

THE CHALLENGE OF LIVINGSTONE TODAY

An Example of Excellence

Dr. David Livingstone is an example of excellence. His life, legacy and literature continue to speak to us today. The challenge of David Livingstone is most relevant to our times.

If Dr. David Livingstone was here today, what would he say to us?

We do not need to guess. We have his writings and published statements available. We can know exactly what David Livingstone would say to us today. It is what he said to the people of his generation:

"The Salvation of men ought to be the chief desire and aim of every Christian!"

"All men have the right to hear God's Word. No nation ought to hoard the Gospel like a miser!"

"Can the love of Christ not carry the missionary where the slave trade carries the trader?"

*"If you have men who will come **only** if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come even if there is no road at all!"*

*"We must be **uncommon Christians**, i.e. imminently holy and devoted servants of the Most High. Let us seek that selfishness be extirpated, pride banished, unbelief driven from the mind. Every idol dethroned and everything hostile to holiness and opposed to the Divine will crucified; that **holiness to the Lord** may be engraved on the heart and evermore characterise our whole conduct."*

*"We have still a debt of gratitude to Jesus... and there is no greater privilege on earth, than after having our own chains broken off, to go forth and **proclaim liberty to the captives**, the opening of prison to them that are bound."*

A Vision of Victory

Dr. David Livingstone was inspired by an optimistic view of the future. Like most of the missionaries of the 19th century, Livingstone held to the Eschatology of victory:

"Discoveries and inventions are culminative... filling the earth with the glory of the Lord. All nations will sing His glory and bow before Him... our work and its fruit are culminative. We work towards a new state of things. Future missionaries will be rewarded by conversions for every sermon. We are their pioneers and helpers... let them not forget the watchmen of the night, who worked when all was gloom and no evidence of success in the way of conversions cheers our path. They will doubtless have more light than we. But we serve our Master earnestly, and proclaim the same Gospel as they will do."

*"A quiet audience today. The seed is being sown, the least of all seeds now, but it will grow into a mighty tree. It is as if it were a small stone cut out of a mountain, **but it will fill the whole earth.**"*

Daniel 2:34-45

"We work for a glorious future which we are not destined to see, the Golden Age which has not yet been, but will yet be. We are only morning stars shining in the dark, but the glorious morn will break – the good time coming yet."

An Understanding of History

*"The dominion has been given by the power of commerce and population unto the people of the saints of the Most High. This is an everlasting Kingdom, a little stone cut out of the mountain, without hands, which will cover the whole earth. **For this time we work.**"*

"By different agencies, the Great Ruler is bringing all things into a focus. Jesus is gathering all things to Himself and He is daily becoming more and more the centre of the world's hopes and of the world's fears."

A Harvest of Souls

Today there are over 500 million people in Africa who claim to be Christians. This includes: 150 million Protestants, 50 million Anglicans, 140 million Charismatics, 60 million Pentecostals and 100 million Independents. David Livingstone ploughed in stony ground and sowed the Gospel seed that has produced this great harvest.

"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the Kingdom is the Lord's and He rules over the nations." Psalm 22:27-28

David Livingstone Changed my Life!

The life and legacy of David Livingstone changed my life. As a new Christian, I imbibed many of the pre-suppositions and tendencies of churches in the 1970s. I read *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *There's a New World Coming, Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* and other date-setting, end-times, rapture fever publications. I was Saved. I loved the Lord. I was enthusiastically involved in Evangelism. But my understanding of Biblical doctrine was actually quite shallow.

End Times Obsession

I imbibed the prevailing prejudice against Calvinism and was convinced that we were living *in the last days*. Therefore I could not at that time consider marriage, or children. There was not enough time! I could not allow myself to be *distracted* by such *worldly matters* as family and raising children. I needed to devote the last few days on earth to *snatching souls from the fire*. The rapture was coming, surely before the end of that year! I was completely closed to the idea of Theological training. What is the point? *The Lord will have come before I can finish my studies!* Better to stay in the field winning souls in these last few days remaining.

The Puritan Hope

Then I read *The Puritan Hope – Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy*, by Iain Murray, published by Banner of Truth. This book informed me that all of the pioneer missionaries of the 19th century missionary movement were Calvinist and post-millennial! I had no idea what post-millennialism was, but when I read that the Father of Modern Missions, William Carey, and the best friend Africa ever had, the great missionary pioneer Dr. David Livingstone, were both Reformed and post-millennial, I determined to read up more on these matters.

Sanitised and Censored

Earlier I had read a thin, modern biography on David Livingstone. It did not seem too extraordinary, because, like many modern books, it had been sanitised. All controversial, or politically incorrect, details had been omitted. The modern censored version of Livingstone's life did not mention the ravages of the Islamic slave trade, which David Livingstone confronted, documented and fought against. It left out his Calvinist convictions and post-millennial eschatology of victory. The modern biographies left out the fact that David Livingstone carried a six-barrelled revolver and a double-barrelled rifle. His violent confrontations with Islamic slave traders and bold initiatives to set thousands of captives free were also apparently deemed too controversial to include in these modern sanitised, abridged versions of Livingstone's life!

Back to Original Sources

However, I have always been a bookworm and had a love for history. Finding most of the books available in the average book shop today to be quite shallow and predictable, I have developed a preference for scouring through second hand bookshops finding rare old first editions of these missionaries and pioneers.

Livingstone's Travels in Mozambique

I was reading Livingstone's *Missionary Travels* as I was following in much of his footsteps in Tete Province of Mozambique in the Zambezi Valley in 1989. That was when I and the medical team I was

leading were captured by Russian forces and imprisoned in SNASP security prison in Machava, Maputo. What I learned from the writings and from the exemplary life and extraordinary legacy of David Livingstone transformed my life and ministry.

What Did I Learn from Livingstone?

I learned from David Livingstone the importance of **discipline**. He was disciplined in reading and in exercise. He was self-controlled. Livingstone abstained from alcohol for life. He was temperate, duty orientated and hard working.

Work Ethic

Livingstone's work ethic is a rebuke to us all. From age 10 he worked 14 hours a day, 6 days a week, walking an average of 34km a day, much of this in a crawling, or stooping position, amongst and under the machinery, or balancing over it. Imagine the tremendous physical training this was for his later transcontinental expeditions throughout Africa. This he did in the steamed heat and humidity considered essential for the production of thread.

Hunger for Knowledge

David used his first week's wages to purchase a book on Latin. Less than 10% of the children who worked in the cotton mills ever learned to read or write. David not only learned to read and write, he taught himself Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Each night, after work, he would attend a night school, 8pm to 10pm. Then at home, he would study, often until midnight. Each morning began at 5:30am and his workday at 6am.

Disciplined Study

When he was studying Medicine and Theology, he would walk from Blantyre to Glasgow, refusing every offer of a ride on horse carts passing by. He preferred the four-hour walk, often in the snow, in order to strengthen his muscles for his chosen career in Missions.

Overcoming His Disadvantaged Background

Livingstone never accepted charity. Although being brought up in the poorest of circumstances, where a family of seven were forced to live in a single room, 10 feet by 14 feet, without any electricity, plumbing, or running water. He worked and saved up to put himself through both Medical school and Theological College. David was the first worker from the cotton mills to receive a university education. And nobody gave it to him. He earned it and passed with high honours, receiving his Doctorate from the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, November 1840, and ordained as a Congregational Minister, 20 November 1840. Against all odds he achieved far more than any would have thought humanly possible for someone born into such a poverty stricken and disadvantaged background. He did not wait for someone else to open up Africa, to invent 4WD vehicles, to build the roads and bridges. He drew the first maps of the Zambezi. He did not have an attitude of entitlement. David Livingstone had a Protestant work ethic.

Doctrinal Steel

To achieve what he did, Livingstone was decisive, goal orientated and inflexible. Reformed Theology put doctrinal steel in his backbone. He was a man of **integrity**. A man of his word. He meant what he said and he said what he meant. He walked many thousands of miles across difficult and dangerous terrain to return his porters to their village.

Holy Spirit Fire

David Livingstone understood the power of prayer. He had Holy Spirit fire in his heart, soul and mind. He prayed and sang the Psalms daily.

Love for God's Creation

He had a great love for God's creation, for nature and for wildlife. His books are filled with intricate sketches and fascinating details on animals and vegetation.

Vision

David Livingstone was inspired by the post-millennial eschatology of victory. He had a Kingdom vision.

Ministering to Body, Mind and Spirit

David Livingstone understood the greatness of the Great Commission. He worked to comprehensively fulfil the Great Commission, ministering to body, mind and spirit. As a doctor, he ministered to the **body**, as a teacher he ministered to the **mind**, and as a preacher of the Gospel, he ministered to the **spirit**. Wherever he went he used his medical knowledge and training, his breadth of reading and learning and his deep faith and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures to enrich and empower the people of Africa.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

David Livingstone teaches us that actions speak louder than words. He was described as: *"A man of resolute courage"; "Fire, water, stonewall would not stop Livingstone in the fulfilment of any recognised duty."* Indeed he did not let swamps, rivers, deserts, or mountains prevent him from opening up Africa for the Gospel.

The Great Commission Was His Supreme Ambition

David Livingstone was determined to make a difference. The Great Commission was his supreme ambition. Christ's last command was his first concern. He wrote: *"I hope to be permitted to work as long as I live, beyond other men's line of things and plant the seed of the Gospel where others have not planted."*

In His Steps

"I am a missionary, heart and soul. God had an only Son, and He was a Missionary and a Physician. A poor, poor imitation of Him I am, or wish to be. In His service I hope to live; in it I wish to die."

Dedication

"I shall open up a path into the interior, or perish."

Faith

"May He bless us and make us blessings even unto death."

Determination

"Shame upon us missionaries if we are to be outdone by slave traders!"

Perseverance

Battling rains, chronic discomfort, rust, mildew and rot, totally drenched and fatigued, and laid low by fever, countless times, Livingstone continued to persevere across the continent. Trials tested the tenacity of the travel-wearied team. Often Livingstone endured excessive and unnecessary suffering and deprivation, hacking through dense jungle on foot, because lack of funds prevented him from affording the *"luxury"* of a canoe!

Not Sacrifices

"These privations, I beg you to observe, are not sacrifices. I think that word ought never to be mentioned in reference to anything we can do for Him, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes, became poor."

It is a Privilege to Suffer for Christ

The challenge of Livingstone rings out to us today: *"Can that be called a sacrifice, which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? ...it is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather, it is a privilege!"*

Sacrificial Service is More Eloquent than Sermons

David Livingstone emphasized that sacrificial service is more powerful than eloquent sermons. We need to put feet to our Faith.

Exposing the Islamic Slave Trade

Livingstone also alerted the world to the cancerous sore of the Islamic Slave Trade. It was Missionary explorer David Livingstone whose graphic descriptions brought the ravages of the East African slave trade to light. His *Missionary Travels and Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambezi* exposed the horrors of the slave trade: *"Two of the women had been shot the day before for attempting to untie their thongs. One woman had her infants brains knocked out because she could not carry her load and it; and a man was dispatched with an axe because he had broken down with fatigue... those taken out of the country are but a very small section of the sufferers. We never realised the atrocious nature of the traffic until we saw it at the fountain head, 'There truly Satan has his seat.' Besides those actually captured thousands are killed and die of their wounds and famine, driven from their villages by the internecine war waged for slaves with their own clansmen and neighbours, slain by the lust of gain, which is stimulated, be it remembered always, by the slave purchases of Cuba and elsewhere."*

Courage to Confront Evil

David Livingstone taught that you cannot be neutral in the battlefields of life. He had the courage to confront evil. His fearless faith fought *the good fight of Faith* and set many thousands of captives free! **"Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."** James 4:7

Patience and Perseverance

David Livingstone is an example of extraordinary patience and perseverance. He overcame every obstacle. Walking across the continent of Africa. He walked from Delgoa Bay (present day Port Elizabeth), up all the way through Graaf Reinet to Kuruman, in what is today the Northern Cape. He walked across what is today Botswana and all the way back across the Cape Colony to Cape Town, to place his family on a ship to return to Britain. He walked from Cape Town across the whole of the Cape Province through what is today Botswana, Zambia and Angola through to the Port of Luanda. He walked from the Atlantic Ocean across the continent of Africa, crossing what is today Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique to the Indian Ocean. **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."** Philippians 4:13

The Zambezi Expedition

He came back and explored much of the Zambezi River, the Shiri River and the Ruvuma River, walking across much of what is today Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. **"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."** Romans 8:37

Walking Across a Continent

On his third great missionary journey he walked across the whole length of Tanzania, much of Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, the Congo, Burundi and finally died on his knees in prayer in the province of Luapula in Northern Zambia. In his 30 years of dedicated missionary service in Africa, he walked from coast to coast, across, what are today, 12 vast countries. He walked across a continent that did not yet have roads, bridges, or purified water. **"I shall try to hold myself in readiness to go anywhere, provided it be forward!"**

The Power of the Printed Page

David Livingstone teaches us the power of the printed page. It was books that he read, such as *Practical Christianity* by William Wilberforce, which channelled much of his life in dedicated labours to eradicate the slave trade and open up Africa to the Gospel. Livingstone wrote *Missionary Travels*, the *Zambezi Expedition* and his *Journals*, which inspired generations of missionaries to dedicate their lives to winning Africa for Christ.

Mobilising Missionaries

Livingstone's steadfast example inspired Mary Slessor to devote her life to Calabar (present day Nigeria), and Peter Cameron, to launch the Africa Inland Mission. Peter Cameron had returned to Africa in failure after his first Mission. However, when he read the inscription on the tomb of David Livingstone in Westminster Abbey: **"Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring and they shall hear My voice."** Cameron was rebuked, inspired and resolved to return to Africa.

Strategic Thinking

Livingstone knew the power of the printed page and of public speaking tours. He also focussed on the universities as strategic for mobilising Reformers and Missionaries to fulfil the Great Commission. Livingstone saw rivers as *God's highway* to reach Africa for Christ. As all communities need access to water, rivers are a strategic artery which missionaries should utilise to fulfil the Great Commission.

Leadership Training

David Livingstone believed in Leadership training. His vision was to establish Bible Colleges for Africans to be trained as Evangelists, teachers and missionaries, to disciple the nations.

Lessons for Life

The life and legacy of David Livingstone has taught me the importance of discipline, exercise, reading, a Christian work ethic, temperance, self-control, self-denial and to be duty orientated. His Reformed Theology has put doctrinal steel in my backbone. He has taught me the importance of being a man of my word, a person of integrity, and most important a student of God's Word.

Great Commission Vision

The post-millennial Eschatology of Victory of David Livingstone has inspired me that we are not working at uncertainty. The Lord who gave us the Great Commission will ensure that it is fulfilled. His promises and His power are fully sufficient to empower His Church to fulfil His Great Commission, *making Disciples of all nations, teaching obedience to all things that He has commanded.*

Raising the Standards

David Livingstone's comprehensive vision of fulfilling the Great Commission, ministering to body, mind and spirit has raised the standards of missionary service for all of us. It is a rebuke to religious tourism.

How to Change Your World

Actions speak louder than words. Sacrificial service is more powerful than eloquent sermons. We must put feet to our Faith. We must recognise that we are in a world war of worldviews. Islam is a threat to Faith and freedom. You cannot be neutral. Confront evil. Fight the good fight of Faith! Be bold. Be brave. Be courageous. Be patient and steadfast. Persevere. Overcome every obstacle. Go forward in the Faith. Never forget the power of the printed page. Invest in books. Invest in your mind. Read. Teach your people to love reading. Readers make leaders. A reading Christian is a growing Christian. Do not forget the schools, colleges and universities. They are strategic. We must disciple the next generation to be faithful to God's Word and effective in God's service. Think strategically as to how to reach the nations for Christ. **Make your life count for eternity!**

In the words of C.T. Studd: *"Only one life, it will soon be past. Only what is done for Christ will last!"*

As William Carey declared: *"Expect great things from God! Attempt great things for God!"*

What would David Livingstone say to us today?

*"I beg to direct your attention to Africa. I know that in a few years I shall be cut off from 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. **Will you carry out the work which I have begun? I leave it with you!**"*

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me!'" Isaiah 6:8

Africa for Christ!

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The full message can be listened to on Sermonaudio.com.

The audio CD of the message can be obtained from: Christian Liberty Books, PO Box 358, Howard Place 7450, Cape Town, South Africa, tel: 021-689-7478, email: admin@christianlibertybooks.co.za and website: www.christianlibertybooks.co.za.

You can also view our new PowerPoint, [The Family, Faith and Upbringing of David Livingstone](#) on Slideshare.