

Unreached Peoples: China's Minority Groups #2 the Amdo Tibetans

by Paul Hattaway

The sermon emphasizes the urgent need for the gospel among the Amdo Tibetans, a largely unreached people group living in spiritual darkness under Chinese rule.

Scripture: Psalm 96:3, Isaiah 52:7, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:14

Topics: "Missions Evangelism", "Spiritual Bondage"

Description

This sermon delves into the spiritual darkness and isolation of Tibet, particularly focusing on the Amdo Tibetans who are in desperate need of the gospel. It highlights their traditional beliefs, struggles, and the lack of exposure to Christianity, emphasizing the urgent need for evangelism and the hope of breaking the chains of spiritual bondage through the power of the gospel.

Transcript

Tibet, known as the hidden kingdom or rooftop of the world. For centuries, this land has been shrouded in mystery. Its landmass forms a plateau nearly the size of Western Europe.

Buried in the heart of Asia, Tibet is isolated from the rest of the world by the Earth's highest mountain ranges. The rugged mountain peaks of the Himalayas to the south stretch more than four miles into the heavens. It is a land of awesome beauty and spiritual darkness.

Tibet is comprised of three provinces. Utsang, or central Tibet, is a dry and dusty region sheltered by the Himalayas. Calm in the east is a lower, heavily forested region whose mountain slopes give birth to some of Asia's great rivers.

Amdo is a land similar to the American Northwest, with vast prairies giving way to snow-capped mountains. The Tibetan people have descended from nomadic tribes, ethnically similar to the Mongols. Tibetan legends tell of a monkey and an ogre who came together to produce six children, the first Tibetans.

These children intermarried, multiplied, and gradually dispersed to populate the land. Ancient Tibet was ruled by a series of monarchs. The country reached its zenith of power in the mid-700s A.D., with an empire that stretched for more than 2,000 miles from east to west.

During this period, Tibet's 37th monarch placed a veneer of Buddhism over the native blend of shamanism, animism, and tantricism known as *bon*. Today, the cities and villages of Tibet are filled with colorful Buddhist prayer flags. Beaten back and forth by the wind, these prayer flags are visible reminders of unfulfilled spiritual longings.

Under the domination of Mongol authority in the early part of the 13th century, Tibet's religious leaders emerged as liaisons with the outside world. By the mid-1600s, a new religious sect within Buddhism had come to prominence with a line of teachers known as Dalai Lamas. The Dalai Lama is believed to be a literal reincarnation of Tibet's patron spirit, Chenrezig.

In 1950, the 14th Dalai Lama faced the realization of communist China's intent to liberate Tibet from the influence of foreign imperialists. Beneath the diplomatic language, there was no mistake about the long-term agenda of the newly formed communist regime. After nearly a decade of attempting to coexist with the People's Republic of China, the Dalai Lama was forced into exile in India.

The Tibetan provinces of Amdo and Kam were largely subsumed into the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. What remained of Tibet proper became known as the Tibet Autonomous Region, controlled by mainland China. The exile of the Dalai Lama has greatly impacted the peoples of Tibet.

Among them, 1.5 million Amdo Tibetans are isolated from contact with the outside world. They are a hidden people group, separated from Tibet proper and covered by the thick blanket of Chinese rule in the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan. Historically, Amdo Tibetans were renowned as a rugged, even fierce people, roaming the Tibetan plateau on horseback.

Many Amdo are nomadic, wandering the vast grasslands and mountain valleys with their herds of yak, goat, and cattle. Outside the cities, they live in yak hair tents, moving from place to place when the animals have made good use of the land. The Amdo are a people focused on survival in harsh conditions, largely disinterested in the outside world.

They are a people in desperate need of the gospel. Amdo society is traditionally patriarchal. The oldest male represents the family and makes most of the decisions.

Men have a large amount of leisure time, delegating many of the daily chore to the women and children. Among the herdsmen, alcoholism and opium use are common vices. Amdo women do most of the daily work.

They are responsible for the upkeep of the tent. Tending the fire and cooking the meals. They also milk the herds, churn the milk to make butter and yogurt, and gather water from the mountain streams.

Children of Amdo herdsmen spend many hours with the yak and sheep in the open spaces of the grassland. They have little opportunity for formal education. Many are totally illiterate.

In the villages, they have traditional schools under the Chinese system. Some children are educated in the monastery and enter the monkhood. Most Amdo children know very little about the Buddhist religion.

But they are taught from a young age to believe life is comprised of a nearly endless cycle of birth and rebirth. The goal in each life cycle is to tip the scales of life with more good karma than bad. Amdos believe good karma is earned through moral living and adherence to Buddhist teachings.

Pilgrimages to holy sites, spinning prayer wheels and prostration before idols become more important as age brings one closer to death. There is no assurance of what the next life brings. The twin chains of fear and fate keep Amdo Tibetans veiled in darkness.

Day after day, 1.5 million Amdo-speaking Tibetans are trapped in this cycle of spiritual bondage. They are a people in desperate need of the gospel. While there have been reports of isolated conversions, there is no known Amdo church.

Only a handful of Christian workers are targeting the Amdo. Mission researchers have identified them as one of the least evangelized people groups in the world. One could travel for weeks at a time among the Amdo nomads and never find one person who has heard the name of Jesus.

Yet the words of the Apostle Paul ring true for the Amdo people. How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? But God has not forgotten the Amdo Tibetan people. He desires to be worshipped by all the people of the earth.

One day, an Amdo church will be among the countless throng worshipping the Lamb who sits on the throne. Centuries of spiritual darkness will give way to the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The chains of bondage enslaving the Amdo Tibetans will be shattered by the power of the living word.

Perhaps God is calling you to join with others who are prayerfully resolved to work together to see a move of God among Amdo Tibetans. Individuals and churches are joining hands, forming strategic partnerships focused on the goal of a church planting movement among the Amdo. We must begin by increasing the volume of prayer, earnestly seeking God in prayer and fasting, asking him to release the Holy Spirit on the current Dalai Lama, himself an Amdo Tibetan.

Call out prayer teams to go and break up the soil through worship and intercession. Raise up long-term workers to join the few who already have responded. Provide greater freedom to live and work among Amdo people.

Bring vision for outreach and a genuine burden to the Chinese believers living in Amdo regions. Complete the work begun in the hearts of Amdo Christians through adequate discipleship. Speed the completion of the Jesus film and other evangelistic materials in the Amdo language.

And bring forth a triumphant Amdo Tibetan church for the glory of his name.

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