

# I Preached the Sermon on the Mount



Photo of Jerusalem © Jim Wood 2008

By Ken Slade

**I**srael. Golan Heights. Syria. Lebanon. These are some of the places surrounding Capernaum, the base area from which Jesus Christ ministered almost 2,000 years ago.

It's an area that today – as then – bristles with military tension and the ever-present potential of terrorist activity. Hardly the world of peace he preached about!

It's not number one on most tourist itineraries either, yet here we were, an oddly mixed busload of 28 people from several different nations.

Our cheerful, confident Israeli tour guide, Reuben, had already demonstrated a flare for re-creating the "feel" of historic events in his beloved homeland. A few days earlier, as we looked down from the dizzy heights of the fortress Masada upon the remnants of surrounding Roman encampments, Reuben had excited our imaginations with the impassioned exhortation of the zealous Jewish leader who encouraged 1,000 of his followers to embrace death rather than Roman desecration in AD 73.

The words from Masada live on in local history books, but the wider world has not felt their power. Jesus' words, on the other hand, rippled across the nearby Sea of Galilee and across the centuries have communicated an attracting power that draws to Israel many thousands of people from all nations every year, despite the continuing visible

presence of military forces prepared for immediate deployment.

After we had climbed the mount by the Lake of Galilee, our guide asked – with an amazing theatrical talent to tease us – if we had ever seen a Jew carrying a New Testament Bible. No? His hand slid into his backpack and withdrew a black leather book.

## The way to world peace

"These words of Jesus on this mount are not religious", Reuben stated boldly. "If only all mankind would listen to them and live by them, the world would have peace."

There was silence on the mount as these words hit our consciences. Standing in a land engulfed for so long by war and violence, we struggled to deal with the impact of Jesus' vision of peace.

I was standing nearest our guide. He thrust the shiny black book at me. "I want you to read Matthew chapter 5 to us all," Reuben said. "It will explain why I brought you here."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed

are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (verses 3-10).

These eternal truths floated quietly from the printed page to the hearts of my companions. Our attention was riveted on the simplicity of the message.

Reuben was right. This is the way to peace for all people. The words of peace I had spoken to a busload of 21<sup>st</sup> century tourists had begun to turn the world upside down nearly two millennia ago. They had offered hope to an oppressed people.

They still do when one is bold enough to trust the author of eternal life and let him live them from within our hearts.

"Hey, Ken!" called out Stephen, a South African member of our tour group. "I got it all on my tape recorder. They'll never believe this when they hear it back home – Jesus' Sermon on the Mount with an Aussie accent!"



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