

OVERFLOWING

SERIES: KNOWING THE GOD OF
JUSTICE AND HOPE



Catalog No. 20171217
Ezekiel 47:1-12
Final Message
Paul Taylor
December 17, 2017

Ezekiel 47:1-12

Several years ago I had a sabbatical from my role at the church. I spent most of that time away from the area in a combination of studying and visiting family. When my family and I finally returned to our home, we had been away for over six weeks. It was so great to arrive in front of our home and look forward to getting settled back in our own place. Everyone was thrilled to be home

But then we walked inside the house. After a few seconds, someone asked, "What is that sound? It sounds like water." It was. Water was flowing or rather spewing from the hookup behind our washing machine. There was water all over the floor of our hall and going into two of our bedrooms.

Our grand return home turned out not to be so grand. It was four months before all of the repair and restoration was completed. Then we finally were able to be fully home again.

Water is a funny thing. We need it. But it's also dangerous. In recent times, we've seen desperate times of not enough water like the drought in California. And we've seen terrible times of too much water like the hurricanes of the past season.

Today we'll see water at its best. In fact, it will be better than any kind of water we've ever experienced.

This is our last week of fourteen weeks studying the book of Ezekiel. We called this series *Knowing the God of Justice and Hope* because almost everything in this book is attributed to the goal of knowing God. It's been fun and challenging for me to see how these words are so relevant to me today. I hope you have a sense of knowing the fullness of God better from the book of Ezekiel.

This book began with a vision of God arriving to his people in exile. Then we heard about judgment on God's people. Then judgment on the nations around them. Then a description of how God will restore his people. That restoration reaches its climax in the last eight chapters of the book which are focused on the

new temple of God. There are architectural plans for the temple, details about furnishing, and instructions for how to worship.

Last week we saw the glory of God enter the temple. God's presence would return to once again dwell amidst his people. Today we'll see what happens when God's presence fills a place. It doesn't stay there. It overflows. Today we'll see the presence of God overflowing.

When we came home from sabbatical, we found a stream of water where we didn't expect it. This morning, we'll see Ezekiel discover the same thing. But where the water in our house was destructive, the water we see this morning will be very different. There will be two strange things about this water. Two ways that this water doesn't act like water is supposed to act.

When my wife and I lived in Texas with little children, the neighborhood water park was the place to go during the summer. Tubes spouting water, wheels spinning with water coming out of them, splash zones and wading pools. You'd do anything to get wet. And on a hot day, you'd see kids in that water and the only word that could describe them would be joyful.

It fits then that this is the third Sunday of Advent and we're also talking about joy. The water that we'll see this morning is the kind that brings joy. Like cold water on a hot day. A refreshing drink for a parched mouth. Splashing, laughing, refreshing, healing joy.

Don't we need this kind of a message in our world today? Doesn't it sound nice to lay aside the burdens of our nation and our world and our busy, frenetic lives and just splash in the water?

We'll watch as God promises to bring increase in a world where everything decreases. We'll watch as God promises to bring life to a place where there is only death. And we'll see how he intends for his Spirit to be a source of joy in his people that overflows to a world parched with thirst.

We'll see how we can have joy. We'll see how we can bring joy to the world. Let's look at Ezekiel 47.

Overflowing water

During these last eight chapters, Ezekiel is being led on a tour of the new temple by a heavenly guide. Read what happens when Ezekiel sees water coming out of the temple.

Ezekiel 47:1-5:

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. 2 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.

3 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. 4 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. 5 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.

Ezekiel sees water coming out from under the door of the temple. He follows it around to the back door because the East Gate of the temple was always closed. He finds the trickle on the south side. But as he follows it, that water progressively grows until it forms a river that can't be passed through.

This water was coming from the place in the temple where a huge basin called the Bronze Sea stood. This tub was fifteen feet in diameter and stored the water that was used for ceremonial washing in the process of offering sacrifices.

You may have heard that ancient Israelites weren't particularly fond of the ocean. That's an understatement. They weren't generally boat people. The sea represented chaos for them.

Having something called the "Sea" in their temple was itself a kind of statement. The Israelites were saying that the chaos of water could be managed through the purposes of God. The uncontrollable could be stored and used for the sake of bringing glory to God.

But now the uncontrollable seems out of control once again.

As we follow Ezekiel's journey, we notice the first strange thing about this water: it grows where it isn't supposed to.

If you turn your hose on and let it run, the water will be strong right near the hose. But as the water flows away, the stream will get smaller. Rivers sometimes grow as they move through the land, but that's because they pick up new water sources. Tributaries and springs feed that river and help it to grow.

But this trickle of water coming out of the temple becomes a raging river without any new sources of water.

When my daughter and I were in Kenya a few months ago, we received names based on the Maa language, the native language of the tribal group we interacted with the most. My daughter received the name of "Nolari." As far as I could understand, this word means "rain." But it was hard to get a precise answer from people because often they would tell me that the name means "blessing."

Some said her name meant "rain" and some said that it meant "blessing." I would ask people which word it really meant, and they would look at me as if the question didn't make sense. Rain is always a blessing. So it means rain, but yes, it means blessing.

In the desert lands of the ancient near East, water flowing from the temple and growing into a river is most certainly a blessing. This doesn't happen. Water runs out. Water seeps into the ground. There is never enough water. You have to find ways to store it and keep it and manage it.

But here is water in abundance. Here water overflows. And what we are meant to understand is that the temple of God which has been filled with the glory of God is now overflowing the blessing of God. The blessing of God is pouring out of the temple, and it does not dissipate or dissolve. It grows. It starts as a trickle, but ends as a raging river.

The blessing of God grows

We live in what economists called a scarcity mindset. That means that the basic problem in our society is limited resources. There isn't enough stuff to go around.

Here's an official definition of scarcity: "In economics, scarcity is the result of people having "Unlimited Wants and Needs," or always wanting something new, and having "Limited Resources." Limited Resources means that there are never enough resources, or materials, to satisfy, or fulfill, the wants and needs that every person have. Scarcity is called the "basic economic problem," meaning that it always exists."

This is the basic economic problem. We could summarize it by saying, "there is never enough." That's how we live. Not enough time, not enough money, not enough energy, not enough goodwill, not enough understanding or forgiveness or friendship. There is never enough.

But God's economy works differently. In the kingdom of God, the widow's olive oil never runs out. In God's economy, a few fish and a couple of loaves of bread can feed thousands. In God's economy, water that starts out as a trickle grows as it flows from the temple.

Our problem is that we live in two kingdoms at the same time. It is true that there aren't enough iPhones for everyone in the world, there isn't enough housing in the Bay Area, and I don't have enough physical energy to accomplish everything I'd like to in a day. In fact, the entire next chapter of Ezekiel has precise instructions for how to partition the land among the twelve tribes because the land is a finite resource.

But we can't make the mistake of applying the scarcity economy to our spiritual lives. In the kingdom of God, the blessing of God grows. In the kingdom of God, there is enough.

As you imagine Ezekiel walking along this growing stream of water, can you hear God speaking to you? There is enough. You are enough. I am enough. We are enough. The blessing of God grows. It will always meet the needs of the world. The kingdom of God starts as a seed but grows enormous. In the kingdom of God, there is enough.

Whatever else is true in your life, God is enough. You may not have enough in this kingdom, but in God's kingdom, there is abundance. God will make it grow. It is enough.

Cleansing water

Ezekiel is being shown this dramatic vision of the temple. It is overflowing with water that increases where it should fade away. But as the vision continues, he sees something else odd about this water.

Ezekiel 47:6-12:

And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. 7 As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. 12 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."

This water seems to have a destination. It is flowing south and west from the temple. That takes it through the Arabah, the dry and desolate area around the Jordan valley which receives only 2-4 inches of rain per year. Eventually, the water enters the sea. The sea that is in view here is the Dead Sea, approximately 20 miles away from the city.

The Dead Sea is a bizarre place. It is one of the saltiest bodies of water on the earth. It averages near 34% salinity. That's almost ten times saltier than the world's oceans. Some of you have visited and floated in the Dead Sea. Others have heard about it.

It's called the Dead Sea because nothing can live there. The high salt content makes plant life, fish life, any kind of life virtually impossible in or around the lake.

But now we have a river of water flowing from the temple of God that pours into the Dead Sea. Here is the second strange thing about this water. When it hits the waters of the Dead Sea, its waters become fresh. When it becomes fresh, it stops being dead. All along the banks of the river, trees are flourishing. Within what used to be the Dead Sea are fish and every living creature. Fishermen earn their living there, as if they were fishing on the Mediterranean.

Once again, that isn't the way nature works. When fresh water joins with salt water, what do you have? Salt water.

Usually, when something dirty encounters something clean, the dirty infects the clean. Most of the Jewish Law is based on this principle: dirt spreads. What is clean must be protected. That is the reason for so many strict rules and regulations about keeping things clean and making things clean. It's very hard to keep clean things clean.

We generally think this way too because our world works the same way. You can spend hours cleaning your house. But it will degrade into dirtiness in minutes. Dirt spreads. Clean you have to fight for.

If our economics are based on a scarcity model, our hygiene is based on a pollution model. We generally believe that things get polluted by other things. Dirty things make clean things dirty.

But this water is different. This water grows where it is supposed to shrink. And it makes fresh where it is supposed to become dirty. This clean water makes the saltiest water clean.

The temple of God has been filled by the glory of God, and it has overflowed with the blessing of God. This blessing multiplies in abundance. And this blessing makes the unclean clean. This blessing heals and restores and brings life where it lands.

The blessing of God heals

Several years ago, some scuba divers braved the Dead Sea. It's an incredibly dangerous thing to do because even ingesting a small amount of that salt water would close up your throat and cause you to suffocate. But the divers swam to the bottom and saw something surprising.

They found springs of fresh water bubbling into the Dead Sea. Turbulent but clean water was coming from the floor of the lake. Around those springs were pockets of life. Algae and green growth. But that fresh water was quickly swallowed up by the salty Dead Sea.

That's how we sometimes view the world. Maybe there's a little bit of healing or good news. Maybe somewhere something good happens. But it can so easily be swallowed up by the suffering and pain and injustice of the world. There is healing, but it pales in comparison to the suffering around it.

But the blessing of God multiplies and heals. This fresh water of life does not become salty when it encounters the Dead Sea; it makes those waters clean.

This is how Jesus worked too. In the first chapter of Mark, Jesus encounters a leper. That man asks him to be clean. According to Jewish Law, touching a leper made you unclean. There was good medical backing for that. The disease is contagious. The pollution mindset is helpful when it comes to sickness.

But Jesus touches the man. And he doesn't become unclean. Instead, the leper becomes clean. For Jesus, his cleanness overcomes the uncleanness of the leper.

Just as the scarcity mindset is true in economics, the pollution mindset is true in our world. But once again, we have to remember that we also live in the Kingdom of God. We also live according to the alternate rules of a different kind of kingdom.

We live in a rule where the clean overcomes the unclean, where healing overcomes sickness, where joy overcomes pain. If you know Jesus, you are made clean.

We are enough, and we are clean. Whatever failures you've had, whatever sin you are struggling with, in whatever way you are convinced that you fall short of some standard, know this: You are made clean. If you have put your faith in Jesus, then the blessing of God has healed you. You are clean. You are healed. You are made whole.

We worry that sin and darkness and filth will infect us if we get too close. We worry about the little bit of leaven that might infect the bread. But in the Kingdom of God, light chases away the darkness. We don't have to protect ourselves. We don't have to isolate and withdraw and establish Christian enclaves where we think that sin can't find us.

We take our cleanness out into the world. We go out from here with light and watch the darkness flee. We are sent into our culture to transform and renew and heal. You are not at risk of being infected. You are sent out to heal.

The river of life

Ezekiel has been shown a dramatic video of overflowing water from the new temple of God. And eventually, God's people returned from exile. They rebuilt a temple. But it wasn't the same. It was smaller. That new temple certainly never had abundant healing water spilling from within.

Five hundred years after this prophecy, a thirsty woman goes to a well in Israel to draw water. She's wounded and isolated so she goes when no one else is supposed to be there. But a man named Jesus is there.

John 4:13-14:

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Jesus seems to be talking about a different kind of water. Most water that we drink satisfies us for a time, until we need more. But Jesus describes water that will become a spring. Water that multiplies. Water that grows. And this water won't just sustain life. It will create it in new ways. Normal water keeps us alive. This new water will bring us eternal life. You might say it creates life in place of death.

We are like this woman. We are trying to make life work. Figure out what we need. Make sure we're taken care of. Find water where we can and avoid the kinds of situations that are too painful for us to deal with. We're constantly navigating our needs and our emotions and our wants and our insecurities. Trying to live amidst scarcity and avoid pollution.

A few weeks ago my family car broke down so we had to figure out rides and finances and schedules to deal with it. We had to manage our own stress and energy level and solve the problem at hand while the rest of life carried on and other things had to be dealt with.

Our lives can be dominated by managing scarcity and pollution.

But in this season, we remember a child who changed all that. Jesus was born to open up all those things. To give us healing water in abundance. To welcome us into a kingdom that operates on different rules. This water makes us free.

As we approach Advent and as we consider this healing water of abundance, my invitation to you is to receive the freedom that Jesus offers. Know that you are enough. Know that you are clean. Receive freedom.

If you don't know Jesus, now is a great time to welcome him into your heart. If you already know Jesus, perhaps you aren't truly experiencing the freedom that he can offer. It's hard for us. It's hard for us to receive. We'd rather declare our freedom or earn freedom or manage freedom or even insist on our freedom. But God is there to offer us freedom based on faith. All we can do is to receive it.

In the Kingdom of God, there is enough. In the Kingdom of God, healing conquers suffering. You still have to face those other things in life. But you can receive the freedom that Jesus offers.

Look around this Christmas season. What does it look like for you to receive the freedom of Christ? How can you make that real in your life? What's holding you back? Where are you locked in on scarcity and pollution? How do you need to be re-oriented toward abundance and healing? Allow the story of the birth of Christ to do that for you. Drink the living water. Receive the freedom of Christ.

But this isn't the last place where this strange kind of water appears. In fact, this vision of the new temple returns in another vision. This is the last vision recorded in the New Testament: the apocalyptic vision given to John and recorded in Revelation.

John sees not just a new temple, but a new city. And that city has a river that flows out of it. Read how it is described in Revelation 22:1-2: "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Does that sound familiar? This is the same river that we saw in Ezekiel. Now we see it in Revelation. It's not just trees growing on its banks. It's the tree of life. The leaves aren't just for healing. They are for the healing of the nations. This is Ezekiel's river version 2.0. Or maybe it's just a fuller picture.

So many threads of so many themes throughout the Old and New Testament come together in Revelation. Here is the tree of life from Genesis, the river of life from Ezekiel, the fruitful tree of Psalm 1, the spring of water leading to eternal life from John 4. It all comes together here.

What it means for us is that this is not just for us. This is not just the freedom that we have from the water of Christ. This is where all of history is headed. This is for all of God's creation. These leaves don't just heal God's people. They heal the nations.

Jesus will come back and finish his work. The season of Advent is about remembering that Jesus was born, but it's also a time of anticipating his return. Jesus will come back, and this river that we see in Ezekiel will be experienced in the world.

So we can receive freedom. But we can also be agents of giving freedom to the world. We can be the people who point others to the abundance and healing available through Jesus. Receive freedom during this season. But give it too. Give freedom.

This is the amazing thing in the Kingdom of God. You can give away what you have, and you won't have any less. You can enter into places of hurt and suffering and not be overcome. You can bring peace and joy and love and hope and light to all those places that are shrouded in darkness and pain.

We tend to think about freedom as if it is a limited resource. Me having more freedom means you are having less. And we tend to think that freedom needs to be protected and even fought for. While those things might be true in the kingdom of man, the kingdom of God is different.

When I give away freedom, I don't lose any of my own. There is enough to go around. In fact, when I give freedom to others, I'm actually freer. Freedom is like the blessing of God. It multiplies.

Maybe you're struggling with giving freedom to someone. If I forgive them, won't they just get away with it? But if you give them freedom, you'll be freer too.

There are many ways to share the freedom you have. Forgive someone. Release someone. Tell them about Jesus. Help them financially. Listen to them. When you've received the freedom of abundant healing water from Jesus, you can share it with everyone. You have enough to share. And when you share, you end up having more.

Receive freedom from Jesus. Give freedom to those around you.

Conclusion

When we came home from a long trip to the sound of water in our home, that was not a good thing. We saw water spilling out on the floor of our home. We didn't know it at the time, but it meant that we were going to enter into a long season of repair, remodel, restoration, and writing checks.

In our last look at the book of Ezekiel, we see the prophet encounter water where he does not expect it. It is seeping out from under the doors of the temple. I don't think he fully understands what this water means either. Because for him and for God's people, it also means that they are about to enter into a long season of something new.

But for him and them and us, that is a season of joy. We encounter the blessing of God as an overflowing stream of abundance. It's a stream of water that brings life and healing. It brings us joy.

The vision that Ezekiel receives here is a vision of the Gospel. This is the good news of Jesus Christ. The abundant, infinite, healing, restoring love of God knows no bounds. It reaches everywhere. It never runs out. It heals everything it touches. It makes the salty water fresh and brings the dead to life. This is the water that is available to you and me in the person of Jesus. This is the Gospel. Receive this water. Receive Jesus. Live in him.

You are enough. You are clean. Be free. Overflow with freedom into the world. It's a season of joy. Splash around and enjoy the blessing of God.