

Joppa
Acts 9:34 – 11:15

Peter is obeying Jesus command to go into all the world. He is in Lydda when there is a request for him to come because of Dorcas death in Joppa. The saints loved her because she was so generous and kind. Peter prays for her and commands that she get up. Restored to life she rises from her bed. Many believe and so there is much teaching to be done there in Joppa. Peter stays with Simon the tanner, whose house was by the sea. Joppa was probably much smaller then so the expression 'by the sea may' have meant actually right off the beach.

Meanwhile in Caesarea a Roman centurion is profoundly affected by the Jewish faith. He has heard stories of Jesus. 10:2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. An angel appears to him and says God has seen his prayer and gifts. That must mean his gifts were from a heart of love toward God as works alone do not get God's attention. He is told to send men to Joppa to get Peter who is staying with Simon the tanner.

Peter is on the roof waiting praying while waiting for lunch when God begins to speak to him. He sees a sheet with unclean animals in it descend before him. God tells him to kill and eat. Peter being a devout Jew refuses to do so. God says, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Then the Lord tells him to go with the men who have come looking for him.

The men arrive from Cornelius home and tell about Cornelius vision and request for him to come. While Peter is on his way, Cornelius assembles his friends and relatives. When Peter arrives he is invited into a Gentile home. This would defile a Jew. But Peter has had a revelation, one that Jesus had been trying to teach in many ways throughout his time with Peter. 10:28b "But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean." Who did Romans worship? Peter was asked to overlook his prejudices and preconceived ideas. Here is what Peter got out of that vision: 10:34,35 "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism³⁵ but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." Peter must have remembered the trip through Samaria, to Tyre and Sidon, to the Decapolis, the feeding of the 4000. Suddenly it dawns on him! You don't have to be a Jew to love God. It can happen to anyone around the world in any country.

Peter shares the gospel, which he says they are already aware of, and they receive the word and are filled with the Holy Spirit. They are speaking in tongues like the disciples did at Pentecost. What's he suppose to do with that?

Accept them as brothers. Next chapter he has to answer to Jerusalem for daring to enter the Gentile home with the message.

What are your prejudices? Is there some group which you say could never be believers? OK let me stretch you a little. Can a Mormon become a believer? A Jehovah witness? A Muslim? A Buddhist? To Peter the most un-Christian people in the world were Romans. Who is the most un-Christian people in the world to you? Someone might say – my family! Whoever they are, can they become believers? The Holy Spirit can work in any heart and draw them to God. You will see the signs of God's work that you saw in Cornelius, devotion, fear of God, generous giver, regular prayer life. Share the Gospel with them – not religion – and you will find fertile ground for the seed of the word.

One more thought, Jonah left from this port. See Jonah 1:3 Where was he supposed to be headed? The people he was called to preach to, he had the same opinion of as Peter had of the Romans. This little town has been a place of God working in men's lives to overcome their prejudices of people that God has made in his image. Maybe he wants to do that in us too if we will hear from him as Peter and Jonah did.

Caesarea

An incredible city and port built by Herod the Great. Several Bible stories take place here. Philip the evangelist came here after witnessing to the Ethiopian Eunuch. Acts 8:40 The brothers brought Paul here to escape an assassination attempt. Acts 9:30 Possibly that was because Caesarea had a large military presence. Peter came and witnessed to the Centurion here. Acts 10 Paul's second missionary journey ended here. Acts 18:22 After his third missionary journey he stayed with Philip here for awhile. Agabus the prophet warned Paul of his upcoming imprisonment. 21:8-15. Felix tried Paul here. 23:23-33

For our devotion at this sight I would like to consider the story of Herod Agrippa 1 who probably died on the stage of this theater. The grandson of Herod the Great, found out the Jews were pleased by his persecution of Christians. He had James executed and arrested Peter. An angel led Peter out of prison in the night. Herod Agrippa had the guards on duty executed – a common practice when you lost a prisoner. He went from Jerusalem to his HQ here in Caesarea. This people pleaser then gave a speech dressed in royal attire. The sun may have shown off his silver plated mail causing him to shine. See Acts 12:21-23
²¹ On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people.²² They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man."²³ Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

Here was a man who would murder to please his constituents and gain a tighter grip on his power. But at the height of his success and the praise of people, while delivering an oration that wowed the crowds God weighed this man's soul.

The Scripture does not say he died for killing James or for hoping to kill Peter or even for putting the praise of people first in his life, but because he did not give God the praise. Everyone here is gifted with talents and abilities. Sometime you will shine and people will praise you. But Who deserves praise? The One who gave you the gifts and abilities. Agrippa had been given authority, a gift of speaking, influence and power, but he took all the praise for himself. It is the same temptation every man faces to some degree. We must always be careful to give God the praise, for every good and perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights who does not change like shifting shadows. He is the same God today as the God who struck Agrippa dead for not giving God the praise. Of all people we who know the word should be careful to point all praise that comes our way to the One who works all good things in our lives.

Mount Carmel

The most famous story on this mountain is the story of Elijah and his confrontation with the prophets of Baal. 1Kings 18:16f Elijah had pronounced God's sentence of draught three and a half years earlier. King Ahab comes to meet Elijah who has just come out of hiding.

¹⁶ So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

¹⁷ When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

¹⁸ "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals.¹⁹ Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

The enemies of God will always blame what they have caused on the people of God. Who is ruining America? "The religious right are", says the liberal left. If you are following hard after God, get used to it. Elijah says, "Lets have a show down. You want to find out who is really God? Lets have it out 1 versus 850!" Mount Carmel is the enemy home field. You see the rains and storms would hit here first when they come off the ocean. Baal and Asherah were the fertility gods that were associated with the rain that nourished the crops. This was where they thought Baal loved to show up.

²⁰ So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. ²¹ Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God,

follow him." But the people said nothing.²² Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.²³ Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it.²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire--he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

When challenged to choose the people just did not know what to do. But the people were open to a confrontation between the prophets to see which God was more powerful. There are people in our cultures that are not so anti-Christian as they are just confused as to what is real. Is secular humanism all there is or is there really something to this Jesus Christ?

²⁵ Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire."²⁶ So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.²⁷ At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened."²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.²⁹ Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

The evening sacrifice was at 3PM. Elijah gave them $\frac{3}{4}$ of the day to get it done. He was stacking the conditions in their favor. But nothing happened. The prophets of Baal believed this dance would bring on the fall rains, but there was not even a cloud in the sky.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which was in ruins.³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel."³² With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed.³³ He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."³⁴ "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time.³⁵ The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

Elijah had no doubt that Jehovah was God and wanted the people to end their wavering between gods. God had him do everything possible to prove to them that this was no trick.

³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.³⁷ Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

This was not just Elijah's idea, he did these things at God's command. Who turns hearts back to God? This was no lightning bolt for there are no clouds in the sky. Lightning does not consume great stones. This is fire from God!

³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!"

They fell on their faces and cried Eli Jah! Eli Jah! The Lord is God. In contrast to Agrippa there was no praise directed to Elijah. They were saying his name but declaring their faith in praise. We all have friends that are where these Israelites were vacillating between gods. We can see them won – see God turn their hearts if we will do what Elijah did. No – not call fire down from heaven, but obey his command. "I have done all these things at your command." And then he prayed, "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

Let's take a moment to consider if we are obeying God's command in our lives. Then let us pray that God will answer our prayers for those in our lives that need to know... Eli JAH - the LORD is God.

Megiddo

We have only a few scriptural references to Megiddo. Solomon had a palace here. Jereboam, Omri, Ahab, and other kings of Israel used it. Josiah fled here when wounded fighting against Egypt and died here. But I would like to talk about the location of Megiddo. It is at crossroad of Asia, Europe, and Africa. Perhaps that is why there have been more battles in the valley below than anywhere else in the world.

God promised this land to Abraham and had Moses lead the people of Israel here to this land so centrally located. The purpose of God for the nation of Israel was for them to be a light to the world. While the cultures around them burned their

babies alive to appease their gods, Israel was to show a God who was concerned with every life. The Outer Court of the Temple was to be a place of prayer for all nations. As trade went by this central location those involved in commerce were to be affected and to affect the world in which they lived.

To some degree this did happen. We read of the Queen of Sheba coming to visit Solomon to hear his wisdom. We know the Jewish people settled in cities outside their nation and had an influence. The Laws of Moses did affect western law to a great extent. But for the most part, Israel was more affected by the nations around them.

Jesus calls us out of the world. 2Cor 6:17 Tells us to come out of the world and be separate. The whole idea of holiness is separated for God alone. And yet that does not mean isolated. Jesus prayed in John 17 ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. How was Jesus sent into the world? To be salt and light! And that is what we are to be. Was Jesus separate from the world? He was even separate from his own culture! He never seemed to fit anywhere, and neither should we. For our home is in heaven. Yet, while we are here God wants us right in the middle of things, being salt – giving the flavor of God to all we come in contact with. And He wants us to be light, exposing darkness and showing the true way through our lives and our words.

Megiddo sits right here in the middle of things – a testimony of one kind or another depending on who controlled it. Your life is to be right in the center of the calling God has on your life to be a testimony for God. As salt give the flavor of how Jesus would do what you do. Talk about spicen it up. And as light expose what is wrong in your field and shine on how it should be done with integrity and respect, giving God the glory.

God doesn't call us to be isolated but to be in the world as He was in the world. The only way we can truly do that is by letting his life in us express itself in our particular calling. Jesus calls his people to places like Megiddo – in the cross roads to display his life. Consider how He may want you to do that in your calling every day.

One other thing about this tel is the fascinating cistern. From at least 1000 BC this cistern stored water in case of a siege. In our spiritual battle we sometimes come under siege. It occurs to me that a lot of preparation was done to provide this supply that would endure a long difficult time. Do you have such as cistern? By that I mean do you have the truths of Scripture stored up deep within you so that when you face the spiritual battles we all face, you can bring up from your well water of life. Yes, it should always be springing up, but you know as well as I do that in the battle it doesn't always seem to flow so freely.

The psalmist said he had hidden God's word in his heart, so that he wouldn't sin against God. That well of his heart was full of the word of God. It was there to guide and instruct and refresh him when temptation mounted a siege against his soul.

Psalm 84 tell us of passing through the Valley of Weeping and making a well there. Some of our wells are dug in difficulty. We dig deep and can return to that store of water when faced with difficulty again. How full is your cistern? This one is no longer connected to the source so it is empty. Be sure that never happens to you. Amen?

Beth Shan

At the end of the period of the Judges Israel desired a king. Saul was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel. The story of his call shows humility and a dependence on God. Jabesh Gilead had been delivered from a siege by Saul when he first came to power. As time passed he relied more and more on his own abilities. In one particular battle Saul grew anxious waiting for the prophet Samuel and went ahead without him. Then after the battle he disobeyed God's command and tried to cover it with a lie. As Saul's heart departed from God, the Spirit of God departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.

After David became a part of his administration, popularity for David made Saul furious with jealousy. Eventually David had to flee. Saul hunted David down but time and time again God delivered Saul into David's hands but David would not touch God's anointed king. While David was out of the country pretending to be a part of the Philistine war effort Saul and his son Jonathon were defeated in battle.

⁸ The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa.⁹ They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people.

¹⁰ They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.¹¹ When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard of what the Philistines had done to Saul,¹² all their valiant men journeyed through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them.

The grateful people of Jabesh Gilead remembered how Saul had saved them and valiantly risked their lives to keep their dead bodies from shame. Somewhere here on a wall of this city they took down the bodies of Saul and Jonathon.

I think there is a wonderful message in what they did and in how David treated Saul. Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ err from the path of total surrender, and sin in their life causes them to wound you. But I think we are to remember their kindness when they were walking with God and pray for their repentance. We should never give up and treat them as an enemy but warn them as a friend. If they hunt us down, stay away from them, but don't seek vengeance on them.

I have people in my life who have compromised and considered me an enemy because I tried to encourage them to turn back to a place of surrender to God. You probably know people like that too. Do not rejoice in their suffering and shame but pray that they will turn again to God. Remember the good and leave the judgement of evil with God.

Jezeel

What can we learn from the tragic story of Ahab and Jezebel's murder of Naboth for the theft of his property? 1 Kings 21 If these two are remembered for anything it is their wickedness. Although Ahab repented when he heard the judgement of God he was facing, he later hardened his heart against the miracle at Mount Carmel. When God was clearly displayed as the supreme Sovereign One, he sided with his wife in defying Him and his prophet.

The heart of man can become so hard he does not care that there is judgement awaiting him. The heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it? Without the wonderful grace of God in our lives – there we are in Ahab's shoes.

I was thinking about how hard hearted a particular person was who claimed to be a Christian and I believe the Spirit of God spoke to me and said, "Your flesh nature is exactly the same!" We know we are all sinners but when I thought about a particularly hard heart and that that is my old nature it made me especially thankful for the grace of God. I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no - NO! - good thing. My old nature is like Ahab in this story. I would lust and murder to get what my heart desires. So would you without the grace of God. That sure makes me thankful for what He is doing in me. I don't say done for it is right now that He is keeping us from going down that path Ahab took. Thank God daily for the grace that keeps you from that old nature.

Ein Harod

Judges 7 At these waters God chose the small band he was going to use. The army spread out in the valley was too great for the 32,000 that Gideon had assembled. So what does God do? He decreases the number. First all the

fearful are sent home. 10,000 are left. Then they have the drink test. Down on your tummy to suck up the water or watchful and alertly scooping up handful at a time. Down to 300 men and now God will get all the glory for the victory.

Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray that they enter not into temptation. The risen glorified Lord told Sardis to 'watch' or 'wake up'. 1 Peter 5:8-10 (NIV)
8 Be self-controlled and alert. (Peter told his flock) Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Alertness is an essential quality of the Christian life. God can use the alert soldier as he did in Gideon's day because the Devil will not catch him napping. We are not ignorant of his schemes. So recognizing the battle we are in and the high stakes we face, we stay alert – spiritually alert.

I think that today God is looking for the same kind of Christian soldiers who will be alert in this life. He has great battles and great victories planned for them as Peter alluded to in that passage. Let's read it again. Is your Christian life alert?

Nazareth

It is believed by some that the town named Nazareth is derived from the 'netzor' meaning 'branch'. The branch of David (people who could trace ancestry back to King David) came from Babylon around 150 –100 BC. They also settled on the east of the Jordan in Kochaba. Because of the prophecies of a descendent of David reigning forever on his throne – who was referred to as 'the branch' they kept very careful genealogical records in Kochaba. There was an expectation that at anytime the Messiah or future eternal king might be born among them.

Just 3 miles north of Nazareth, a huge Roman city, Sepphoris, was being built. It was to be a town of 30,000 compared to Nazareth's 300 – 500 people. Most of the work for those in Nazareth was probably in construction on this new city. Jesus was a 'tek-ton' meaning builder. He may have worked with wood but more likely he was a stone mason.

We visited the synagogue which is believed to be built over the synagogue where Jesus attended as he was growing up. Here he would have memorized the Scriptures in Hebrew for that is how he quoted them. He may have labored as a young man on that Roman city with its great theater and hippodrome and there learned enough Greek to communicate. But Jesus daily language was Aramaic. Most of Jesus life was centered right here with yearly trips to

Jerusalem for the festivals. Jesus waited until the work of his cousin John the Baptist was done in preparing the way for him. Then the call came. He set down his chisel and went to be baptized by John.

After the temptation in the wilderness, his first temple cleansing, a trip through Samaria to witness to the woman at the well – a time of healing in Capernaum. Jesus returned to his life in Nazareth. The towns people had heard what he had done in Jerusalem and Capernaum and were surprised – not in a bad way, but perhaps more in an excited way. After some time had passed and he had heard John was imprisoned it seemed time to begin reaching out with his message and mission.

That Sabbath was Jesus turn to sit in Moses seat. The males took turns reading from the Law and prophets and commenting on it. When Jesus was handed the scroll of Isaiah it was at chapter 61. Luke 4:1-24 When he told them the passage was now fulfilled they were excited and perhaps applauded as was common in synagogues of that time. But then he went on to explain his mission to reach out even to the Gentiles. They had already heard about his trip through Samaria and if they had any reservations about Jesus it was from this. The Samaritans had called him 'Savior of the world'. As Jesus shared how God sent the prophets to Gentiles the anger began to grow into rage.

Why? Consider the mindset of the time. They were hoping an new Joshua or David would lead the nation to freedom and begin a reign in which Israel would never again be conquered. In the time of David the extended family ate at the kings table and enjoyed special benefits of relation to the king. The Netzorians hoped for this coming day in which they would rise to the top of the nation in importance. But here Jesus is saying he's going to the Gentiles and they will reject him. It is too much for them to bear, hearing this builder claim he is the One but that their ideas and desires are so wrong that they will reject him. Who does he think he is?! And so they attempt to assassinate him in the way a blasphemer would be killed, by throwing him off the cliff. He miraculously walks through their midst and alone goes to the city that will be his new home Capernaum.

The people were reading the same Scriptures but understanding them in a selfish way. When Jesus tried to correct their misguided understanding and tell them the truth, they rejected Him. Can we have the same misguided understanding of the word because of our personal prejudices and preconceptions? How do we guard against acting like they did? How can we stay open to the revelation of the word by the teacher, the Holy Spirit?

Nain

Luke 7:11-17 (NIV)¹¹ Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out--the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people."¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

There are three times in Jesus ministry that he raised the dead. This is the first. It was relatively early in his ministry. It was just a half-day from Nazareth and a full days walk from Capernaum. In the culture of that day only the men could earn a living. Since this woman's husband had died she was dependent on the income of her only son. Now that he had died she would be at the mercy of handouts and gleaning fields. Jesus, seeing the situation, "his heart went out to her" and He reached out and touched the coffin. To touch the dead would cause religious defilement and process of ceremonial cleansing required to make one clean again. But just as in the case of Jesus touching lepers, their contamination does not defile him, his holiness makes them clean and whole. At the moment Jesus hand lighted on the coffin the boy was no longer dead! Life comes from his touch.

Not only does Jesus understand our situations and his heart goes out to us, but He comes into our lives and if we will allow his touch, what has not been clean will be made clean. Do you have faith in the touch of Jesus? Do you believe his holiness is greater than your uncleanness? If you ask, He will gladly touch your life and bring life, right now, just as He did in Nain 2000 years ago.

Sea of Galilee

Because it is shaped like a harp the lake is called Kinnereth. It was on the shores of this lake that much of the ministry of Jesus took place. I think the story of Jesus first getting in a boat to preach is interesting. Luke 5:1-3 (NIV) ¹ One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God,² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

What follows is that great catch and Peter's realization that he is in the presence of the holy. Then Jesus tells him not to fear, from now on he will catch men.

Peter had seen Jesus down on the Jordan and followed him, seen him in the synagogue cast out a demon, and even seen him heal his mother-in-law. But something dawned on Peter when that net filled with fish. There is a mixture of astonishment and fear, a revelation that he is holy and I am vile. And then Jesus lets him know it is going to be ok. Have you ever had that revelation?

Water carries the voice extremely well when it is still. If you've ever been fishing early in the morning you can hear the casual conversations all the way across a small lake. I think this was the first of many fishing expeditions for men from the bow of Peter's boat.

With Capernaum as a base he traveled to the towns around the lake, sometimes taking a boat across the lake. After the sermon on the mount he sent the disciples ahead so he could spend some time alone in prayer. He saw them fighting the wind most of the night when finally around 3am He came to them walking on the water. (Luke 6:47f)

Matt 14:25-34 (NIV)²⁵ During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."³⁴ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret.

I've heard Peter put down for taking his eyes off Jesus but I would have been in the boat gripping the mast! Have you noticed how many times Jesus says, "Don't be afraid"? He has to keep saying that because He keeps doing things that are anything but normal. When we see something so out of our realm of experience – like a dead man standing in front of us showing us the wounds that killed him – we need to hear something like, "Peace be unto you"! He is Master of all that is because it exists because He wills it so. A withered hand, a current of wind, the buoyancy of water, the properties of bread and fish, even invisible spirits, all obey his voice. He spoke and they were. What problem can you possibly have that a God this supreme cannot deal with? No wonder He says, "Is anything too hard for me?"

Testing God and hearing him say "come" are two different things. In case any of you zealous believers want to get wet – make sure you hear him say 'come'. But if you do – He will change the very laws of nature so that you can obey his voice. What a mighty God we serve!

The lake has changed little since the days of Jesus. We are not so sure of many of the sights but of this one we are absolutely certain. Jesus saw these views. And even though the depths of the lake have a negative connotation to the Jews of that day, being a picture of the abyss, I think Jesus must have enjoyed his own creation here. Perhaps that is why it has been kept these 2000 years, according to his Sovereign will.

Capernaum

Here is another place where we can say with certainty Jesus taught and lived. It was a town of perhaps 1500. Most of these would have been farmers and basalt chisellers. Basalt is common in this northern part of Galilee and so this was the center of the crusher and grinder manufacturing. It was also a crossroads and therefore a tax collection point. Matthew collected taxes here. That required a Roman garrison, the remains of which have been discovered.

It is believed that Jesus stayed in the home of Peter. He performed more miracles here and probably taught here more than any other single place. 5 of the 12 disciples were from here. Having been rejected by Nazareth because of his intent on reaching Gentiles, Jesus moved his base of operations here and called it his own city. Matthew 9:1. That Sabbath he taught in the synagogue, the black basalt base of which you can still see. It was financed by the Centurion who commanded the garrison here. (Luke 7:5) The ruler of that synagogue came to Jesus when his daughter was ill, and Jesus performed his second miracle of death to life here. He healed all who were brought to him. (Luke 4:40) The only sick or impaired people in this entire town were those who refused to come to Jesus – if there were any.

But look at the expectation that comes with revelation. Matt 11:20-24 (NIV)²⁰ Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.²¹ "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum make up a triangle of cities in which most of Jesus ministry took place. Ray Vander Laan teaches in those great tapes on faith lessons from the Land of Israel, "I am the Capernaum of today." I have seen miracles in your lives, in my own. I have seen the word brought to life and heard the teachings of my Maker. If I do not repent and bring forth fruit that remains – woe is me. You are here because God is investing in you that you might first – recognize what Peter recognized – He is holy – I am not – woe is me! But then to hear his call to share with others, by the way you live – by the way you respond – in your conversation. This experience here will open a number of great opportunities for you if you will step into them and allow the sap within you to bear fruit.

He also points out some of the pictures of Jesus used. In the back is one of the olive crushers. This millstone is what Jesus referred to as being hung around the neck of anyone who offends a little one and cast into the sea. Remember the sea represented the abyss. What a vivid picture! How every life was precious to the Creator! He wants us to think and see as He does – with Kingdom thoughts. The world downplays lives that young, handicapped, so called unskilled, the little ones. You know little ones – they are as precious to Jesus as you are.

The olives were picked and crushed here, and put in round burlap like bags and put under the press. Oil is connect with the Messiah for the word means anointed One. It was used for wounds, for cooking, as a lubricant. The olive press that squeezes out this precious oil is called a gethsemene.

These pieces of equipment are quite expensive. The average person could not afford to buy and have it hauled to his grove. Wealthy people would buy one and others would rent time on the equipment. The person that let Jesus use their garden Gethsemene must have been of some wealth and influence. Jesus went there and felt the weight of that great gethsemene. It squeezed from him such stress that blood came from his forehead. That gethsemene is your sins and mine. This particular gethsemene was here when Jesus walked the city – it kind of makes me wonder if He ever thought of the analogy.

Crushing and pressure – look what it produced in our Savior – eternal life for you and me. It produces valuable things in our lives too. We would rather there was another way, but God knows the best way. The oil is too valuable to leave on the tree to rot. He has picked you and He will bring oil from your life. Don't resist, follow your Master's example and say, not my will, but yours be done.

Peter of Primacy

Read John 21. This is thought to be the site where this took place. Jesus had told them to meet him in Galilee. While they were waiting Peter decided to go

spend a night fishing. In the morning someone from the shore yells out to them, asking if they have a catch. They tell him they were skunked. He tells them to cast the net on the right side. They have heard this outrageous request before. I can just see them all looking at each other eyes widening! "Here we go again!" Peter can't wait. He dives into the water and swims to shore. The fish don't matter anymore – Jesus can give you a boat load anytime. Then Jesus gives Peter three chances to declare his love, one for every word of betrayal. Although Jesus twice asks if he has agapeo love Peter all three times responds with phileo love. He has learned that his will is not as strong as he thought and without Jesus, he can do nothing.

Again, I think Peter had love for Jesus like no other disciple with perhaps the exception of John. I want to be like that. Throw myself in the water to be by his side. I want to hear him give me the chance to declare my love for every time I've denied him. You know what? Jesus doesn't change and He is no respecter of persons – so I think I will have that chance. I take it every morning but I mean right there with Him filling my vision – looking into those eyes of fire He is going to ask me. I think I'm going to respond just like Peter.

Tabgha

This is the place of seven springs. The twelve had just returned from going out 2x2 (Luke 9:10) and Jesus tried to take them aside to Bethsaida, perhaps to bring home to them the lessons they had learned. But the crowds had discovered where Jesus was. Jesus does not fight the God of Providence, He preaches the kingdom and heals those in need.

As Dr. Williams points out in your guidebook, Jesus must have been teaching the crowd as they walked to Tabgha. There would be plenty of water for the crowd there. Luke 9:12-17 (NIV)¹² Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here."¹³ He replied, "You give them something to eat." They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish--unless we go and buy food for all this crowd."¹⁴ (About five thousand men were there.) But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each."¹⁵ The disciples did so, and everybody sat down.¹⁶ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people.¹⁷ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

The wonderful lesson here you are probably all familiar with. But the more wonderful the lesson the more we can hear it again and again. Just five loaves and two fish – that's all we have. You probably wonder what God can do with

your meager talents. They certainly aren't enough to meet the need you come in contact with daily. But here is that great lesson we could hear every day. Little is much in Jesus' hands. Like the story at Ein Harod, too much or too many robs God of his glory. The less there is of you the more Jesus gets the glory for what He does through you. You know I teach Bible in High School – every morning I ask God to multiply these five loaves and two fish I bring to the kids. Nearly every morning He answers that prayer and I come home wanting to take notes and the revelation He gave as I opened my mouth. Ask and you shall receive.

The disciples had started the day wanting to tell Jesus what a wonderful thing it was that God worked through them as they preached the gospel and healed the sick. They ended with another illustration of what God can do with a little when it's placed in his hands. Now they will head out on the lake and learn without Him they can do nothing. Don't overestimate what you can do. Don't underestimate what God can do through you.

Sermon on the Mount

Every culture develops ways of looking at the world. Most of them develop out of the heart of man. The same was true of the Jewish culture in the time of Christ. Even with the word of God as a guide they had skewed much of its meaning and overemphasized the rules over the spirit. The multitude on the Mountain side was hearing another perspective. Jesus had grown up in a community just like theirs only his perspectives were not formed by his culture but by the Father. He read the word and listened to the Spirit's commentary, not man's. In that time when a person was to sit in Moses' seat to comment on the Law they would usually quote a famous Rabbi of old, or even the oral traditions. But when Jesus spoke He never did that. In fact, He would say, "You have heard that it is said,...but I say to you." That is why they were surprised at the authority with which He spoke.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus point out the Kingdom way of thinking. Matthew gives the most complete summary of what was preached in chapters 5-7. The introduction tells us that he took his disciples on up higher away from the crowds. He had some deeper things to speak to their hearts. He was beginning to woo them away from the traditions and thoughts they were familiar with and getting them to think of things from his mind – the mind of Christ – reality.

Let me share a few from the pens of my High School students:

Kingdom:

Deny yourself

Cut off what causes sin

Forgive others to be forgiven

World:

Be true to yourself, feels good-do it

You can't help what you desire

Make `em pay

Don't worry about your life
Turn the other cheek
To lust is to be guilty of adultery
Meek inherit the earth
Poor in spirit are blessed
Blessed are the merciful
Pray in secret

Plan out all the details – make it happen
Get even!
What harm is a look?
The forceful take the earth
The proud are better off
The merciful are weak losers
Make a good impression

It sounds so simple, especially coming from the pens of High School youth, almost idealistic. Its like we in the American culture, raised in church have heard it, but who really lives like this? Jesus disciples do.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus... Phil 2. Don't be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. You are a heavenly citizen – born into a new culture. Think the way things truly are and not the deception of the world.

The High Place of Gibeon

2 Chron 1:3-13 (NIV)³ and Solomon and the whole assembly went to the high place at Gibeon, for God's Tent of Meeting was there, which Moses the Lord's servant had made in the desert.⁴ Now David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim to the place he had prepared for it, because he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem.⁵ But the bronze altar that Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made was in Gibeon in front of the tabernacle of the LORD; so Solomon and the assembly inquired of him there.⁶ Solomon went up to the bronze altar before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it.⁷ That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."⁸ Solomon answered God, "You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place.⁹ Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth.¹⁰ Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?"¹¹ God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king,¹² therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have."¹³ Then Solomon went to Jerusalem from the high place at Gibeon, from before the Tent of Meeting. And he reigned over Israel.

The ark was in Jerusalem but the Tent of Meeting – the Tabernacle and the brazen altar were here at the High Place of Gibeon. Here is where Solomon sacrificed a thousand offerings to the Lord. ⁷ That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Wouldn't that be wonderful? It is wonderful! For Jesus says to us, "Ask and you shall receive." "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it." We have the wonderful privilege that Solomon had but in a greater way, moment by moment. Now let me balance that in case you think I am preaching the prosperity gospel with another verse, ¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 1 John 5:14 (NIV)
That is not a let down to the Child of God but an insurance that our heart will not deceive us into asking something that is not according to his will. The Child of God knows all God's will is what is best for him and so desires to ask only according to his will.

Sometimes we forget that our heavenly Father wants us to ask for ourselves. We pray for others and we should but He wants to pray for wisdom. James said if you lack wisdom you should ask God and He will give it to you. I'd like to take one thought away from here. God comes to us just as He did to Solomon and says, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." What are you doing with such a loving request? What a Father! What a request!

If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those that ask. Luke 11:13

Bethlehem

The incarnation happened in Nazareth. And all the pro-lifers said, Amen. So what happened here? A virgin gave birth to that incarnation and wondered what it could all mean. She wrapped him in cloths – swaddling cloths. Newborns in that time were lightly salted and wrapped in cloths for a time. The poor little things couldn't move their arms or legs. So when the angel told the shepherds that they should look for a baby wrapped in cloths they knew they were looking for a newborn – a just born – baby. Poor Mary had guests a few hours after delivery. And considering the long journey, I bet she would of rather slept.

What a seen! Wide eyed shepherds, some animals, Joseph still not knowing what to think of the whole thing, tired but smiling Mary holding a little mummy of a baby. Jesus dropped into this world with all its traditions and customs, not in the palace nearby – the Herodium, not even in the great city of Jerusalem, but in this humble little cave for animals. And shepherds! They were not even trusted to testify in a court of law. Often suspected of thievery, they were certainly not royal dignitaries. They would come later to provide travel expenses.

I think of all the tradition of which we are learning only a small portion in this tour. Then I think of our traditions and times, culture, as it is called. I'm sure glad He understands all that. I mean coming from the throne of God to this confusing mess man's traditions would be culture shock in the extreme. But He understands all our mess and the evil and the prejudices and He came anyway. He came to the Bethlehem, the House of Bread, to be the Bread that came down from heaven. His little body born here so it could be broken for the life of this world. Those little hands that formed the universe, so small and vulnerable. For you and me they were born.

Herodium

In these fields Ruth gleaned behind Boaz' men. Somewhere in the hills Jacob buried Rachel. In the shadow of this fortress the King of kings was born. Herod built this as a defense (fearing Cleopatra) and a stopping point to the next fortress, Masada. From there he could flee home to Idumea. You see Herod was of the line of Esau. He married into the royal Hasmonean family and through the power of Rome's army subjugated Israel. The prophecies said Isaac would rule over Esau but here this massive fortress, the third largest of its day, said otherwise. It had an upper and lower fortress and covered 45 acres. From the tower top you can see the Dead Sea – on a clear day.

The Jewish person had the promises of God that a Savior would be born right here in the shadow of this giant fortress. They were asked to believe the little baby born down there was more powerful than the man who built this. You kind of get a sense of why they expected a conqueror, a military king. Here they lived with the presence of these forts and garrisons. What did Jesus possess that could change any of this? But if we look back through time we see Herod was a miserable man who destroyed more lives than he ever helped. His dynasty was short lived. But then we look at the little baby born in that stable and how his gentle life changed millions, changes me today. We are here because of that little baby and the life he lived. He built no towers like this, wrote no books, raised no armies, but his influence grows through the centuries.

Today we are faced with the same challenge. We see the decay of American culture. Hollywood looks like it can do as it pleases to corrupt our society. The church in many denominations is denying the Word of God. Secularism, humanism seem to have won. But we are asked to believe that Christ lives in us, that He is still at work changing lives, as powerful as the day He spoke the stars into existence. What do you believe is more powerful? Do you live like you believe it?

Bethany

There are two Bethanys. One is beyond the Jordan. Jesus had some close friends here, Mary, Martha and Lazerous. One writer speculates that Jesus was in Bethany beyond the Jordan in another home owned by M M and L. That may be how they knew where to send the note to Jesus that Lazerous was sick.

Jesus had left Galilee and was only a short time from going to the cross. He waited after he got the note until Lazerous had died. Then he came here to Bethany. He met the grieving sisters and told them he was the resurrection and life. He saw all the mourners and heard his friends weeping at their loss. Then Jesus wept. This word in Greek means quiet sobs. Jesus knew He would raise Lazerous so He was not crying over that. He was weeping with those that weep. I am so glad that the Scriptures tell us about this. Heb 4:15 (NIV) ¹⁵ " For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin." Sympathize is the Greek compound word sun- patheo meaning to feel with. He feels with us in our loss, in our struggles. What a God!

Then He did what He had already done twice before – raised the dead. Lazerous was bound like baby Jesus was bound. I imagine he had to hop out of there. That would have been a scene to give you the willies. Jesus knew that the religious leaders would then decide to execute Him, but the time had come. Passover was approaching. He is the Resurrection and the Life.

Qumran and the Essenes

Qumran was first the center of a farming community around 800 BC. In Babylon the sect of the Essenes rose out of the belief that the exile was God's punishment for the disregard for God's Law. Around 150 BC they settled here believing the Temple system defiled and corrupt. They came here to seek out holiness and prepare themselves for the coming Messiah. They expected his appearing at any moment because of the prophecies of Jeremiah and Daniel. 31 BC an earthquake destroyed the community but it was rebuilt in 4 BC and lasted until 68 AD when the Romans came and destroyed the community. At that time the Essenes disappeared.

Oldest known Hebrew documents were found in the caves around here. They may have been hidden from the impending Roman attack as keys were also found in the caves, as if they were hoping to flee, come back and return to normal life. An alternate theory suggests they were worn out and therefore "buried". The documents here also give us a glimpse into the lives and thoughts of the people of the time.

God did not bring his Son into a totally unprepared community but sent John the Baptist to prepare the way. It seems God also influenced thinking of Israel to

some extent with this group, the Essenes. They called themselves the New Israel, talked of preparing the way of the Lord, (by that they did not mean highway but lifestyle), wrote of the end of the age, believed the prophets wrote about them just as Peter expressed in Acts 2:17. Their communal style was very similar to that of the early church. They had a type of communion, they baptized, they believed in justification by faith! They referred to the Messiah as the Son of God. They taught that the conflict in the world was a battle of light and darkness. 2 Corinthians 6:14 They looked for two Messiahs, a King and a Priest.

When the scrolls information began to come to light critics of the Bible said Jesus was just an Essene Rabbi and was teaching nothing new. Interpretation is often tainted by what one is trying to find to defend his belief. My conviction is that the hand of Providence moved these people to see the truths in Scripture that the Messiah would bring out so that some would be ready in spirit for his coming. Jesus teaching was a radical enough departure from tradition, without Essene' ideas in the Jewish world they would have been so drastically different as to be impossible to hear. I guess you have to believe that God is working everyday and in many hearts to believe that – but that is the kind of God I believe in. After all, Jesus is the light that lights every man that comes into the world. Perhaps the Essenes disappeared because the ones that were not killed recognized Jesus as a fulfillment of their findings in Scripture.

There is a stark contrast though between the Essen and Christian way. The Essenes separated themselves and sought holiness in isolation. Christians are in the world but not of the world. Christianity radically went out to confront and to challenge instead of holing up. Two thoughts: What is God doing today to prepare us for his 2nd coming? I think of the book Left Behind. You may not agree with the interpretation it gives of Scripture but it certainly has preached the Second Coming and the end times. The other thought is that we should continue to be like the Early Christians in living to confront and challenge the world and not isolate ourselves like the Essenes. In your field, your community, there are places where the ways of man need to be confronted with the Gospel of Jesus. How is God leading you to present the light in a world of darkness?

Masada

Metsuda in Hebrew means fortress. This spot is mentioned in 1Sam 24:22 and Ps 18:1,2 David and his men hid here when fleeing from Saul. I'll skip the details of the story of Masada assuming you have read it in your guide book or seen the motion picture. It happened during the New Testament times. The fortress was said to have enough provisions to feed 10,000 men for 10 years. Between the food storage and great cisterns one could endure a long siege.

Herod the Great built it as a hold out in case Mark Anthony gave the area to Cleopatra.

After Herod's death a small band of Roman soldiers held the fortress. When Rome came to squelch the Jewish revolt, a group of 967 zealots overpowered the troop here and held out four years. In the end the 967 committed suicide rather than to surrender to the Romans.

It makes it a little clearer how unappealing Jesus message of a Kingdom within was to these whose outward freedom was so important. They believed that they must be free, owing allegiance to no one but God. They had missed their Messiah and the point of which Jesus wept over Jerusalem. To be free physically was as important to them as spiritually free. Jesus wept because he saw the destruction this misplaced effort would result in. The heart of man is the same throughout time. We can do the same, place emphasis on buildings and programs, denominations and politics, all to the neglect of Jesus' real teaching, the Kingdom of God is within you. Freedom is knowing the truth and letting it capture your heart. The fruits of the Spirit are more powerful than the sword. Jesus' life proves that. Rabbi Saul's life proves that. The life of each apostle proved it. And your life should prove it too. Be careful that your emphasis does not become drawn to the outward structures of man. Set your heart on things above and not on things on the earth.

You may see young Jewish soldiers here as this is where they make their oath of allegiance to the country to never let Masada happen again. Perhaps it is a good place for us too to make a commitment, a commitment to keep in mind the focus is spiritual and not some physical goal. It is not about big numbers. If that was the case Jesus was a failure, it is not a building, or a denomination, but your personal relationship of love to your Savior. Focus on the eternal. The mistake of the Zealots was long before they got here, it was in missing Yeshua who was offering them a way to enter the kingdom of God spiritually, and preferring a physical and very temporal kingdom.

Mount of Olives

Thanks again to Ray Vander Laan's inspiration for this devotional. Jesus came from the home of Mary and Martha and the resurrected Lazarus. The Jewish leaders had decided Jesus must die. As Jesus approached the disciples began to praise God for the miracles they had seen. This was Sunday, the beginning of the seven days of Passover. The Romans beefed up their forces for this day because it was often the day when a nationalistic insurrection would break out. A Rabbinic tradition says this day the Temple doors were kept open for the Messiah to enter.

As Jesus entered on that submitted foal of a donkey, the people shouted "Hosanna". The term meant 'save now'. It was not the recognition of the Savior of the world but the hope that Jesus was about to become General Joshua or King David and physically expel the Romans. We will travel from here to the Garden of Gethsemane on Hosanna road which is the approximate path on which this took place. The palm branches too were a symbol of nationalism. It was like waving the Jewish flag. The last time the nation was free was under the Hasmoneans who put the palm branch on their coinage.

Jesus wept. Not the quiet sobs a few miles away at Lazarus' tomb for the sorrow of his friends, but audible sobs. It must have made the crowd wonder. How unlike a king! Picture Jesus crying out loud as the people are praising him and throwing down their cloaks in front of the donkey.

This very day, the book of Numbers tells us, each family had to choose their lamb for Passover. Jesus presents himself as the Lamb of God. The shouts of the crowd are in his ears the sound of – No thank you – we want an earthly king. Jesus looks ahead a few decades and sees the terrible consequences of their choice.

Luke 19:38-44 (NIV)³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"⁴⁰ "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes.⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side.⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Even today we have very physical expectations of the Savior. We praise Him for all He has done but we have expectations for things that show us our treasure is here in this earth. Why just a few days later do they cry, "Crucify Him!?" He didn't fulfill their expectations of what the Messiah should do. He weeps for us out loud when He sees the consequences of our wrong choices. We praise Him but is it for deliverance from sin and his love or what we expect him to do for us? Are you satisfied with Him as the Lamb of God or do you want something more? If it is physical comfort he is suppose to bring us then he failed his own apostles, most of which died violent deaths. But if it is for a love to live for eternally – He is our great success and fails none that come to Him – the sacrifice Lamb.

Garden of Gethsemane

As we have mentioned before, Gethsemane means olive press. There is a cave near here in which that press was located. They are quite expensive and would be owned by the affluent, others having to pay a portion of their oil to use it. The "Garden" probably was enclosed and had a keeper who knew Jesus was allowed to use it with his disciples.

Olive trees do not die unless uprooted. When a trunk cannot support the branches because it gets too big, the tree is hewn down and a new shoot is allowed to develop. Jesus is the "Shoot of David". Seeing the nation was not bringing forth fruit – it was hewn down and a new shoot was allowed to grow from the lineage of David. These trees may have grown from the ones Jesus walked under.

Jesus took the three and asked them to pray with him. He threw himself to the ground. Matthew 26:39 says He fell with his face to the ground and prayed, so I don't know about the rock in this chapel. He was in agony. Because we take sin so lightly we can't imagine the horror Jesus saw coming in having the sin of the world placed upon Him. The cup of wrath that rebellion of man deserves was to be poured out on Him and He of all people knew how terrible that justice must be. In those six hours on the cross he had to endure an eternity of hell.

Matt 26:42 (NIV)⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

Older manuscripts do not have "me" - taken away from me. I think this horror He faced He knew to be each of ours unless He drank it for us. If it could not be taken from you, unless Jesus drank it, the sinless One, then the Father's will – Jesus enduring the wrath of God – be done. Considering that weight of sin (our sin like a gethsemene stone) he was under such stress, like blushing in the extreme so that capillaries break and blood comes from the sweat glands – a condition called hematidrosis.

He had woken the disciples up several times. They could not keep their eyes open. Judas leads the mob with torches and betrays Him with a kiss. Jesus asks, "Who are you looking for?" They reply, "Jesus of Nazareth". Jesus says, "I AM". That was the name the voice from the burning bush told Moses to tell Israel who had sent him. The force of that knocked them to the ground. Jesus was in control, even having Peter put up his sword and healing the High Priest servant's ear. They bind him and lead him to the home of Caiaphas, which we will visit.

As we leave here consider the decision Jesus made for you here. The cup would not pass from you unless Jesus drank it. You would be facing the wrath of God.

But Jesus said Yes to the Father's will. He said Yes because He always does the Father's will but also because He loved you enough to take your place.

Temple Area

I do not have a faith lesson for you here, just some information for you to chew on. Writing from the days in which the Temple stood said that you could see through the doors of the Holy place to the curtain from the Mount of Olives, which is 250 feet higher than the Temple Mount. An issue of archeological digest suggests that the marks of the footings on the area enclosed in the Dome of the Rock match the dimensions of the footings of the Holy of Holies. In addition there is an indentation on the top of the rock that matches the dimensions of the ark of the covenant. The direction of that matches the ark's orientation. It seems to be more than coincidence.

Many believe prophecy indicates a new Temple will be built and sacrifice will be re-instituted. If that is the case it would mean nothing spiritually because the Lamb of God has already been slain for the world. But some interpret the Scriptures as saying the anti-Christ will have something to do with this and will stop it in the middle of the last seven years – and set himself up as god.

Jerusalem Model

In the yard of the Holy Land West Hotel at the cost of over one million dollars, a 50 to 1 scale model of Jerusalem in 66AD has been meticulously constructed. You can see Herod's palace, the Pilate's palace, the Temple and its gates and entrances. Note the second story colonade. Jesus may have debated with the Pharisees there and it may have been the meeting place of the early church. Off to the end of that level in the SW corner was the place of the blowing of the Shofar when the lamb was slain. Below here in the rubble was a stone that read, "The place of the blowing of the Shofar." It may have been the pinnacle of the Temple in which Jesus was tempted by Satan to jump off.

Note the 'house of prayer for all nations' inside the outer most Temple gates. It is by far the largest courtyard. Hundreds of thousands could gather here. The Jewish leaders did not mind trade and noise going on here for it was the Gentile area. In no way would it ever be allowed in the Jewish area! Imagine Jesus going here yearly from the time of his youth and seeing this circus. It is no wonder He confronted the hypocrisy of the leaders and chased out the profiteering money exchangers and animal merchants. How could Gentiles come to pray and be influenced to seek Jehovah when all this noise and commercialism dominated the place? Note too how it could be used as a short cut from one side of the Temple to the other filling it with traffic that was not there for worship.

Between the court of Gentiles and the Temple itself is a small wall. Upon it is written, Gentiles who enter will be put to death. It is called the balistrad or sorek in Greek. This may be the middle wall of partition that Paul was referring to. It kept the Gentile from the place where God resided and the sacrifice. Paul says this wall is broken down and Jew and Gentile are one new man in Rabbi Yeshua.

Where is the temple today? You are it! What is your outer court? I will not bring merchandising into that inner place, my prayer life, my time of Bible study and worship, but what about my outer court. Does my outer life that world sees invite people to worship God? Or is it so full of business and traffic and noise that the thought would not pass one's mind? Jesus was quite forceful in this issue. It takes some real temple cleansing for my outer court to invite people who enter in to worship the living God. I admire Doc's willingness to ask people if they would like prayer. Encourage them to pray to in your outer court, temple of God.

Bethesda

John 5:1-17 (NIV)¹ Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews.² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"⁷ "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."⁸ Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,¹⁰ and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."¹¹ But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'"¹² So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."

This is probably Jesus second Temple visit during his ministry. There was a very interesting thing that must have happened here. When the water would whirl

the first one in was healed of whatever ailment they had. As Jesus passed by this pool He could have healed all who were there as He had in Capernaum. But He didn't – He just picked out this one man. The text says He learned the man had been in that condition a long time. Some may have mentioned it or maybe Jesus asked about him. Then Jesus asks a strange question, "Do you want to be healed?" Many of the people around the pool were probably cared for by gifts and handouts. Not everyone desires to be made whole, physically or spiritually. The man explains how he needs help to get in the water when it whirls but no one is there to help him. Jesus tells him to take up his mat and walk!

The man is instantly cured. In the excitement Jesus disappears into the crowd. The Jews see him carrying the mat on the Sabbath. That is technically working. So they rebuke the healed man. He defends himself by saying, the man who healed me told me to carry it. After all if He could heal He would not ask me to sin – if carrying the mat is a sin. The Jews want to know who would heal on the Sabbath! As if they could heal but chose not to work on the Sabbath. The blindness is incredible.

The healed man runs into Jesus again and Jesus gives him a warning. Then the man tells the Jews. When they catch up to tell the writer and only keeper of the Law that He has broken the Law his response is, God is always at work and I am too. God doesn't take a break from meeting the needs of man. They readily saw that Jesus was saying He was equal with God. We miss that because of the cultural differences. God causes the Sun to come up, the rain on the fields, feeds the birds, He doesn't need a day of rest - Jesus says, "Me too". Funny how skeptics like to say Jesus never said He was God.

In another Scripture Jesus tries to help them get over their legalism over the Sabbath by telling them the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27) It was made for us to rest and recoup, to have time to focus on God. It was not made to enslave us and rule our lives. Jesus always got at the spirit behind the letter, the reason God gave the Law. He knew better than any man the great heart of the Father. I think it grieved him to see man twist the Law into a rod to beat people with, when it came from the loving heart of God to help man and bring the realization of our need for God.

We can do the very same twisting, trying to get people to conform, judging them when they don't. We have to be very careful not to condemn different methods of reaching out, different ways of worshiping. Remember the loving heart of the Father is behind his laws and his ways to draw men to Jesus, not conform them to a pattern of living. Sometimes we recognize the Old Testament Laws that we are no longer bound by, but create 'New Testament' Laws to replace them. We are freed from the Law so we can be led by the Spirit that will always lead us to keep the spirit behind the laws. Have you created any Laws that you try to get

people to live by? Is there some method you push that is outside of loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength?

A friend recently told me of a church he attended for a time where the Pastor would preach on the sins of any newcomer. If they smoked, the sermon was on smoking. If they swore it was on swearing. Instead of preaching about Jesus' love for them and letting the Holy Spirit bring conviction, that Pastor wanted immediate conformity. You can guess what happened to those newcomers, gone to never return. Love never fails.

These are thoughts on about 1/3rd of the sites we will visit. Others will share their devotional thoughts. I hope they have blessed you, even perhaps increased your desire to see the Land where Jesus walked. Some of the inspiration for these devotionals came on a video series by Focus on the Family New Testament series with Ray Vander Laan. I would recommend that series to everyone.

Chorazin

Although we are not likely to visit this site I want to share something from the "That the World May Know Series" about this site, as it has really touched our fellowship. It was one of the towns in the triangle of Jesus' main ministry. There is a big black basalt courtyard. Around the edges you can see the remains of the rooms. The sons would add on to their father's home another room when they took a bride. Insight into how they went about this helps us understand many things Jesus said and thoughts that I believe were the background the disciples heard with.

When the Father and his son found what they thought was a suitable bride for the son they would go together to the woman's father. The father of the groom would negotiate the bride price. Once an agreement was made on the price, the groom would present the prospective bride with a cup of wine representing his life and ask her to take and drink it. Doing so meant she received his life and gave him hers.

Then he would return to his father's house while the bride waited. The time was undetermined. He had to complete the room for her. When the father of the groom said the room was finished the groom, his family and friends would go blowing the shofar to the bride's house. The friend of the bridegroom would wait at the door while the groom consummated the marriage. That completed

the groom would shout out to his friend and the friend would begin the party that lasted a week.

As we were servants of sin, we were under the authority of our father the Devil. God the Father negotiated the price. The higher He was willing to pay the more value He saw in the bride. The price was all his son's blood. That agreed upon, Jesus took the cup in the Last Supper and breaking with tradition of the seder of that time offered the cup to the disciples as a groom would to his bride. In effect He was saying, "I love you. Will you marry me?" To drink of the communion cup says we receive him and give him ourselves.

Then he tells us he goes to prepare a place for us. In his father's house are many rooms. He will come again and receive us to himself that we may be forever with him. The trumpet will sound. The waiting and prepared bride will consummate the marriage with Jesus and there will be a great wedding feast. Come soon Lord Jesus!

We had a wonderful trip to Israel, in spite of delays and closed sites, many changes in plans. We were able to see a lot of sites and some I had not seen before and to share some devotional thought at many of them. The largest church that came along with us was a black congregation. They were really a blessing, especially with music.

I always seek to hear what the Lord is saying to me personally, not especially to share it but to grow in Him. This trip had a number of impressions on my heart, but I think one of the greatest is how contrary the ways of God are to that of the world. A number of places we visited spoke of how God gets the glory when what is insignificant in the eyes of the world becomes available to Him. In fact, He desires to work in ways that downplay the involvement of man, and emphasize the work of God, so that all the glory is God's.

We saw that in the sight of Ein Harod, where the Lord whittled an army of 30,000 down to 300 to fight an army that was a 100 times as large. The world would call it lunacy, but God declared Himself to be sufficient.

We saw it in the feeding of the 5000 at Tabgha, where 5 loaves and 2 fishes were enough – and that supplied by a little boy. They were sufficient when placed in the hands of Jesus and surrendered to God.

We saw it at the Valley of Elah, where a little boy faced a well-armed giant twice his size and trained in combat, with a little slingshot and few stones.

We saw it in the home of Caiaphas, the church of Peter of Gallicantu, where a despised builder from Galilee was interrogated by the religious power of Israel, a

power that was approved by the empire of Rome, to decide what was religiously correct for the nation. As they mocked Jesus, and laughed at his claim to be Messiah, He declared that one-day they would see Him at the right hand of God – the place of real power and authority, and that He would return in the clouds (glory).

We saw it in the upper room- where a band of people whose leader had been murdered, believed that God could use them to change the world, with all Rome's power, magnificent structures, world dominance. They believed that in spite of the religious dominance of the Saducees and Pharisees, Jesus would work through them to reach the world with the good news of what He had done.

2000 years later we look at the rubble, which were once magnificent buildings. We read of the surrender of Rome to Christianity. We see evolution of the Pharisees into the absurd and contradictory life of the Hassidic Jews. And the bride of Christ continues to grow and the Good News of Jesus Christ and what He has done continues to spread. The grandeur of the world quickly passes, but the truth goes marching on. What looks so impossible with man is often the path God chooses to work that we might see how all sufficient, all powerful, all glorious is our God.