

Benjamin Disraeli was prime minister of the United Kingdom in the 1800's. On returning from a trip this great Jewish statesman once said, "Like all great travelers I have seen more than I can remember and I can remember more than I have seen." That is how I feel this morning. 40 of us just returned from an awe-inspiring trip to Israel. We saw more than we can remember but some things we can never forget.

Like Caesarea Maritima - the port built by the maniacal Herod the Great, the same Herod who tried to kill Jesus. CM is the place where the first Gentiles became followers of Jesus, the place where Peter preached and Paul was imprisoned. Herod built the place to make a name for himself. Ironically, after his death, the first Christian evangelists set sail from this port city to make a name for Jesus.

We then drove to Mt. Carmel, the place where Elijah the prophet gathered the people of Israel and set before them a choice, serve the God of Israel or serve the gods of the pagan nations around them. One lone prophet of God faced off against 850 false prophets. Elijah said, "'How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.' And the people did not answer him a word." (1 Ki. 18:21). God had the last word.

We visited Caesarea Philippi, a hot bed of false religion where people made God in their own image and worshiped the gods of their wildest imaginations including Pan, who was half man and half goat. Against the backdrop of that religious flea market, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I am." They said, "Some say John the Baptist, other say Elijah or one of the prophets." "Who do you say that I am Peter?" "You are the Messiah, son of the living God."

While we were in the Galilee, 20 people were baptized in the Jordan River to express their faith in Jesus. We did this not at the usual tourist baptismal site but in an undeveloped section of the river where a Muslim family watched with great interest from their fishing boat.

We headed south through the West Bank, past Adom, the very place where the damming of the Jordan River took place so that Joshua and the Israelites could cross the river, confront the enemy and claim their inheritance.

We turned right at Jericho and made our way up to Jerusalem. We walked on the Temple Mount, the most sacred site of Judaism where the temple once stood as a house of prayer for ALL peoples. We sat on the Southern steps, the same steps Mary and Joseph climbed to present the baby Jesus at the temple, the same steps

that Jesus would have sat on and taught His disciples, the same steps where Peter preached on the day of Pentecost and 3,000 were saved. We witnessed the ritual baths where those 3,000 would have been baptized and the church began.

Why the travelogue? Because our eyes saw all these things. We were witnesses to the historical bedrock of our faith. With our ears we have heard about these places in the scriptures, faithfully transmitted by people who were meticulous in getting the story right. Our visit to Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered proves it. As we saw all these things we were confronted by the same choice that the people of God have always faced - worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or choose some other foundation upon which to build your life. Choose you this day whom you will serve but if you see with your eyes and hear with your ears but do not believe in your heart, you cannot expect the blessing of God. Seeing is NOT believing.

One thing we saw a lot of in Israel were rocks. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear some tourists approach a site and ask, "More rocks?" But these rocks serve a purpose beyond merely testifying to the veracity of historical events as we will see on this Palm Sunday. Turn to Lk. 19:28-40. As Jesus entered Jerusalem the last week of His life, a crowd of disciples gathered to "praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen." The other option was to dismiss Jesus as an imposter. Some of the Pharisees said, "Rebuke your disciples." Shut these people up. Tell them to be quiet. Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out!"

What did Jesus mean by that statement? There have been songs written that suggest that the only proper response to Jesus is to praise Him and worship Him as Lord. If we don't, the rocks will. If we remain silent, the very stones that witnessed Jesus' miracles will praise Him. But I don't think that's what Jesus meant. Turn to Joshua 23. In these last two chapters Joshua preaches three sermons. It is a comforting thing to know that Joshua was about 100 years old when he preached these messages. If I live to be 100, that's what I want to be doing. The concerns that were Joshua's burden all of his life were still the same concerns and burdens at the end of his life. He was concerned about the future of the people of God. He wasn't concerned about himself. He was concerned about the kingdom. He was concerned about the church. One of the characteristics of godly men and women when they grow older is that they are still investing in the future. A future they may never see. A future they may never partake in, but the future of their children and the future of their grandchildren and the future of generations to come. Joshua

was looking ahead, through the corridors of history, at generations to come, and he was concerned about their spiritual well-being.

As you read the final words of Joshua you hear the repeated refrain that it is God alone who orchestrated the details in the life of His people...23:1-10.

Then Joshua moves to the only appropriate response to all these things...23:11-16. You have seen all that God has done. You have heard all that God has said. Now, believe in a way that leads to obedience or you will not experience the blessing of God.

In chapter 24, Joshua gathers all the people to review their history and to recommit themselves to the Lord...24:1-6. How should they respond? 24:14-15. The last part of v. 15 offers us the most practical response to all of the evil that is in the world today. There is a lot of hand-wringing among Christians these days. Not a day goes by that I don't hear or read someone who is lamenting what is perceived to be the serious decline of our culture. But rarely do we hear how we should respond. We are told to be informed about issues, to be politically active, to support various Christian organizations. All these ideas are good but they can obscure the most important decision of all - "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." I'm going to ask you to make that declaration this morning. But before I do, let's get back to the rocks.

At the end of Joshua's speech, the people agreed to serve the Lord...24:24-28. He set up a large rock and said, "This rock has heard you. If you do not do these things, then this stone will cry out in judgment against you." Now you know why Jesus (Joshua in Hebrew) says, "If these people don't praise me, the rocks will cry out." So the choice is yours today. Choose you THIS DAY whom YOU will serve.

I'm going to invite you to do something personally, something corporately and then we will end responsively.

First, I want you to challenge you to take some time this week to write a "tombstone tweet." Just using 140 characters (not words) write out what you would want on your tombstone. Once you have done that, share it with someone.

Secondly and corporately, I want you to take an envelope that is in the seat back in front of you and keep it with you all week. Pray that God would reveal to you how you can financially support the mission of this church. There are thousands of great

causes out there but I am convinced that our first priority is to support this local expression of His body. The best thing we can do for this city is to say, "As for me and my church, we will serve the Lord."

And finally, I want to invite you to stand and repeat the words on the screen.

"Now therefore, I will fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. I will put away all other gods and serve the LORD. As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

"Lord, we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears. Grant us the faith to believe in our hearts the you are God and Jesus is Lord so that the rocks don't cry out in judgment against us and so that we can live with the glorious expectation of your blessing upon our lives."