



DAVID LIVINGSTONE'S TEXT

(MATTHEW 28:18-20)

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Today in the seventh in our series on texts that changed history, we come to the story of David Livingstone. Livingstone lived a remarkable life, a life filled with hardship, accomplishments, and contradictions, but also filled with fame and the admiration of the western world. He is buried in Westminster Abbey with the heroes of his nation, possibly the only missionary to be so honored. His name was made immortal by an American newspaper man named Henry Stanley of the New York *Herald Tribune*. When Livingstone had not been heard from for years and was feared dead, Stanley mounted an expedition to find him. After locating him, Stanley uttered those famous words, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" A century and a half later, those words are still being quoted by people who have little or no knowledge of the man to whom they were addressed.

Let me read for you the assessment of David Livingstone given by one missionary historian so that you can get a little idea of the man. He writes:

After his death and burial in Westminster Abbey, David Livingstone's reputation was secure from assault from anyone but the

most reckless heretic. Even in the middle of the twentieth century, historians would still acknowledge him as the greatest missionary of them all. For almost a hundred years, he would take

his place in the pantheon of English-speaking Christians as a figure of inspiring sanctity and devotion.¹

David Livingstone's text had little to do with his conversion, but everything to do with that sanctity and devotion. We find it in Matthew 28:18-20, and it is best known as the Great Commission.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE'S TEXT: MATTHEW 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

LIVINGSTONE'S PREPARATION

Many biographies have been written of David Livingstone, but to get the flavor of the man it is best to start with his own journals, which cover the first half of his work. The volume is called *Missionary Travels and Researches* and it can be found online in many places, including Project Gutenberg. It is there that you will read the story of this great text of Scripture that sustained him through an almost impossibly difficult life's work. Let's begin with Livingstone's preparation for his life as a missionary, which begins in his little home town of Blantyre, Scotland.

His youth

David Livingstone was born in 1813 into a poor Scottish family in Blantyre, a town of the county known as Lanarkshire. His parents were godly people who were active in local church ministry. His father died when he was young, and at the age of ten David had to go to work in a textile factory to help support his mother and his siblings. He worked from 6:00 AM to 8:00 PM daily doing menial factory work.

He had an eager mind, however, and he did not let his long hours interrupt his education. He bought a Latin grammar book with his first paycheck and he studied it even while working. He enrolled in evening school that started after his 14-hour workday ended. All through the day he would steal glances at books propped open on his spinning jenny. After coming home from school he would begin doing his homework, and he seldom got into bed until after midnight.

Preparing for the field

David began his preparation for the mission field even before his conversion, which took place at age twenty. He explains this by saying:

Great pains had been taken by my parents to instill the doctrines of Christianity into my mind, and I had no difficulty in understanding the theory of a free salvation by the atonement of our Savior; but it was only about this time that I began to feel the necessity and value of a personal application of the provisions of that atonement to my own case.²

Even then he was making plans to go to China as a missionary doctor, but the family's poverty delayed his education. It was not until 1836, at the age of 23, that he was able to start the formal training he needed. Even so, the time he could devote to study was limited. He studied at Anderson's College in Glasgow, but he had to spend his summers back in Blantyre working in the textile mill. His areas of concentration were medicine and theology. Finally, in 1840 at the age of 27, he had the training he needed and was ready to head for the field.

His application to the London Missionary Society was approved, but about the time he was ready to leave for China the First Opium War broke out between England and China and he had to change his plans. The LMS directors wanted him to go to the West Indies, but in the meantime he came under the spell of the furloughing African missionary Robert Moffat who had spent most of his life in South Africa. Moffat told Livingstone that from his mission station in Kuruman he could look north across the plains and see the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary had ever been. The description captured Livingstone's imagination, and he asked to be sent to Africa, which he was.

LIVINGSTONE PUTS HIS TEXT TO THE TEST

It would be in exploring these villages that Livingstone would put his text to the test. The knowledge that Christ was with him in his dangerous explorations was basic to everything he did. He had a rocky beginning, however.

Reaction to the field

He left for Africa in December of 1840 and spent thirteen weeks on board ship in language study, arriving in Capetown in March of 1841. He spent a month there before moving on to the mission station at Kuruman where Robert Moffat and his family were stationed, although they were still not back from furlough. He loved Africa right away and thoroughly enjoyed the trip from Capetown to Kuruman.

After his first few weeks, however, he was not happy with what he saw of African missions. Capetown was crawling with missionaries, with many who

were reluctant to go inland to meet and evangelize the local populations. Even at Kuruman, farther inland, there was a lot of carping and criticism and not much of an inclination to go toward those thousand villages that Robert Moffat had spoken of.

Painful early experiences

While he was waiting for the Moffat family to arrive, Livingstone decided to make an expedition north to scout out the territory. It was to be a trying time. Of his two years being an apprentice at Kuruman, over a year was spent in travels. He and two other missionaries traveled 200 miles north to establish a new outpost at Mabosta. While on this trip, Livingstone was attacked by a lion and badly mauled. His left arm was so severely hurt that it was useless to him for the rest of his life. Three months later he returned to Kuruman to pay his respects to Robert Moffat and his family, who had now returned from their furlough in England.

Respite at Kuruman

It was while he was at Kuruman visiting and convalescing from his injuries that he became very attached to Robert Moffat's daughter Mary. Within a few months he had proposed, and they were married in 1845. Their marriage would have to endure many separations and great hardships.

Difficult explorations

They soon moved to the station in Mabosta that Livingstone had established, and it was there a year later that their first child was born. Livingstone had seen too much of the process of missionaries settling down comfortably in one spot, and he was determined not to do that. Not long after their first child was born, he and Mary moved further north, and later still further. By the time their second child was born in 1847, they were living in their third house. Their semi-nomadic lifestyle led to a...

Family crisis

Livingstone was guided by a principle that he himself uttered quite often. He liked to say, "The end of the explorer's work is the beginning of the missionary task." But David didn't engage all that often in the missionary task. He kept moving and exploring new places. Sometimes Mary went with him, and sometimes she didn't. Neither situation was all that successful. If she accompanied David, she might find herself eight months pregnant in the middle of the jungle. If she stayed home, she would have to put up with lions threatening her children. Right after returning from a long trip, Mary gave birth in her exhausted condition to their third child.

The outcome of that was a scathing letter to David from Mary's mother, castigating him because of his extensive travels and the physical demands that they made on Mary. The result of the crisis was that he and Mary, after the birth of her fifth child in 1852, agreed that Mary and the children should

return to England for a rest and for the children's education. They would not see each other again for five years; but Mary's absence freed David up to do something he had wanted to do since arriving in Africa. He would explore the Zambesi River.

The Zambesi expedition

The Zambesi River expedition became the most famous exploit of Livingstone's life. Before I describe it, I should tell you what Livingstone set forth in his notes as his three great objectives as a missionary. They were, in his own words (1) to evangelize the native races; (2) to explore the undiscovered secrets, and (3) to abolish the desolating slave-trade.

Evangelization. Exploration. Emancipation. Those were his three dreams, and they were all connected to each other. The slave trade was being run by Portuguese and Muslim slave traders, who depended on a few poor tribes to do the capturing for them. These tribes lived in non-agricultural areas and could not earn a living any other way, so they cooperated with the Portuguese and the Muslims and raided other tribes, carrying off people as slaves to be sold for money. Livingstone thought that the best way to keep this trade from thriving was to open up commerce and trade to these inland tribes. If they could trade with the outside world, they might be able to make a living and less inclined to betray and enslave their neighbors. Roads were not a practical hope, but if he could find a navigable river, he thought he could really put pressure on the enslaving tribes to give up their occupation. So, he went exploring the Zambesi and its tributaries.

After putting his family on the boat to England, he started by recruiting native helpers and going north along the Zambesi all the way to the Atlantic coast at Loanda. They were trying to see if the river was navigable. Then they reversed course and headed east, again following the river and its tributaries to see if boat traffic could be sent upriver from the coast. They followed the river all the way to the Indian Ocean on the east coast of Africa. Livingstone thus became the first missionary to go from coast to coast and came away encouraged at the possibilities of commerce in this region, but it was a harrowing experience. The Portuguese knew what he was up to, and they put members of their hostile tribes on the trail of David Livingstone as he traveled. At one point he and his group were cornered, and he was sure that he would not live to see another sunrise. That night he entered into his journal:

January 14, 1856. Evening. Felt much turmoil of spirit in prospect of having all my plans for the welfare of this great region and this teeming population knocked on the head by savages tomorrow. But I read that Jesus said: 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' It

is the word of a gentleman of the most strict and sacred honor, so there's an end of it! I will not cross furtively tonight as I intended. Should such a man as I flee? Nay, verily, I shall take observations for latitude and longitude tonight, though they may be the last. I feel quite calm now, thank God!

Though his helpers were terrified at the noises they heard coming out of the jungle, the group was not attacked the next day, or the next. A few weeks later Livingstone and his helpers arrived on the coast of the Indian Ocean, having traveled the entire length of the Zambesi River. It caught the attention of the British public, even of the Foreign Office, and soon his name was on the lips of people all over the English-speaking world. That was fueled by his return to England later that year to see his family and for a furlough.

LIVINGSTONE IN ENGLAND

Shortly after finishing the Zambesi expedition, Livingstone returned home to see his family, and was amazed to find that he was a famous man. He spent a year in England on furlough, and during this time he published the journals of his fifteen years in Africa. The book became an immediate best seller, and he was much in demand as a speaker all over England. He was showered with awards and honors.

He also used the year in England to sever his ties with the London Missionary Society, which had sent him out. They had been critical of his failure to set up mission stations along the route of his travels. He felt that they were entirely too patient with opening up the continent to the world. He solved his problem of funding by receiving an appointment from the Foreign Office to become the British consul for East Africa, and from the time he returned to Africa in 1858 to the time of his death he occupied that office. The government furnished funds and equipment for his remaining travels.

LIVINGSTONE BACK IN AFRICA

Of course, many people did not want him to go back. He was regarded as a sort of national treasure, and they didn't want to lose him. He wrote to his friends, again emphasizing his dependence on Matthew 28:20, these words:

I return without misgiving and with great gladness. Would you like me to tell you what supported me through all the years of exile among people whose language I could not understand and whose attitude toward me was often hostile? It was this: 'Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' On those words I staked everything, and they never failed.³

His last years in Africa were not so fruitful as his earlier ones. Henry Stanley found him shortly before his death. Stanley was not a believer, but he wrote

a book about his experience in meeting Livingstone and he made it clear that Livingstone's life commended the Lord Jesus to him. Stanley's book only increased Livingstone's fame.

But during these years, Livingstone did make some notable discoveries. He was the first westerner to see Victoria Falls (in fact, he named it for his queen), but he failed to find the sources of the Nile, and his last expedition did not go well. He was far better as a solitary explorer than in leading a group of people who had to depend on him.

By 1873, Livingstone was suffering from malaria and dysentery and was unable to do much other than to write. When his native assistants came to wake him up one morning, they found him dead on his knees in the posture of prayer. He had gone to be with the Lord while talking with the Lord. The British Foreign Office requested that the body be sent from Chitambo, Zambia, where he had died back to England. Livingstone's helpers put him on a stretcher and carried his body 800 miles through the jungle to Loanda, where they put him aboard a steamer to London for his interment in Westminster Abbey. Before leaving Chitambo, however, they removed his heart and buried it at the site. They knew that David Livingstone's heart belonged to Africa.

LIVINGSTONE: AN ASSESSMENT

How are we to think of this man? He certainly was not a typical missionary in any sense. The only way to evaluate him is in the light of...

His goals

We have already heard of his three goals: evangelism, exploration, and emancipation. Most missionaries would have concentrated on only one of these, and any one of them would have been quite enough to fill anyone's lifetime of work. Livingstone, however, was not most people. He took all three of them on. How did he do? Let's first consider...

His failures

Despite his reputation, he certainly had a few. He has been criticized for neglecting his family or putting them at risk through the dangerous adventures of his travels. There is some validity to this, but you cannot read his journals without coming to the conclusion that he loved them all very dearly. In his latter days he wrote expressly of his one great regret, which was that he had not spent more time with his children. One of his sons, sharing David's hatred of slavery, eventually emigrated to the United States and reportedly died fighting on the side of the Union in the Civil War.

People criticized him for the time that he spent apart from Mary as well. When he returned to Africa alone after his furlough, he heard it said that for a man to be apart from his wife for so long a time must mean that the man

had decided he would be happier apart from her. There must be, the critics said, something deficient in Mary that he could be separated from her for long stretches and still be content. He thought this was miserably unfair to her and wrote her about it. He encouraged her to come back to Africa in 1862 and she did. Regrettably, she died shortly after returning of malaria. She died in his arms, and he wept long and hard over her.

Probably his worst failures had to do with his goal of evangelism. He said that the missionary task begins when the explorer's task ends; but his tasks did not end. He kept moving. His journals are filled with the record of his efforts to evangelize, but he did not see much personal fruit. He did see a great deal of long-term fruit, as I'll explain in a minute.

His critics said he was more of an explorer than a missionary, but he denied it very emphatically. He wrote in answer to them:

I am a missionary, heart and soul. God Himself had an only Son, and He was a missionary and a physician. A poor, poor imitation I am, or wish to be, but in this service I hope to live. In it I wish to die. I still prefer poverty and missions service to riches and ease. This is my choice.⁴

His successes

He certainly was a great success as an explorer, and this was directly related to his text. Matthew 28:20 was a living reality with this man. People were amazed at his courage, but he said it was all very simple: "Without Christ, not one step; with Him, anywhere!"⁵ That sounds like a missionary to me.

Perhaps his greatest success of all was in raising the consciousness of the British and American public to the great work to be done by missionaries. More missionaries went to Africa because of the reading of Livingstone's journals than for any other single reason. Ruth Tucker, in her book *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, said of his influence: "He was the hero that Victorian England desperately needed, and the recognition he was accorded fueled African missions for more than a century."⁶ He led few to Christ. Those who followed him led thousands to Christ.

How did he do in eliminating the slave trade? Here is one historian's assessment of his work:

David Livingstone, missionary, medical doctor, explorer, geographer, linguist, and botanist, is an even more striking example of the Christian statesman... He set his mind to end the slave trade in Central Africa and to his powerful and personal witness to the love of Christ was added a political strategy having the British, Portuguese, Boer, Arab, and African authorities as ob-

jects. To David Livingstone more than any other one person is owed the elimination of the slave trade from Central Africa.⁷

Not a bad record, when you think of it. His failures were small compared to the good that he did, and people even today turn to missions as a life calling through the influence of his writings. Nobody can read the story of his life even now without being impressed and encouraged to be a better person. It is certain that David Livingstone will move people to take seriously what Jesus Christ said to His disciples about being with them always. That is something that he built his life on, and it is something that can still be believed and imitated.

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NOTES

¹ Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Missionaries* (New York, Lippincott, 1973), 111.

² Quoted in Hy Pickering, "Conversion of David Livingstone: Africa's Greatest Friend," available online at <http://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/bliving12.html>. Visited 21 January 2010.

³ Quoted in Robert J. Morgan, *From This Verse* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

⁴ Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, 15th Anniversary, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004), n.p.

⁵ John Blanchard, eds. *The Complete Gathered Gold: A Treasury of Quotations for Christians*. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), n.p.

⁶ Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1983), 147.

⁷ "The Layman as Christian Statesman." *Review & Expositor* 60, no. 1 (Winter 1963), 75.

David Livingstone Lyrics: You be a mystery and I will uncover the truth / You be the chorus and I'll be the verse to go through / You be the dynamite blasting away at the walls we take apart / You be Dave.Â David Livingstone. Jon Bryant. Release Date. Discover David Livingstone famous and rare quotes. Share David Livingstone quotations about heart, christ and sacrifice. "God, send me anywhere, only go with me..."Â David Livingstone (1858). â€œCambridge Lectures: Together with a Prefatory Letter by Sedgwickâ€, p.23. 296 Copy quote. Author:David Livingstone. From Wikisource. Jump to navigation Jump to search. â†Author Index: Li. David Livingstone (1813â€1873). sister projects: Wikipedia article, Commons gallery, Commons category, quotes, taxonomy, Wikidata item. Scottish missionary and explorer. David Livingstone.Â Extracts from Dr. Livingstone's Report on the East African Slave Trade as reproduced in The slave trade of east Africa (1869). Letters[edit]. Letter to Watt regarding his marriage. Letter to George Drummond regarding his marriage.