

Finding Christ in Palestine

✖ It was another one of those 13-hour days, lots of hard, but good work. By the end of the day we had brought 1,500 bars of olive oil soap from the West Bank to the apartment of my friend. Mahmoud is an ex-Palestinian Muslim who lives in Israel with permission from the Israeli government. In 2000 he was tortured and imprisoned by the Palestinian Authority (PA) for two years because he left Islam and became a Christian.

He was excited about his new faith and shared it with his family and village before the PA arrested him. In 2002, Mahmoud was miraculously set free when the Israel Defense Force invaded the village and broke down the prison walls.

It would be too dangerous for Mahmoud to enter the West Bank now, so his family met us in a remote area. They make the soap in their village, and Mahmoud packages it in Israel to be sold. They were able to spend only two precious hours together, but it was a playful, loving time with his family. As we drove away, I could see tears forming in Mahmoud's eyes, as he once again had to leave his family.

When approaching his apartment we prayed for help to carry the heavy load up five flights of stairs. Upon arriving we saw two boys sitting on the steps. I told them we would pay for their help to carry the soap, but they said, "We want nothing, Mahmoud is our friend." We all made several trips up and down the many stairs. Finally, as we rested the boys shared their horrific life stories.

The 14-year-old boy lives with his mother and sister after having to flee their village. His father was considered a "collaborator" and killed by the PA because he informed Israel about a plot against the Jewish people. Because the family was in danger, the Israeli Government gave them permission to live in Israel proper. This Arab boy has learned to speak Hebrew

fluently, is attending a Jewish school and chooses to be a part of the culture he has acclimated to in Israel.

The 15 year old was taken by the PA for questioning because his father was a wanted 'collaborator.' During the interrogation, torture was used in an effort to extract information from him concerning his father's whereabouts. After being beaten and hung by his ankles for 24 hours, he disclosed the information. The teen was immediately taken to prison, and soon after his father was put into the same prison. Six months later, Israeli troops entered the town and set the prisoners free.

Still today, they are wanted by the PA, so the father and son live together separated from the rest of their family. Though this teen never had the chance to finish school, he said he is grateful to live in Israel but misses his mother. He blames the PA for their suffering.

He showed us his scars from the past, but he said he that he now has a future in Israel. We prayed, as the teen wept. He said, "Here you are strangers caring and praying to God for me, but my own people are trying to kill me."

As we packaged the soap together, we were joking and laughing, enjoying each other's company. They felt compassion, and they felt love, but their scars run deep and we know only the Lord can give them the comfort they need.

I gave them each 100 shekels; however, their need is not in dollars but in securing a future with hope. They need the Prince of Peace to bring them everlasting Shalom, and I believe this night they experienced Him.