

When Lord? When?

by Kett Sable



The question still intrigued me as I listened to my mother’s story yet another time.

Since my father’s death, my mother had started reminiscing more. She was always a good story teller. Best of all she loved to tell adventures from a time in her life when she and my father were missionaries among the native Indians in a remote Argentine forest. Often she had us helpless with laughter or moved to tears as she recounted their lives. Their precarious existence encompassed both great humor and heartbreaking sorrows. But this particular story was about the missionaries. It evoked neither laughter nor tears, but instead a profound question, “When?”

I could imagine the scene, coming up to Christmas. It was the hottest time of the year. The flies and mosquitoes swarmed everywhere. After torrential rains, the frogs and toads would keep everyone awake with their night-time cacophony. The humidity and heat drained everyone at this time of year, and yet the Indians would celebrate Christmas Day with enthusiasm, worship, games and laughter. Especially, this was a day when everyone would eat.

As festivities approached, another missionary family visited from a neighboring village. This alone was a rare pleasure and reminder to my mother of England. The men talked ministry, the children played and the two mothers sat down over a cup of green tea.

Something was disturbing my mother's colleague, Esther. She had taught her two boys, now young teens, to ask God for their desires and to put their trust in Him. It was a lesson they took to heart as they focused on Christmas presents. Each night one would ask for a catapult like the ones the Indian children played with. But the other would ask for a silver signet ring with his initials.

Esther was unsettled. She did not want to damage her children's faith, but a silver ring was way beyond their means, even if it could be bought in this remote area. How could she handle this situation without denying God's word? While the boy was happily expecting a ring on Christmas Day, his mother dreaded the disappointment.

As they chatted, my mother's mind drifted back to her own twenty-first birthday when her parents had given her a signet ring. Curiously, she had never liked it, thinking it too masculine, though she treasured the love of her parents. It had been a real sacrifice following the austerity of the war years.

She mused and began to wonder. "Just a minute," she said as she excused herself to rummage through unopened luggage. There it was. There was the ring she had been given on her twenty-first. Proudly engraved with her initials, the ring had become redundant after she had married and exchanged her maiden name for her married name. The engraving, JB, which made it quite wrong for her, made it exactly right for Esther's son.

Problem solved! She gladly handed over the ring to Esther's look of amazement. What a special ring it was. This ring had been positioned by God to deliver on his promises, and make a trusting boy very happy.

"When Lord?" I wondered, "When did you start to answer that boy's prayer?"

"Was it when you prompted the two families to meet up just before Christmas?"

"Was it when they were called to work as neighbors?"

"Was it when my parents set sail and my mother packed a ring she was never likely to wear?"

"Or had you started answering his prayer much earlier? When the boy was named? Was it you who inspired the twenty-first birthday present to my mother? Maybe even before the beginning of time you

had heard the prayer of a boy out of sight of the world in a remote forest.”

And as I meditated, another question formed. “When Lord? When will we trust you with childlike faith?”

Psalm 139 16-18

Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand.