

Return From Israel 3-11-07

There will not be a sermon this week as we will be showing a DVD of our experience in Capernaum. I do want to share with all our subscribers what a blessed trip we had. We followed the life of Christ in chronological order from His birth to the ascension. The journey led us to many places that most tourists never see. Instead of packing in as much as possible, we limited the number of sites so that we could read the scriptures related to each site and hear a message from one of the three pastors that went with us.

This was an unforgettable experience as we saw the views that our Savior saw. In those places where the scenes have changed because of civilization and new structures, we examined the archeological findings to recreate in our minds how it appeared in Jesus' day.

As with most experiences in life, the Holy Spirit had a message that was beyond what any of us expected. One of those messages connected to our study in Genesis. Everywhere we went we heard numerous languages. There were multitudes of Nigerians, Indians, and Orientals. We often heard European languages as well as Southern drawl from our own US of A. The Lord was making it very clear that He had blessed the entire earth through the seed of Abraham, Jesus. Though we wore different styles of clothing, worshipped in different ways, and spoke in different languages, it was obvious that most of us had come to be closer to our Savior. We were all on the same mission, to know Him better, and to walk where He walked.

In keeping with this theme, we had an amazing experience in Capernaum, Jesus' hometown for the three years of His ministry. After seeing the remains of a church built over Peter's home and a synagogue built over the one in which Jesus preached and healed the man with the withered hand, we sat in the shade to sing some worship songs. It was surreal to sit beside the Via Maris (Way of the Sea) and realize the 600-year-old prophecy of Isaiah 9 was fulfilled in the days of Jesus, right where we sang worship songs.

As the tempo picked up and turned to praise, we saw some Nigerians swaying to the music. We motioned for them to join us and soon we were all praising God together. Their tour was moving on so after hugs and pictures they started to leave. We began to sing again and not only did they come back, but a group of Indians were drawn to praise the Lord with us. Red and yellow, black and white were singing praise to the Lord together from the depths of our hearts. Tears of joy were freely flowing as we worshipped and hugged one another, realizing we all loved and worshipped the same Lord. Truly the world has been blessed through the seed of Abram. It was a taste of heaven. But it didn't stop there. Soon, some of the Indians were asking for us to pray for them and we began to pray together. I felt as if my heart would burst from my chest it was so filled

with joy and praise for what God was doing. As was frequently the case, we were the last to leave the site as it was closing. Someone in our group asked the Franciscan priest if he saw what had happened. He said with a big smile, "Yes! I wish that would happen every day!" The Spirit had put an exclamation mark on the message with that experience.

The other message the Lord had for us came about in an unusual way. Our Palestinian guide had explained that arranged marriages were usually about financial security. I had asked about the bride price and if it was still negotiated in these days. He said that it was in some groups, but seldom paid unless there was a divorce. The Lord laid a thought on my heart that I cannot shake. He paid a price for us that was greater than anyone ever paid. That is how much He values us. It certainly wasn't for financial security. We, the bride of Christ, married way out of our class. We'd like to think that some marriages were arranged purely for love. In our case it was agape, the love of God. There was no selfish or temporal motive in God's heart. God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son... How that should comfort our hearts!

Some of us found ancient fishing weights of stone along the ancient ports of the Galilee. We came back exhausted but filled with memories for a lifetime. We traveled from Bethlehem to Nazareth and on to the Galilee. In the Galilee we sailed on the lake, watched a swarm of fish, saw a modern fisherman catch three of them in his net. We sat in Jesus' secret prayer closet overlooking the lake. We went through ruins of the three towns that saw most of his ministry. On we went to Ceasarea Philippi and the Decapolis region and down the Jordan to Jerusalem. We saw the ancient Jericho road and the tomb of Lazarus. We walked from the Gethsemane cave across the Kidron valley to Caiaphas home, to Golgotha, the empty tomb, and the place His feet left this earth. From now on when we read the Gospels we will see these the text in living color, remember the wind on our faces, the flower in the fields, the flocks of sheep, the worship we offered up in each of those settings.

The tour is full of archeological information as well as information on Jewish culture that helps us understand the words of Jesus. This is really unlike any tour package as it really focuses on specifically on the life of Christ in a chronological sequence. If you would like to go with us next year in March, please e-mail us. You need to be in good condition to walk several miles each day, often in rough terrain. The basic cost this year for air, hotel, two meals a day, and ground transportation was around \$2500 though you will need more for tips, lunches, and any shopping. The trip depends on political conditions at the time. We do suggest you purchase travel insurance. I would like to suggest that if you are an older person who is physically unable to go, perhaps you could sponsor a young person. Think how it would affect their life!