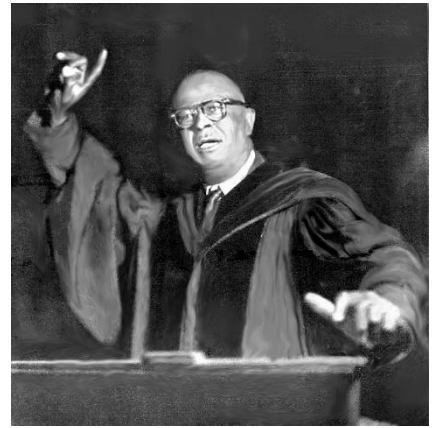


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Bishop Lawson Journeyed Through the Jungles of West Africa

By Joseph C. G. Johnson



It was in the year 1947, when my mission friends and I heard that Mother Margaret Giles Johnson had gone down to the City of Monrovia to meet a big man that had come from distant place, called America, to visit our little mud-hut mission. That big man was Bishop R. C. Lawson, an international missionary traveler. We waited eagerly to see him, since he was the first bishop to ever visit that remote part of Liberia. We also want to see the great man who's religious works the missionaries had very much spoken of.

But we were somewhat disappointed, for Bishop Lawson had failed to arrive on the day scheduled. We did not know what the trouble was, and we had no way of finding it out. "What had happened?" We asked ourselves. We hoped that nothing had happened to the plane that had taken him from Monrovia, Liberia, to Freetown, Sierra Leone.

In spite of our great anxiety, our day of surprise and real delight was yet to come. For after a few days had elapsed, our visitor Bishop Lawson, arrived at the mission station. Mother Margaret, the teachers, the workmen and nearly all the mission children and I ran down the little mission hill to meet him. Mother Margaret was so happy to see the Bishop that she immediately began to thank the Lord for his safe arrival. Of course, she asked the distinguished visitor a few questions: "Where have you been?" "What had happened?" She did not press for answers to these questions, since the visitor seemed tired and hungry.

Why was the Bishop late? Here is the answer. Bishop Lawson had forgot part of the name of the town Jawajeh, where he was supposed to have branched off for Zuie Refuge Mission. Because he was unable to give us the correct name of this town, the people of the village where he had sojourned for the night before could not give him the proper direction. Even though he did not get the direction he needed, he decided to continue the journey to Kalahun, Sierra Leone, by truck. He traveled by railroad train from Freetown to Pendem-Sierra Leone. He was now to travel by truck through the northern part of the same country.

Bishop Lawson arrived safely at Kalahun, Sierra Leone. There he decided to spend the night, since he was tired, and it was somewhat late for him to get men to help him across the border at Foyakama Military Station, between Liberia and Sierra, Leone. By the next evening, the town chief had ordered a few able-bodied men to take Bishop Lawson

to Kolahun, Liberia. Through hills, valleys, swamps and watery roads, this great man of God walked in the jungle with these strange men.

At Kolahun District Headquarters, the District Commissioner sent a telegram to President Tubman through the Secretary of Interior to inform the President that the American Bishop named R. C. Lawson had arrived at the aforementioned headquarters. The Commissioner had asked whether or not it was alright to assign couriers and a few soldiers to see that the Bishop got to mission station. President Tubman responded that he knew who Bishop Lawson was, and that it was considered proper to furnish the Bishop with sufficient couriers and soldiers to protect him.

Preparations having been made during the following weeks Bishop Lawson, the men and the soldiers set out for Zuie Refuge Mission. This journey was to take them through many long and tiresome days of walking. Bishop Lawson who, before his trip to Africa, had no occasion to walk through such swampy, hilly, dense jungles, was then willing to do so for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bishop and his helpers walked from Kolahun to Kalahun that day. It took them about 17 hours to reach their destination for the night. They remained at Kalahun for a day, so as to regain strength for the journey before them.

Having rested for a day, they started on their longer and rigorous walk. The time for the real test had come. Bishop Lawson was to walk the longest and most watery road that the man had ever walked through snakes and leopard-infested jungles. The Bishop and his helpers were unable to reach the village ahead of them before dusk. They slept in the dense, damp and cold forest, known as the Gbandi-Gola Jungles. The men hung a hammock between two trees, therein Bishop Lawson spent the night. He hardly slept. He spent most of the night in prayer for he realized that only God was able to keep the snakes and leopards away from his hammock. At dawn, they resumed the journey.

Even though the journey was too strenuous for the Bishop, he never did forget to tell the people about the saving power of Jesus Christ as he and his men walked through the villages. In fact, he learned a few words of the dialect these men spoke. The people in these villages told Bishop Lawson that they had never heard of Jesus Christ before. Well, before the sun set, the men and the Bishop had arrived at the village they were unable to reach the day before. They rested quite a while, and then passed on to Galahun, the soldier's barrack where they spent the night.

From Galahun, they made headway to Zuie Refuge Mission. The distance between these two towns was about nine hours. Rough and dangerous the trip was, for the Bishop and the men in barges and canoes had to cross many creeks and rivers overrun by plaguy alligators.

In concluding the first installment of articles, I hope to write on Bishop Lawson's journeys through the jungles of West Africa, if God wills it so, I wish to draw the mind of the reader to some salient facts.

1. Whatever may be said of Bishop Lawson, whether good or bad, the fact still remains that Bishop Lawson was a man called of God to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. This had been made known by the way the Lord used him and his workers while he was living. He was not afraid to travel long distances for the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. His many trips to Africa and to many parts of the world are self-evident proofs.
2. In addition to the above fact, Bishop Lawson was not a healthy man, but his indomitable faith in God kept him going steady. God gave him courage and then strengthen his body so that he might be able to do God's work. In spite of frailties caused by old age, Bishop Lawson was always busy carrying the message of the gospel to a dying and confused world.

