# David Livingstone

The modern missionary movement started about 150 years ago, with people who were concerned about the continent of Africa. A Scottish preacher called Robert Moffatt, who was serving in South Africa, returned to Scotland to try to enlist more missionaries and on a cold, rainy night, he went into a church in Scotland. To his dismay the only people in the service that night were women. Back in those days, women didn’t go alone to the mission field and so, as there were no prospective missionaries there, he decided to change his message, and instead he preached about the need for the Lord of the harvest to send forth more labourers. He made this statement: ‘Every morning when I get up and look at the horizon, I see the smoke from a thousand villages where the name of Christ has never been heard.’

Robert Moffatt didn’t know there was a teenager present in that service. He was hidden up in the organ loft, where his job was to pump the bellows for the pipe organ. This teenage boy, standing up in the organ chamber, heard every word Moffatt said and was haunted by that phrase, ‘The smoke from a thousand villages where the name of Christ has never been heard.’ So this young man decided he would become a missionary. His name was David Livingstone.

Livingstone became a medical doctor and went to Africa. He was not content to stay in South Africa, but instead explored the inner continent. He was a great missionary and a great explorer and was the first white man to cross the continent from east to west, discovering Victoria Falls in his travels. He covered over 29,000 miles and mapped one million square miles of previously uncharted territory.

When he first began his ministry in Africa, some of the native tribes opposed him and one tribe said they were going to kill him and everyone in his party. One afternoon, as they were setting up camp, word reached Livingstone that these warriors had been tracking him all day, were outside the camp and were going to attack and kill everyone when it got dark. That night, on 14 January 1856, David Livingstone wrote in his journal: ‘It is evening. I feel much turmoil and fear in the prospect of having all of my plans knocked on the head.’ Those who studied his handwriting said you could even see the fear in the way he wrote the letters. He went on, ‘But Jesus said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and earth, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the ends of the earth” … This is the word of a gentleman of most strict and sacred honour, so that’s the end of my fear. I feel quiet and calm now.’ By this point in his journal the writing is firm and no longer betrays any fear.

They didn’t attack that night and later the tribe was brought to faith in Christ. David Livingstone asked the chief of the tribe, ‘Do you remember the night you were tracking my party?’ ‘Yes,’ the chief replied. ‘We had heard rumours you were going to attack us,’ said Livingstone. ‘That’s right,’ the chief said, ‘we were ready to attack the camp that night and kill you and everyone else.’ ‘Why didn’t you attack?’ David Livingstone asked, and the chief said, ‘When we got close to the camp, we looked and saw 47 warriors surrounding your camp with swords in their hands.’ David Livingstone was baffled. They hadn’t had any guards or any warriors.

Later, when he was on leave in Scotland, he shared this story at a church that was supporting him. A man came up to him afterwards with his prayer journal and said, ‘Look, I wrote it down, January 14, 1856, was that the night?’ David Livingstone said it was and the man then said, ‘That night a group of men came to pray for you. We prayed for your protection. I wrote it down. There were 47 men praying that night for you.’

David Livingstone became so immersed in Africa that most people thought he was dead because they had not heard from him for years. The New York Times hired Henry Stanley, an explorer, to go and find him. Finally, Stanley came to a camp where there was the only white man for miles and miles around. In that classic statement, he walked up to David Livingstone and said, ‘Mr Livingstone, I presume?’

Henry Stanley was not a Christian, but he developed a friendship with Livingstone and was led to Christ. As Stanley said about Livingstone: ‘He converted me to Christ, and he wasn’t even trying to do so.’ What a mark of a Christian man.

Stanley tried to get Livingstone to return to England to receive medical treatment, but Livingstone refused. He wrote, ‘I am a missionary, heart and soul. God had only one son, and he was a missionary and a physician. A poor, poor imitation of him I am, or wish to be. In this service I hope to live; in it I wish to die.’

In Westminster Abbey David Livingstone, this great missionary explorer is buried. What few people know is that that’s just his body. His heart is not buried there. Very early one morning, not long after Stanley left and when Livingstone was 60 years old, the people in his camp heard a noise in his tent and went in. There was Livingstone on his knees in prayer, dead. According to his wishes and his written instructions, his heart was removed from his body and was buried in Africa. Because, he said, ‘My heart has always been here, and this is where I want my heart to stay.’

**J.John**
Reverend Canon
[**www.canonjjohn.com**](https://canonjjohn.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e685d22ea9a50877a9e0024b2&id=89138385c7&e=6cd4d63c93)