

Intimacy With Jesus: It's More Than a Trip to Israel

We were slouched on the couch, in a jet-lag stupor, when he leaned over to me and said, "You know what?"

I let my weary head swing his direction. "What?"

"Israel was great and everything, but I feel like I didn't get to spend any time with the Lord while I was there."

"Seriously?" I answered. "I've been feeling the same way, but it just seemed so weird to say it after spending 10 days in the Holy Land."

We talked about the eight-hour days of touring and learning, combined with not-the-best sleep coming off of jet lag and getting used to new beds. It didn't leave much energy for getting up to have a quiet time with the Lord, and we were both missing that.

Made me think of the lady I saw in the old city of Jerusalem, down on her knees in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. In front of her was a stone, where it's thought Jesus was laid when they took him down from the cross. Next to her was a stack of white cloths, with a T-shirt store stamp of Jesus' face on each one. She was grabbing cloths from the stack and rubbing them on the stone, while fervently praying something we couldn't understand.

We speculated that the lady would be selling those cloths back home to people who desperately wanted a special connection to Jesus.

Is that what it takes?

I remember years ago when our good friends went to Israel and came back to tell about it. Somebody asked me then if I didn't

wish I could take the same trip. My answer was no, I didn't care to. Didn't feel like I needed to go to Israel to have some special experience with God.

Well, a week ago found me standing in the special places of the Bible stories—looking out on the same valley where David killed Goliath (note the picture of us at this site on this blog post), standing on Mount Carmel where Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal, looking at a first-century synagogue, by the Sea of Galilee, where it is highly likely Jesus would have spoken to the Jews on Shabbat.

And do you know what I thought each time?

Ah, so this is what it looks like.

And do you know what I felt?

Ah, so I was right. Seeing these things does not give me some increased feeling of intimacy with God but only gives me visual confirmation of what I have believed all along.

Because back in Wyoming, when I was a kid in a little Baptist church, I was watching my Sunday School teacher use a flannelgraph to tell us the story of David and Goliath.

And I was believing. With all of my heart I was believing that God used that little shepherd to kill a mighty giant with a stone.

I looked out the tour bus window as the guide said, "Look to your right, and there you can see the little stream where David would have picked up the stone."

"Cool," I said. "So cool to see." But it didn't change anything in my heart, because for so long—for decades—I had been opening up my Bible in the morning and reading all of these stories and leaning hard on the God who wrote them.

When our tour team sat in the beautiful garden, located

outside of what is thought to be Jesus' tomb, we celebrated the Lord's Supper together. But back in the States I had remembered what Jesus had done on my behalf before I ever touched the rock wall or stepped my foot into the place where His body might have lain for three days.

So the preacher and I agreed that Israel was an indescribably rich experience, but our hearts longed for a quiet room in our own home and time spent intimately with Jesus.

Many times during our Israel trip, I thought of Jesus' words for those of us who would come to him long after his appearance on earth:

"Blessed are those who have not seen, and have yet believed" (John 20:29b).

I highly recommend a trip to Israel, if you ever have the opportunity to go. But if it's a deep connection with God you're looking for, you can find that right where you are. Open your Bible and believe what you read. All of the locations and the stories and the truth are real. You don't need to see Jerusalem or rub a stone or see some special place to know God.

Only your heart needs to travel. {eoa}

This article originally appeared at .