

Rivers of Living Water

Ezekiel 47:1-12

INTRO:

The title of my message is “Rivers of Living Water.” Most of us are foreign to the idea of depending on a river. We have faucets and water at the flick of our finger! Can you imagine though, what it would be to have to find a river or spring every time you wanted a drink?

Some of us have seen deserts and wilderness places. Perhaps you have been to Death Valley in California. I hear that in that area there is an unbelievable swell of vegetation and flower blooms due to the unseasonable amount of precipitation California has had this winter. Nature documentaries sometimes show a time-lapse view of how quickly a desert revives when a small amount of rain falls.

In a land like Israel with an arid climate, many of the stream beds dry up until the rains return. It is like this in many parts of the world today. People walk long distances to get their daily ration of water. And when it does not rain, people starve.

With this in mind, let us turn to our text.

Read Ezekiel 47:1-12

I. Background to Ezekiel 47

A. The prophet Ezekiel

1. He was a priest who was exiled to Babylon, probably in 598 B.C. (the second of 3 waves of exiles before the city was destroyed in 586 B.C.)
2. He received “visions of God” (1:1) and “the word of the LORD” (1:3), and “the hand of the LORD was upon him there” (1:3)
3. His mission was to speak to the exiles who God describes in chapter 2 as “rebels”
 - “And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.” (2:5)

B. The book of Ezekiel

1. Fourth longest book in the Old Testament.
2. Very complex
 - Filled with dated oracles and visions that are not recorded in chronological order.
 - Apocalyptic descriptions and extended allegories
3. Ezekiel often acts out his messages
 - He visualizes the siege of Jerusalem by playing “army men” and acting out the destruction of the city.
 - This involves cutting his hair with a sword and burning some of it.
 - He is told to bake his bread over a fire fueled by human dung – but is allowed to use cow dung
 - He is commanded not to mourn when his wife dies

C. Three Key Visions in Ezekiel.

There are 3 central visions of the book (per Ez. 43:1-5).

1. His opening vision (chapter 1)

- He sees a wheeled chariot that is hovering over the ground, with cherubim-like creatures and wheels full of eyes, on top of this is a crystal sea-like surface on which the LORD is seated on His throne.
 - The significance is that the LORD is not confined to the Temple in Jerusalem (still standing at this time)
 - He is able to be with Ezekiel and with the exiles, as unlike pagan gods, the true God is not confined to one land only.
2. His first temple vision (chapters 8-11)
 - Ezekiel is transported to Jerusalem and able to see the hidden idolatries performed even in the Temple itself.
 - He then sees God's presence depart from the Temple and the city.
 3. SIDENOTE: key details of the prophecies of Israel's restoration
 - The dry bones prophecy (Ezek. 39)
 - Good shepherd prophecy (Ezek. 34 – read vs. 23-24).
 - New covenant known as "covenant of peace" 34:25
 - Giving of New Heart & the Spirit (read Ezek. 36:25-27)
 4. His final temple vision (chapters 40-48)
 - After the prophecy of the future restoration of Israel, Ezekiel sees a grand vision of a renewed Temple.
 - Our text is part of this vision.
 - In 43:1-5 he sees the same vision of God's presence enter the restored new Temple.

Ezekiel 43:1-5 "Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. And the vision I saw was just like the vision

that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple."

II. A Vision of Living Waters

A. Source of the River

1. Jerusalem had no river, just some springs
 - Water was brought to the Temple from springs and aqueducts
2. In this vision, the Temple is the source for the river

B. Size of the River

1. It begins with a trickle and grows as it goes until it is a flood.

C. Life-giving Effects of the River

1. Many Trees in a formerly desert area
2. The water turns the Dead Sea into fresh water.
3. Many fish now can live in the water and the sea.
 - The fishers are standing along the shores of the Dead Sea.
4. Evergreen Fruit trees with leaves for healing – reminiscent of the Tree of Life.
5. "so everything will live where the river goes" (v. 9)
6. The un-withering nature and special quality of the fruit trees is because "the water for them flows from the sanctuary" (v. 12)

III. A History of Living Waters

A. Eden's Four-fold River

- Gen. 2:10 "A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers." **gold, onyx are mentioned and they are central to the Temple, there is a tree of life in the garden too, like Ez. 47 - Rev. 22**
- SIDENOTE: 3 points illustrating why Ezekiel is looking back on Eden with his prophecy in 47.
 - i. Ezek. 36:35 "land shall be like a garden of Eden"
 - ii. Eden called the Mountain of God in 28:14 and the temple vision starts with the Temple on a high mountain (40:2).
 - iii. Outside of Eden was wilderness – similar to the Dead Sea region being a wilderness (prior to the coming of the river in ch. 47).

B. Water from the Rock (Exodus) – preserved life

- Ps. 78:16 "He made streams come out of the rock and caused waters to flow down like rivers."
- Ex. 17:6 "you shall strike the rock and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink."

C. The Joyful River of God

- Psalm 46:4 "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God" ****there is no river in Jerusalem****
- Psalm 36:8-9 "and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life..."
- Ps. 63:1 "...my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water."
- Is. 12:3 "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

D. The LORD is the Fountain

- Jer. 2:13 "they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters"
- Jer. 17:13 "they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water."

E. Streams in the Desert (New Exodus) – renewed life

- Is. 35:6 "waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water"
- Is. 43:19 "For I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."
- Is. 48:21 "they did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and the water gushed out."
- Is. 49:10 "He who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them"
- SIDENOTE: the NT draws on this, with John the Baptist using the same cry given in Isaiah 40:3 – another New Exodus passage.

F. Cleansing with Water and the Outpouring of the Spirit

- Is. 44:3 "I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants."
- Ezek. 36:25-27 "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean... I will put my Spirit within you..."

G. Renewed Israel + and a fountain in Jerusalem

- Is. 58:11 "you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail."

- Zech. 14:8 "on that day living waters shall flow from Jerusalem"
- Joel 3:18 "in that day... a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim."
- Zech. 13:1 "on that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. ****to cleanse sin****

H. New Jerusalem (ultimate fulfillment)

- Rev. 22:1-2 "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." **** Clearly draws from Ezekiel****
- Rev. 7:17 "For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water" ****ultimate New Exodus****

I. CONCLUSION from the History

- Water is connected with spiritual joy and life in God's presence
- Water is sourced in God – the True Fountain of Life
- Water is associated with the Temple
 - Eden itself was a paradise – "Garden of God" – depicted in Ez. 28 as a mountain
 - Eden is the template to which the Tabernacle and Temple imagery point back to.
 - Ezekiel's temple looks back to Eden with the "trees of life" on its banks

- Also Ezek. 36:35 and the mountain of God idea 40:2/28:14
- Water is associated with the Holy Spirit who will be outpoured and cleanse the renewed Israelites (and believers in Christ) of their sins

IV. An Experience of Living Waters

John 7:37-39 has enhanced meaning for us now that we understand the significance of "living water."

John 7:37-39 "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

A. Background to Jn. 7

1. The setting is the Feast of the Tabernacles
2. This feast in Jesus' day had become accompanied with a water pouring ceremony.
3. A golden pitcher was dipped in the pool of Siloam and carried by the priests in a grand procession into the Temple and poured out as a libation with the morning sacrifice.

B. Jesus echoes a call for the thirsty to drink

- Is. 55:1 "Come, everyone who thirst, come to the waters"
- This call is repeated in Revelation
- Rev. 21:6 "to the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment."

- Rev. 22:17 "let the one who is thirsty come: let the one who desires take the water of life without price."

C. Jesus draws from the OT theme of Living Waters

1. The quotation does not match any single verse in the OT.
2. It likely has the whole "history of living waters" in view, particularly:
 - Zech. 14:8 "on that day living waters shall flow from Jerusalem"
 - Ezek. 47 (sidenote: vs. 9 in Hebrew is literally "2 rivers")
 - Ps. 78:16 "He made streams come out of the rock and caused waters to flow down like rivers."

D. Jesus himself is the New Temple (and thus the source of living waters)

1. Jn. 2:21 "But he was speaking about the temple of his body."
2. This is why Jesus says he can give living water in chapter 4 (where he also stresses that worship will no longer be Temple focused, rather true worshippers must worship in spirit and truth (4:24).
 - John 4:14 "but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

E. John the disciple, interprets this living water as the outpouring of the Spirit

- Is. 44:3 "I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants."

Matthew Henry:

"Christ is the temple; he is the door; from him those living waters flow, out of his pierced side. It is by believing in him that we receive from him rivers of living water"

Christ's side was pierced and out flowed both water and blood (Jn. 19:34). This flow is what Zech. 13 talks of when a fountain is opened in that day that cleanses from sin.

Having cleansed us and given us the Spirit, Jesus ascended to heaven and left us to be his Temple on earth. We are to have the rivers of life flow from our hearts and impact others around us.

1 Peter 2:5 "you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house [temple], to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (also 1 Cor. 3:16-17 / 6:19 / Eph. 2:21-22)

F. Jesus speaks to us today [application]

1. Who
 - Anyone – whoever is thirsty
 - Universal yet personal offer
2. What
 - Come and Drink – no price required!
3. Why
 - Jesus can truly satisfy.
 - Living water will be in you as a spring – Jn. 4:14
 - It will "well up unto eternal life" – Jn. 4:14
 - It will flow out of your heart to others with the good tidings of the Gospel – Jn. 7:38

4. Consider

- Are you satisfied with a trickle of God's joyful presence when rivers are offered to you?
- Are you enjoying God and truly delighting in him as you ought? – or are you in a dry and parched land where no water is?
- Is your well stopped up? Or is there a river of life emanating from you?
 - Prov. 10:11 "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,"
 - It is not through us directly that the Spirit is mediated to others, rather we show them Christ – and they go to Christ, the true Temple and find living water directly for themselves – and then pass it on to others!
- Are you living like a tree who is "planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither" [Ps. 1:3]?
 - Ezekiel's vision shows that such stability comes because "the water for them flows from the sanctuary" – from the Temple.

Closing:

Many of us are firmly rooted in the banks of "the river of God" – we are marked by a deep gladness and a confidence in Christ. Some of us perhaps have never responded to Christ's invitation to come and drink and receive from him living waters springing up to eternal life.

Some of us find ourselves in a barren season, not experiencing the joy of God's presence.

Others of us have fallen away from the LORD and are harboring sin or bitterness. We need the life giving river to renew our Dead Sea spirits and turn us fresh again.

Perhaps we need to pray like David:

Ps. 51:12 "Restore to me the joy of your salvation"

We all can heed the invitation that Isaiah offers (and that Jesus ultimately fulfills)

Is. 55:1-3

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live."

And may we be able to take heart that God promises:

"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." (Is. 12:3)

Let us pray.

BENEDICTION:

Rev. 22:17 Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.