

Livingstone was the Greatest Modern Missionary

On May 1, 1873, the famous discoverer and missionary Dr. David Livingstone died while on his knees in prayer, having suffered malaria after exploring the swamps at the southern end of Lake Tanganyika.

His faithful companions and admirers dried his body for two weeks and embalmed it with brandy and salt, then carried it for nine months, under extreme hardship and hazardous terrain, before reaching the African coast. His body was shipped for burial in the famous Westminster Abbey in London.

It was no more than fitting that a memorial service was held for this man of God in the heart of the country which he loved so deeply. Led by President Kenneth D. Kaunda of Zambia, 1,000 pilgrims gathered at the historical village of Chief Chitamba, now called Chipundu, to pay tribute to Livingstone.

"After 100 years, the love of God and the memory of David Livingstone so enamored his friends of all races that they are gathered here in thanksgiving," noted President Kaunda in unveiling a commemorative plaque.

Livingstone has been considered one of the greatest and influential missionaries of modern history. He was born of humble origin in Scotland. His youth was hard. He worked long hours each day and studied on the side. His heart was set on missionary work in China. However, political difficulties between England and China prevented the fulfillment of this ambition. His vision turned toward Africa. He joined the London Missionary Society and sailed for South Africa in 1840.

His passion was to travel and to reach people who had never heard the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. He was a man of deep compassion and worked hard to right wrongs. His manner with the Africans was so excellent, so patient and understanding that he never had to use violence for self-protection.

He hated the slave trade and did much to open the eyes of the Western world for the cruel and murderous practices of the slave traders. For 40 years this little giant tramped across Africa. He knew no fear. His will power kept him going despite a body that was often racked by fever and spent with dysentery.

Northcott wrote about him: "He could throw off fevers, drink gallons of stagnant poisonous water, eat African food and march for hours in sun and rain without getting tired."

His contributions to science were significant and awarded with honorary degrees. His fame spread far and wide. As a missionary, Livingstone did not have many converts. His importance lies in his explorations which opened Africa for the gospel, and his personal inspiration and influence which led many to go to Africa as missionaries.

It was his challenge given at a public lecture at the University of Cambridge on December 4, 1857: "I beg to direct your attention to Africa. I know that in a few years I shall be cut off in that country, which is now open. Do not let it be shut again! I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity. Do carry on the work which I have begun. I leave it with you," which called forth the Universities' Mission to Central Africa.

Dr. Livingstone will be remembered by many as the great discoverer and the tireless traveler who made a great contribution to science. But the church in Africa will remember him for his missionary zeal. Myriads of Africans who have turned to Christ in the hundred years since his death have to thank him for opening the door of their continent and letting in the light of the gospel.

His life and ministry will remain a challenge for the church around the world. The message he left with us in his journal will continue to call Christian youth to forsake all and go to far away countries for the sake of Jesus Christ.

"I place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ. If anything will advance the interests of the kingdom, it shall be given away or kept only as by giving or keeping it I shall most promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time and eternity.

Johan D. Tangelder
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