

I Walked Today Where Jesus Walked

President Harold B. Lee

Harold B. Lee, "I Walked Today Where Jesus Walked," *Tambuli*, Apr 1984, 36

For three glorious days we walked on sacred ground and felt the influence of the greatest person who ever lived upon this earth, Jesus the Christ, the very Son of the living God.

As we approached the Holy Land we read together the four gospel narratives, and then as we left our room each time, we prayed that the Lord would deafen our ears to what the guide said about historical places but would make us keenly sensitive to the spiritual feeling so that we would know by impression, rather than by hearing, where the sacred spots were.

For the first time, there in the Holy Land, I think I began to appreciate that lovely sacred refrain that has been put to music: "I walked today where Jesus walked."

In fancy, as we rode in a rented car with a competent guide about nine kilometers from the walled city of Jerusalem to the town of Bethlehem, nestled among the Judean hills, we could hear again the strains of that sweet Christmas hymn:

*"O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie.
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in the dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight."
(Hymns 165)*

Beyond us and to our left was the field of shepherds. In our mind's eye, as we looked upon the hillside where sheep still grazed as they did way back nearly two thousand years ago, we caught the significance of the story of the shepherds.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

"And the angel said unto them Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." ([Luke 2:8-11.](#))

Presently we were, as it seemed, with the shepherds at the mouth of the cave hewn out of the rock now to be found in the basement of the Church of the Nativity. There seemed to be in this place a kind of spiritual assurance that this was indeed a hallowed spot. Down in the basement is the cave hewn out of the rock, which seemed to us to mark a sacred place.

Out beyond Jericho, the city of palms, we were to find again a wonderful spirit on the banks of the Jordan River, where the courageous John the Baptist had baptized the Son of Man. The sacred incident that took place is recorded simply:

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

"And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." ([Matt. 3:16-17.](#))

For about five kilometers out of the walled city of Jerusalem we traversed the road to the cottage of Martha and Mary and Lazarus, where the Master found more congenial company than within the gates of Jerusalem among many of the self-sufficient of the Jews. A short distance away from the homesite of Martha and Mary is the rock-built tomb of Lazarus. As we stood there at the mouth, we remembered the drama that took place as the Savior declared just prior to the raising of Lazarus, the significance of his great mission when he said to Martha:

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

We fancied we could hear Martha’s fervent testimony: “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” ([John 11:25–27](#).)

In our mind’s eye we fancied we had witnessed the miracle of the raising of Lazarus, as the Savior peered into the mouth of that tomb on the cloth-wrapped figure of Lazarus, who had been buried for several days, and said in a commanding voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” ([John 11:43](#).) The power of this Man of God over death had asserted itself.

It was from this topmost peak that his ascension took place, and the two men in white stood by and said to the multitude as they saw him go up into the clouds: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” ([Acts 1:11](#).)

We walked on the sacred ground in these places and again in Gethsemane. In the Garden of Gethsemane, one of the deeply spiritual places, there are eight old gnarled olive trees showing evidence of great antiquity. It was here that Christ kneeled, in the vicinity of the very spot where we were standing. We fancied we could hear again the agonized words of his intense suffering, which he described in a great revelation:

“Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink.” ([D&C 19:18](#).)

And then he had prayed, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” ([Matt. 26:39](#).)

Time was now running out for us on our visit to Jerusalem. We had followed the guide through the traditional hall of judgment, where the Master was beaten and sentenced to death by a tribunal that made mockery of justice. We followed the way of the cross supposedly to the place of crucifixion and the place of the holy sepulchre. But all of this, we felt, was in the wrong place. We felt none of the spiritual significance that we had felt at other places, for had not the Apostle Paul said, speaking of the crucifixion, “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered *without the gate*”? ([Heb. 13:12](#), italics added.)

In other words, he suffered to his death upon the cross for the sins of mankind, not within the gates of Jerusalem but outside the gates, and yet the guides were trying to make us think that his crucifixion took place inside the walls. And again, what we were seeing there did not agree with John’s description of the place where the crucifixion and burial took place, for John had said:

“Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.

“There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation day [the Passover]; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.” ([John 19:41–42](#).)

There was yet another place we had to visit, the garden tomb. It is owned by the Church of the United Brethren. Here our guide took us as though it were an afterthought, and as the woman guide with her little son led us through the garden, we saw a hill outside the gate of the walled city of Jerusalem, just a short way from where the hall of judgment had been inside the city walls. The garden was right close by, or “in the hill,” as John had said, and in it was a sepulchre hewn out of a rock, evidently done by someone who could afford the expense of excellent workmanship.

Something seemed to impress us as we stood there that this was the holiest place of all, and we fancied we could have witnessed the dramatic scene that took place there. That tomb has a mouth that could be sealed by a rolling stone, and there is a stone track built to guide a stone as it was rolled across the mouth of the tomb. The stone has now been removed, but the stone track is still there. Mary, after peering into the tomb, saw that He was missing, and she went out weeping bitterly.

“But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, “And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

“And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

“And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

“Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them I ascend unto my Father, and your father; and to my God, and your God,” ([John 20:11–14, 17.](#))

As we looked out that night from the veranda of our hotel room, silhouetted against the sky was Mount Zion, and there was King David’s tower marking, so they told us, the place where they say the Last Supper was held just before the Savior went down to the Brook Cedron and to his betrayal and judgment and finally to death. Here on this mount Zion or in America’s New Jerusalem (our students of the scripture are not in agreement as to which) is to be commenced the greatest drama of the whole history of the world to usher in the second coming of the Lord. The Master himself has described this momentous event:

“... the Lamb shall stand upon Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having his Father’s name written on their foreheads.

“And it shall be a voice as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder, which shall break down the mountains, and the valleys shall not be found.” ([D&C 133:18, 22.](#))

“And then shall the Lord set his foot upon this mount, and it shall cleave in twain, and the earth shall tremble, and reel to and fro, and the heavens also shall shake.

“And the Lord shall utter his voice, and all the ends of the earth shall hear it; and the nations of the earth shall mourn, and they that have laughed shall see their folly.

“And then shall the Jews look upon me and say: What are these wounds in thine hands and in thy feet?

“Then shall they know that I am the Lord; for I will say unto them: These wounds are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends. I am he who was lifted up. I am Jesus that was crucified. I am the Son of God.” ([D&C 45:48–49, 51–52.](#))

The next morning, as we went over the rocky slopes along the Jaffa Road to Tel Aviv and to our airport, we beheld the work of returning Jews to make the “desert blossom as a rose,” as the prophets had foretold.

I came away from some of these experiences never to feel the same again about the mission of our Lord and Savior. I had impressed upon me, as I have never had it impressed before, what it means to be a special witness. I say, with all the conviction of my soul, I know that Jesus lives. I know that he was the very Son of God. And I know that in this church and in the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be found the way to salvation.

[photo] The garden tomb. (Photography by Eldon K. Linschoten.)

[photo] The Mount of Olives. (Photography by Lynn M. Hilton.)

[photo] The Garden of Gethsemane. (Photography by Gerald Silver on Lynn Hilton Expedition, 1976.)

Notes

President Lee was First Counselor in the First Presidency when he wrote this article in 1972 recording his visit to the Holy Land. President Lee served as President of the Church from July 1972, until his death in December 1973.

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