

Faith Of Our Youth

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"The Voice of Young Christian Faith"

Volume 5 Issue 3

Two Seas Compared

by Jeff Fogel

High in the mountains of northern Israel are a number of mountain springs that flow fresh and clean from deep within the earth. These springs form streams and flow together to form the Jordan River. The Jordan River flows south to a body of water known as the Sea of Galilee. The south end of the Sea of Galilee, again, becomes the Jordan and flows for fifty to sixty miles to another body of water. However, this body of water is quite different from the Sea of Galilee. There is no outlet for water flow and no life dwells within her depths. The taste of the water is bitter and it thirty percent mineral content. This body of water is known as the Dead Sea. It is the lowest point on the earth at approximately 1300 feet below sea level.

These two bodies of water are often used to compare what types of individuals we are. For example, in the song book entitled "Sacred Selections for the Church" by Ellis Crum, there is a song titled, "There is a Sea." The first verse of this song describes the Sea of Galilee, the second describes the Dead Sea, and the third asks us a question: "Which shall it be for you and me, Who God's good gifts obtain?" Then the song describes Christ, what he has done for us, and what he left, for a time, in order to give himself for us.

There are four major subjects that can be addressed when comparing the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. They are purity, ability to hold life, deception, and the ability to receive and give.

The Sea of Galilee is a pure body of water, while the Dead Sea is very impure. Jesus taught in Matt. 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Both bodies of water have the opportunity to receive from a pure source, being the mountain springs. We, as Christians, also have the opportunity to receive from a pure source which is the living water offered to us by Christ. John 4:14 mentions, "But whosoever drinketh of

(See "SEAS" on page 2)

inside...

Shortcuts
Jesus is Sitting Beside You
"Choose whom ye will serve"
"Behold, a greater than Jonah"

by Rich Miller
by Stephanie Moody
by Dane Hartman
by Marc Hermon

pages 3-4
page 3
page 4
pages 4-5

Wisdom of Our Elders Constructive and Defensive by WALTER LEE

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..." (Rom. 15:4)

If this scripture were seriously studied and then applied, it would be the answer to many spiritual problems that confront us. We believe that all that is necessary to find the plan and method to produce a thriving church is found by turning back through the pages of the Old Testament.

When we turn to the book of Nehemiah, we see that when Nehemiah went down to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall, he met the same obstacles that confront the church today. It is generally agreed that the people must "have a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). All too often we overlook the question that should confront us: "What is successful and efficient work?" It is possible for a congregation to diligently and unceasingly labor and still not accomplish their goal, because they fail to labor according to God's plan.

In Neh. 4:17 it states that the builders on the walls of Zion worked in this manner: "Everyone, with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon." Within this verse of Scripture we find two kinds of work--constructive and defensive. Both were absolutely essential. Thus we see these men did not devote all their efforts to construction of the wall, but also used their efforts to defend what was already built. If they had used "both" hands speedily to rebuild the wall, only to have their enemies destroy it because they were not prepared to defend it, what would they have accomplished?

In the task of "rebuilding the walls" of spiri-

(See "WISDOM" on page 3)

the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." To maintain purity in our lives, we must continue to drink from this pure source that Christ offers us. This requires a study of God's word, devotion to prayer, spending time in fellowship one with another, and, most important, being cleansed by the blood of Christ. Purity also requires that we share our abundance, whether physical or spiritual, with others who are in need.

Deception is another major topic when describing both seas. If I fill two bottles with water, one from the Sea of Galilee and the other from the Dead Sea, could you tell the difference just by looking at them? The answer is no. To tell the difference between the two, you must take a drink from both bottles. Only then can you tell there is a difference. Water from the Dead Sea is deceptive. Even though the water looks clear and pure, its taste is bitter. Satan is also deceptive in how he appears. II Corinthians 11:14 mentions, "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." This should be no surprise since Satan is the "Father of all lies." The Devil's weapons, temptations causing us to sin, are also deceptive. Sinful actions look enjoyable, but the end result is sorrow and bitterness. The story of David and Bathsheba portrays this well in II Samuel chapter 11.

While the Sea of Galilee is able to support an abundance of life, such as fish and other creatures, the Dead Sea cannot support life. This is true with mankind. When man chooses to walk in darkness instead of the light, God cannot dwell within, for God is light. In order for life to dwell in man, he must "walk in the light," then he can have fel-

lowship with Christ and his saints. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:5-7).

Both seas are able to receive; unfortunately, one fails to give. The

"The people of the world cannot receive the gospel unless it shines through us as Christians."

Dead Sea gives nothing of what it receives from the mountain springs. What are we doing with what God has given to us? Do we share with others, or do we keep everything for ourselves? How sad it is when we continue to receive blessings from God and yet give nothing back, not even a "Thank you"! God sends the sun and rain on the just and unjust. Do we give thanks to God for this? God gave his only Son for our sins so we would not have to die spiritually; yet, how many of the world's people have obeyed the gospel, let alone give thanks for the sacrifice God was willing to make? God also frowns on people whose desire is to hoard possessions and not share with others. Jesus mentions in Matt. 6:19, 20 not to "lay up treasures for yourselves on earth where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal." We are sup-

posed to be laying up treasures in Heaven. One way we can do this is by receiving from God and sharing with others while here on earth. Jesus even told one young man in Matt. 19:21 to, "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

Although the Dead Sea fails to give to other sources (and if it did, it would give nothing but bitterness), it still receives the fresh abundant resource from the wells of God deep in the earth. Unfortunately, this pure water turns bitter once in the Dead Sea. Regardless, the Dead Sea could never receive the pure water from the mountain springs of north Israel unless the water from these springs first passed through the Sea of Galilee. The people of the world cannot receive the gospel unless it shines through us as Christians. They must first notice the abundance of God's mercy, grace, and love which dwells within us. They must also know that our conduct is such that we are what we claim to be. Then the world will desire, perhaps, to obey the gospel of Christ.

"We are the only Bible the careless world will read." Let us portray the gospel in its pure form, even if the world turns God's abundance sour in their lives. The only return we may get from the world is bitterness and hate, but we must continue to share God's abundance with others. Although the Dead Sea will never be pure, perhaps the lives of sinners will be made pure by the abundance they receive from us as Christians.

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Member of Stull Church of Christ

tual Zion in this age, we need, above all things, constructive and defensive work as Nehemiah used. The sooner we awaken to that fact the better. Let us never cease laboring on the walls of Zion; but, let us use the "sword of the Spirit" to protect what we have. Every member of the Lord's body should be able to protect themselves from false doctrine. If there was ever a time when the Gospel needs proclaiming, it's now! But let us both convert the alien sinner and educate the believer in the way of righteousness.

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Elder of the church at Nixa

Jesus is Sitting Beside You

by Stephanie Moody

*If you could see Jesus sitting beside you,
Would you be watching that horror flick,
That questionable love story,
Or nothing at all, take your pick?*

*If you could see Jesus sitting beside you,
Would your conversation remain the same,
And would your choice of words be different?
You only have yourself to blame.*

*If you could see Jesus sitting beside you,
Would your personality remain as it is?
Would your lifestyle change in any way?
Are you following the path that is His?*

*If you could see Jesus sitting beside you,
Would the world see Him there too?
It's through you that they will be able to see Him.
Are you doing the things that you should do?*

*For Jesus is sitting beside you,
And there He will always be,
But the world can only see Him through what you do,
So ask yourself, "Can they see Him in me?"*

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Member of Martensdale Church of Christ

SHORTCUTS

by Rich Miller

At one point or another, all of us have been faced with a particularly tough problem within our school, work, or personal lives in which a shortcut makes itself available. In moments of weakness, we are tempted to take this shortcut, and often times we do just that. When our course of action backfires, we learn--too little and too late--that no problem or challenge goes away unless it is attacked head on and faced with hard work and diligence.

Unfortunately, the same shortcuts that we are tempted with in our carnal lives are prevalent in our spiritual lives, as well. The major shortcut is usually where brethren tend to "pass the buck" to other brethren of the congregation, who most likely serve in leadership capacities. These let others do most of the Lord's work. We are told in Phil. 2:12 to, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Let us also remember that although scriptures such as Acts 2:38, Gal. 3:26, 27, and others promise eternal life to all who seek it, we must be active participants within the Body of Christ and not just spectators. Consider James 2:14-26 where we are continually reminded to add works onto our foundation of faith. Other passages to keep in mind are Rom. 14:11, 12 and John 9:4. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Jesus tells each of the seven churches of Asia, "I know thy works." If we take the time to mediate on these passages, we find that eternal life is something that cannot be obtained by continually trying to "beat the system."

Now, let us look at another familiar spiritual shortcut--perceived inadequacy. Some members of the body feel that they do not have the necessary tools, skills, or talents to be able to effectively work in God's kingdom. Granted, there are certain members of the congregation who, for example, have no qualms with getting up on the pulpit and presenting a lesson, while others shake with dread at the mere thought of doing such a thing. We all have our strong points. The idea is to FIND them and utilize them to let our lights shine bright. Also, we should understand that the common, ordinary Christians are the very backbone of the church! Elders and evangelists are richly blessed individuals who are "apt to teach" as well as lead, but

(See "SHORTCUTS" on page 4)

they simply can't handle the entire load. Therefore, it is essential that all members within the Body of Christ realize their role, and carry out that role with diligence and faith. Remember, God considers every member of his flock of equal importance!

In closing, I offer two final passages for your consideration. Rom. 12:1 - "Therefore, I urge you brethren in view of God's mercy to present your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing unto God; this is your spiritual worship." Gal. 6:7 - "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." We simply cannot be found worthy of eternal life if we are always looking for a shortcut to salvation. Continually trying to do so is futile. Let us always press along to the goal, so that Jesus may say unto us on our day of judgment, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:33, 34)

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Member of Church of Christ in Pennsylvania

"Behold, a greater than Jonah is here!"

by Marc Hermon

You have a terrible enemy. This enemy has killed many of your countrymen and is threatening to take you into captivity. God himself has describe to you the wickedness of the capitol city of this foreign country. These were the thoughts of Jonah as God came to him and asked what he perceived as impossi-

ble, "Go and preach to the Assyrians at Ninevah!"

One would think that Jonah would fear for his life in this endeavor and therefore be scared to go. Well, Jonah didn't want to go, but it wasn't because he feared for his own life; rather, it was because he was afraid his preaching would actually be considered and God would forgive them. Jonah hated his enemies so much that he didn't care if their souls were lost. So, Jonah had a decision to make: "Obey God or run away?" As mankind usually does when it uses

"[Jonah's] hatred for his enemy had blinded him of the depths of despair that he had just recently endured."

human logic, Jonah chose incorrectly; and without God in your life, things can start looking pretty bleak.

Jonah's life started a downward spiral. He went down to Joppa. He went down into the ship. He went to sleep down in the sides of the ship. He was thrown down into the water. He was swallowed down into the belly of the fish and went down to the "bottoms of the mountains" (2:6). Finally, with weeds wrapped around his head (2:5), and realizing that he couldn't go any further down, he turned to God in prayer. How sad it is that we often use prayer only when we can't see any other way out.

However, God showed that his forgiveness runs deep as the fish and Jonah's life started looking up!

(See "JONAH" on page 5)

Choose whom ye will serve

by Dane Hartman

"Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:14, 14).

As young, maturing adults, we are continually taking on new responsibilities. Along with that, we are faced with more and more decisions. Not only do we have more decisions, but decisions of greater and greater importance. The most important decision we must make in our lives is the same one that Joshua urged the Israelites to make in Joshua 24. We, too, must decide whom we will serve in this life and such a decision will determine where we will spend eternity. When the consequences of the choice are weighed, it seems very easy to decide which we should choose. However, very few people choose to take the proper steps to secure a place in heaven. Perhaps this is so because so many people are ignorant of God's plan.

If we decide we want to spend eternity with the Lord, we must first repent of our sins and be baptized as Peter teaches in Acts 2:38. We can see the importance of the scripture in our lives throughout the whole 119th Psalm. However, we must not only study the scripture, we must also obey it and apply it to our lives as James wrote in James 1:22.

You must choose if you want to live in Heaven with the Lord and Savior, or in eternal torment with Satan, and then take the necessary steps. No one can decide for you. You are the one who chooses where you will spend your eternity. "For the son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels: and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27).

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Member of Prince Rd Church of Christ

Granted, it started by being vomited up, but it was a step in the right direction.

This time Jonah decided to do the right thing. He preached to Ninevah and his fears came true. They repented and God forgave! Jonah wished that he could die. His hatred for his enemy had blinded him of the depths of despair that he had just recently endured. God's patience with Jonah was overwhelming. He sent a shade plant and then caused it to wither the next day to demonstrate to Jonah his selfishness. Jonah was so angry that he hadn't even considered that the 120,000 children in the city would have also been destroyed.

We never find out if Jonah saw the error of his way and learned to forgive. I hope he did. Matthew 6:12 says God will forgive us as we forgive others.

Does that scare you? Are you comfortable with God forgiving your sins only as well as you forgive others? It was a good thing for Jonah that God didn't base his forgiveness of Jonah on how Jonah forgave others.

In Matthew 12:40-41, Jesus talks about the sign of Jonah, comparing Jonah's three days and three nights in the belly of the fish to the time he would be in the earth. He ends the statement by saying, "Behold, a greater than Jonah is here." Jesus went through the most atrocious of deaths and in the very midst of his agony asked God to forgive the very people who were inflicting this pain. That is the kind of person who I want in charge of my forgiveness! BEHOLD, A GREATER THAN JONAH IS HERE!" PRAISE GOD!

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Member of Pleasant Hill Church of Christ

Seeking Encouragement Part 1: From God

by Kevin Morton

All of us get down from time to time. Things happen in this life which cause us pain. Things don't always go our way, and when they don't, we tend to become downhearted. As Christians, where do we go for encouragement in times of sorrow? Many people try to escape their problems by "bottling them up" and hiding them. Sometimes we go to a friend or family member to talk about our problems. I find myself doing both of these things now and then, but many times, I am still troubled afterward. Speaking with others usually helps, but what if there is something you are trying to deal with that you are embarrassed to talk about, or that you know will cause someone else pain or to be offended? What if the people you talk to just can't make you feel better and there seems to be no one to turn to? Whenever we are faced with one of life's hardships, we can ALWAYS go to the Lord.

We need to realize that God deeply loves us and cares about us. He gave his only son to die for us! (John 3:16) He should be the FIRST one we go to in times of trouble. When I'm alone in my car I like to talk to God, tell him how life is going for me, and when I'm down or depressed, it always helps to talk to

him about it. It is easier to talk to God than to anyone else because there is nothing that can be hidden from him. He sees and knows everything that goes on in our lives and will not be offended or upset about something we tell him. God knows us better than anyone else does, including ourselves. He understands exactly how we feel at any given moment in our lives, so if we ARE having a hard time with something, he is there to listen and to comfort us.

"God gives encouragement to anyone who asks for it if only they follow him and live by his word."

The other day, I was in my car and I was feeling a little down and lonely. I decided to turn off my radio and I just started talking to God, telling him my problems and asking him to help me. After I finished speaking to him, I felt amazingly better and even a little stronger spiritually. God showed me, as he had so many times before, that he could help me with my problems. As Brother Bill Hensley said in one of his sermons, "A talk with God can turn the tide." God can turn a person's attitude from depressed to joyful in a matter of minutes. In Psalms 10:17, David sings to the Lord, "You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted, you encourage them and you listen to their cry." The

(See "ENCOURAGE" on page 6)

Lord encouraged me by simply listening to my prayer.

God gives encouragement to anyone who asks for it if only they follow him and live by his word (Matt. 21:22, Romans 15:5, John 15:7). As Christians, we can go to him in prayer with any of our requests or concerns and he will hear us (Eph. 6:18). In the last moments before he was taken away to be crucified, Christ himself prayed to God earnestly in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said in Matt. 26:38, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." In verse 39, he prayed to God, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." After praying to God about this three times, Christ was strengthened. In verse 46 he says, "Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer." He was ready to carry out God's plan and give his life on the cross. He was no longer afraid to face death. If God can give Christ the strength to overcome death, don't you think he can give us the strength to overcome our hardships as well?

Remember, we can always go to the Lord for encouragement, for as his children, "God has given us eternal encouragement" (2nd Thes. 2:16). We need not fear or be weakened by anything in this life, because God is on our side and is always watching over us and protecting us. I have a sign on my bedroom wall, which reads simply, "Why worry when you can pray?"

I hope that these words have strengthened all of you. Thank you for your attentiveness. I invite any questions or comments on this subject. Look for "Seeking Encouragement, Part 2: From the Brethren" in a future issue of FOOY.

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Member of Ottawa Church of Christ

"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith in purity."

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Take the time to thank those who have encouraged you.

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Future Families of Faith

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December 1999

Jason Russell and Amanda Albertson
Spring or Summer 1999

Jerry Staiger and Elizabeth Jones
Spring or Summer 1999

Matt Harvey and Kelly Hartman
June 1999

Songs of Our Youth

Lyrics: Christie D. Brown

I Need You

Music: C. Alena Caldwell

1. I have a lot of ques-tions that have no ans-wer Lord, but I
2. And Lord I need your pa-tience, for-give me all my strays.

know that trust - ing you's the on - ly an - swer I af - ford.
Hold my hand land guide me thru - out all of my days.

need your strength and guid - ance, your love so deep and wide. With-
know you'll give me com - fort while in this life I go. I'm

out your spir - it in me I'd be emp - ty in - side.
reach-ing for your pre - cious gift, what I need to grow.

I need you Lord. I need you Lord.

"FOOY" Views

Starting from our school days, a frequently encountered question from adults and our classmates was, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" I fondly remember the times when I proudly said that my choice was an astronaut, or maybe a doctor, and yes, even for a short time, a fish farmer. As we mature from the young kindergartners to young men and women in high school, hopefully our choice of a career will change as well. The fantasies of the big leagues or famous rock-n-roll bands gradually give way to accountants, construction, nurses, and teachers. One of the most important questions that we must consider is, "How will this career or job opportunity affect my life as a Christian?"

Such a question, unfortunately, is often asked too late or not at all. Far too often the story is told that a person accepts a job, moves their family, and only then do they consider how and where they will serve the Lord. Paul instructed the church at Colosse to, "set your affections on things above, and not on things of the earth" (Col. 3:2). Power, possessions and greed are so second nature in our society that a young Christian, relatively new in the faith, is often led down these seductive and destructive paths. If you choose a career based on a high salary or on prominent social or corporate status, then you have chosen incorrectly.

There are many decisions that affect the course we will take in our life. Our walk with God and our life time mate are two of the major decisions, but our career is vital as well. Think of how much impact something will have on who you turn out to be if you participate in it forty hours a week for

thirty-five to forty years. If your job takes you away from a faithful congregation, how important is it? Matt. 6:33 states, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Our sole purpose in life is pleasing God and doing his will. In this light, how will the career you choose fulfill this goal, or will it hinder it?

A final note to you young women who are seeking to find your future place in the world. It is good for you to obtain a college degree if that is your goal, but the career of a homemaker is very noble, indeed. The world may recognize women of corporate excellence, but my praise goes to the women who have chosen against such pressures and decided that to stay at home and serve God in such a way. And I do not believe I stand alone. No paycheck or plaques can replace the joy of seeing your children grow personally instead of from the baby-sitter's stories.

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). As you choose your career or consider taking that job offering, ponder on the bigger picture of how such decisions will hinder or aid you in your life to God. Far too many young people our age have chosen present rewards and luxuries over patiently waiting for those in the world to come. For these, the words of Christ in Matt. 6:2 ring clearly, "They have their reward."

Your Brother in Christ,
Jeremy Morris

Faith of our Youth

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inside...

Two Seas Compared
Constructive and Destructive
Seeking Encouragement

by Jeff Fogel
by Winford Lee
by Kevin Morton

pages 1-2
pages 1, 3
pages 5-6