

LESSONS FROM THE END OF THE AGE

DEEP AND WIDE

EZEKIEL 47:1-12

If you attended a Southern church as a child you know a familiar tune. It was a Sunday School favorite.

It's called "Deep And Wide." It even has hand motions. Remember the lyrics, "deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide."

Just be glad I didn't try and sing it...

I bring up the song because that's what I've entitled my message today, "Deep And Wide." If you'd turn in your Bibles to Ezekiel 47... We'll read verses 1-12...

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar.

He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side. And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist.

Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed. He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?"

Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other.

Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes.

It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt.

Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine."

The Barnum and Bailey Circus once had an exhibit called "[The Happy Family](#)." A cage featured lions, tigers, panthers - all squatted around a little lamb. The fierce predators seemed at harmony with the lamb.

One day, PT Barnum was showing off his exhibit.

Someone asked him, *"Do you ever have any problems with this strange mixture of animals?"* Barnum replied, "Oh, never, apart from replenishing the lamb every now and then, they get along just fine."

So much for *"The Happy Family."* As much as we'd like it to be true - *that everyone just gets along* - in this world it's not. Predators exist among animals and men.

But one day Jesus will return and end the hostility caused by man's sin. He'll usher in an age of peace.

We're told in Isaiah 11:6-9, *"The wolf... shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat... the nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the Earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD."* What an amazing time. The conflict boiling over in our world today, will be a distant memory.

Understand, God's redemption will not be complete until all that sin has twisted is restored. One day, all that sin has *soiled* will be cleansed of its *stain*...

Romans 8:22 puts it this way, *"For the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."*

Right now the creation groans over sin's effects.

When the trees creak, and the frogs croak they do so in a melancholy tune... Julie Andrews sings, *"The hills are alive with the sound of music."* Yet sadly, they sing in a minor key... All of nature knows things are not as they should be - not as God meant for them to be.

But one day Jesus will remove the curse of sin!

The Bible teaches that on a day yet future, Jesus will return. He'll defeat His enemies, establish His kingdom in Israel and around the world, and launch an age of peace and prosperity that will last for a thousand years.

At that time, Jesus will roll back sin's curse on nature. The world and all its ecosystems will morph.

Pollution will vanish. The oceans and ozone will be repaired. When Jesus sits on the throne - wolf and lamb, man and animal - will live as a big happy family.

Once, a woman bragged to her pastor that she had a one-way ticket to heaven! The pastor replied, "If that's the case, you're going to miss a lot. I have a round-trip ticket." When we depart Earth via undertaker or rapture, it's not for the last time. We're coming again...

Jude 14 tells us about Jesus' second coming. "The Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints." And if you know Jesus you'll be one of this army of saints!

The Bible teaches when Jesus returns to take over this Earth, He won't come alone. You and I will be by His side. We'll be commissioned to rule with Him.

In that day the Lord will usher in a golden age - a *Shangri-La*. He'll put an end to sin and all its tragic consequences. Jesus has saved our soul, but He'll also save the Earth. He'll restore the polluted planet to a Garden of Eden - and you and I will help Him govern.

This is what Ezekiel 47 is about. Ezekiel foresees an environmental miracle! He looks ahead to the Kingdom Age... in the land of Israel... at the future Temple in Jerusalem... and he describes his vision in verse 1...

“Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east...” Now, whenever I read this, my first reaction it is not a pleasant one. I squirm.

For on a couple of occasions we have come up to the doors of our church, and noticed water flowing from under the threshold... *and it was not a good thing!*

Once a toilet got stuck and overflowed... Another time the ice maker sprung a leak... Still another time gutters clogged and a few classrooms flooded...

And I would imagine for folks who've just endured a hurricane, water under the threshold is not a good sign for the pastor who comes to the doors of the church!

Not so though, for Ezekiel... When He sees water seeping out from under the threshold of the Temple he gets excited... The Middle East is a region of the world rich in oil, but sparse in water. Any trickle is a blessing.

And this is especially true in and around Jerusalem.

Most Israeli cities have public fountains and pools, but not Jerusalem. There, water is a scare resource.

Have you noticed, large urban areas are almost always located on a river... *Babel was built on the Euphrates River...*

Cairo on the Nile... London on the Thames... Rome on the Tiber... Atlanta on the Hooch.

But Jerusalem has no river! In ancient times its chief water supply was a spring. The Gihon Spring feeds the pool of Siloam. When we go to Jerusalem and walk up Hezekiah's Tunnel its water-flow is the Gihon Spring.

Here, what the Prophet Ezekiel sees is a new subterranean spring on the Temple Mount. It's bubbling up from the Holy Place, flowing *south of the altar*. Pure, fresh spring water is rising up near the altar of God.

And Ezekiel notices the further this water *flows* the deeper and wider it *grows*. He's escorted into the stream. He and his tour guide *go with the flow*. Ezekiel jumps in and wades in the direction of the current.

He walks 1000 cubits downstream... Realize, a Babylonian cubit was about 21 inches - thus, 1000 of them, would be 1,750 feet, or 583 yards - *or put in terms the men will understand, nearly 6 football fields*.

Ezekiel is standing in water ankle-deep, splashing with his sandals... *Cool water feels good on a hot day*.

But then he wades another 1000 cubits downstream.

He's now off the Temple Mount and he's standing in the middle of the Kidron Valley. The water level is now up to his knees... *He's still having fun wading through the current. The stream is like a gentle brook.*

Ezekiel and his guide then go another 1000 cubits southward. He's now 3000 cubits, or a mile downstream. Now the water is up to Ezekiel's waste...

He's tucked his robe up under his belt just to wade in the water. The current is getting stronger and faster.

Finally, Ezekiel moves another 1000 cubits south.

And now, 4000 cubits from its source, what was once a trickle, has become a full-fledged river... *The Prophet Ezekiel is now in over his head.* The powerful river is too swift to swim, and too wide to cross. Ezekiel has to get out of the water, and walk along the riverbank.

And there he makes another startling discovery...

The water is so clean and pure its banks have sprouted groves of various trees. This river is a source of nourishment. It helps to spawn foliage and fruit.

Verse 12 says the leaves on these trees never wither. Their fruit never fails. These are fruit trees that never go dormant. They blossom with new fruit every month. The river makes them continually productive.

Even the leaves on these trees are useful - *they contain healing ingredients.* Rather than take medicine, people just eat leaves from these trees. Imagine, needing a prescription filled, and rather than go to the pharmacy, all you have to do is order off the salad bar.

Ezekiel follows this river another 40 miles to its ultimate end... *From a spring by the altar - to a trickle in the temple - to a creek through the Valley - now a river in the desert - it finally dumps into the Dead Sea.*

And there another miracle takes place. The saline depths of the Salt Sea are healed - it springs with life.

Realize, the tap water from your faucet contains 1% salt. When you go to the beach you swim in ocean water that's about 7% salt. The Great Salt Lake in Utah is about 12% salt. But the Dead Sea is 33% salt...

That's five times saltier than the ocean. Salt crystals form a white foam that sits on the surface of the sea.

When you swim in the Dead Sea the water is heavier than your body - which makes it impossible for you to sink. You don't have to tread water. You can lay down and read the newspaper. The salty water holds you up.

And it's this enormous salt content that makes the Dead Sea dead. Nothing can live in its waters. No animals drink from the sea. No fish swim under the surface. The Dead Sea is the ultimate dead end.

Yet when the water from the Temple reaches the headwaters of the Dead Sea *a healing* will take place.

The lethal salt gets neutralized. The river that flows from God's house purifies the Sea's poisonous waters.

Notice, from *En Gedi*, the wonderful oasis on the northwest shore... to *En Eglaim*, which is today a dried up spring on its south shore... what was once *a dead sea* will teem with life! Fishermen will cast in their nets!

We're told in verse 10, *"Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many."*

The “*Great Sea*” is the Mediterranean. Imagine, the Dead Sea will become a fisherman’s paradise.

The same genre of fish that today are in the ocean of the Mediterranean, you’ll find in its waters. *Chartered fishing excursions will be operating on the Dead Sea!*

Notice the amazing promise in verse 9, “*Everything will live wherever the river goes.*” **Whatever God’s river touches gets healed!** It’s a curative tonic. Every putrid pond, and every cesspool, and every stagnant eddy into which this water seeps will be transformed.

And this is just a small glimpse of the incredible transformations that take place all over the world when Jesus rules the Earth from His throne in Jerusalem.

If Jesus is able to heal the waters of the Dead Sea, cleaning up an oil spill in the Gulf will be no problem!

Ezekiel 47 teaches that one day there’ll be a little bit of heaven everywhere on Earth. The planet will be a garden - the whole world will be a tropical paradise!

And let me suggest, what we see happening in Ezekiel 47 isn’t just fulfilled in *the end of time*...

I believe it occurs *anytime* Jesus is allowed to sit on the throne - even the throne of a person’s heart.

What will *one day* occur on planet Earth can take place *today* in the spiritual life of a person who surrenders the crown and course of their life to Jesus!

To me, this end times river is analogous to God’s influence in a believer’s life. Jesus promised us in John 7:37-38, “If

anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

When I surrender the reigns of my life to Jesus - and give Him all my heart - *a love, peace, joy, energy, power* bubbles up in me. A spiritual current of life-giving vitality flows into areas of my life that were salty and dead. As the living water flows transformation occurs...

There's a story that's told from Joe Montana's college days at Notre Dame. The famous quarterback took a course, "Introduction to the New Testament."

In fact, this class was popular among the football players - not because they were particularly interested in the Bible - but because its tired, old professor always gave the same, one question final exam, "Trace and discuss the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul..."

A good answer earned you an easy "A."

Well, when it came time to take the exam everyone was shocked when they turned over the test and it had a different question, "Offer a critical analysis of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount." A sigh went up from the room.

No one had prepared for this question... But Joe noticed one of his lineman scribbling feverishly... Later, his teammate bragged that he'd gotten a B+. Joe asked him how he answered the surprise question...

The fellow said, “Well Joe, when I saw he wanted a critical analysis of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, I wrote, ‘*Who am I to criticize the words of the Master?*’

But, I do have something to say about the journeys of the Apostle Paul.’ Then I wrote what I’d prepared.”

And I could say to you this morning, “*Well Joe, when you stop criticizing the Master, and allow Jesus to call the shots in your life, a river of spiritual life, power, and healing will begin to flow from deep within your heart.*”

With the time I have left, I want to examine how this future river spoken of in Ezekiel 47 acts like the living water of God’s Spirit that flows and transforms us...

There’re **three points** I want us to consider... **how it spreads, what it spawns, and where it starts.** *Three “S”s - how it spreads, what it spawns, where it starts...*

For as soon as a person surrenders their life to Jesus (*I mean really turns over control to Jesus*), and invites Him to take the helm of their heart, a spigot turns on inside. God’s river surges in that person.

As the river in Ezekiel 47 bubbled up in the Temple, a river of spiritual influence springs up in a believer!

And notice first, **how this river spreads.**

It begins as mere *seepage* - turns into a *trickle* - then into a *stream* - then into a *creek* - then into a *mighty river*. In essence, it builds gradually and incrementally.

It widens and deepens as it flows. As we sang as kids, “*there’s a fountain flowing deeper and wider.*”

When you first jump into the Christian life the living water is fun. It's like a trip to the water park. It's like splashing in cool water on a hot summer's day.

The word is "*relief!*" Your sins are forgiven. The guilt is gone. The anvil you'd been lugging around rolls off your shoulders. You're given a new lease on life.

But as you go with the flow that initial euphoric experience deepens and widens. It's like Ezekiel's experience... as he waded further and further into the river, the current got stronger - the flow got deeper.

Finally, Ezekiel was submerged - *in over his head!*

And likewise, the further you go with God the more profound - the heavier the experience becomes.

The longer I stand at the foot of the cross the more I realize what it cost my Lord to earn my forgiveness. An appreciation grows that grips my allegiance... I realize, Jesus is not just *my Savior*, He's also *my Lord*.

His ways and will are best. I want His influence and input to permeate more and more of my thinking...

In time, I even develop a desire to serve Him. My life begins to turn in directions that will count for God.

Talk to missionaries who've made huge sacrifices to follow Jesus, and they'll confirm it didn't happen overnight. When they began with God they had no idea where their path would take them. They were just happy to be forgiven. They got in the flow, and by faith it carried them places they never thought they'd go...

But it's this incremental progress that becomes a stumbling block for some folks... They want to start from the high dive - get into the pool at the deep end.

They're determined to be a spiritual giant from the start... It's a prideful attitude really, *"If I can't be the greatest Christian ever, I just won't be one."* Some people view being a Christian as self-achievement - as *mastering* a lifestyle, rather than following *the Master*.

The truth is, God makes us all get into the pool at the shallow end... *where we can learn to swim correctly.*

This is why humility is a prerequisite for becoming a Christian. You begin by dismounting your high horse, and humbling yourself. You embrace *"little child status."*

Realize, when *you begin* anything you do so as *a beginner*. Whether it's playing golf, or woodworking, or stock investing, or being a Christian. There's no need to be embarrassed by it... *you're just a beginner.*

None of us starts out our Christian life with instant maturity. We were all a novice at one time.

Nobody becomes a Christian, and presto *he knows all the books of the Bible instantly, and can quote Scriptures, and teach Bible Studies.* You get in the river at once, but going deeper requires you to wade further.

Ezekiel started out **ankle-deep**, then found himself **knee-deep**, then **waist-deep**, then he got **in over his head**. *But the important thing was that he started!* He stepped in. He trusted the river, and went with the flow.

Downstream the water got *deeper* and *wider*...

And Christian experience always **deepens** as you go. It starts with a desire for God's forgiveness and His blessing, but it ultimately changes my character!

It also **widens** as you go... it starts as a personal interest for me and my needs, but eventually broadens into a burden for others - perhaps even a whole world.

It reminds me of the bank robber who hit the same bank three times. When the police interviewed one of the tellers, they asked if she noticed anything different about the man. She answered, "Well yes, each time he robbed us he seemed to be a little better dressed."

Obviously, the robber was gaining some momentum. He was moving forward in his chosen line of work.

And this is what happens to you when you continue on with God. The current gets deeper and wider.

You get caught up in the momentum.

It grows stronger - sins you once overlooked bother you now. Your life grows purer and holier. You too, become better dressed spiritually as you go... You no longer care only about yourself, you start seeing other people's needs... It's amazing, **how the river spreads!**

But it's also interesting **what this river spawns.**

In Ezekiel's vision trees grow up along its banks that sprout fruit. There's even healing in their leaves.

And when the river mixes with the stagnant waters of the Dead Sea, *God's river wins*. It neutralizes the poison, and

stimulates life. The living water allows fish to hatch, and animals to drink. It's a source of life.

What does this river spawn? In a word it produces **healing**. And this is also what the river of God brings to our hearts... The river of God's Spirit brings *healing*.

I'm sure you've noticed, this world is a cold, cruel place. It's a minefield armed with emotional bombshells that hurt us and harm us. *Oh, the disappointments, the heartaches, the losses, the pain, the setbacks...*

How many of you have ever wondered if the enemy had slipped in and secretly booby-trapped your life?

But whatever this river of God now touches, it heals!
It neutralizes the acidic. The trees that are watered by this river have healing properties in their leaves.

While on Earth, Jesus' ministry was characterized by numerous and incredible remedies. The river flowed with healing then, and it flows with healing today.

In Luke 4 Jesus tells us why the Father sent Him into the world, **"He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted."**

When the life-giving water of God begins to bubble up in your life it slowly but steadily washes over open wounds. It neutralizes the bitterness - the hatred - the pride that kept those wounds infected. It now irrigates irritated areas, and siphons off the emotional mucous that kept you from healing. The river of the Spirit brings healing wherever it flows and to whatever it touches.

Let me just say, this is what's needed in our country today. The racial tensions that exist are eating us up.

After all the progress that's been made politically: *civil rights legislation, even two terms of an African-American president* - still no one trusts each other.

Let me say, only Jesus can bring the healing we need. As long as we're *black* and *white* nothing will change. We need to be *new creations* - "*a third race*" the Bible calls us. We need to be *a new man in Christ*.

This is how we should see ourselves and each other.

Here's what happens to *people who are lost without Jesus...* Stuff goes on outside their life - they trip and fall - they're slammed and let down - they're victimized.

And this is the same stuff that happens to Christians.

We live in the same world with the same heartaches, *but there's a difference...* Stuff still happens *to me*, but now there's stuff going on *in me* - *to encourage me, to strengthen me*. I am not a stagnant pool any more.

My life is being irrigated by God's river of spiritual life, and it's that river that keeps the healing flowing...

If you've been hurt, *even deeply so...*

If you gave your love to a person who then dumped you... If you gave years of hard work and productivity to a company that's now dumped you... If you gave your best efforts to a ungrateful child that's sadly dumped you... If you just feel dumped on, and rejected, and pained - *you need to get to the river...*

You need to splash and be baptized in God's river!

Old people can jump in! Teenagers can jump in! Even married folks can jump in! *Just get in the river!*

Trust me, the river of God's Spirit is powerful. And this river can't be explained... it carries miracle cures!

When it collides with the salty water of doubt, and fear, and depression, and failure, and hatred, and prejudice it strips sin's saltiness of its power.

It answers doubts, and calms fears, and strengthens weaknesses, and stirs love. It cancels out the *rejection of people* with the overwhelming *acceptance of God*.

Notice again verse 11, *"But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt."*

If you've ever been to a swamp or a marsh you know the water just sits there stagnant. Scum festers on the surface. Bugs and flies circle over the top of the water.

And if we're honest we'll admit there are some swampy and marshy areas in our lives that remain sinful, and poisoned, and dead. We've become selfish and self-serving in a relationship - or we've held on to a nasty habit - or we've harbored an ugly bitterness...

Is there an area of your life that's a spiritual swamp? It's the *scummy* part of your life. And it really *bugs* you.

Well, it's happened for one simple reason... *you've set up barriers that keep the river from flowing into that area* - *levies of pride, dams of selfishness, sandbags of stubbornness* are blocking the river from flowing...

You need to tear down those barriers today, and let the river invade those swampy places.

I repeat, wherever the river flows it brings healing!

It's amazing, the river Ezekiel sees in this chapter... [how it spreads, what it spawns](#) - and [where it starts](#).

Remember, Ezekiel first saw the water bubbling up under the threshold of the Temple - **right by the altar!**

If the Prophet had tried to jump into the river further downstream he may've drowned. But Ezekiel took that first step of faith *in the Temple - right next to the altar.*

The river of God flows through all of life - it fills up the valleys, it flows through the desert, it pours into the Sea - but it always starts in the Temple, *at the altar.*

And this is where each of us have to go to begin with God. We come to God on His own terms - *on His turf.*

In a sense, God will meet you anywhere... *at the swimming pool or the pool hall... in the boardroom or at the boardwalk... in the bakery or in the factory...* but wherever it is that God meets you He always brings you back to one place - *the beginning place - the altar.*

If you had actually visited the former Jerusalem Temple the altar would've been your *least* favorite spot.

You would've loved the inner courts...

Especially, the Ark of the Covenant - the glory of God hovered over the Ark... And the table of incense - it gave off a fragrant smell... And the golden lamp stands were a work of

art. Oh, we all would've admired those lamp stands! But the altar - *that was the bloody place!*

That's where the sacrifices were offered.

At the altar you would've seen the innocent lamb bleating as the priest grabbed its woolly neck, and slit its throat. You would've heard the animal screech, and then moan in agony, and exhale a final, guttural gasp.

Nobody ever liked being taken to the altar... but in this new, still future Temple, it's where the river starts!

Today, the altar of God is not an altar in a Temple.

It's not the front of a church, though often we refer to it as such. Today, the altar of God is the cross of Jesus.

That's where the blood was shed, and the price was paid. At Calvary's cross my sin, and your sin, were laid on Jesus' sinless shoulders. At His cross Jesus paid our penalty and earned for us a permanent pardon.

A famous photo snapped by journalist George Strock features three dead American soldiers on Buna Beach in New Guinea. This particular photo has since been titled, "[The Photograph That Won World War II.](#)"

It was taken 18 months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and though tens of thousands of our fighting men had already died in battle, not a single photograph of a fallen American soldier had been put into print.

But in September 1943 the government relented and gave in to Life magazine's insistence. They sensed the civilian

commitment to the war was waning, and the public needed to be reminded of the urgency of victory.

This image made the conflict real, and relit a spark in America to do all we could to support the war effort.

And this is why the Christian life really begins at the cross. For that's where **we see** - we behold our need, the severity of our sin - and the depths of God's love.

That's where our hearts learn to *love Jesus* and learn to *love other people* with a sense of urgency.

When you put a boat into a lake you need a ramp - a *launching point*. And the same is true for us spiritually.

This is why for us the river begins *at the altar*.

There's no other way. There's no other entry point. The cross is *the getting in place* for God's mighty river.

Shun, or scoff, or ignore the cross of Jesus and your life will stay swampland. It'll remain bland, and boring, and stagnant, and polluted, and terribly infected.

If you don't begin at the altar you'll never know the flow of God's love, and healing, and forgiveness.

There is a fountain flowing deep and wide, but today it flows from the wounded side of Jesus. It all starts - the healing bubbles up - at the altar of the cross.

If you want to go wading in the life-giving river of the Spirit of God - if you want God's influence and healing to spread deeper and wider *in your life* and *in your world* - then it starts on your knees, next to the altar.

All the miracles God will ever do in and through your life were paid for and originate at the cross of Jesus.

You'll never be gloriously over your head - drowning in God's love - if you don't humbly get in at the cross.

This morning I want to offer two invitations...

If you've never stepped into the miracle flow of God's life-giving river, I pray you'll do so today!...

And if there's a swampy, infected area in your life, I trust you'll tear down whatever pride, or fear, or doubt there is that's blocking the river from flowing to you...

For 2000 years God's river has brought healing wherever it flows. I hope you'll see for yourself! Trust God - jump in - go with the flow! "Deep and wide, deep and wide... there's a fountain flowing deep and wide."