

Come on in, the water's fine!

Ezekiel 47:1-12 & John 7:37-39

A guided tour

Imagine you're on holiday and are offered a free guided tour of a beautiful mansion house and its grounds. You jump at the chance because this is a place you've always wanted to see. And the guide is so knowledgeable, so informative. You are shown pretty much every nook and cranny of the grounds and house. Everything you see is explained in detail. It just brings the whole thing alive. You can really imagine what it must have been like to live there.

The prophet Ezekiel (in the passage we read) was on a guided tour. A very detailed, very intricate tour of Jerusalem and the temple. But this was no ordinary tour, because the Temple had actually been destroyed fifteen years previously. Instead this was a 'virtual tour'! A vision from God of what the temple would be like and a vision from God of the worship that would occur there.

Eight chapters, nearly a fifth of the book of the prophet Ezekiel, are devoted to this vision, to this guided tour, that God gives Ezekiel of the temple and its worship. You might like to read it later. (chapters 40-48)

At the point where we join the tour this morning, Ezekiel is being shown water coming from the temple. Water that starts small but becomes deeper and deeper. A river that flows eventually into the Dead Sea.

So let's consider this river that Ezekiel was shown, flowing out of the temple. All rivers, as good geographers know, have a source, a course and a force.

Source

First of all, its source.

I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple towards the east. The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar (v1)

So in Ezekiel's vision the source of the river was under the threshold of the temple.

At this point Ezekiel must have scratched his head for a while. A river coming from the temple? Since when had there been a source of water up there on that dry pinnacle? Jerusalem had no natural river. And then he would realise. Ah of course! There never had been, and there never would be. This was a *picture* of God's Spirit. The river was the healing and life giving power of the Holy Spirit of God. (The same river that is referred to in the Revelation of St John -chapter 22- where John receives the vision of the New Jerusalem)

This water that Ezekiel saw coming from under the threshold of the temple, it was the river of God's spirit flowing from the house of God. So the source of the river was God himself.

Course

Secondly, the river's course.

This water flows towards the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the sea. (v8)

This river was heading East. It would travel through the dry, arid Jordan Valley before arriving at the Dead Sea. There's an image here of bringing refreshment to a dry and dusty area. And when it empties into the sea, the sea becomes fresh (because it neutralises the salt water).

Because this is a virtual river and Ezekiel knows, (and now we know) that there isn't a river that has this source, or indeed a river that takes this course, we can appreciate that it's a metaphor for refreshment. The course of this river is where there is desperate dryness and where refreshment is most needed. And where there is no longer life, this river will allow life to flourish. Even the 'dead' sea will be revived!

Force

Source, course, thirdly force.

As the man went eastwards with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle deep. He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross...

The river that originates in the temple as a small flow of water grows steadily deeper until 4000 cubits later (that's about 2000 metres) away it is a river deep enough to swim in.

I picture it a bit like when you go to a leisure centre swimming complex and the pool area is carefully shaped and sloped to give different depths for different people. There are toddlers splashing in the shallows, there are children playing in water that's waist high. There are serious swimmers in the deep areas. As a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, this river with varying depth allows us to be immersed as far as we can cope. There is always more depth of the Spirit to enjoy as we are able.

Jesus' offer

But now let's leave Ezekiel and fast forward 600 (ish) years. We're still in Jerusalem. There is a temple here (if you remember it was rebuilt) and it's the feast (or festival) of Tabernacles. In fact it's the last day of the feast and the priests are busy with a ceremony of pouring out

water around the altar in thanksgiving for God's blessing & in hope for the future. As this happens Jesus (who has come up to Jerusalem for the end of the feast) shouts out "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to *me* and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, *streams of living water will flow from within him.*"

Wow. What an invitation. Anyone who wants to can have life bubbling up inside them and flowing out into the world around. Anyone who believes in Jesus can have the Holy Spirit welling up in them and pouring out. Jesus, as he recalls Ezekiel's vision, is making it clear (to those who have the ears to hear) that what came from the temple of God now comes from him. He is the source. He is replacing the temple. And the Spirit will flow out of the lives of individual human beings. Men and women and young people and children.

Opportunity for refreshment

All that's great isn't it? But what does it mean for us here today? We aren't standing in Jerusalem seeing that vision that Ezekiel saw, or hearing the words that Jesus spoke. Are there streams of living water flowing out of us? Where do we stand in this river?

In a few minutes there's going to be the opportunity to ask God to fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit. The musicians are going to play quietly and if you would like come to the front there'll be people to pray with you.

The course of the river that Ezekiel saw ran through the driest places. Streams of living water running through a thoroughly arid area, bringing refreshment, bringing life and growth. If you are feeling all dried up, come and ask God for the refreshment of His Spirit this morning. Ask him to pour out his living water so that you can come back to life and to grow and flourish.

And Ezekiel's river got deeper and deeper until he had to swim. There is always more of God's spirit available. Perhaps you realise that this morning it's time to go deeper, to take another step into the river of his Spirit. Perhaps its time to lift your feet off the floor and start swimming. To duck your head under and be utterly drenched.

As we consider this I want to stress that we aren't asking God for this refreshment because it might be a nice thing to do, but because we need to be full up to overflowing, so that these streams of living water will flow from us. So that God's spirit will be evident in our lives, so that we can do the things God has called us to do. So that we can make the impact God has called us to make.

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to *me* and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, *streams of living water will flow from within him.*"

House Group Notes
Come on in, the water's fine!
(Ezekiel 47:1-12 & John 7:37-39)

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All rivers have a source, a course and a force.

Source

Look at verse 1

At this point Ezekiel must have scratched his head for a while. A river coming from the temple? Jerusalem had no natural river. And then he would realise that this was a *picture* of God's Spirit. The river was the healing and life giving power of the Holy Spirit of God. (The same river that is referred to in the Revelation of St John -chapter 22- where John receives the vision of the New Jerusalem) This water that Ezekiel saw coming from under the threshold of the temple was the river of God's spirit flowing from the house of God. So the source of the river was God himself.

Course

Look at verse 8

The river was heading East. It would travel through the dry, arid Jordan Valley before arriving at the Dead Sea. There's an image here of bringing refreshment to a dry and dusty area. And when it empties into the sea, the sea becomes fresh because it neutralises the salt water. Because this is a virtual river we can appreciate that it's a metaphor for refreshment. The course of this river is where refreshment is most needed. And where there is no longer life, this river will allow life to flourish. Even the 'dead' sea will be revived!

Force

Look at verses 3-5

The river that originates in the temple as a small flow of water grows steadily deeper until 4000 cubits later (that's about 2000 metres) away it is a river deep enough to swim in. As a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, this river with varying depth allows us to be immersed as far as we can cope. There is always more depth of the Spirit to enjoy as we are able.

Jesus' offer

But now let's leave Ezekiel and fast forward 600 years. We're still in Jerusalem. There is a temple here (it was rebuilt) and it's the last day of the feast of Tabernacles. The priests are busy with a ceremony of pouring out water around the altar in thanksgiving for God's blessing & in hope for the future. As this happens Jesus shouts out "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to *me* and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, *streams of living water will flow from within him.*" Jesus, as he recalls Ezekiel's vision, is making it clear that what came from the temple of God now comes from him. He is the source, he is replacing the temple. And the Spirit will flow out of the lives of individual human beings.

Opportunity for refreshment

Are there streams of living water flowing out of us? Where do we stand in this river?

The course of the river that Ezekiel saw ran through the driest places. Streams of living water running through a thoroughly arid area, bringing refreshment, bringing life and growth. If you are

feeling all dried up ask God for the refreshment of His Spirit. Ask him to pour out his living water so that you can come back to life and to grow and flourish.

And Ezekiel's river got deeper and deeper until he had to swim. There is always more of God's spirit available. Perhaps it's time to go deeper, to take another step into the river of his Spirit. Perhaps its time to lift your feet off the floor and start swimming, to duck your head under and be utterly drenched.

We don't ask God for this refreshment because it might be a nice thing to do, but because we need to be full up to overflowing, so that these streams of living water will flow from us. So that God's spirit will be evident in our lives, so that we can do the things God has called us to do. So that we can make the impact God has called us to make.

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For Discussion

1. Do you think a 'river' is a good metaphor for the Holy Spirit? Why/why not? What other metaphors for the Spirit do you know and find helpful?
2. Compare Ezekiel's vision with John's vision (Revelation 22:1-3). What are the similarities? What are the differences?
3. How does the Spirit bring refreshment? Share some of your experiences.
4. Now that Jesus has replaced the Temple as the way to God, and the Holy Spirit flows from believers (Jn 7: 38), what responsibilities does that place on us? How can we make sure we remain effective channels for His Spirit?
5. What does it mean to be a Spirit-filled Christian in 21st Century Lichfield?
6. Spend some time praying for one another to receive a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit