

<sup>1</sup>Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. <sup>2</sup>Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. <sup>3</sup>Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. <sup>4</sup>Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. <sup>5</sup>Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. <sup>6</sup>And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. <sup>7</sup>As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. <sup>8</sup>And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. <sup>9</sup>And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. <sup>10</sup>Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. <sup>11</sup>But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. <sup>12</sup>And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing." – Ezekiel 47:1 -12

Greetings, KCF. I love and miss you all. Thank you for your amazing generosity as always. This morning I want to bring you some devotional teaching on the Purpose of the Holy Spirit and the purpose of Church. Doubtless, you will have had many sermons on the Holy Spirit recently since it was Pentecost 2 weeks ago but I felt led by the Lord to this familiar passage in Ezekiel for you, which is a picture of the Holy Spirit. I trust that what I have to bring is what God wants you to hear right now as a fellowship. A bit of context, Ezekiel was a priest taken into exile during the first attack of Babylon on the city of Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 24:8-17). Throughout the book of Ezekiel, many of his visions are recorded and this passage above is from his last and longest vision: that of a new temple. Ezekiel then sees water flowing from the temple and it makes everything alive and fresh, bringing healing everywhere it goes. Interestingly, where it says "fresh" above in verse 8 the Hebrew word is actually healed. So, the verse actually reads this: "when the water flows into the sea, the water will be healed".

Now the entire vision of Ezekiel is hard to interpret, so to understand it we have to look at how the New Testament understands it. In John 7:37-39, Jesus is at the Jewish festival, the feast of booths or tabernacles, where they would remember how God led Israel for 40 years through the desert, providing food and water for them. Specifically, the feast would highlight how God miraculously provided water for them from the rock (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:2-13) and in the time of Jesus, they linked this provision with Ezekiel's river flowing from the temple. So, the Priests would pour gallons of water down the stairs of the temple on the last day of the feast as a way of hoping for God's promise of water; not from

a desert rock this time, but from the temple. It is as this is happening that Jesus cries 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.'" (John 7:37-38). Then John comments that Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit (v.39). Now Jesus isn't quoting any specific scripture in the Old Testament here, but he seems to be summarising many Old Testament promises at once: promises that God would pour out his Spirit on the dry and thirsty ground like water (Isaiah 44:43) for instance, and of course that God would provide refreshment for his people from the Rock again like in the wilderness and that a river will flow from the new temple that Ezekiel saw. That fact also that Jesus mentions rivers of living water seems a clear reference to Ezekiel's river too.

So, it is plain here and from other passages, that Jesus saw Ezekiel's river and therefore temple, as symbolic of the Holy Spirit flowing out of the new temple of human beings. Earlier in John's gospel in chapter 2, Jesus has already called himself the new temple. Since He is referencing Ezekiel's river here and claims that it will flow out of people, He is claiming that those who trust and believe in Him also become a new temple of God's presence like Jesus is. And this is the New Testament understanding: Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and 1 Peter 2:5 for example. And Ezekiel's river is picked up again in Revelation 22:1-2, where it flows from the Throne of God and the Lamb (Jesus). So, the Revelation passage is interpreting Ezekiel's temple as Jesus, since the river flows from the temple in Ezekiel and in Revelation the same river flows from Jesus and the Throne of God. Since, Jesus is the new temple, and we are his body, we also become the new temple, because we are in Christ, and so we share in the attributes of Christ.

Enough of Biblical interpretation now. What does God want to say through this passage in Ezekiel? Well, look at what the river does, its effects. Everywhere it goes, life sprouts and the world is healed. And Trees of life grow on either side of the river. The leaves of these trees are for healing, and the passage in Revelation quotes this and adds the words, "for the nations". The leaves bring healing for the nations. You will know that the Tree of Life was in the garden of Eden in Genesis 2. Now there is a whole forest of Life growing on either side of the river. It seems to be that Tree of Life in Genesis is a picture of the life that God gives to us – eternal life (see Genesis 3:22). And of course, Jesus in the Gospels is the one who gives us eternal life. So, Jesus is calling Himself the tree of life. And remember, the river is the Holy Spirit: wherever He goes, Trees (plural) of life sprout. So, it seems also the case that we, as followers of Jesus, the Tree of life, also become trees of life again because we are in Christ and so share in the things of Christ – and we bring healing to the nations by bringing God's presence and salvation through the Gospel to all peoples.

With all that in mind, what I believe the Lord wants to say is that the purpose of the Holy Spirit being poured out on his church is to transform the world around us, just like Ezekiel's river does. When we become followers of Christ, we become trees of life whose leaves (probably acts of love and forgiveness and bringing the Gospel ultimately) heal the nations and we become mobile temples where his presence flows out of us like a river, like Ezekiel's river, transforming the world around us, healing everything, and bringing God's life. And so, the warning for us from Scripture, is to avoid any selfish mindset of the Holy Spirit only being for me to have a "good time" or to be "blessed", or for us when we gather as church, to make us have great meetings basking in his Presence. Now of course, we can enjoy God's presence as we worship him. That is fine. But we must avoid any selfishness

creeping in, a mindset that only thinks of being blessed and measures a meeting's success by how blessed we were. This is not why the Spirit was given. The Spirit was given to US, so that WE, can bring HIM to OTHERS! We are allowed to enjoy all the blessings that the Spirit gives to us, which are so many and so precious and I personally wouldn't be anywhere without God's presence through his Spirit, but we must not think that the Spirit is given for us to have a good time – he is not, he is here to transform us so that the world may be transformed through us as his presence gushes out of us like a river. And as we live with that goal always in mind, you will all find that you will enjoy God's presence and have the best meetings ever! But they are a consequence, not the goal! Keep the goal in mind always because God's purpose is for everyone to enjoy his presence, not just you. Since we cannot physically be together right now to meet, this is the perfect time to reflect on the purpose of meeting together as the church – it should always be with the world transforming river of God's Spirit in mind, that we meet. Church is never about us or about how blessed we are when we meet – though that is indeed a consequence, so I am not downplaying that – but about building ourselves up in the Lord, being transformed by his presence, in order that the world may be transformed through us, the New Temple, the trees of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. God wants to bless all people: so yes, enjoy God's presence, enjoy and thank Him for the gift of His Holy Spirit! But remember God wants those who don't know Him yet to enjoy that gift too; so let the Holy Spirit transform you and flow through you to bring healing everywhere you go and into every situation, so that you and everyone else can enjoy being blessed by God's precious Holy Spirit.

God bless you all!

Michael.