

The River of Life

“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”

Proverbs 10:11

Ezekiel 47:1-7

John 4:1-15

John 7:37-39

Outline

Opening Prayer

1. The Importance of Water

Up to 60% of our body is made up of water

Brain and heart 73%

Lungs 83%

Skin 64%

Kidneys 79%

You have to have water to live.

2. Story about dehydration while hiking in South Dakota

3. The importance of water in the Bible

4. Scripture reading

5. The temple made new

6. What flows out reflects what lies within

7. Jesus and the Samaritan

8. Claims and standards

9. Identity in Christ

10. Fruit produced

Water is life. Without water, all organic life begins to wither and die. The human body is no different. Did you know that your body is about 60% water? Your brain and heart are made of 73% water. Lungs are 83% water, skin has 64%, and kidneys are 79% water. Without water, these vital organs and muscles start to shut down and die. A look at nature shows that water is one of the most essential needs in life. The earth is covered in it, and without water all we see is death. I have experienced dehydration many times throughout life. One time in particular could have cost me my life.

I was working in South Dakota in one of their most beautiful State Parks. Custer State Park is about a 20-minute drive from the Mount Rushmore monument. My friend and I decided to do an overnight backpacking trip on some trails we had never been on. Both of us carried a backpack weighing around 50 lbs. each, which is really heavy for a one-night backpacking trip. Most of that stuff was not necessary, and we paid the price for it dearly. Between the two of us, we had 7 liters of water for an 11-mile hike. We made it to our camp quickly with only slight grumbling about the weight. The next day was hot and humid. By the time we reached the trail head that lead back home, we had burned through all our water. With 6 miles more to go, and at least a 2,500 ft elevation change, we were hurting for water.

The muscle starts to seize uncontrollably after dehydration has really set in. Believe it or not, there is a point when you don't feel thirsty at all. We reached the mountain top and just about passed out. I still had to try to get to work by noon, so I pushed myself to keep going. My legs would cramp horribly after walking about 200 ft. I would have to stop and rest for a while before I could continue. On one of my many frequent breaks flies buzzed around me, and I am sure I looked half dead. A family stopped and asked if I was ok. They offered me much needed water and walked with me the rest of the way home. If it hadn't been for their kindness, I am not sure I would have made it off that mountain. Water breathes life into all of creation. If you don't get enough of it, your body has a way of letting you know. The Bible uses water as an analogy of God's spirit working inside us.

Throughout the Bible, water is used as a powerful analogy of life-giving change. Baptism is a sacrament that uses water as a way to represent the death of our old lives of sin and our new life in Christ. Several proverbs talk of the fear of the Lord as being like a fountain of life. In Genesis 1:2 the Spirit of God is described as hovering over the face of the waters. Water is life. The Bible uses powerful analogies of how the Spirit of God moves in us, very much like a river moves toward the sea.

In Ezekiel 47:1-12, we read about a beautiful vision Ezekiel has of the renewed temple of God. The Bible says: 'The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was trickling from the south side. As the man went eastward 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, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross. He asked me, "Son of man, do you see this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so, where the river flows everything will live. Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea. But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing' (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

After the fall of Jerusalem in 597 B.C by the Babylonians, the people of Israel were deported. They lived in exile for 70 years as punishment for their sins against God. The most shameful act the Babylonians did was destroy and loot the temple of God. This act proved without a shadow of doubt the God had left the presence of His people. The vision that Ezekiel experiences is the restoration and building of a new temple. In 539 B.C. the people of Israel were sent back by king Cyrus to rebuild the temple of God. The temple that they built was not the same one in Ezekiel's vision. Most scholars agree that the fulfillment of this vision won't occur until the end times.

Jerusalem is built on several hills. It is one of the few ancient major cities that was not built by some natural water source. This vision shows a radical issuing of a river from the temple of God. At first, Ezekiel only sees a trickle of water flowing from the threshold of the temple. His guide leads him about a third of a mile away, and has Ezekiel walk through the

ankle-deep stream. After another third of a mile, Ezekiel experiences the knee-deep water. The waters are waist deep after another third of a mile. At almost 1 ½ miles, Ezekiel can't cross the mighty river any more. Think about it. In so short a distance, the water goes from a small trickle to a mighty river. There is no such river like this on earth. The vision describes a miracle that can only come from the Lord. Remember, water is life. We can stand in awe with the people of Israel at the mighty life that God pours out from his temple.

The guide then tells Ezekiel about the living qualities of the water. The river in the vision runs into the Dead Sea. Miraculously, the river will HEAL the waters of the Dead Sea, making them fresh and inhabitable. The Dead Sea is 9.6 times saltier than the ocean. 34% of the water is salt. There is not a single fish that can live in such salty water. And yet, this vision promises that in the end times this sea will be made fresh. Some scholars argue that this vision is meant to be taken literally instead of figuratively. One problem with that interpretation is that it will take a lot more than an infusion of fresh water to make the Dead Sea inhabitable. Fresh water already flows into the Dead Sea, but because there is no place for the water to exit, large amounts of minerals are deposited into the Dead Sea. It's not hard for us to see the spiritual analogy that is being made here. Jesus himself is probably referring to this vision when he speaks to the Samaritan woman in John 4:7-10.

'A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, **“Give me a drink.”** The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, **“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”** (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food) John 4:7-10.

The gift of God is eternal life. The only way to receive that eternal life is to take and drink of the living water. We recognize that without Christ, our lives are as dead as the Dead Sea. We cannot have the Spirit of God in us without being miraculously healed. Jesus is claiming his identity as the living source of God's radical healing power. Remember, water is life. While regular water keeps our bodies from death, it cannot save our souls. Jesus is the living water that can save you. He identifies as the river flowing from the temple that brings life to the Dead Sea. God does not want you to just be healed from the spiritual death of sin, he also wants you to walk with him in faith.

Ezekiel does not just see the trickle of water and leave it at that. His guide makes him experience the might of the water. First the water is shallow, only ankle deep. Then it gets knee deep, then waist deep, and finally Ezekiel has to swim across. Our Christian lives are supposed to express the same progression in faith. God is always calling us to a deeper walk with him. Walking in ankle deep water is fine, refreshing, probably sweet, but if Ezekiel stopped there he wouldn't have experienced the awe and power of God's river. Further down the river, Ezekiel sees dozens of trees on both sides. They produce fruit of all kinds. Their leaves heal and their food is plentiful. Ezekiel's guide explicitly says that because the trees are fed by the waters from the temple, they won't wither or die. Everywhere this water goes it produces life. The Spirit of God gives physical and spiritual life. Where are you drawing your source of life from? What kind of fruit are you producing?

The miracle of this new life-giving water cannot be expressed better than Christ's sacrifice on the cross. God in the flesh had to die for all mankind, so that eternal life was made possible through the indwelling of the Spirit of God. In John 7:37-38, Jesus clearly declares this truth saying, **"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.**" Jesus is boldly claiming that the living water is faith in him. He is making a very clear connection between himself and the vision Ezekiel sees of the temple. Sin and death cannot overcome the sacrifice Jesus made. The vision Ezekiel has is completed when Jesus comes again to make all things new. It is also a challenge to current Christians to see their walk of faith mature over time and to be part of the life-giving change in their communities.

So where does this vision leave us in the 21st century? How do we receive the life-giving water and how do we grow in our walk of faith? This vision challenges us to walk in a deeper relationship with God. The more that we sacrifice our own desires for God's sake the more we walk in His truth and love. This means claiming faith that the Holy Spirit lives inside you and is turning you into a new creature of God. Like the Dead Sea, the Spirit is giving us new life. This new life is not just an internal change, but like the trees on the river bank we must heal the world with our fruit. Let's unpack how we can do that in our present day and age.

The number one way that we can externally live out the internal change in our hearts is by watching what kind of words are coming out of our mouths. Words matter. We convey meaning and create ideas with words and images. By carefully watching how we speak to others, we can get a glimpse at the state of our hearts. Proverbs 10:11 says, "The mouth of the

righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.” Do you uplift and encourage others around you? Do you speak with love and grace to strangers and loved ones alike? Or, do you curse, lie, verbally abuse, and gossip? Everyone fails with their words, but this is one of the best places to start when desiring to heal the world.

Another way to produce fruit is to find suffering and do your best to change it. This takes a lot of work. First you need to understand the suffering. You can do that by speaking to those experiencing it. Find different ways to change it. Encourage others around you to help. Then follow through with what you plan to do. There is SO much suffering in the world. You, as the church, are called to do something about the suffering in the world. Don't just wade in the ankle-deep water. God has a lot more planned for you than that. It takes faith to keep walking with Him, but I promise that if you allow God to work through you then you will see fruit.

Water is life. Just as your body needs water to live, your spirit needs Christ. The call to a deeper walk with Christ should challenge all of us to love others well. In the midst of a world grappling with climate change, COVID-19, economic recession, racial injustice and so much more, we need this water. The Church needs to stand up for the broken and hurting, produce fruit that lasts, and strive to build God's kingdom on earth. Now is not the time to stand by and wait. Inactivity will slowly kill the spirit God longs for. Find peace and security outside of your four walls and challenge your church community to live out their faith. Watch as you begin to change from the inside out. God is calling, will you answer?

If this message strikes home for you, I invite you to answer the call. If you feel the Spirit tugging on you to make a change in your life, don't ignore it. Please reach out to us and ask how you can make a difference in the lives of many. If you are not a Christian, but you want to learn more about this living water, please ask freely. There is no judgment here. We are all striving for life in this world, but a life well lived comes from drinking the living water. This is the only way we can find fulfillment and peace. Thank you so much for joining us today. I love you. God bless!