

Free Church Mission Heroes

Titus Johnson Free Church Missionary to Congo 1922

The "Swedish David Livingstone"



Titus Johnson graduated from the Free Church Bible Institute and Seminary in 1918 and felt called to Africa. A couple of years later, before finding out that Africa Inland Mission (AIM) was not sending out missionaries, he took passage on a ship to Cairo in steerage. Travelling up the Nile, he ran out of money. From Khartoum to Rejaf (*Rajjaf*), his funds allowed him only a bunk without meals. So he packed 24 loaves of bread, six jars of jam and a few cans of sardines for the 18 day trip.

Then he headed westward by bicycle and canoe, a trip of about 1000 miles, until he reached Bangui. From there he traveled to Lake Chad, to Cameroon, back to Bangui, across to Congo via Kala, Libenge, Karawa, Likimi and Lisala. He finally went down the Congo River to Kinshasa (Leopoldville). In 1922 the Free Church Conference voted to establish a work in Africa based on Johnson's research.

He sent his vision in a written report to the 1923 conference of the Swedish Free Church for a work in the very needy Ubangi district which he described as "1200 miles without a single witness to the Lord." He called for more workers and by 1925 there was a contingent of 11 missionaries on the field despite problems getting the colonial government to recognize the Swedish American Mission.

Titus Johnson returned to the States in 1926 and resigned from the mission in 1928. He began preparation to become a physician and surgeon and had completed his internship in 1936 but, in the midst of the Depression, there were no funds to send him back to Africa. He did return in 1948 and served at the Karawa hospital which was being served by Covenant missionary Dr. Wallace Thornbloom. On one of his visits to Tandala, the Free Church station, Dr. Johnson performed 70 operations in 14 days.

It had long been the goal of the mission that the Congolese church would become autonomous. So beginning in the late 1980's missionaries were being re-deployed to other fields as the work in Congo that Titus had envisioned began growing toward maturity. The last missionaries officially left in December 1996 as a civil war embroiled the country. But the church has grown and now numbers over 970 local churches in an area the size of Indiana, a tremendous testimony to the vision of Titus Johnson and the blessing of the Hand of God.