

Speed the Light... Warming hearts in the coldest inhabited place on earth

It was cold. It usually always is. But, this day was colder than most. Temperatures were getting far below zero when I drove my Speed the Light Chevy Blazer to the town of Ak-Dovrok. The name of this city is Tuvan, the language spoken where I live, and it means “White Mountain”. It is called White Mountain because of the asbestos they mine on in the nearby hills. People are dying from Cancer because of the asbestos, they are dying from Tuberculosis because there is no medicine and they are dying from alcoholism because there is no hope.

When I prayed about where we were to plant our first church, God clearly said Ak-Dovrok. I thought, “But God there is nothing there and the people have no jobs to sustain a church plant.” There was a 98% unemployment rate. This would be the first trip I would take in my new STL SUV. I wasn’t even sure the vehicle would make it. The roads are like small mountains with pot holes the size of craters. The temperature on a good day reaches -20 and although the sun was out I quickly learned that those were the colder days.

I took a step by faith and listened to what God told me to do. As we traveled to the far east of Tuva where the city is located, the terrain was harsh and it had taken its toll on the people living there. People in their 30s looked like they were 50 and those closer to 50 looked like they were about to enter eternity. Their eternity wouldn’t be filled with heavenly angels. Most people die in their 40s. They had never been given the opportunity to hear the gospel. They had never seen a Bible and, at that time, those who spoke only Tuvan didn’t have a Bible to read in their language. These Tuvans had no hope of knowing Jesus because they had never heard his name.

Without my trusted Chevy we could never have presented the gospel to these lost Tuvans. When we drove into the city there wasn’t much going on. There wasn’t much to do. We announced to the local people when we would be holding a “biz platna” or free meeting in the town hall. Each city in Russia has a town hall in which the Communists built to promote their propaganda. I’m sure the Communist party leaders didn’t imagine that it would ever be used as a platform to share a religion they believed to be the “poison of society”.

A few days before the meeting we began helping people in the city with basic needs such as food. We would fix doors and window frames that were worn from the harsh winter. As we painted the inside of apartments we built bridges into the hearts of people.

The night of the evangelistic meeting it was -30 degrees. My faith was strong that we would at least have ten people in attendance. The meeting was to start at 5 pm but when I went into the hall at 4:55 no one was there. My faith was at its lowest point. Had I missed God? Was my travel and labor for nothing?

I talked to the director of the hall at 5 pm and told him that I thought we would need to cancel our meeting. He refused abruptly to cancel any meeting and said that my problem wasn't the empty seats. I thought maybe I'm not seeing something he was seeing. "You said the meeting started at 5 pm right?" he said. "Yes, of course," I stated. "Well", he smirked, "that's when I open the doors for the over 200 people standing outside waiting to get in."

The director finally opened the doors to the frozen people standing outside. Every seat was filled in the hall and 34 people stood along the walls.. When the altar call was given every soul came forward to denounce Buddhism and Shamanism to make Christ their Lord and savior.

My Chevy blazer isn't the prettiest in town any more. It has been scratched by hooligans walking the streets, it has been hit by a police officer who refused to pay for its repair because there wasn't enough damage done to it, and it has had rocks thrown at it by an angry mob of people who threatened to kill us for sharing the gospel. But, without my STL Chevy Blazer I would never had the chance to launch 43 new churches in Tuva and people would still be waiting to know the hope that I, the driver of a STL 1997 black Blazer, have come to know.

Speed the Light, in the rain

The rain poured on their heads as they waited outside. Fifteen Russian teenagers from Victory youth ministry stood in a circle praying for the rain to stop. They didn't care about their clothes that were getting soaked or their hair that was getting flat. All these teenagers from Victory youth ministry cared about was a chance to witness to other teens who had never heard of Jesus Christ.

The target audience was teenagers living in the Russian town of Kaa-Xem. It is one of the poorest towns in all of Russia. Teenagers living in Kaa-Xem don't live there because they want to but because they have to. They are not too concerned with appearance. They only have one good set of clothes. They don't own cars. A driver's license would cost more than a half a year wage to get.

They live in homes infested with rats and roaches. Their alcoholic fathers too drunk to find the door to their apartment lie in the stairwell. The stench of urine turns the stomach. There is no lighting in the halls of the wooden apartment building. They light matches to dodge large holes in the floor boards.

All that the fifteen teenagers had was a fender sound system provided by American teenagers living half a world away who gave to Speed the Light. The rain wasn't letting up so they had to get creative quick. After praying they found a covering and paid a woman to use her outlet to set up the sound system. Russian Rap blasted from the fender reaching the ears of hundreds living in nearby apartments.

After the gathering the local teenagers these fifteen teens did human videos they had written and practiced themselves. The rain poured down but couldn't dampen their spirits. They had a job to do and they would witness for Christ no matter the circumstance. Christian songs in the Russian language spoke to these poor teens and hearts began to open. These teens had never heard of Jesus so the message was simple. Jesus, God's son, walked this earth a perfect man, died at the hands of an angry

mob, then he was resurrected. As God's son, he offers us freedom from sin and eternal life. Hands went up all over the crowd in response to the question, "Do you want to know God's love?" These fifteen teenagers wet from hand to toe lead other teenagers to salvation.

This is just one instance when our small fender sound system was used to lead teenagers to Christ. Hundreds were saved at the youth Olympics we conducted two years in a row. We use the system regularly to share the gospel at dormitories. We use it at youth group meetings every week. We use it at major evangelistic events when we rent a hall that has no system. We have used in hundreds of times and have seen thousands hear the gospel for the first time and thousands of people repent. This is how STL is giving us a voice to speak to a community about the love of God.