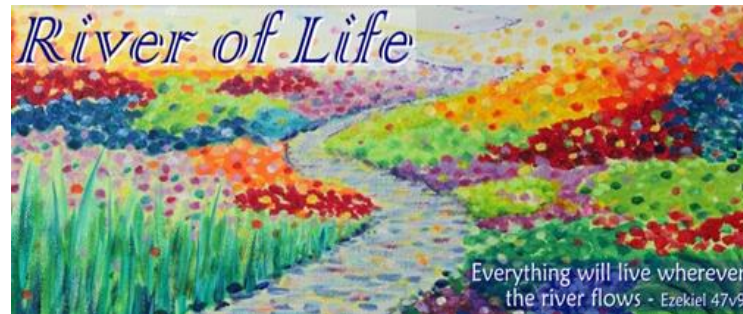


Let Your River Flow: Ezekiel's Temple and You



One day 4,000 years ago the angel of the Lord and two companions paid a visit to Abraham, who had pitched his tent in the hill country of Canaan, far above the Jordan Valley. Off in the distance below the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were glistening in the sunlight. After announcing to Abraham that his elderly wife, Sarah, would bear him a son within a year, the angel of the Lord decided to reveal to Abraham that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were about to be annihilated. Abraham was alarmed by this news, because his nephew, Lot, was living in Sodom.

So, Abraham decided to bargain with God.

Abraham approached him and said, “Will you sweep away both the righteous and the wicked? Suppose you find fifty righteous people living there in the city—will you still sweep it away and not spare it for their sakes? Surely you wouldn’t do such a thing, destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Why, you would be treating the righteous and the wicked exactly the same! Surely you wouldn’t do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?” And the Lord replied, “If I find fifty righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the entire city for their sake.” Then Abraham spoke again. “Since I have begun, let me speak further to my Lord, even though I am but dust and ashes.

Genesis 18:23-27

Abraham keeps dickering, until he has bargained the Lord down to ten righteous. If there are ten righteous in Sodom, Sodom will be spared. Too bad, ten righteous are not found, and Sodom and Gomorrah are slated for destruction. But through Abraham's intercession, his nephew, Lot, and his family are dragged out of Sodom just before the meteor crashes in from outer space. So where are the remains of Sodom and Gomorrah now? These ruins are at one of the lowest spots on any continent on earth---at the bottom of the Dead Sea, covered with water so thick with salt and potassium and other minerals that no fish or sea creature can live in it.

The Dead Sea. Dead because water flows in from the Jordan River and simply evaporates. It has no outflow. Dead because nothing can live in it. And at its bottom lie the ruins of a dead culture.

When water flows in and never flows out, when all it does is take in fresh water, but give nothing but vapor to the world around it, what else can it be but a dead sea? And now the experts tell us that the Dead Sea is itself

drying up. In a few decades it won't be a sea at all, just a salty, barren crater covering the remains of a culture that, long ago, fell under the judgment of God.

So what happens to me, when I keep drinking in the living water of God, but never give it out?

When I keep feeding on the Living Bread, but never give it out?

When I keep receiving God's mercy with praise and thanksgiving, only to let it dry up inside me, as I cling to my grudges and continue my subtle retaliations against those who have aroused my ire.

I become a Dead Sea.

What happens to a church, where the word is alive, the Spirit is moving, people are receiving blessings from the Lord, but there's no outflow?

Holy inflow, but no outflow.

Church is over and we walk out the door leaving the name, love and mercy of Jesus behind us as we melt into the culture, living lives indistinguishable from the lives of those who have no faith.

We become a Dead Sea.

Now let's turn our thoughts away from the ruins of Sodom at the bottom of the Dead Sea to another city in ruins not many miles away. We're looking at Jerusalem many centuries later. Jerusalem lies in ruins. The Chaldean armies swept into Jerusalem in the year 586 B.C., sacked and burned the city, dragging off hundreds of captives to Babylon. Now, nearly seventy years later, Jerusalem is nothing but ruins. The ancient wall is piles of rubble. The magnificent temple of Solomon is only charred wood and heaps of stone.

Far off in Babylon a Jewish prophet named Ezekiel has a vision. In his vision Ezekiel sees Jerusalem restored. He sees the temple rebuilt, more glorious than ever. But here's the most important part of his vision:

Ezekiel sees the Dead Sea Allegory in reverse. Instead of fresh water flowing into the Dead Sea and stagnating...

Ezekiel sees a tiny stream flowing from the temple, growing into a River of Healing and Life.

Then (the angel) brought me back to the door of the temple; and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east....and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.

Ezekiel 47

It begins as a trickle, flowing beneath the door of the temple. The stream flows south of the great outdoor altar, across the courtyard toward the East Gate. As this trickle flows out the East Gate it begins to deepen to ankle depth, then to waist depth, until it becomes a mighty river that heals everything it touches. Ezekiel saw this, when Jerusalem and the Temple were still in ruins. But it happened. Jerusalem was rebuilt. The

Temple was restored. And that river of life began to flow when the "Ultimate Temple" was rebuilt----when Jesus rose from the dead.

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

It began as a trickle, when a handful of nobodies were baptized in his Spirit after the resurrection. They received life---they gave life. They received mercy---they gave mercy. They received love---they gave love. The Word spoke to them...and soon the Word was speaking **through** them.

This life from God passed from one person to the next, each passing it on to others, until this river of human souls, anointed by the Spirit of the Lord, began to flow in all directions. West, across the Roman Empire as far as the British Isles. East as far as India. All within four decades! Without the help of armies, or money, or political clout.

Just person-to-person, life-to-life.

This river changed the course of history.

We are looking at two rivers:

The River Jordan,

flowing into the Dead Sea, covering the ruins of a dead city.

Ezekiel's river,

which begins as a trickle in his vision, takes on flesh in the body of a dying man, becomes a stream of life as this man breathes the Spirit of God into a handful of followers.

One begins as fresh water and ends as a stagnant sea.

The other begins as a trickle and becomes a River of Life that never ends.

Why are these two rivers so prominent in scripture? We see the River Jordan throughout the Bible. Ezekiel's river shows up in the Garden of Eden and reappears in the last chapter of Revelation, flowing through all redemptive history.

There is a River, the streams whereof shall make glad the City of God. (Psalm 46)

These two rivers are prominent in scripture because every person who ever hears the word of God becomes part of one or the other.

If the life which the Word creates in you never flows out of you, if it keeps coming in, but never flows out as mercy, (*"Thank you, Lord for saving my soul! But who does this man think he is, belittling me like that! I'll take care of him!"*) never flows out as forbearance and love---you become a Sodom.

But if the life which the Word creates in you finds an outlet, even if it's just a tiny trickle, you have become Ezekiel's Temple.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" John 7

Never mind if the river flowing out of you seems to be only a trickle. If there's any outflow at all, you have the beginnings of a river of life.

If what you are reading now has the ring of truth.... if it is confirmed in your heart by the Spirit as you ponder these words, then whatever is valid in what you are reading is living water. The Lord is speaking to you---and to me. And when he speaks, his word is Spirit and life, straight out of heaven.

But now comes the critical moment. What are we going to do with this living water? Are we going to be another Dead Sea? Or are we going to be Ezekiel's Temple?

Is it going to collect in us and stagnate? Or is it going to flow out?

All we have to do is let it flow. Let it flow, even if it's only a trickle. Even if you feel totally inadequate. Even if everything around you seems hostile and dry. Let it flow.

"What do you mean, Let it flow? I'm no preacher. I'm no prophet. Don't expect me to be out on the street corners preaching at folks, 'cause I'm sure no fanatic!"

Here's what I mean: At the beginning of your day, find a place to be alone, even if it's the bathroom with the door shut.

Stretch your hands toward heaven and present your body as a living sacrifice to God, saying, "Here I am, Lord. Flood me afresh with your Spirit!"

Then go out about your business believing that God has arranged everything (which he has). Expect that you will indeed touch someone with God's life, through a word of encouragement, through an unspoken prayer, through the touch of your hand, through a few words spoken on the phone. Go out into your day with that mindset, and living water will begin to flow from the threshold of your temple---from your body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit if you are truly a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

It will flow from your mouth. From your hands. Of course, it will begin, as it always does, as a trickle. But just as in Ezekiel's vision, that trickle will become a stream, and that stream will become a river.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

Keep drawing near to the Lord Jesus for fresh life --week-by-week in your fellowship, day-by-day alone before God. But don't stop there. Let that life flow out! Into your home. Into the neighborhood. Into the telephone. Believe that the Spirit of God has transformed you into Ezekiel's Temple.

Out comes a little trickle. God will take that little trickle and turn it into a river. God will take your faltering words and cause them to burn with fire!

Just start giving out what the Lord Jesus is putting in, and a stream of healing and life will follow you wherever you go.

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