

A remarkable story

Tre Moore reports on a memorable church dedication service that the 2020 Team took part in.

We arrived at the village of Kattava around 10:45 am. It was early in the day, but the sun was already shining brightly, ready to greet the IREF team. To the left of our bus, some women were standing in a small river, washing their clothes; three children played on the shore nearby. The excitement in the air was tangible. This was going to be a special day, for a church was being planted in the village of Kattava. I was humbled to be a part of this celebration and soon I discovered the incredible history behind the birth of this church. As the day went on, I talked with some of the villagers and was blown away by the faithfulness of God!

In 2018, a USA church took a Thanksgiving offering to help build a church in India. On January 10th 2020, the IREF Kattava Church was launched and dedicated to the Lord.

Establishing an IREF Church in the village of Kattava was the vision of a man named Mattaiah. He was an uneducated man who was saved later in life. Mattaiah and his wife first heard the good news of Jesus during an IREF Gospel meeting. Mattaiah then left his life as a buffalo-herder to serve Christ as an IREF Village Pastor. Frequently, he would travel to Kattava from a distant village to share the Gospel; but it was rejected by many. Kattava was strongly against allowing a Christian building in their village; so Mattaiah would sit under a tree and preach – the same time, the same place, week after week. This continued for years.



However, through Pastor Mattaiah's faithful commitment to preach under that tree every week, villagers came to know of his message and his faith in God. But despite his strong efforts, no church building was allowed in the village. But God was still at work!

In 2010, a 15-year-old girl named Sandyha became severely ill with advanced liver disease. Sandyha lived in Kattava and her condition continued to worsen. In an act of desperation, her family invited Mattaiah to pray for her healing. He did so gladly – and young Sandyha was completely healed! Praise God!

After her miraculous healing, Sandyha joined Mattaiah under the tree to listen to the Gospel message and committed her life to Christ.



Even during rainy season, Mattaiah faithfully travelled to Kattava to teach. When it rained, a local villager offered his veranda to Mattaiah to continue his teaching. As Mattaiah shared God's Word outside, the man sat inside his home quietly listening. After some time, this man also gave his life to Jesus! He owned four adjacent houses and eventually his entire family was led to faith in Christ. It was truly an honour for me to meet him at the church dedication and hear his testimony.

Despite these conversions through Mattaiah's faithful witness to Kattava, there still was no opportunity to construct a church building in the village. So, Mattaiah continued to preach under the tree and began to bring his son, Sudhakar, with him.

Sudhakar stepped into full-time Christian ministry whilst in his 20s. He currently serves as an IREF Pastor and Evangelist. During IREF outreach events, Sudhakar can be heard shouting the good news of Jesus throughout the streets. His voice needs no microphone and is full of a strong passion for Christ! He has a wife, two young sons, and a daughter.

Mattaiah was thrilled to see God's hand on Sudhakar's life. His son's devotion to a life in Christian ministry gave him new hope for an IREF church to be built in Kattava.

Then suddenly, everything changed. In 2015, Mattaiah had a heart attack and died. We don't always understand God's ways. *"Why did this happen? Mattaiah was faithful to the Lord."* Yet suddenly, he was gone.

This is what made the church dedication so special. I stood under 'the preaching tree', listened to testimonies from many of the villagers, and watched Mattaiah's son, Sudhakar, bring honour his father's

legacy as he was commissioned as the first Pastor of the Kattava Church.

When we arrived in Kattava, I had no idea of the story behind this church. By the end of the day, I felt overwhelmed by it.

The church dedication was filled with joy. Because of the village's narrow streets, the Team had to walk several blocks through the village to get to the church building. As we walked along, villagers threw flower pedals into the air to the sound of beating drums and a clarinet-type instrument. An explosion of fireworks interrupted the music as people laughed and smiled the whole way. The teenage village boys giggled as they lit the fireworks and ran off, leaving us plugging our ears and waiting for the deafening noise!

We walked down the main village road, took a left turn, and saw a beautiful blue building with a large purple tent set up in front of it. The outside of the building was set up for a day-long medical camp. IREF believes it is critical to take care of people both spiritually and physically. Two hours after the church's dedication, the building was used for an all-day free Medical Clinic.

To open the dedication service, Emmanuel Rebba read Psalm 127:1 – *“Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”* After this Bible reading, a ribbon-cutting ceremony took place to formally open the church building, and its first worship service began.



The service commenced with worship so loud you couldn't hear the person next to you! In front of the congregation, two young boys banged drums. One of the boys was Abishek, Sudhakar's son and Mattaiah's grandson. He spoke only a little English and spent most of the afternoon at my hip; I nearly tripped over him more than once! Abishek is currently in 6th Grade, and when asked, *“What do you want to be when you grow up?”* he replied, *“Pastor”*. The team gave him the nickname 'Pastor Abi' and he loved it!

As the service continued, a young woman in a yellow Punjabi came forward to share her testimony. It was Sandyha, the woman who had been miraculously healed when 15-years-old after Mattaiah had prayed for her. Now 23-years-old, she spoke about overcoming her illness and how God had saved her life. What a joy for Sandyha to see a church planted in her village eight years after her healing!

Pastor Sudhakar closed the service with a moving prayer. It was an emotional day for him. He was smiling from ear to ear; yet as he prayed, he began to weep. He was reaping the harvest his father had sown.

There are many lessons to be taken from this story.

1. God can use anyone

Mattaiah had herded buffalo for most of his life. He was uneducated, a simple man. But when he got saved, he committed himself to God's service. This meant teaching in multiple locations every week. On many occasions, it seemed as if no one was listening to him; so he simply prayed for the village. I can't imagine how insignificant Mattaiah felt at times - mocked for his poor grammar and lack of education. And yet he pressed on.

As I read the Scriptures, I notice many of the disciples were also uneducated – fisherman, ordinary men.

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” [Acts 4:13]

2. We won't always see the fulfilment of our efforts.

Mattaiah never saw the church building come to Kattava. But his son did and grandchildren did.

- Moses never set foot in the Promised Land; but Joshua did.
- David never saw Israel's first temple; but his son, Solomon did.

These men handed their dream to the next generation, where it was fulfilled.

“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers on the earth.” [Hebrews 11:13]

Life is like a relay: we run our race and pass on the baton to the next generation. The saying, *‘One plants, another reaps’* is true.

Jesus said to his disciples: I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others have already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest.”
[John 4:37-38]

Our calling is to be faithful. We can confidently leave the results of our labours, and their timing, in God's hands.

Thank you all for your support of IREF.

David Hunt [Chairman, IREF(UK)]