

***“The River of God’s Presence”***  
**Ezekiel 47:1 – 12**

**Introduction:**

This morning we are looking at a theme of Scripture that is absolutely imperative to disciples of the Lord Jesus. Our principle is being a people who are the precious possession of God, a people who earnestly long to experience the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit living in our lives, making us alive to God! The Scriptures teach us we are called to know Him personally and to be immersed in His presence each new day!

Jesus promised us in John 14:15 – 18 *“If you love me you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.*

And Jesus speaks that same truth again in John 14:21 when He says, *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*

I am convinced the Lord desires to dwell in the midst of His gathered people in powerful, manifest presence. He desires to come upon us in power and do His transforming work among us by His Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul wrote about the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the hearts of believers in II Corinthians 3:17, 18:

*“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

The word Paul uses for transformed in that text is the word “metamorphousthe.” It is the word from which we get our English word metamorphosis. It means “to change, transform or alter the state of being.” It is what happens when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. Its state of being is transformed from crawling worm to flying beauty! That is Paul’s powerful picture of the Spirit of God dwelling in you and me!

When the hand of the Lord breaks into human history, the presence of the River of God flows into His gathered people, things that could hide in that life are exposed and brought into the light! In the light of His presence sin is exceedingly sinful, and selfishness and self-interest we see in our lives has to go!

Throughout the Scriptures we are taught about the sacrifices people give to God. In the Old Testament sacrificial system you had the constant slaying of innocent animals to ceremonially cleanse the worshippers of their sins. In the Old Covenant God delighted in the smell of burning flesh, the animal represented God’s people being willing to face and deal with their sins. Then

you have the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world to actually become our means of eternal life, **our once and for all sacrifice as the Sacrificial Lamb of God** ... *“who takes away the sins of the world.”*

In the New Testament we have the development of a new set of sacrifices because Jesus is the sacrifice who cleanses our hearts, minds and even a guilty conscience of sins. We can offer God sacrifices of praise and our bodies as temples of the living God in which He dwells. The Scriptures speak of voluntary, freewill offerings we can bring to God from deep within us as **Sacrifices of the Heart** in which the Lord God takes great delight:

Psalm 51:7 *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart oh God, you will not despise.”*

Romans 12:1, 2 Paul urges us: *“Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, His good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

However, in the midst of the Lord desiring our hearts and delighting in the sacrifices we bring to Him **it gets really ugly when we bring Him offerings in which humanity gets in the way of what pleases Him.** There are numerous Old Testament pictures of the flesh getting in the way of what pleases God:

One illustration is the story of Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu, Leviticus 10:1-3. There we can read about two guys who thought about how wonderful it was to see the glory of God’s fire on the altar and decided they’d go about it their way to make it happen again. God delights in honoring Himself through His chosen!

Leviticus 10:1b, 2 *“and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord contrary to His command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died ...”* And in verse 3b: *“Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.”*

Another illustration is the story of Saul and his army waiting for the prophet Samuel to come to offer the sacrifices and seek the blessing of God on their military campaign at Gilgal, I Samuel 13:5 – 12. Saul took it upon himself to offer the sacrifices and proclaim the blessing to God’s great displeasure. God delights in honoring Himself among the people through those whom He has chosen! When our humanity gets in the way of offering ourselves to God, He acts to reveal it.

--I Samuel 15:30 (confronted with his sin of disobedience) *“Saul replied, I have sinned, but please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me so that I may worship the Lord your God.”*

--II Chronicles 16:9 *“For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.”*

The Lord God delighted in the smell of burning sacrifices in the Old Testament and He delights in the smell of the fleshly burning out of our hearts today! The smell of burning flesh today, is God's person in Christ Jesus being willing to deal with the fleshly nature's power to rule us.

There are far too many of God's people whose definition of sin begins and ends with "the transgression of a law." While I agree that is part of the definition there is far more to it than this. For those of us who come from a Wesleyan perspective, the definition of sin is "self-interest."

If your definition of sin is solely, "the transgression of the law" then Jesus died to forgive our transgressions and the end of His work on our behalf is to make us obedient to the law. But if you define sin or the fleshly nature as self-interest, then Jesus died to set us free from our propensity to selfish behaviors, seeking honor among people, self-defense when we are hurt. And it follows that only Christians can deal with sinful self-interest righteously!

Our passage found in Ezekiel 47 is taken from a prophetic section of the book, the prophet has written while in the throws of exile and stark punishment. The Lord permits Ezekiel see the near future and in a panoramic view the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are prophetic word pictures here for 70 years and 700 years and 2500 years!

### **I. The River of God as a Metaphor:**

In the Old Covenant the river of God symbolized the absolute **wonder of the children of Israel dwelling in the very presence of God. The river of God was symbolic of His Shekinah glory.** It was manifested on the earth as the Spirit of God who dwelt in the fire and blasts of Mount Sinai, the fiery bush before Moses. He was the pillar of fire and cloud over the tabernacle and the smoke of His glory that filled the temple in Jerusalem so that the priests couldn't do their priestly duties.

He was the water from the rock in the wilderness... He was the stream from which David drank in the Psalms... He was the presence and provisions of God around and upon people!

Psalm 36:7 – 9 *"How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. **They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.**"*

**In the New Covenant the River of God represents the Holy Spirit of God who not only dwells around and upon people moving them to do specific tasks but also dwells in the hearts of people as present person who empowers them for life and service:**

He came upon Jesus in the form of a dove ... He came upon and filled the disciples in small pillars of fire, who empowered them for service and witness and enabled them to turn the whole world upside down ... He is the promised Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts to ignite us in passion to walk with God, to give us counsel and direction, to convict us and to make the ministry and provisions of Jesus Christ real. He is the presence of God who inspired the Word of God and makes it come alive in us.

A really tremendous word in Ezekiel's prophecy is found in 47:1 *"The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east).*

Notice this powerful truth with me: **The River flows from the heart of God through the temple.** In Ezekiel's day the temple was a building but today, **the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit.** This river is a metaphor for the Spirit of God flowing through us like a mighty life-giving stream!

John 7:37 – 39 *"Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me as Scriptures has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.'"*

To our Lord Jesus Christ the river of God was a metaphor He used to speak about the presence of the person of God's Holy Spirit dwelling in and flowing from our hearts as the children of God. *"Whoever believes in me as Scripture has said, streams of living water flow from within him."* The point is that He is a powerful provision of God in our hearts and lives and we get the incredible privilege of being containers He can flow from to touch the lives of other people!

An excellent illustration of what a life looks like before the presence and the power of God flows into and out a life like streams of living water, is Peter pre-Pentecost Day, as compared to Peter post-Pentecost Day. Before the presence of the Spirit lived in him in power he backed away from even knowing Jesus before a servant girl. But after he was filled with the River of God's presence on Pentecost Day he stood and fearlessly, courageously preached Jesus to the very people who had demanded Jesus' death!

## **II. Ezekiel's Vision:**

There are several things about Ezekiel's vision that are just tremendous word pictures about how the presence of God in the form of His Holy Spirit works and moves in the lives of His people in the kingdom of our God and His Christ.

**FIRST – Notice that the River God flows from the Temple of the Lord:** (in the New Testament, every Christian who has been born of God) flowed down through arid places and flowed into the Dead Sea . The word picture here is of fresh, precious life giving water flowing into that which was so salty and unusable that it didn't support much life at all. The word picture is of the Holy Spirit through a believer of Jesus – A TEMPLE OF GOD'S SPIRIT!

**SECOND - Notice what the River of God's Holy Presence does when it enters the Dead Sea:** verses 8b, 9, 12a. *"When it empties into the Sea the 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... 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, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them" .*

**This RIVER OF GOD flowing from the little temples of the Spirit gives Life to every heart that it touches. The river of God produces fruit. The Holy Spirit in the human heart as we surrender to Him produces the life of Jesus Christ in us and the fruit of His presence love, joy, peace . . . .**

Please notice another key issue here is that **Ezekiel had to follow God out into the waters of the River of God!** For the children of Israel, the river represented a clear transition, into something better in God. When they went through the river with God it represented a place of deeper intimacy with Him, dwelling with Him in the land of His provisions. But they had to go through the river, like Ezekiel had to follow God out into the River of His presence.

**This beautiful picture really represents a word to our hearts about stages of surrender of the believer's heart:**

The first thousand cubits the water was **ankle deep** – Ezekiel's feet were immersed in the water. This represents where he decided to go. The word picture is we must at a primary level **surrender our ways and embrace His ways**, how I will chose to walk my life's path! God delights in people who seek His face and choose His ways. From my perspective, as a fellow journeyman on life's pathway, the people who inhabit the church in Pennsylvania tend to have a great deal of **pride in the way we serve the Lord** and have done so for generations! Pride and surrendering deeply are really antithetical issues!

The second thousand cubits the water was **knee deep** – Ezekiel's knees were immersed in the water. This represents his will, which must be surrendered deeply to God. That to which he bends his knees owns his will. The word picture is that at a secondary level I must decide to **surrender my will for my life and embrace His will for my life**.

The third thousand cubits the water was **waist deep** – Ezekiel's trunk and legs were immersed in the water. This represented the most powerful part of his body. The word picture is at a deeper level we must decided to **love the Lord supremely and surrender to Him our strength**, all that we have to offer Him for use in His kingdom.

The fourth thousand cubits the **water flowed over his head** – Ezekiel couldn't stand and keep his head above the water, because it was a river no man could cross. Ezekiel was immersed. This represented the river flowing over him and he was no longer able to handle the flow in his humanness. The word picture is at the deepest level, I must choose to surrender all of me, including my mind, thought-processes to allow the Spirit to teach my spirit according to the Word of God which He authored. One of His primary roles is to illuminate God's Word to us!

**The real question is this: What do we do in a natural river when we can't swim, walk, stand or cross it? We drown. But this is a River of Life, and when you drown you in a River of Life only what shouldn't have been there all along is dead!**

**What do we do in the River of God when it is overwhelming us as He deals with things in us that should not be there? We surrender to His presence, power, leadership and in the process of that surrender we learn what it means to live to Him in His river of life!**

The River of God's presence was much bigger, deeper, and more powerful than the prophet Ezekiel could have thought or understood. When it comes to the supernatural presence of Almighty God dwelling in us, it is best to love him passionately and choose to stay surrendered to Him deeply. Living with The Spirit of Jesus in life is a wonderful journey as the Holy Spirit reveals more and more of His heart and desires to us!

### **III. LIVING IMMERSED IN THE RIVER OF GOD**

I need to bring three truths to bear in relation to this choosing to live immersed in the Holy Spirit of the living God, the RIVER OF GOD.

**FIRST choose to live abandoned to His Presence and Provisions.** He is awesome, living, active and all-powerful Lord God and when it is all stripped away He is more than enough to keep, protect and make my life an abundant, joyous trip!

By withholding myself and only attempting for God what I am pretty sure I can manage I miss the blessing of watching Him do in me what I cannot do but He will do! There's a crucial question this brings to mind. **Why would any man or woman of God do anything for a lifetime he or she can do?**

**SECOND what the River of God touches becomes fresh and alive!** The Holy Spirit receives my gift of a surrendered heart and life. He impassions me, makes me new inside and gives me a life to live I couldn't know apart from Him!

**THIRD the RIVER OF GOD is the Power of God flowing from His living sanctuaries . . . .** Jesus said, "*streams of living water shall flow from within him. By this He meant the Holy Spirit whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.*" We get the indescribably awesome joy and privilege of cooperating with the Holy Spirit to be a vessel, a vehicle of His presence through which He flows to others, in the mighty Name of Jesus Christ our Lord advancing His kingdom on earth!

**FOURTH notice with me the River of God flows downward,** painting a picture for us regarding how the water of His presence flows from the throne of God. **In the natural realm water flows downward, along the path of least resistance, to the lowly places.** What picture of the kind of human heart and soul into which God would manifest His presence. When God desires to do a new thing in us and we resist Him the water of His presence is not flowing as He would desire.

Ezekiel 47:12 is an awesome word of prophecy to us as potential little river beds: "*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, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.*"

Jesus said, "*I have appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that remains.*" This prophetically speaks to us about being people who receive His Holy Spirit, choose to stay immersed in Him and who are used in the lives of others to give life in Jesus, the deep healing of His presence as He ministers to the hurts and heartaches of life, gives us forgiveness of sins and healing of soul!

**Concluding Questions:**

How deeply have I decided to wade out into the River of His presence in my life?  
Where am I presently walking in my desire to see the presence of God dwell in my life,  
transform me, and enable me to help others to meet Jesus?

ANKLES ... my ways given up for His Ways ... KNEES ... my will surrendered to His will  
...WAIST ... my strengths give to Him ... HEAD ... immersed in Him, under His control?

October 28, 2018 AM

**“The River of God’s Presence”**

**Ezekiel 47:1-12**

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We are studying being immersed in God’s Presence: John 14:15-18, 21

The sacrifices people brought in the old covenant and the sacrifices of Jesus

Bringing God the sacrifices of our hearts? : Psalm 51:7 and Roman 12:1-2

When our humanity gets in the way

Aaron’s sons

Saul and his army

**I. The River of God as a Metaphor**

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In the Old Covenant

In the New Covenant

The river flows from the heart of God through the Temple

II. **Ezekiel's Vision**

The River flows from the Temple

Notice what the River does to the Red Sea

Ankle Deep

Knee Deep

Overhead

II. **Immersed in the River**

1.

2.

3.

4.

## **Discussion Starter Questions for Home Groups**

- 1. The Lord Jesus promised His followers they would receive the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. What do you think He was preparing them for this experience?**
- 2. What are some of the ways the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts transforms us, changes us?**
- 3. What do you think is on Paul's heart and mind when he tells the Corinthian believers the Holy Spirit dwelling in their lives will transform them?**
- 4. Why do you think people are so often pictured in the Bible as making sacrifices to God that are completely unacceptable to God? What is behind the issue of "taking one's own way to sacrifice to God?"**
- 5. Why is it important for us to understand the truth that sin is not merely transgression a known law, but is also the wired in "self-interest" in our hearts?**
- 6. When we experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit it is analogous to a river of life flowing into us? Why do you think Jesus used that picture for us?**
- 7. Which one of the four depths of surrender spoke to you more personally and deeply? Why?**
- 8. The river of life picture teaches us the Holy Spirit cleanses us, makes us alive to God and His truth, and makes us living sanctuaries of God. Do you think most Christians today understand this truth?**
- 9. Read together aloud II Corinthians 3:7 – 18 and discuss insights you have regarding how God transforms our hearts over time.**
- 10. What are some ways the Lord God spoke to your own heart as you heard the message on the river of life flowing into and through us to others? In what ways is the Lord God at work in you transforming you by His presence? Can you share your thoughts with your home group members?**