

Unreached Peoples: The Dai People of China

by Paul Hattaway

The Dai people in China are in desperate need of the gospel, but few Christians are living among them to share the good news.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19

Topics: "Missions Work", "Cultural Evangelism"

Description

This sermon reflects on the traditional water splashing festival of the Dai people, highlighting the significance of washing away past mistakes and starting anew. It delves into the challenges faced by the Dai community, including the impact of urbanization on their traditional way of life and the pressure to adhere to Buddhist beliefs. The sermon also emphasizes the need for sharing the gospel with the Dai people, who have limited exposure to Christianity.

Transcript

Each year, I really look forward to our traditional water splashing festival. It's fun, my grandmother always tell me to remember, it's time to wash away the bad we have done, and begin springtime with a new start. Throughout China and the surrounding countries, the Dai are known for their annual water splashing festival, which is especially celebrated in Xishuanbanna, a city of tourism in the province of Yunnan.

Those not working in tourism, make their living in lucrative trade with nearby Myanmar. Others provide for their families through rice farming, sugar cane, or rubber plantations. Of more than a million Dai people in China, about 300,000 live in the Deheng region.

Their lives have traditionally centered on farming. In recent years, the Dai have seen their farmland replaced by city property. As new work must be found, traditional family relationships become strained.

Men and women need to find work in the city. Some women have opened up Dai dress shops. Xiaoming works 12-hour days to support herself and her brother.

She is also saving for her daughter's education. Yet the majority of Dai remain in agriculture, where they labor long hours for meager incomes. Most Dai identify their religion as Theravada Buddhist, but very few actually understand the fundamentals of their beliefs.

What they do understand involves belief in reincarnation and the need to perform good deeds to attain a better life the next time around. You need to earn merit to have good things in this life and in the next life.

The Dai live with tremendous social pressure to be Buddhist.

However, most people do not go to the temple regularly, except the elderly who are more concerned about what will happen in the afterlife. Animism and belief in the power of evil spirits also permeates Dai culture, especially after dark. A tradition behind the water-splashing festival says a demon once ruled the Dai people.

He stole seven daughters from a Dai king and forced them to become his wives. In order to free the people, one of the daughters chopped off the demon's head, which burst into flames. Villagers splashed water to put out the flames.

Today, the water symbolizes the washing away of mistakes and problems of the past year. After you've been splashed with the water, it feels like you wash away the past and welcome something new. Jesus says, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up to eternal life. Despite the good news of eternally satisfying water, which Christians know, the gospel is barely trickled to the Dai people. Why are the Dai people so unfamiliar with Jesus? One reason is that there are so few Christians living among them.

Imagine living among 300,000 people and not having a single church that speaks your language. Will you pray about going and taking the gospel to the Dai people? You

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