

## THERE IS A RIVER

It was an incredible sight. The trees were unlike any you have ever seen, graceful, majestic and beautiful. The birds sang in a harmony that made the greatest of composers sound ordinary. There were lawns, garlanded with flowers and streams babbling through the garden. It was the most beautiful sight that the earth has yet seen. It was Eden.

It came from the heart of God. In the eternity before creation he had dreamed, planned and designed. Out of the experience and the fellowship of the Godhead came the wonder of the universe, vast galaxies flung across the blackness of space. An eternity in the preparation, the merest word of God was enough to cast star systems into their orbits. All the wonders of the heavens were created in a moment. Barely a word from the Almighty had sufficed for their creation.

The garden took time. The entire expanse of the universe was just a backdrop, an expression of divine exuberance. The earth mattered. The garden mattered. The garden needed serious divine attention.

And with good reason. God did not create just for the fun of it. Surprising as it may seem, creation was not just a whim, a way to pass the time. God did not create just because he was bored.

He had a plan, a purpose and a very clear intent. The entire universe was created for just one reason. He created with us in mind. From the moment when the beginning began, this was his intent. From the moment when the first atoms popped into being the Lord was looking for a people. God himself was seeking fellowship. He was seeking the sons of God, a people not just to rule but to fellowship with.

This has always been his desire. His entire history of the earth is focused on this one plan. The Old and New Testament tell one story, the story of our God and his people. In the Old Testament it was the story of Israel and in the New Testament it is the story of spiritual Israel. The Lord wants a people.

And if much of creation is just a canvas, a background, Eden was a more intimate setting, a place designed as the home of man upon the earth. It was created perfect for God's most important creation. The beauty and perfection of that garden is almost impossible to imagine in this fallen, broken world.

Eden was the first picture, the first revelation of the Lord's plan and of the home he planned for men made in his image. It was beautiful beyond our imagination. It was untouched by the fall, by pain, by hardship. It possessed beauty beyond the greatest of human art. No poet can describe it. No artist has ever painted it. No composer has ever captured it. The birdsong of that garden out performed the greatest of orchestras. Its flowers put Michelangelo to shame. Shakespeare at his finest could not describe it. Eden was the triumph of God's creation. It was the jewel of creation.

In the garden God poured himself out. Whole galaxies had been finished in a moment but Eden took effort, a torrent of eternal effort. Into this place would go the only

creation made in God's own image. Into the Garden of Eden went man. The entire garden was designed to be his home, an environment for men to dwell in.

To see Eden is to see a revelation of God's plan for us. It shows his warmth, his abundant generosity. It was a place of peace. God filled it with food. To work there was joy not hardship. Here was abundance of life and of his supply. Every tree bore fruit and food. It expressed how God felt about his people. Eden is a declaration of God's intent and a picture of his purpose.

Eden was designed to be the home of man. It was planted in the east and men have looked for it ever since. They will never find it. Eden was never entirely on the earth. The word east is used for more than a point of the compass. It also refers to the eternal realm, the heavenly realm. Eden was on earth but it also touched the heavens.

Eden was planted on earth within time but its origins were outside of time. It was not an entirely physical place. Nor was it an entirely spiritual place. It was a hybrid, partly earthly and partly heavenly. Not until the son of God became the Son of Man would anything else have both characteristics. Eden foretold Christ, who is wholly God and wholly man.

If this was to be man's home then what does it tell us about man? Why, that God intended man to be both physical and spiritual. The garden was designed to provide this creature with a perfect environment, a place on the earth and in the heavens.

And in this garden there was a river. It was a vital part of the garden. Without water there is no life. When NASA wanders round other planets they look for water. With water there may be life. Without it there is only barren rock. In Eden there was life.

*'And out of Eden there flowed a river.'*

I always assumed that the river flowed through Eden. It does not. It begins in Eden and flows out of Eden. In Eden there is a spring, a source and a beginning. In this eternal garden was the source of life, the fountainhead of a great river which gave life to four great rivers. A spring of living water lived, yes lived in Eden. Without it there was no Eden and no Adam, no place for God and man to walk together in the cool of the evening. God put life at the heart of the garden. It was in Eden that the earth first saw true living water. When man fell and eventually God removed Eden from the earth altogether it was lost forever.

Except of course that the Lord preserved it. For the rest of human history, past present and future Eden will not return to earth but it has not been destroyed. There will be an Eden upon the earth again. However, it will be a changed land.

So far only one man has seen the new Eden in fullness. His name was John and he saw Eden descending out of the heavens onto a new earth. He called it the New Jerusalem. Eden existed before men fell. It existed in beauty and wonder untouched by pain and the toil of our broken lives. The New Jerusalem was seen at a time when the fall, sin and death have been destroyed. Eden was the beginning and the promise. The New Jerusalem is the fulfilment.

And make no mistake, they are the same place. The garden has become a city. Once again it will be an earthly place but as before it has a heavenly origin. From the New Jerusalem the Son of Man will reign over earth and the Son of God will reign over the heavens.

And in the New Jerusalem as in Eden there is a river. The same river that flowed from Eden also flows from the New Jerusalem. It flows straight from the throne room of Almighty God and down through the streets of the city. It is living water. It rises and begins and has its source in the King himself. It is living water from Christ alone. He is the fountain of life. He is living water. He is the water that will not pass away. Those who drink the water of Christ will never thirst again. In Christ and in Christ alone there is life undying, life eternal and unbroken and it flows from him in a torrent.

John saw so much in the New Jerusalem that he barely knew where to look. His pen could not keep up with the wonder before his eyes and frankly he did a poor job describing what he saw. No one else could have done better. The vision was beyond proper description.

However, the Lord thought the river important enough to reveal it to another man. The prophet Ezekiel also saw the river of God. He saw the trickle, the stream that came out of the throne room and he stood in the river as it bubbled over his toes. He walked in the river as it washed his feet and as he waded in the river it rose to his knees, to his waist and then to his shoulders. By now he was standing in a torrent. Then it was too much for him to stand at all. Christ was overflowing too much for any man to keep his feet. He could either try and escape the river or he could float and be carried along in a torrent of Christ. Ezekiel gave up. He gave up and surrendered to the current of Christ, trusting his Lord to take him where he would. He could neither stand nor walk of his own volition. He was entirely in the Lord's hands and utterly at his mercy. He went where the Lord took him and had no other hope than Christ.

Somewhere in that flood Ezekiel also saw the effect of that life. An abundance of trees with healing in their leaves grew alongside and bore fruit all year round. Wherever the river flowed there was life, plants, animals and fish. The river gave them life and turned a barren land into a land flowing with milk and honey.

This is the river of God. This is what it means to swim in that river. Approach it with caution.

There was a river in Eden and there is a river in our future, in the New Jerusalem. Satan has rebelled. Man has fallen. Death has entered the world and has God's plan changed? You must be joking. If you think something as insignificant as the rebellion of an archangel and the fall of his creation has changed the plan of my God by one iota then you really need to know him better. He's calling you to that.

All of this is beautiful but it does raise an obvious question. So what?

What if anything does all this mean? So there's a river flowing from God. Does it really matter on this earth? Well, I said the river had not been seen since Eden other than in visions by a couple of men.

That wasn't true. There was a moment when that spring broke upon the earth and the river of God poured out of heaven and onto the earth. It came unexpectedly. It came in a rush and it came with power. In short it came upon men who could only surrender to the flow and go where the Lord took them. I am talking about an old Jewish festival called Pentecost.

In a small upper room 120 men and women were together. They had followed Christ for a little over three years and they had seen him ascend into the heavens only a few days earlier. They had no idea what to do and so they waited and prayed and ate. And early that morning the heavens opened and the Spirit of God fell upon them in a torrent. The floodgates of heaven were opened and a torrent unseen since creation poured out of heaven, straight from the throne room of God. A new revelation came to earth and a new creation was begun.

Upon a man terrified for his life less than eight weeks earlier came boldness before Jerusalem's biggest crowd. Upon men who had never travelled more than a few miles from their homes came the tongues of distant nations. Upon an illiterate fisherman came eloquence and fine words. The Lord poured out life upon his people and in that torrent began the church of Jesus Christ on earth.

In the river came the fullness of God for his people. With that river came apostles, evangelists, teachers, mercy, loving kindness, healing and interpretation of tongues, bread, water and light. The reality is that that list will continue throughout eternity and it will not be exhausted as long as Christ himself is not exhausted. In that river the generosity of Almighty God was demonstrated and declared.

God who created the heavens, the infinite expanse of space with no more than a word,  
**held nothing back!**

God who was unsatisfied with the level of detail provided by atoms and therefore created subatomic particles,

**held nothing back!**

This God, the father who spread the constellations against the skies, who wrote his stories in the constellations,

**Held Nothing Back!**

This God who took the time to create the full spectrum of colour and finding that it was insufficient to express himself created separate spectrums in ultraviolet light,

**HELD NOTHING BACK!**

The eternal, immortal and absolute God took everything he had. He withheld nothing from his son and now his son was pouring all that he was out onto his people.

**HE HELD NOTHING BACK!**

He did not look to see if every one of those men deserved it. He did not weigh with care the pros and cons. He simply poured it out irrevocably upon his people. The father declared himself well pleased with his son before his ministry had even begun and now the son poured out everything he had on men who had achieved nothing. Jesus Christ opened the floodgates and his river flooded an upper room. Carried by the torrent the disciples and apostles flooded out onto the streets.

A huge crowd watched in amazement and as the river flooded the city thousands accepted Christ. The church in Jerusalem was born. A stone temple built with human hands lay within sight. It had taken 70 years to build. Now there was a new and living temple and a royal priesthood. And Christ built it in a moment.

It was a beginning but that is the river in which the church has swum ever since, sometimes to her ankles and sometimes to her neck. That river, that outpouring is the fullness of Christ, seen by us as through a glass darkly but unmistakeable and unstoppable.

We all know from time to time that the Lord can help us. We come across a difficulty or a hope and ask the Lord to intervene. 'Lord, make this a little better.' This is not the gift of God. The gift of God is his fullness. He did not come to wash our feet or to cleanse our legs. He did not come to soak us to our waist or even our necks. He most certainly did not come to sprinkle us with his goodness. He came to immerse us, to drown us in himself and raise us up a new creation. There was a river at the beginning and there is a river at the end but they are one and the same. The spring is Christ and the River is Christ. He has opened the store houses of heaven and emptied his throne room upon us.

Jesus Christ is a river. Accept him in his fullness. He did not come to help you or get you past some small difficulty. He came that you might know life and know it in abundance. Jesus Christ is our all. In every circumstance he is our life, our survival and our victory. There is no circumstance or situation for which you are sufficient. There is no circumstance or situation for which Christ is not sufficient.

I cannot do it and nor can you but Christ in you can and that is more than enough, yesterday, today and forever!