

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

2/27/2011 "The Silence of God and Jesus" Jeremiah 12: 1-4

Recently Elizabeth and I spent ten days in the Holy Land. We enjoyed the magnificent beauty of the Sea of Galilee, the eerie calm of the Dead Sea, and the hustle and bustle of the city of Jerusalem where we traced Via Dolorosa, Jesus' road to Calvary.

We visited coliseums and amphitheatres created by the Romans. They were made of stones, rocks, and marble cut to precise measure for the roof, the walls, and the floors. We walked through the ruins of Herod's magnificent palace on the top of a high mountain and his gorgeous summer villa at the Mediterranean sea shore. The creative ingenuity of the rich and powerful were truly breathtaking.

But I was also struck with human sin and evil hidden behind all the splendor and glory that the kings and their vassals and the elite enjoyed. What I mean is this. The palace and the villa were erected by the hands of the poor and oppressed. Those magnificent ruins are hiding the sweat and tears and crushed bones and screams of the human beings who were treated like animals.

In Jericho, we visited a coliseum that could contain as many as 15000 spectators. We were told that there they watched for entertainment the gory scenes of lions devouring Christians.

I wondered what thoughts crossed the minds of those Christian victims. I wondered what they were thinking when they faced the bared teeth of the menacing lions and the spectators in frenzied excitement.

I am convinced that what they were thinking in those fearful hours was the same as what Jeremiah had been thinking when he witnessed the destruction of Israel at the hands of the Babylonian empire in six century B.C. "You will be in the right, O Lord, when I charge against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?"

And yet, the amazing thing is that those Christians did not lose faith. They did not beg the authorities to spare their lives. They died their violent deaths as faithful believers of Christ.

Why was that possible? It was possible, not because they had encountered God through the beauty of nature. After all, the magnificent rocks and beautiful slabs of marble were used to glorify the power of cruel kings. A beautiful seashore was transformed into a villa that housed slaves.

Nor was it because they had encountered God through the creative ingenuity and goodness of human beings. They did not see any goodness in those spectators who had assembled to see them devoured.

No. Those Christians died as faithful believers, because they had encountered God in Jesus Christ. The reality of Jesus kept them brave. The reality of Jesus kept them faithful. He had revealed through his cross and resurrection God's infinite power, love and compassion. They remembered his unforgettable words, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden. I will give you rest."

So the message I brought back to you from our trip is this. What saves us? Who makes our human life truly human? Not the beauty of nature. Not the glory and splendor of this world. Not the creative ingenuity of human beings. It is Jesus Christ and him alone who makes our human life truly human. He is the Savior. He is our Lord. He is our true friend.

Thank You to God