

Easter, He Came Back...to us!

4.12.20

Today is the most sacred day for Christians throughout the world. It's truly the reason we're Christians...it's the reason we'll go to heaven some day, it's the reason that you're watching this on this Day...the Lord's day...FOR today is resurrection day...today is Easter...today is the day we set aside each year to acknowledge the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Today is the day that guarantees for all those who know Jesus, that just as He rose from His death, we'll rise from our death. Why? Because death lost its power on Resurrection morning 2000 years! Hallelujah! Today we celebrate because the tomb is empty, because He Came Back to Us!

On two occasions, I've had the privilege to stand in front of...what is known as the Garden Tomb.



Once was in '07 and the last time was '18 and Lord willing, I'll do it again in July of 2021. Here's a picture of me and Pam in 2018. We had just been inside...



See our smiles!!! It's a magnificent place...and I'll tell you this...that's why I want to go back. You see, I've been to a lot of places on this earth...and there is no place like Israel...it's mesmerizing and life-changing to go there. So...



Join Pastor Kevin and Pam with Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church

Bible Land Exploration

July 6-16, 2021



If you're interested, message me...and I'll send you a brochure...I've got room for 42 people and 22 are signed up so far.

The area around the Garden Tomb. is opulently cared for...it's a place where you go and reflect and can even have communion...this is a picture of where I led our group in communion in 2007...



see how pretty it is and how much younger I looked. ☺ And, it's a place where you go inside the tomb and look back out and see that there is a sign on the door that says it all!

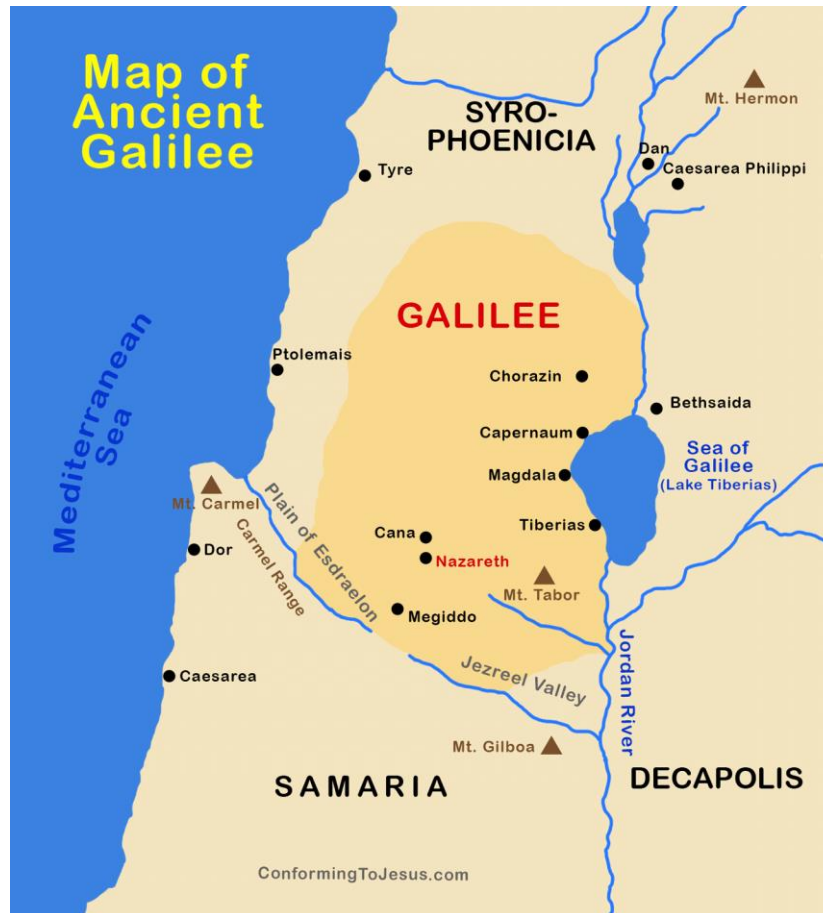


“He is not here, for He has risen from the dead.” And you know what church, those are the same words that were spoken to the ladies at the tomb in Matthew 28. See them now...

Matthew 28:1-7

¹ Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he^[a] lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”

The angel said that Jesus was going to Galilee. A lot of times people miss that. Yes, Jesus rose from the dead in Jerusalem, but that's not where He's from. He's from here... See the map...



Why Galilee? Because it's home. Yet, you must know Galilee is a nothing place...it's a nothing territory in a Roman occupied country, and Galilee has no power. It's truly a nothing place, nothing special, with nothing people, and nothing to look forward to...but, it's where Jesus grew up and lived for 30 years. Jesus came out of Galilee and to this day...that single fact is it's ONLY claim to fame!

Galilee... Jesus performed 80% of His miracles there AND it's where the majority of the disciples were from. Yes, Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead near Jerusalem, the big capital city of Israel, but it's Galilee that the angel said the disciples were to go.

Think about it...after His resurrection. Jesus could have walked into Antonia's Fortress, right up to Pilate and said, "I'm back and now it's payback time." But, that's not Jesus... It's not about payback... Listen...it's never about payback for Christians...NEVER...it's never about payback for Christians... Are you getting someone back? Let it go...it'll leave you empty...

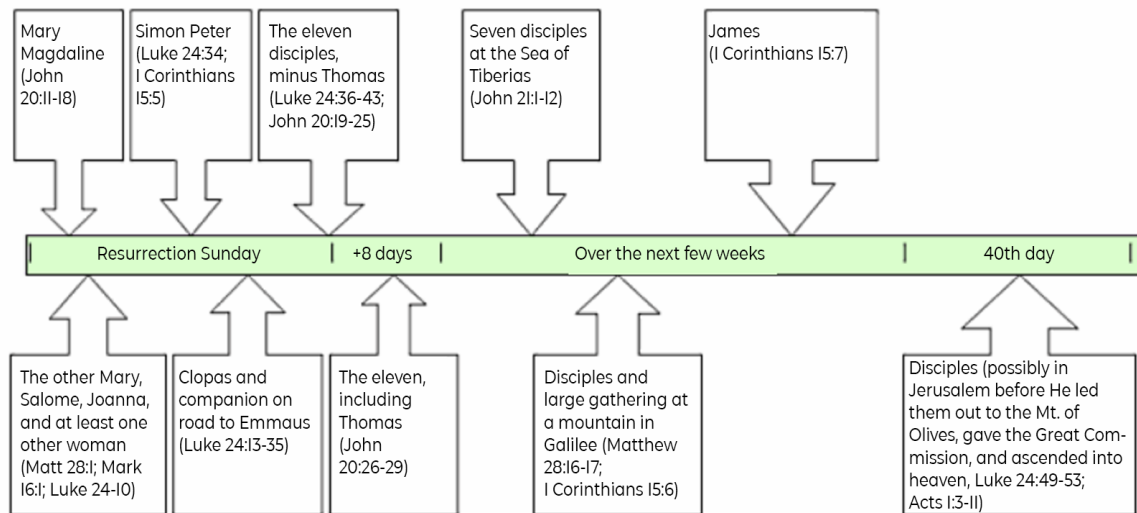
No...Jesus didn't go to Pilate and He didn't go to Rome to kick out the Emperor or to Herod's palace to overthrow the king...He didn't go anywhere but home. And you know what...if He had risen from the dead today, 2020, He wouldn't have gone to the White House either, or to Beijing, or Buckingham Palace... No! He would have gone home...where all the "nobodies" live...

Well, "nobodies" according to the world...but NOT nobodies according to Jesus...NO... they're royalty, because they're His! They might not have realized it at the time...but, because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, those who have chosen to follow Him were guaranteed to not only be children of the King of Kings (royalty)...but, they would also rise from their own death.

When Jesus went back to Galilee after His resurrection...He went back to the same group of people who had so disappointed Him, misunderstood Him, and many, who forsook Him. He went back to Peter who denied him, and Thomas...even though He would doubt Him yet again... In essence, He returned to His betrayers. I'm a BETRAYER and you are a BETRAYER. We've all blown it so many times... But, that's grace...that's mercy...that's love...that's Jesus...and that's why He returned to us!

As you're turning, I want to show you a chart. This is a chart of the resurrection appearances... Remember, after the resurrection, Jesus walked the earth for 40 days before ascending in heaven.

Timeline of the Post-Resurrection Appearances



That green line depicts the time from Resurrection Sunday to day 40...His ascension day, and 1 Corinthians 15 lays out these appearances.

1 Corinthians 15:3-7

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles

Now, to make this easier, and to help us see and understand what we just read, we've broken this passage of appearances down into a chart...

1. **Mary Magdalene (Resurrection Sunday)**
2. **Women who had come to the tomb, on the road (Resurrection Sunday)**
3. **Two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Resurrection Sunday)**
4. **Apostle Peter (Resurrection Sunday)**
5. **Ten Apostles in the upper room on Resurrection Sunday (Thomas wasn't present)**
6. **Eight days later to the disciples plus Thomas in the upper room.**

7. Seven Apostles by the Sea of Galilee
 8. 500 followers on a mountain in Galilee
 9. James (Jesus' half-brother)
 10. Day 40 to 11 Apostles on Mount of Olives in Jerusalem when He ascended into heaven
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Think about it...that first Easter, nobody actually saw Jesus rise from the dead. No one was there when He came out of the tomb. People only saw Him afterwards. Listen, they didn't appear to Jesus...no, Jesus appeared to them. Jesus appeared to His followers! He appeared to Mary Magdalene...and He called her by name! "Mary." Yes...**He knows your name!**

One Bible scholar I read this week said, "**In the Bible, the 'proof' of the resurrection is not the absence of Jesus' body from the tomb; it's the presence of Jesus to His followers.**" Amen! That's Easter, folks...Jesus coming to us! He came back to us and that's why we've been meeting together every Lord's Day for over 2000 years!

You do understand that's why we have church on Sundays don't you? We're told in Hebrews 10:25 to "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together..." You see, Easter is why we come together as believers... Listen, each Sunday, (which is called the Lord's day), we make the choice to assemble together and to worship and to fellowship and to pray and to study the Scriptures. That's Acts 2:42. See what the first church did...

Acts 2:42

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Listen, the ecclesia, ("the gathering" as it's called in the Greek) is for the purpose of growing the believer and worshipping the Lord. That's what the Bible teaches.

Please listen, what I'm getting ready to say needs to be said in this age of consumerism and "spectatorism" that's permeating Christianity in America. Are you listening? I'm all for what's called "Seeker-friendly services." Without question, we want those who don't know Jesus to join in and hear about Him and to be saved. That's a given and that's absolutely something we want to see happen...but understand this, that's not the sole purpose for why we come together on the Lord's Day. In fact, if you read the book of Acts...evangelism never took place in the ecclesia, the church meeting...it took place...out there! Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in. We go out there and lead them to Jesus and THEN we bring them in here...where they're trained and nurtured!

Listen, I'm afraid we've gotten this whole thing backwards in America...this (the church building) is not the place where we're to bring the lost...yes, it's okay for unbeliever to come here...yes...but we can't even do that right now...no...we're to go out there and win the lost...and bring them in here to celebrate.

This is the celebration place! We've got to quit seeing our church buildings as the hospital for the sin-sick...it's not... It's they GYM...where we build believers! We're called BY JESUS to be paramedics and we're TO GO and make disciples...out there and be like the first church and add to their number when? On Sundays? No! Daily!! Out there...

Oh church, the fields are white unto harvest out there...and we've got to GO and make disciples...we've got to open our mouths and share the Gospel! Again, I'm convinced the Lord is

allowing this coronavirus to teach us that. Because there's nothing happening in our church buildings right now, right... So, does that mean there's not going to be any salvations until after the coronavirus! Oh, Satan would love that! God forbid! **No...the plan all along was for us to go out there and win people to Jesus...**

Listen Church, today is Easter...it's the Lord's Day...the Day where we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, and it's the gathering of the Church where the followers of Jesus, the saved, come together as the body of Christ and worship Him and grow in Him. Yes, we totally want to reach out to people who are seeking something better in their lives. But, get this... Scripture is not a story about how we seek God...NO...it's the story of God who seeks us! He came for us!

Church, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who didn't just sit back and wait for the lost sheep to head back home...no...He came after us...He sought us! Jesus didn't just stay in heaven and say... "Well...they got themselves into this...it's their fault, their problem..." No...Jesus left heaven and with His own life...He reached down into the muck and the mire of our lives...and extended His pierced hand and said, "I did this for you...come to me and I'll pull you out of your sin and save you!"

I was listening to the radio this past week and I heard the new song by Casting Crowns, "Love Moved First." The lyrics of that song describe perfectly what I'm trying to convey. Watch this...

Love Moved First, Casting Crowns

This is the story of a runaway
With no way home and no way out
I threw the best of me away
I had my chance, it's too late now
Too far gone and too ashamed
To think that You'd still know my name
But love refused to let my story end that way

You didn't wait for me to find my way to You
I couldn't cross that distance even if I wanted to
You came running after me
When anybody else would've turned and left me at my worst
Love moved first

What kind of grace, relentless grace
Would chase this rebel down
Crawl into this prisoner's cage
Take my hand and pull me out
You knew I couldn't make the change
So You became the change in me
And now I live to tell the story
Of the God who rescues

You didn't wait for me to find my way to You
I couldn't cross that distance even if I wanted to
You came running after me
When anybody else would've turned and left me at my worst
Love moved first

David knew all about this...

Psalm 40:2-3

²He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.

³He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.

That's Easter folks! That's Jesus coming to us and pulling us up out of our pit of destruction...out of the miry bog and setting our feet upon a rock and putting a new song in our mouths! We were just singing that: ***"By Your spirit I will rise from the ashes of defeat. The resurrected King is resurrecting me!"***

I want to show you two of the people Jesus appeared to on the day of His resurrection. Two people that I believe we're mired down in bog of confusion, disillusionment and supreme doubt. Yet, Jesus came to them...

Luke 24:27-35

²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. ²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, ²⁹ but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay **with us**, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay **with them**. ³⁰ When he was at table **with them**, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it **to them**. ³¹ And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn **within us** while he talked **to us** on the road, while he opened **to us** the Scriptures?" ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known **to them** in the breaking of the bread.

Over and over again we saw it there in that passage... WITH THEM US, TO US, WITH US! Jesus came to these two men. Of all the things He could have done on resurrection Sunday...He spent supper with just two men...two men who needed Him desperately! That's Easter!



Listen, try to place yourself in the position of the disciples of Christ on the day He was crucified... It would have been easy for them to have thought this is the end... Perhaps many thought, "It's over between, we've gone too far...we betrayed Him, forsook Him, and now He's dead." You know

Friday night and Saturday had to be gut-wrenching. Who slept? No one! And if you did, it was fitful dosing!

But Sunday morning came...Easter came... and HE CAME BACK... TO THEM...to US! Back to the very ones who had forsaken Him, betrayed Him, and were unworthy of Him...and folks...that's all of us! And yet, He came back to us.

Listen, as Christians on this Easter morning, April 12, 2020, we're people who have experienced something that quite honestly, non-believers have yet to experience and yet to believe. Many of you watching today, are people who have had something happen to you that the world doesn't yet know. YET...because we have the opportunity to get the good news...the good news that death doesn't mean the end...we have that opportunity right now (perhaps a time like no other)... Will you tell them about the peace you have? That's what Jesus said...He said, "PEACE! Do not be afraid." Maybe you're watching today and you don't have peace. Do you...do you have peace today? You'll never know true peace until you trust in Jesus and follow Him, because He is the Prince of Peace. You can surrender right where you are! Call on Him to save you...confess your sins and repent and be born again!

Listen, because of Easter, as believers, we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and fear no evil? Why? Because we're not alone...Jesus is with us and thus, when we come to the end of life, we can look right over that dark valley...to the other side...because Jesus came back TO US...so that we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death WITH JESUS and fear no evil! That, church family is what the resurrection does! It delivers us from despair because Jesus is our "Living Hope." That's what we were singing: **"Then through the darkness, Your loving kindness, Tore through the shadows of my soul, The work is finished, the end is written, Jesus Christ, my living hope."**

If you ever wonder what the Gospel is...it's this: "When it gets dark, I mean really dark...and there seems to be no hope...that's when Jesus shows up and dispels the darkness." That's 1 Corinthians 15...and that's why it's of "FIRST IMPORTANCE."

1 Corinthians 15:3

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

Listen, to those poor, struggling Christians of Corinth, oh, how they were failing so miserably at being the church, they were a colossal mess...(we'll see this in our study next week, our study: A Life Worth Living), but Paul reminds them of what is most important: JESUS IS ALIVE and that truly is all that matters!

You know it's interesting, for apologists like me, who tend to look at the Gospel, most often, from an intellectual standpoint, I always thought this passage in 1 Corinthians was for the skeptic...the one who needed to be convinced of the resurrection of Jesus... Oh, it is that...but, it's not JUST that. It's for me and for you! 1 Corinthians 15 was for Mary Magdalene, and Peter and the two travelers on the Emmaus Road, and Jesus' brother: James. Individuals! Just people, just US!

Listen, for each one of you watching today on this Easter Sunday...He came back to life for you! You are an individual to Jesus, you're not a number...you're not just one of billions of people on this earth. You MATTER! He knows your name! Hallelujah!

As we begin to close, I want to tell you a story... When I was a freshman at ASU I was struggling. My life was...well...it wasn't turning out the way I thought it would go. My basketball career had ended at Gardner-Webb. I had transferred to ASU...but, I was really struggling to get my footing. The truth was, it was a spiritual struggle more than anything. I was walking to class one day...I've never skipped a class in my life...but, that day I did. I was walking to Edwin Duncan Hall. I remember where I was...and to this day...I can take you right to the spot.

The Lord spoke to me. Not in an audible voice, but nonetheless, He spoke as clearly as I'm speaking to you. And He said, "Kevin, are you going to live for me or not?" You see, I had made a profession of faith when I was 10 years old...but, I was really struggling... Everything had kind of turned upside down. I sat down on a bench and I cried... Not sobbing or even so others could tell, but I cried and I sat there for an hour...wrestling with the question: Am I going to live for Jesus or not? I chose Jesus.

Fast forward now to November 2018, in Israel. I told you at the beginning of the message about the Garden Tomb just outside of the walls of Jerusalem...yes, it is an amazing place, but it's not the place that got me while I was in Israel. It was here:



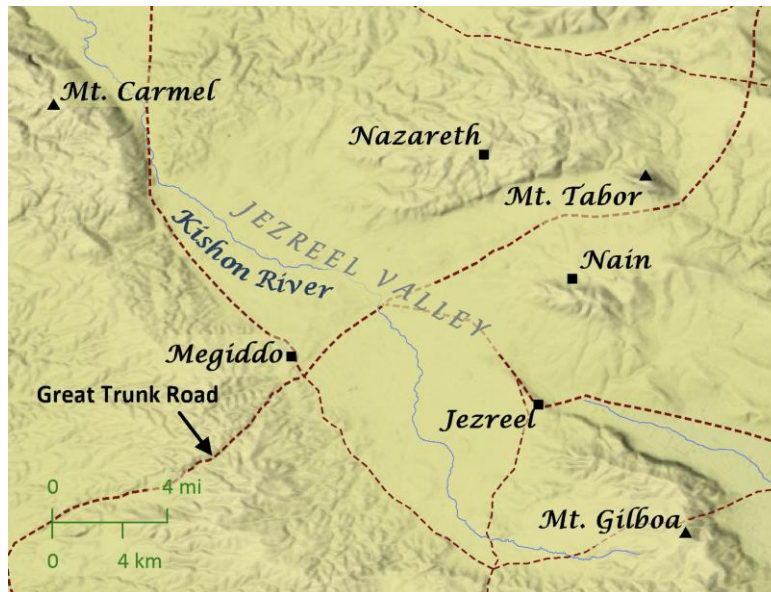
That is a place called Mount Precipice. It is literally the brow of Nazareth...where the town was built. It comes right up to this cliff. On the other side of where I was standing is Nazareth-see it.



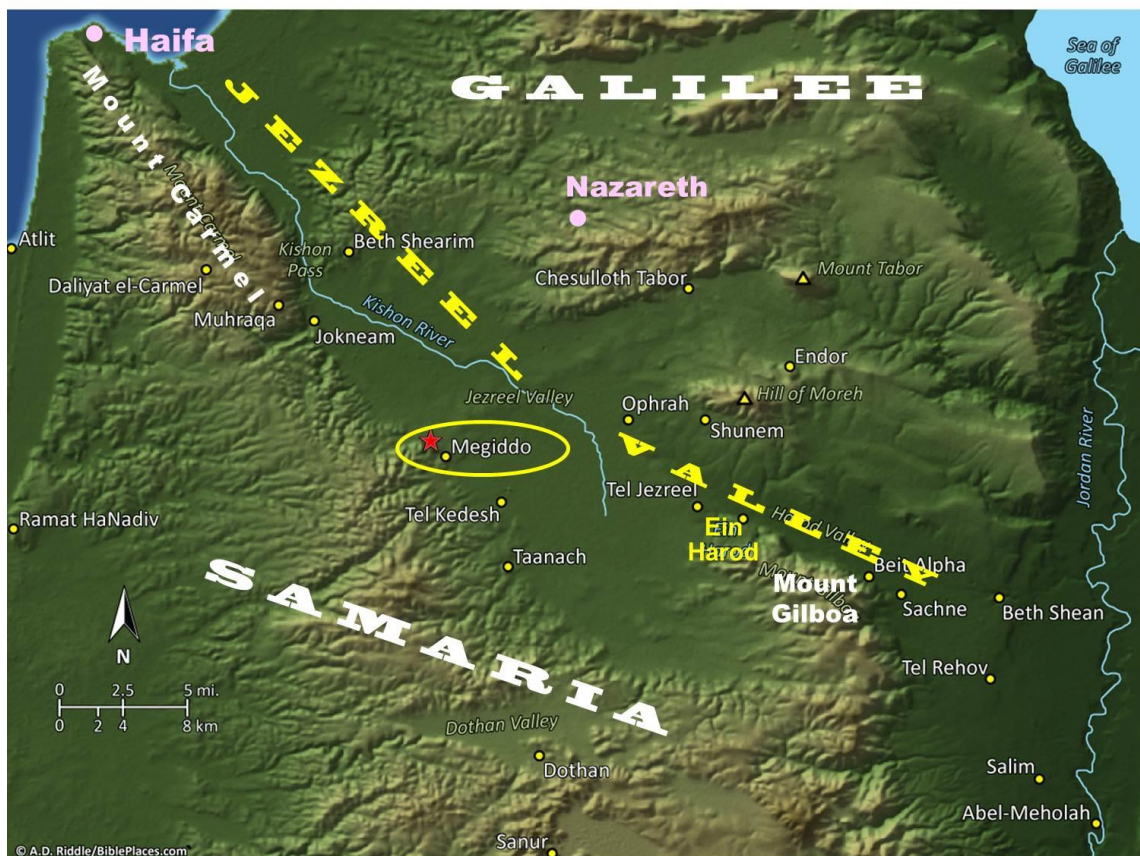
Now, look back over mine and Pam's shoulders... What do you see?



That's a valley down there... Take a look at this map...



See Nazareth, (top-middle). To the southwest of Nazareth is the Jezreel Valley. It runs from Mt. Carmel, where Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal, all the way to Mt Gilboa, where Saul and Jonathan died at the hand of the Philistines. Do you know what the Jezreel Valley is also known as? Take a look.



See that name with the star? That's Megiddo. See Nazareth in the pink? The Jezreel valley is also known as the Valley of Megiddo. Our group stared at that Valley as Tsippi, our guide told us about it. See our group...



I had gotten up to take the picture. And then I took this one:



Do you know who's coming back at the end of the Battle of Armageddon? Jesus! And that's when He spoke to me as clearly as He did that day at ASU in front of Edwin Duncan Hall. He said, **"Kevin, just as sure as I came out of the tomb, I'm coming back...I'm coming back as sure as you are seeing the valley where the last battle will be fought."**

You say, "You're crazy...you're hearing voices." I am... ☺ That's my point! Jesus spoke to me...just as sure as He spoke to Mary Magdalene...and Peter and those two travelers on the road to Emmaus...and to James, his brother...He spoke to me. Jesus said...

[John 10:27-28](#)

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Church, when Jesus Christ burst forth out of that tomb...He came back to us! TO YOU! And as His follower, this is what Jesus said that guarantees:

John 6:40

⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

And you see, church family, Jesus guaranteed that when He got up! He Came Back to Us...to me...and to you! Hallelujah!