**SEA OF GALILEE or SALT SEA ?**

Many preachers have used this illustration in their sermons, but in case you haven’t heard it I’ll challenge you with the same question. As a Christian are you more like the Sea of Galilee or the Salt Sea? Biblically speaking, James would put it this way: “*But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*.” (James 2:18)

If you look at a map of Palestine you will notice that the snow-capped waters of Mt. Hermon flow off the mountain and become the source which creates the Jordan River. The Jordan then picks up speed as it is fed by the Hasbani, Banias and Dan Rivers. It creates Lake Huleh, which then feeds the Jordan as it continues its southern route down into the Sea of Galilee.

The Sea of Galilee is a fresh-water lake (not really a large “sea” as we would think of that word in our culture). It is a walk of 33 miles all the way around its coastline. It is only 8 miles wide and 12 miles long. Life abounds as the pristine waters feed the entire region. Fish run from the Jordan River into the Sea, prospering the country with an abundance of food and commercial trade. It is little wonder Jesus spent so much time here. It is where He found Peter, Andrew, James and John and said, “*Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19).

The Sea of Galilee then feeds the Jordan River as it flows south down to the Salt Sea. The Jordan River breeds life all along its banks. Green is everywhere as the River irrigates the land, giving life-giving resources to vegetation, animals and man. Cities and villages are all along its route because it provides food and commerce for the people. In short, the Sea of Galilee first receives life from waters above it, then gives life to the waters below it.

But now picture the Jordan River as it flows into the Salt Sea. The many fish which swim in the river (tilapia, carp, sardines, etc) soon hit the salty waters of the Salt Sea. According to the website *DeadSea.com* we discover:

“The Dead Sea has a reputation as the saltiest sea in the world, with a salinity of around 34%, about 10 times as salty as the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.”

Because this body of water has such a deadly salt concentration it instantly kills these fresh water fish. There is a good reason the Salt Sea has been renamed as the Dead Sea. Everything that flows into it dies. Birds do not fly there. Animals do not go there to drink. Virtually everything that touches it perishes. Why? Because the Dead Sea has no outlet. It does not flow anywhere because it is what is called a “Terminal” lake. It stops all movement. It stagnates. And you know what happens when everything stops moving… it terminates… it dies.

Read again our text of James 2:18 (along with its context of vss. 14-26). “*Show me your faith without your works, and I’ll show you my faith by my works*.” Faith without works is dead.

James is telling us it is not enough to become a believer (one who professes faith in Christ). Many have received the blessings from God by coming to faith in the facts of the gospel, repenting of their sins and are baptized into Christ (Jam. 1:17; Acts 2:38). But then they become like ancient Israel. These slaves of Egypt had been given their freedom by the grace of God, but instead of giving thanks they turned inward to a life of continually saying, “God, what have you done for me lately?” Give me, give me, give me. We know what happened to that selfish generation don’t we? Because they were takers, not givers, they became terminal. They died in the sands of the wilderness. They never got to the promised land.

I have known many Christians who have fallen into the same trap. Once grateful for the salvation given to them, they turn inward and selfishly approach their faith with a “give me” spirit. They attend worship with an attitude of what they can get out of it, not what they can put into it. They mutter, “It better be a good sermon, inspiring song service, excellent Bible class, and others better approach me with cheerful greetings.” They feel slighted, get their feelings hurt, and leave saying, “I didn’t get anything out of that service.” Go figure. A man only reap what he sows.

Jesus gave a profound statement I have often reflected on to judge my own life. “*Give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap*” (Luke 6:38). I love that quote. It reminds me that once I receive blessings from God, I must pay them forward to bless others. The bountiful blessings God packs down into my spirit can “run over” into the lives of all around me. Solomon put it this way: “*Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered*” (Proverbs 11:25). Read that again, slowly.

I bet you have seen it too. Two people, facing the exact same crisis, react 180 degrees opposite one another. One becomes doom-and-gloom with a dark cloud over his head as he bemoans his bad luck, blaming others for his problems. The other becomes a blue-skies-and-rainbows person who “*count(s) it all joy when you go through various trials*” because he knows the outcome will be a stronger faith (Jam. 1:2-4).

One, like the Sea of Galilee, receives God’s blessings and has created a habit of giving blessings to others, even when times are hard. The other, like the Dead Sea, and like Israel of old, receives God’s blessings, but turns inward and fails to share their blessings with others. Their faith becomes “terminal” (no outlet). Faith without works is dead.

Which are you? In these trials which now test our faith we can become selfish “woe-is-me” pity-party receivers-only Christians, bemoaning our circumstances. Or, we can become joyful “It-is-more-blessed-to-give-than-to-receive” Christians (Acts 20:35). Our faith is not terminal but has an outlet as we get out of our four walls and explore all the ways we can share our blessings with others less fortunate.

I’m so thankful to be a member of the Northwest church. During this global shut-down I have seen the crème rise to the top. This family, this blessed fellowship, has risen up and shown a faith that works. I’m so proud to be among this band-of-brothers. Indeed, as we so often sing, faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

Faith. Let it show. Let it flow.

Freely you have received, freely give.

I love you. Sooooo much!

Rick