

'I've Seen the Smoke of a Thousand Villages'

by Mickey Brubaker

The sermon emphasizes the importance of sharing the gospel with all nations and the responsibility of Christians to be co-laborers with Christ in spreading the good news.

Scripture: Psalm 46:10, Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 24:14, Romans 10:14, 1 Corinthians 9:16

Topics: "Missions", "Evangelism"

Description

Mickey Brubaker preaches about the urgent call to missions, emphasizing the burden on our hearts to reach those who are still sitting in darkness, serving idols, and heading towards a Christ-less eternity. He highlights the responsibility Christians have to carry the vision God has given them, to see as God sees, and to be moved with compassion for those who have not heard the gospel. The sermon challenges believers to respond to God's cry for laborers in His harvest field, to preach the gospel to all nations, and to be willing to make sacrifices for the sake of Christ and His kingdom.

Transcript

How this little phrase burned in my heart when I first read it! It clicked with something inside of me, because I knew what it was saying. No, I haven't literally seen the smoke of a thousand villages, but the eyes of my heart have seen that "smoke." It's not the exhaust of inflamed wood that sets off a burning in my heart. It is the knowledge that everywhere the smoke is rising, there huddled around that fire, in mud huts with earth floors and grass roofs, are homes--homes for many people who are still sitting in darkness--a people whom Satan has held in his grasp for generations. They continue on, serving their idols, trusting in fetishes, slaughtering chickens to appease the spirits, walking on in their blind state, unknowingly turning their backs on God... and heading toward a Christ-less eternity. This is what that smoke represents.

This short statement was first penned by Robert Moffat to David Livingston: "Do not sit down in lazy contentment. Do not choose an old station. Push on to the vast, unoccupied districts of the north. In that direction, on a clear morning, I've seen the smoke of a thousand villages. There no missionary has ever been. There, sir, is your field."

That, my friend, came from a burning heart! He wasn't just glibly telling a friend a beautiful sight he had seen. He was unloading a burden--a burden that was his responsibility to carry. God had gotten hold of a human life and given it a vision from His perspective. This is not a vision that God just occasionally wants us to see, nor is it for just a few scattered people. It is a vision for every heart; His goal is that every heart

beat with His.

Wasn't Dr. Moffat just quoting Isaiah, but in his own words? "Arise, shine," he was pleading, "for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness is covering the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes, my brother! Lift up thine eyes round about and see!" (see Isaiah 61:1-4a).

Do you see, my friends? Do you SEE?! There they are--half of the world. God looks down from His throne in heaven and sees their "smoke." It continually arises before His face, reminding Him of their fruitless lives. I believe we as Christians should see as God sees. I believe our hearts should be burdened with the same things that burden God's heart. Will you then, as Isaiah says, lift up your eyes with me? Lift them up as we stand on the top of a mountain in an area of the world where the landscape is dotted with these small little villages. Gaze, with Moffat and Livingston, out, out, and even further out, across the land...

You have finally made it to the top of the ridge. The cool breeze is refreshing to your hot, sweaty body. You have been climbing for quite some time. Up, up, and still up you climbed. Ploddingly you continued walking on as the sun beat down upon the sand, rocks, and shrubs that made up that mountainside. But now, squinting as the sun sets over the horizon, you stand gazing out over it all. Little pillars of smoke are arising all around. As far as you can see, on all sides, these small puffs rise upward toward a God they don't know. Each ascending cloud represents a family, and sometimes even an extended family. There they are--waiting. Are they waiting on God to display His mighty power so that they will all be forced to fall down at His feet and worship Him? No. They are waiting on us. Christ had the ministry of reconciliation while He was here on earth, but now He has given it to us. They are waiting on you and me. They may not know that they are waiting--but then again, some do. Nevertheless, they are waiting. Do you see their smoke?

The descent is much easier than the climb, and we soon find ourselves entering a village. Over there is a group of people gathered around the body of a man lying on the ground. Off to the side, under a tree, there is a young woman. She is the widow of the man who just died. Suddenly, the nationals turn and walk towards her. She does not even try to resist. Full well she knows what will happen. They place a cord around her neck and commence to strangle her to death. It is useless to do anything. If we would rush forward to try to help her, we would be rudely pushed away and told to mind our own business--or we might lose our lives also. There, before our horrified eyes, she is strangled to death and placed beside her dead husband. WHY? Because when a husband dies, their religion demands that his widow be strangled to death to accompany him in his afterlife. If the eldest son is old enough, HE must be the one to strangle his mother. Moreover, all the children, if they are too young to support themselves, must be put to death. 1

All this is what that smoke represents. It is rising over this village, and this is only one of the thousands. God sees them all, and I believe He weeps. He sent His only Son to die for all these people. It is not a light thing to send your Son to give His life for someone--there has to be something deep on your heart. I'm sure it is starting to settle down a little more as we walk to the next village. We don't have much to say as we hang our nets under the tree, and lay down on our mats for the night. Yes, they are waiting--waiting on us--and their smoke continues to rise.

Suddenly at midnight, a death wail began to rise. A little baby had died. Immediately the witch doctor was called, and the villagers were roused from sleep. Before very long he had pointed out a woman whom he

accused of having caused the death of the little one. She immediately protested, insisting that she was innocent . . . but she had to be tried. They hurried her away to the tree that stood in the center of the village. She was told to climb it, and then hurl herself from the top. She began to climb. Presently she sat on one of the branches, and again protested her innocence. Everyone knew she was telling the truth. She was one of the finest women in the village, highly respected by all. But the witch doctor had pointed her out as the one guilty; thus, she had to prove her innocence. She commenced climbing again, until she had reached the very highest limb of the tree. There she sat, again maintaining her innocence. Then, before our horrified gaze, she threw herself down to the hard ground, and was instantly killed. Her body was all broken apart. She was thereby judged guilty. Had she been innocent, she would have been unharmed.

"Barbarous!" you and I may cry. "Evil, wicked, sinful!" Yes, that's right--it is all of those things, and more. They are walking down a path that leads them straight to hell! But whose fault is it? I realize that God said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek.18:20). But who is responsible to let them know? Who is supposed to go and warn them that the way they are going is wrong, and that God sent a Man to forgive them and turn them around. Christ did His part; but then He turned and handed the baton to us. It is in our hands now, not His. There they are--waiting, waiting on you and me.

All this, though, should not be our greatest motivation. What about God? God has formed them all from their mother's womb for a purpose. God doesn't just casually do things. He took great care as He molded that woman. His heart said, "I'll make her in My image, and after My likeness, so that I can fellowship with her, and she can live for My glory and honor." God had plans for her--but were they fulfilled? Why not? God did not receive the glory and the honor from her life that He deserved. His Name is not being held high and continually exalted through these people as it should, yet they don't know anything better. Again I wonder, "Why not?"

Our drained bodies finally drift off to sleep as the sun just starts to raise its head. What we don't realize is that just a few miles away stood a man in the middle of his town. As the people gathered, he hacked his skull with a great long knife until the blood flowed freely. He then took newspapers and stuck them into his open gashes, after which he deliberately struck a match and set the whole on fire. There he stood, the fire sizzling his blood, burning the paper and the hair, the man enduring the most excruciating agony. Why must he do this? Because his religion demands it. He must afflict his body; he must suffer; he must endure pain in order to gain a place in heaven.

Oh, the grief to God! Oh, how God's heart must pain! "I have made a way," He cries, "a beautiful, glorious way!" Is not God blasphemed when men try to come to Him in any other way?

But, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14) Does it not fall back on us?

The sun has risen, the village is awake, and it is now time to go on. It may seem to you to be a wrong place to stop our story, but I think it is fitting. The story is unfinished, and the problems are unsolved, and that is just the same as it is in reality. These people's stories are unfinished, and their problems are unsolved. They are alive today, you know--thousands of them. Does not God weep in holy jealousy over them all? Why does God weep? Why isn't He receiving the glory? Why hasn't the name of Christ reached them?

Hear these now-famous words again: "Do not sit down in lazy contentment. Do not choose an old station. Push on to the vast unoccupied district of the north. In that direction, on a clear morning, I've seen the smoke of a thousand villages. There no missionary has ever been. There, sir, is your field." Moffat and Livingston had seen many a Christ-less village, many a witch doctor, many a cruelty. They saw the degradation of sin and the nothingness of God's fame. They knew the hurting heart of God. Can you see the passion behind those words?

"Go ye into ALL the world," is one of the ways that Jesus said it. God is crying down through the ages, "My Name--I want everyone to know Me! I am their God and Creator and Lord and King. It is only right that I be set up into My rightful place." "I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Ps. 46:10b).

God sees their "smoke" arise day after day, year after year, century after century. Can we allow the burden of God to settle down upon our hearts? The cry of His heart, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" is still ringing out across the land. Isaiah got into a close enough relationship with God that He could finally hear His pleas. Can you hear that cry? Oh, let us respond as Isaiah did, with a resounding, "Here am I, send me!" (Isa. 6:8).

Paul "strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named" (Rom.15:20). He saw that "smoke" and heard God's cry. "I am a debtor," he said (Rom. 1:14). "I owe something to God, and it is only paid as I preach the gospel to the Greeks and Barbarians." In fact, Paul said, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16b). "I am in debt, and I must pay." Are we any different? Didn't we receive the same commands from Christ? Oh, let us preach the glorious message of the gospel!

"Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God." That was William Carey's admonition to us. Let's take it! Let's dump our lives at the feet of our Master and go forth! We only have one life to live; let's give it all we have and burn our lives out for God! C. T. Studd said, "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him." Is that not true? YES, IT IS!

God closes the Old Testament with Malachi, rebuking Israel for despising His name (Mal.1:1-6). "Where is my honor? Where is my fear?" Israel responds back to God wondering what she has done, and God pours forth His heart. "My reputation is polluted. My name is in the dirt. The world does not see Me for who I really am." But God will not allow His glory to stay unnoticed. He rises up, in verse 11, and heralds forth: "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts."

God has a plan and it will be fulfilled. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). Christ will be preached to all peoples. The question is, will you and I rise up and be a part? Will we, with Moffat and Livingston, get a vision from God and pour out the alabaster box of our lives at the feet of Christ that the gospel would be spread? It is not a burden; it is a glorious privilege! It will not always be easy, but being co-laborers with Christ is a phenomenal blessing! It is an awesome responsibility that God has given to us, but He didn't leave us without the means: "All power is given unto Me.... Go ye therefore...."

Do you see that smoke which those two missionaries saw? Can you picture God's heart? I hope you can see with them as they cry; "I've seen the smoke of a thousand villages." o

1 Examples are from *The Challenge of Missions* by Oswald J. Smith, pastor of the People's Church, Toronto, Canada

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