

LIVING WATERS

Zach Crane

This past June, I was enjoying the refreshing waters of the Jacks Fork River as I waited for the lazy current to deliver a couple of knobby-kneed, giggly, 6-year-old girls downstream. As I did so, my mind flashed back to a hauntingly familiar scene. Just a few short years before, I had stood in nearly that identical spot, in that very same river, splashing and playing with another pair of innocent and carefree little girls. Those “girls”, also in my field of view at the time, were now young ladies; fully preoccupied with the matters of adolescence. As I observed this spectacle, it struck me that these cherished days and experiences were rushing by as swiftly and certainly as the water slipping through my outstretched fingers. No matter how tightly or earnestly I grasped, there was nothing I could do to capture and preserve the moment. Standing there, I knew that, if God is willing, these little girls floating toward me in puddle-jumpers could all-too-soon be full-grown women walking the aisle beside me in wedding dresses. As these thoughts raced through my mind, so did the words of the ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, who said: “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.”

No matter how much we ache with nostalgia. No matter how desperately we wish to relive the “good old days”. No matter how intently we attempt to soak up the moment. The present becomes past as swiftly and relentlessly as the moving current. There is no going back. There is no recreating history. With every passing moment, the conditions of our environment change – and, in many ways, so do we. These thoughts can trouble us. These sentiments can leave us feeling a little melancholy; maybe even a bit cynical. Feelings that are further aggravated when we look back on those fleeting, precious moments and realize we failed to take advantage of them. We squandered golden opportunities. We made careless and short-sighted decisions that we’re now reaping the harvest of. And we realize there’s no going back for a “do over”. Our surroundings have changed ... and so have we.

As I wrestled with some of these very thoughts that June afternoon, another river scene came to mind. A scene described in the book of Ezekiel. For context, the prophecy of Ezekiel comes at a very dark time in Judah’s history. The nation had been exiled to Babylon for refusing to repent of their rebellion against the Lord. Their nobles and wealth had been carried away. Jerusalem and the temple therein had been razed. In short, they were suffering the very consequences that God had warned them of through His prophets for hundreds of years. And now, there was no turning back. Even when the Jews did return to their homeland to rebuild the temple, they would never approach their physical “glory days”. Yet, amid these bleak circumstances, in **Ezekiel 47**, the prophet is shown a powerful and comforting vision.

Not only is Ezekiel given a glimpse of the true temple, but he is shown a river flowing out from under its threshold to the east. The man showing Ezekiel these things proceeds to take him a distance of one thousand cubits downstream and measures the water depth – where it is found to be ankle deep. He moves another thousand cubits downstream, where the water is found to be knee deep. He repeats this process two more times and shows Ezekiel that the river has become waist deep and then, finally, too

deep to cross. In **47:7-12**, we find the beautiful result: this ever-abounding and increasing river healing the waters that it enters, bringing life wherever it goes, and sustaining fruitful trees along its banks.

As I stood in the Jacks Fork that summer day, enjoying the cool, refreshing water and vibrant ecosystem that the ever-changing river supported and sustained – I looked at the people around me again. This time, instead of seeing the dreaded changes of life passing me by ... I saw the beautiful evidence of God's awesome design and bountiful provisions. I saw beloved brethren and members of God's kingdom. A kingdom that had grown and expanded throughout time - just as foretold. An eternal kingdom that we are eternally blessed to be part of. I saw people that, no doubt, had scars and regrets from the past – but had experienced cleansing, refreshing, and healing. I saw people who had submitted their lives to the Lord and leadership of the Holy Spirit and, as a result, were changed ... and would never be the same again. Who were in the process of being changed from glory to glory – being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ – the very source of all these blessings. I saw people whose lives bear valuable and nourishing fruit and whose hearts issue forth rivers of living water – to the good of all those around them.

It's true that no man can step in the same river twice. It's simply not possible. But by the grace of God, we can look forward to spending eternity enjoying the pure river of the waters of life that eternally flow from the throne of God as described in **Revelation 22**. This is the Lord's parting invitation to all who thirst.

Revelation 22:17 *“And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”*