



Who is this man Jesus?

Ahmed, 17, had been a believer for six months. He had been wondering how to begin to tell his family and neighbours, and until he felt it was right to do so he was just quietly walking The Way.

One Friday there was a ruckus of excitement and entertainment, which also had a frisson of fear: a woman in the village was possessed by an evil spirit. Through the day the 'witch doctor' and mosque leader had both had times of working with her to drive the unclean spirit out but to no effect. As evening approached she was still uncontrollable, violent and deeply disturbed.

As the evening wore on Ahmed became more and more disquieted in his spirit. "I know Jesus is more powerful than this" burned in his chest. Eventually he could bear it no more - something had to be done. He went and got his New Testament (which no-one knew he had) and approached the woman. Taking the book he put it on her chest and said, "In the name of Jesus - leave!" For a moment there was frozen silence and then, in one violent motion, she snatched the New Testament and threw it, sending it sprawling in the dust, pages dishevelled.

Ahmed was a new believer, with just six months of teaching, and now he's seeing his faith lying in the dust. So what he did next astounds me. He went and got the book, dusted it off, walked back to the woman, and repeated what he had done before. Holding the New Testament to her chest he said, "In the name of Jesus - leave!" This time the lady gave a loud cry and collapsed into unconsciousness. The crowd were at first concerned that she had died but then realised she was breathing and at peace. For the next wee while she stayed unresponsive but then woke up, disoriented and wondering what had happened, but obviously okay.

I first heard about this two weeks after the event. Ahmed's pastor (an "Imam") was just bouncing with the news that now there was a community who had seen the power of the Gospel in action, through one of their own, and they were asking, "Who is this man Jesus?"

That question, "Who is this man?" is starting to reverberate round Muslim communities in South Asia. When we first went there 18 years ago we began to hear about isolated "pockets of fire." Fifteen years later, towards the end of our time, I visited one area twice. The first visit, in 2004, found one family who had faced real persecution for their faith but had stayed faithful. Around

them were occasional believers but they were very subdued and I had to be very cautious in conversation as to what I asked, and when I could ask it.

On my second visit in 2007, I brought a colleague with me and I warned him to be circumspect. Therefore, both of us were thrown somewhat to find our first cups of tea were with 25 believers who were busy telling us of their faith; how each month they showed the Jesus film and gave a gospel message to any who wanted to come. We were even invited to preach at the next one, happening the next evening, but had to decline. We met over 80 believers that day, and where there had been caution, now there was courage. Where things had been circumspect, now they were circulating.

Lives and communities transformed. It's a pretty good start. Over these last 18 years I have seen God in action as His Kingdom is advancing. South Asia has pockets of fire that are starting to coalesce. Now God is moving us to another country where there is a Muslim community in which we can apply the lessons and experience learnt over the last 18 years. This new country (England) is one of the forefronts of Islam and I believe God wants to transform lives and communities there too ■

Colin and Christine Edwards have been involved in South Asia since 1988, but are currently transitioning to the UK, where they'll be involved with cross-cultural work with Interserve's Urban Vision programme.

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