms.

As they sat together in the same classes day by day, they began to take note of each other. At the end of their two years of study, Davidi proposed marriage to Maliya through his village elders. After an appropriate dowry had been agreed on by the clan elders of the two young people, a wedding was planned for the station chapel in the presence of Christians as well as village friends and relatives.

Before the wedding ceremony, Maliya and Davidi had been given instruction on the meaning of Christian marriage and were told that they would be called on to make public commitments to faithfulness to each other in the sight of God and all those present. They readily agreed to do so.

After Davidi's trial period of teaching one of the primary classes on the station and taking his turn preaching in morning chapels, he and Maliya were asked by a missionary and an African pastor whether they would be willing to go to a village, begin a simple school for village children, and tell the village folk about Jesus. If they accepted,

1 The real names of the couple involved have regrettably been lost in the transmission of their story across four generations.

they would be the first Christians ever to live in that village. They were told that it would not be easy and that they might have to work for a long while before they brought anyone to faith in Jesus. They would surely be tempted by the non-Christian ways about them and would need to commit themselves to the Lord daily for guidance, strength, and wisdom for their assignment.

Their response was humble, but direct. “We were born in the sort of villages you are talking about. We know the ways of those who know nothing about Jesus and his love. We know very well that we alone cannot bring people to Jesus. But if you here at the mission post promise to pray for us every day, we are willing to go.”

A village was found where the chief agreed to accept them. They immediately went to work. Maliya needed to plant fields to feed herself and her husband. Davidi made many trips into the surrounding bush to cut poles and thatch grass to build their simple home and then a little shelter which would serve as both a school and—one day—a chapel.

A few months after their arrival, Maliya told her husband that she wanted to go to the small store along the road at the edge of their village. She had saved a few coins and thought she had enough money to buy a piece of cotton fabric to use as a wraparound skirt. Davidi responded that if she had enough money, she should go.

Maliya entered the store, greeted the paunchy, middle-aged storekeeper, and told him what she was looking for. Looking her over, he commented that he had not seen her in his store before. She explained that she and her husband had arrived in the village only a few months earlier and that they had come to start a school and to tell the people about Jesus.

“Ah, that’s good,” he responded. He placed several bolts of brightly colored cotton prints on the counter. After looking them over she chose one pattern and asked for a piece two meters in length.

He folded the piece and laid it before her. When she asked how much she owed, he replied: “Oh, you don’t need to pay for the cloth today. Just take it. Enjoy it. The next time you come to my store we can discuss your bill.”

Still in her teens and married less than a year, she instinctively knew that the ingratiating clerk was seeking to lay a trap for her. If she followed through on his proposal, she knew that when she re-

turned he would invite her to join him in the little shuttered room at the back of the store to “settle her account.”

Turning on her heel, she left the folded cloth lying on the counter and returned to her husband empty-handed.

“Didn’t you go to purchase a piece of cloth?” he asked.

“Yes, I did.”

“Didn’t you find anything you liked?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Then why didn’t you buy it?” Davidi asked.

Maliya replied, “The price was too high.”

Jim Bertsche