

Yaakuba's story

by Gordon Molyneux

We sat under the stars in a small town up in the north of Burkina Faso, close to the frontier with Mali and not far south of the Sahara Desert. The night sky was clear and the stars seemed somehow much closer and clearer than any of us were accustomed to. Our church team of ten, visiting from the UK with SIM, had been invited to meet the local pastor over an African meal of rice and chicken sauce. Now as we settled back in our chairs, conversation came readily.

'We would love to hear your story?' we told the pastor, more as an invitation than a statement. So Pastor Yaakuba told us how he had grown up in a Fulani family, miles away to the east of the town we were in. Like the vast majority of the semi-nomadic Fulani people, he was a Muslim in a Muslim family.

One day, when he was a young man, he heard some of his friends from the Gourma tribe to the south talking about the Christian message that had changed their own lives. Yaakuba had been impressed by the things they said and the way they behaved, and in the course of time came to believe in Jesus and to follow Him. His decision to become a Christian caused outrage in his family, who insisted that it was impossible and unthinkable for a Fulani to change from being a Muslim.

'You have been cursed!' they told him. 'You will end your days an outcast and a beggar! You will never make it in life. No-one will want to employ you. No woman will even look at you, and you will never have children of your own.' Yaakuba had never felt as isolated as he did then, but nothing could deter him from following Christ.

His own father was the foremost of his critics and adversaries. Yet as the years went by, his father detected in his 'worthless' son a transformation that he could not deny. His son had become honest, loving, and hard-working. Why, he had even been accepted for training at a college in Benin to become a pastor! In the course of time, his father changed his opinion about his son and he in turn became a Christian too, some time before he died.

Yaakuba, meanwhile, had married a beautiful Christian girl, Odil, from his own tribe. He ventured back to his home area and introduced his young wife to the very neighbours who had scorned him when he had become a Christian and had told him he would never get married. They were astounded, and some of them exclaimed, 'If that is what can happen when you become a Christian, we want to become Christians, too!'

Pastor Yaakuba was appointed in 2007 as the very first Fulani pastor in the area we were visiting. The little church where the Christian believers meet is very modest, but God has begun a work in the area that He will certainly continue.

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