

God's Hope for America Bus Tour - Twelve Score Years Less Two

Michael Balcomb

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The God's Hope for America Holy Ground pilgrimage paid homage on July 14 at one of America's most sacred, hallowed sites: the battlefield at Gettysburg, PA. It was here, over the course of three sweltering days in the summer of 1863, that the tide of the Civil War turned once and for all. The price on both sides was appallingly high in terms of death and injury—almost 50,000 casualties in just three days.

Since I last visited Gettysburg, a beautiful and brand new visitor's center has been created, a mile or so south of the battlefield and National Cemetery, and it was here that our driver Paul Vetterli stopped for us to pick up literature and maps and make a plan.

We learned that the battle of Gettysburg was all about terrain. For the first two days, the Union forces held Cemetery Ridge, while the Confederates held Seminary Ridge, only a mile away. On the third day, hoping to break the stalemate, Robert E. Lee made his biggest miscalculation of the war, Pickett's Charge, sending 12,000 Confederate soldiers out across the treacherous low territory separating the two sides to death and disaster.

Reading about this stuff is one thing; feeling it in your bones is another. So we decided to walk the battlefield, rather than have our sleek, air-conditioned coach drive us around. Sweating uphill in high heat and soul-sucking humidity probably similar to that fateful summer 151 years ago, we gave ourselves a small taste of how desperate and miserable it must have been.

I'm almost ashamed to admit it, but it was tough. Suddenly, even the smallest rises seemed hard to climb. Those who forgot to bring bottled water found themselves desperate to borrow someone else's. Trees we normally would have not even noticed became strategically important because of their precious shade. By the time we stood along the battle lines, we all felt weary and weak.

Then we moved on to the National Cemetery to offer prayer at the Soldiers' Memorial. This is the heart of the sacred, holy ground that Lincoln memorably declared had been made holy not by words, but by the acts of devotion and sacrifice made by so many—

“In a larger sense we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.”

The impact of visiting this somber place was even more profound given the events of the last three weeks on this pilgrimage. As we travel in True Father’s footsteps from state to state, we are getting a real sense of why these places are holy. They are that way because of the tears and the sweat shed there, first by Father, but later by countless men and women who honored those places with their own prayer, their own tears, their own sweat.

I can feel that something of that substance, that devotion, remains present to this day. I hope it’s not too presumptuous to think that our own sweat and tears, shed quite freely in this very humid summer, are adding to that rich spiritual heritage.

At the time he gave the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln was convinced that Gettysburg would be remembered not for what he or anyone said, but for what had been done already. Within just over a month, he was dead by an assassin’s bullet. Ironically his words at Gettysburg became internationally famous as a lasting testament of eloquence and patriotism, even as the blunt facts of the war faded into history.

We came across the statue honoring the last survivor of Gettysburg, who died as recently as 1950. One hundred and fifty years from now, so what if the world has forgotten our deeds, and our sacrifices, our efforts, as long as it has remembered and honored True Parents’ words?