

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:7-15

“7 And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 Jehovah God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. 9 And out of the ground Jehovah God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 10 Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates. 15 Then Jehovah God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.”

'The Rivers of Eden'

At verse fifteen of our text we read: “Then Jehovah God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it.” God has planted a garden eastward in Eden and put man there with instructions to tend it and keep it.

- We know from Genesis one that man was to take dominion and fill the whole earth...
A command repeated after the flood in Genesis chapter nine.

So we know that the Garden of Eden was not to be the final habitation of mankind but Adam and Eve had some very important duties to carry out there as we shall see in chapter three.

In our text we see a lot of geography with lands and rivers mentioned in addition to the land of Eden as well as the beauty of God’s garden which we considered last week.

- I want to focus on the rivers this morning, and as a tease we will talk about the gold next week!

Before we look at rivers in the Scriptures and their relationship to our lives and salvation, I did promise to talk a bit about the location of Eden. I found it interesting that the commentators spend a LOT of time discussing the location of Eden and yet there was little discussion of rivers! One thing we can say with certainty is that this Garden was completely lost to mankind after the flood because there is no further mention of it in the Bible nor any trace of it to be found today.

- So can we know where the Garden of Eden was?

This is where there is a lot of discussion, but most of it is speculation. Our text talks about the land of Eden, the Garden in Eden, four rivers and mentions three other lands or regions. So I don’t think it is wrong to speculate or discuss this matter, we just have to be careful to not be too dogmatic about any conclusions we may draw. Any honest discussion requires us to ask a question that impacts how we view these rivers and even the lands that are mentioned:

- How big was the region of Eden?

If it was rather small, then the views of John Calvin would be confirmed where he held that all four rivers ran in and around Mesopotamia, where today we have the nations of Iraq and Iran.

If on the other hand you argue that Eden was a large land, with the garden planted in the eastern portion... Then we would listen to those who talk of the Pishon river being the Ganges river of India far to the east, Gihon being the Nile as Cush usually relates to the African region and the Hidekel river being one of the great northern rivers rather than the Tigris. In this case, Eden would have needed to be very large for it to be the source of all of these major rivers.

The bottom line is that God chose not to reveal the size nor exact location of Eden, but we have enough information to place it in or near Mesopotamia.

- **What we do have is God taking the time in the midst of expanding the story of man's creation to give us these geographical details about some mighty rivers!**
- **Rivers are often mentioned in the Scriptures and are often seen as the rivers of life.**

When we come to the Table this morning we will meditate on Psalm 1 where the righteous man is seen as a healthy tree planted by the rivers of water. I want to also argue that rivers play a significant role in our task of taking dominion over the whole earth. Last week we considered how God gave us the great example with His garden and how man has gone forth to provide food and beauty with gardens and farms, both large and small, throughout the world.

- **We can build gardens small & large, but can we make rivers?**

How about dams & reservoirs? What about fountains and wells?

Here in Genesis God shows us how He brought forth the water needed to care for the Garden He planted in Eden and then how it became the headwaters or source of four mighty rivers. Did God have the entire rest of the planet lined out with such plumbing or was He again giving man an example that he would follow as he went forth to fill the earth and take dominion? My lovely bride might be a bit nervous right now because I mentioned dams...

- **Those who know me know that I can talk of them for hours, but I do not plan to let them hijack the entire sermon!**

However, I don't want us to miss that fact that our own valley is certainly a grand example of the truth I am trying to illustrate here. We cannot create water as God did, nor even make it rain, but we have been able to model what we see with springs and rivers here in the Garden and other places in the world.

For example, over the past one-hundred and fifty years we have taken a relatively hostile area here in the Sacramento valley and made it home to vast agricultural production and a pleasant place for about a million people to live just here in the Sacramento region. This was done with the use of wells and dams to provide the water that is needed in the same way God uses springs and rivers here in the Garden of Eden and the surrounding regions.

We can see where this has been done around the world as man has gone forth, now by the sweat of his brow after the fall and with many sinful consequences as well as blessings. I hope this gives you something to ponder as you cross our rivers in this month of August where just a hundred years ago you could have walked across the American at any point this time of year and the Sacramento might well have flowed upstream by Old Sacramento during a high tide.

- **So we have a river to water the Garden of Eden going forth to be four mighty rivers in the earth.**

As we often see here in the Book of Beginnings, we are introduced to a subject that is then expanded and carried on in the rest of the Scriptures.

- **We see water as part of man's dominion...**

Here in our study of Genesis we will come to many wells, some already in existence and other dug by the patriarchs.

- **Wells are made-made springs to bring forth life-giving water as God did in Eden.**

We even see the concept of dams or the diversion of natural rivers in the life of King Hezekiah where in II Chronicles 32 we read: 27 “[King] Hezekiah had very great riches and honor. And he made himself treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields, and for all kinds of desirable items; 28 storehouses for the harvest of grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of livestock, and folds for flocks. 29 Moreover he provided cities for himself, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him very much property.

- 30 This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his works.”

Under the fall, not all water is pure as God’s people discovered in the wilderness when they came to springs with bitter water. It can also be used as a weapon where we will see God’s enemies filling up wells that were dug or armies trying to cut off the water supplies to cities under siege.

- More importantly, water and rivers are often used in relation to our salvation and again they can be blessings or curses.

Water was used by God to destroy the world in the great flood because of man’s sin and He used the waters of the Red Sea to destroy the armies of Egypt. God himself pronounces such a judgment on Jerusalem in Isaiah 3 where we read: “For behold, the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water.”

But with the coming of Jesus to bring forth the New Creation we most often see water and rivers relating to the new life that is brought forth in Jesus. We will see Abraham and his descendants digging wells throughout the land of Canaan long before God allowed them to conquer that land.

In Exodus, we see Moses bringing forth water from the rocks of the wilderness to provide for God’s people and the Apostle Paul makes sure we don’t miss the point when he writes in I Corinthians: 10:1 “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”

Jesus Himself explains the importance of this as He talks with the woman of Samaria that He met at a well!

John 4:7 “A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” 8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. 9 Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. 10 Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, & He would have given you living water.” 11 The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? 12 Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?” 13 Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst...

- But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

So let us think for a moment about what Jesus may have meant when He said that drinking live-giving water from Him would create a fountain springing up to everlasting life?

Is Jesus talking about salvation for this Samaritan women at this well or is He talking about salvation for the world as He had just explained to Nicodemus in chapter three of the Gospel According to John?

– I would argue for both!

Water is certainly significant when it comes to our individual salvation: We see all the many washings and purifications of the Old Testament coming together in the waters of Baptism where Peter declares to the people who crucified their own Savior, "'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

The Apostle Paul explains this to Titus saying in chapter three, "3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice & envy, hateful & hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

- We must all drink of this living water as individuals but is that all that Jesus was explaining to this woman and all of us?

Think back to the image God has given us at the very beginning:

- Did God provide Adam and Eve with a small spring and water fountain where they could drink the water they needed and water the plants of the garden?

NO, God brought forth a river which not only provided for their needs and the needs of the garden, but went on to become four mighty rivers. We see the same image God has given us here in the Garden when it comes to the world-wide impact of the Gospel. God reminds His people of their task when in the journey through the wilderness they come to the oasis of Elim, "where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters."

- The twelve tribes of Israel were to bring the waters of salvation to the seventy nations of the world.

The Great Commission calls us to disciple the nations and we see what this means vividly at the end of Ezekiel's prophesies when God shows him the new Temple, the Body of Christ & what it means to the world...

Ezekiel 47:1 "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, *[toward the garden of God!]* for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. 2 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. 3 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. 4 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. 5 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. 6 He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. 7 When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. 12 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."

- **I hope this gives new meaning to the call upon His disciples to be fishers of men!**

It also can be easily related to the passage from Revelation that we considered last week with regard to the tree of life and gardens...

Revelation 22: “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

- **The living water that Jesus offers does not just give us a drink...
It offers drink indeed for the nations of the world!**

And I will bring this discussion of water to a close at the point where Jesus ended in His ministry at Jerusalem: In chapters 7 to 9 the Apostle John covers the final visit of Jesus to Jerusalem before His appointed time to be the sacrifice for sin. Before Jesus heals the man born blind and has His final encounters with the religious leaders of that day, He makes a very public declaration of what was offered individually to the woman at the well:

John 7: 37 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

- **Jesus said, ““If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”**

The first question we must each ask is whether we have taken that drink: Jesus offered the living water to the woman at the well NOT because she had gotten herself to a place where she was worthy! No, he offered it freely to a woman who had gone through FIVE husbands and was now living with another man in sin.

- **She was a sinner in need of salvation just as we all are as children of Adam.**

But Jesus goes on to say to of those who partake of His living water that, “out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

- **Being a disciple of Jesus is not a private matter!**

The new life that you have in Christ must flow out to the world just as we saw in the prophecies of Ezekiel.

- **Is that living water flowing out from under the doors of your home?**
- **Or do you try to keep it all bottled up inside?**

So I guess the important question is what would those flowing waters look like in your lives & households?

That is something that I hope and pray will begin a lot of discussions and prayerful meditations among all of us, but let me give you two important things to consider as we do.

Just as the water going out from the Temple was observable and measurable, our fruit needs to be public and real.

This does not mean that it needs to be immediately public:

When Susana Westley was in the midst of having & raising those nineteen children that God blessed her with,

I am pretty sure she spent most of her time at home!

However, Psalm 127 says that her inheritance was those children and they and their descendants have been Olive trees here in our nation.

When William Wilberforce was laboring for decades in the English parliament trying to end the English slave trade he could not point to any public victories until near the very end and he was on his death bed when it was finally ended.

That produced living water that has gone on to bless millions in our modern civilization, to say nothing of the many books and lessons he left.

But again, you may ask what will all of this look like in our lives?

The Apostle John said that Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit when He referenced the waters which would flow. So, as we move through the ordinary time in the Church calendar where we focus on obedience we should take special note when Paul lists as the fruit of the Spirit, using these fruits as the true judge of the quality of the water flowing from our lives...

In Galatians and Ephesians the Apostle Paul tells us that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and all goodness, righteousness, and truth!”

Communion Meditation: Psalm 1

“1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.”