

In January I had the privilege of visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which has a pretty good archaeological claim to be the place where Jesus was buried, and as we Christians believe, rose from the dead.

People react differently to the Holy Sepulchre. To many Protestants, particularly, it is dark, over-ornate, full of strange ritual and a far cry from the Gospel accounts of a rough stone tomb in a garden. When I visited it, I was familiar with the chequered 2,000 year history that explains what it is today, and so I took it at face value. I was simply content to stand in the very space where my salvation was won such a long time ago. It was a place to be alone, and yet to be able to watch the faces of many others who see this place as their own place too.

And yet I could only be too aware of the contradiction between the “ideal” Jerusalem, the place of prophecy, salvation and peace, and the “real” Jerusalem, where different sects and religions vie for control of the holy sites and where the sites themselves are guarded with machine-guns.

This contradiction not infrequently drives pilgrims mad, it appears, so that Israeli psychiatrists have coined the term *Jerusalem Syndrome* to describe it. But even in Old Testament times the prophets too distinguished between the earthly Jerusalem, full of contradictions and strife, and Jerusalem as God saw it, the eternal City of Peace.

When at Easter Jesus gave his life on Calvary and received it back again three days later, it was not so that we would revere his tomb and become nostalgic over the way we would have liked it to look. It was so that we could gain a home in the New Jerusalem, the True Jerusalem, which can be as close to us in our own hearts as on any Holy Land tour. For as the writer to the Hebrews said, “*Here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.*”

*Jon Garvey
The Mission*