

How a Prophetic Vision Led This MMA Fighter Into the Heart of Africa

He's known as the "Big Pygmy," and is using his time in the ring to quite literally fight for the forgotten.

It all started with a vision God gave the newly saved Justin Wren in 2010:

"I was in the rain forest," Wren says. "I knew I was way out there, walking down footpath with trees all around. I heard this awesome drumming—very distinct, but beautiful singing, and saw what I now know where pygmies.

"Everything shifted from curiosity then, because my heart was broken for them. I knew they were hated by other people groups around them. It was so vivid I almost saw just past the people and saw the pain. It crushed me the most because they felt forgotten by people and by God. I cried like I've never cried before in my life, and (I) don't know if I can cry like that again. I was close to hyperventilating, just puddle of tears (the size of) grandma's cookies."

Less than a year later, Wren's prophetic vision came to fruition, and he journeyed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to minister to the Pygmies.

The DRC government estimates there are approximately 600,000 Pygmies in the Congo today, about 1 percent of the population, while other organizations argue there could be as many as 2 million, or 3 percent of the population.

According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), the struggle of the Pygmy people is "considerably worse" than the average Congolese person, who

are ranked as some of the poorest in the world.

"They experience inferior living conditions and poor access to services such as health and education," according to the IWGIA. "Their participation in the DRC's social and political affairs is low, and they encounter discrimination in various forms, including racial stereotyping, social exclusion and systematic violations of their rights."

Which is perhaps why God sent an internationally known fighter to their rescue, and has used Wren's fame to restore hope and joy to the Pygmies.

"He wants to defend the weak, empower the voiceless," Wren says of the Lord. "What He's shown me a lot, a lot of times (is that) Western missionaries, NGOs (Non Government Organizations) look for the quick fix, a Band-Aid of (throwing) money at the problem. ... I feel like a lot of times, people think charity is the answer, but God's shown me something much greater than charity, (which is) opportunity."

For Wren, part of that opportunity included sharing in the Pygmies' suffering. The fighter opted to forgo malaria medication and endure the illness instead.

Spiritual warfare incapacitated Wren's doctors. He was misdiagnosed four times before the Lord showed members of his Congo congregation that the enemy was trying to kill Wren.

"One team member had a vision of a veil being over the doctor's eyes," Wren said. "The team member realized, 'If you don't get Justin out of there, he's going to die.'"

Wren concludes he contracted malaria from mosquitoes, which is one of the top transmissions of the disease, according to the World Health Organization. WHO estimates 300-500 million people contract malaria every year, with close to 1 million dying from the disease.

However, prevention is possible: An increased access to clean drinking water could prevent more than a half-million deaths every year from malaria alone. In addition, fresh water could prevent 1.4 million children deaths from diarrhea and 860,000 child deaths from malnutrition, WHO reports.

But what the enemy meant for evil, God used for good.

Wren initially wanted to raise money for two water wells, but is now closing in on providing funds for nearly 30.

In addition to his crowdfunding efforts, he's donating 33 percent of his proceeds from his book *Fight for the Forgotten* to the Pygmies for land, food and water initiatives.

"My first promise to them was to give them a voice," Wren says. And by making his comeback to MMA (Mixed Martial Arts), he appears to be doing just that.