

Idomeni - Emek Beraka Valley of Blessings



The border between FYR Macedonia and Greece. Refugee camp in Idomeni, Greece. People have been without food for three days, and sleeping on the railway, hoping that the border will be opened.

Our visit to Idomeni was full of expectations; we expected to see people being taken care of in reception centers throughout Greece and the surrounding islands. Unfortunately, that was not what we saw. We were deeply shaken by the horrors that we saw in Greece, and the suffering that is the everyday experience for the refugees there. We saw local people trying to help with what they have, and on the other hand we saw the other side of the coin, the hedonist Europe, seeking its own interests. We experienced how much the rest of Europe is ignoring Greece, and the ideals it usually stands for.

Our entrance into the illegal camp in Idomeni was a picture of dread; people who haven't eaten for three days, sleeping on the cold, begging for information about the borders, etc. Saif, a Syrian refugee, whose parents have been in Germany for over three months said: "It would have been better to have died in Syria, than suffer here at the gates of Europe."

A lack of food, volunteers and doctors, and a lack of compassion from Europe caused two lives to be lost the day we got there. When we got to Idomeni, we were met by a scene of two men pouring gasoline over themselves and setting themselves on fire. That cry for help was aimed at people who think the refugees are 'none of their problem'. It was supposed to awaken compassion.

On the other hand, every step we made through that camp, felt like a step through a valley of blessings. Talking to people there felt like talking to God. We saw His provision every time we sat down to share a meal of boiled potatoes with families in the camp.



Sharing a meal with a family from Syria. The fourth day they are eating potatoes.

Each bite they took was a blessing. I haven't seen that much gratitude for potatoes in my entire life. While most of the western world eats McDonalds and steaks, ungrateful for what they have, these people keep giving thanks for every bite they have. "Only God can help us." – said a mother of a small child, while we were eating dinner together. I have never heard God's name being called so many times, as in these couple of days in the camps in Greece. God was worshiped there much more than in Cathedrals and mega-churches. Idomeni is a valley of blessings. A place where God shows himself each day; though volunteers who have traveled a long time to bring a few bags of potatoes

to the refugees, but also through locals who cook food where ever they can. One Greek local brought his herd of cows to a nearby meadow, so he can give milk to refugees.



Mufid Besic – activist for human rights and Roma minority rights, visiting the camp in Idomeni

The goal of our visit was to see for ourselves what is going on in the field, because we cannot rely on what the media broadcasts; it is usually untrue, or nothing is being said at all. “Elvis, our plan was to focus on the needs of the refugees. But, I feel like we cannot stay indifferent to the European and Turkish politics. Turkey is not the place these people should live. I’m afraid of Turkish humanity and the democracy they have been showing recently.” – says Mufid.



I deeply agree with the statement that Turkey is not a land of promise and blessing. It is a land of fear, especially for Kurds who are in Idomeni. The dictatorship from the East and the politics from the West brought these people to the edge of existence. Idomeni is a place where God himself resides. The East and the West both need to know that God needs to be served.



In Idomeni, on the railway. Mufid (right) founder of “Impact”, a human rights organization, and Elvis (left) coordinator of volunteer work for theCBA (Croatian Baptist Aid).

After we visited the camp in Idomeni, we traveled to Thessaloniki, because we wanted to visit the camp led by the Greek armed forces. However, on our way there, we found 5 illegal camps, where people live wherever they can and eat whatever they can find. One of the camps is located at a gas station, and there is over 2500 people living there for the past month. Upon entry into the station, we met two workers, who, even though the gas station is closed due to this situation, come there every day and give out boiled eggs. Their names are Alexandra and Katerina.

“If we could, we would bring thousands of eggs, but we simply can’t. We would love to help everyone get something.” – said Alexandra with tears in her eyes.



The camp at the gas station.



After that, we went to visit other camps in Greece, and needless to say, the needs in each of them are great. Famine and filth are everywhere. The biggest needs are food and hygiene. Most people cannot afford to buy food every day and feed their children. A lot of children eat plain biscuits daily, but even though that would be something we would probably complain about, there is nothing but gratitude in those children’s eyes. Once a gas station, now a place of blessing - because God is there every day.



Mufid Besic – founder of “Impact” speaking to a family from Afghanistan.

The camp in Thessaloniki is run by the army. We visited the camp with our friends from the organization A21.



Camp in Thessaloniki, run by the Greek army.

The camp was built for 3000 people. They are living in small, prefabricated IKEA houses, and are provided with food by the army. They have toilettes and showers, thanks to A21. The camp is located in a former army base, so the living conditions are better here. The refugees are allowed to go in and out of the camp. The police is there only when food is being distributed, to keep the peace. Even though the whole camp is under the jurisdiction of the army, the organization of everything was handed to an American missionary. I had a very pleasant conversation with the army General Moschopoulous, who gave us a tour of the camp and told us about the situation in Greece. He pointed us to other camps, with much greater needs.



Camp in Thessaloniki for refugees from Syria.



Elvis visiting the camp in Thessaloniki.



A woman, boiling potatoes and cucumbers in a tin can she found in the trash.

The scenes we have seen in Greece are horrifying; but these people are not hopeless. Europe might have lost hope, but these people here have the chance to meet God. Brothers and sisters, we are those who need to be God's presence there. The Great commission given to us in Matthew's Gospel is the guiding force, and the road we need to take. Make people disciples of Christ, and help the least of these. That is our task, and that is our hope. We hold the Bible in one hand and bread in the other. We are servants of Christ.

We cannot allow ourselves to follow Pilat's example and wash our hands of this situation. On the contrary, we should respond to Jesus' words: "You feed them.", and respond with faithful and ready hearts.



If you want to help with material supplies (food, hygiene), you can do so through the “CBA” team, which is directly involved in the field. If you would like to help financially, you can do so by sending the funds to this account:

Account Name: Savez Baptistickih Crkava u RH
Address : Radiceva 30, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia
Bank name: Zagrebačka Banka d.d.
Address: Trg Bana Jelačića 10, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia

IBAN HR8823600001101525063
SWIFT ID Code: ZABAHR2X

If you want to be part of the team working in the field, you can find out more by sending us an email: croatianbaptistaid@gmail.com

Idomeni -Emek Beraka; let us be Christ's presence to these people. During this time of Easter, while we share around the table with our family and friends, let us not forget those who are in need. Let us pray for them, be their advocates and fight for their rights. May our Lord be merciful and full of grace to all of us.

Christ is risen! May the Lord bless you and your families.