

RIVER PEOPLE, EZEK.47:1-12

The Joy of Giving #1,

◆ **Intro:** The classic Christmas tale is that of Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol. Scrooge, the rich, miserly man, lives in misery, (note the similarity of the two words) all alone, owning a lot, but having very little when it comes to a life. I fear our culture has great potential for this. I fear that we as Christ-followers easily get blindsided by our wealth, and we are wealthy. If we were to break down the population of the world into only 100 people, it would play out like this:

- ◆ There would be 51 women and 49 men.
- ◆ 70 people would be of a faith other than Christianity.
- ◆ There would be 70 people of color; 30 would be white.
- ◆ 80 would live in substandard housing (i.e. no running water or electricity, etc.)
- ◆ 50 would be malnourished, living off of perhaps one small meal a day. (translates to over 300 billion living on less than \$2 a day!)
- ◆ 70 would be illiterate and unable to read.
- ◆ And 6 of the 100 would possess half of all the world's wealth and reside in the United States of America.

◆ So can you see how easy it is for us to become stifled people. Here's the whole key of our Advent series: giving people are joyful people. Do you want to add joy to your experience of life? Then give.

◆ Quick overview:

RIVER PEOPLE, EZEK.47:1-12

The Joy of Giving #1,

- ◆ Today we'll talk about being living water, a river instead of a pond.
- ◆ Week 2 we'll discuss the beauties of Christ we can give the world.
- ◆ Week 3 we'll take a break because I'm on vacation.
- ◆ Week 4 we'll learn how to actually release God's giving in our lives.
- ◆ Week 5 we'll observe the power giving puts in our hands to create new good.
- ◆ And on the first Sunday of the New Year we'll take a real close look at what joy is. (All along the way I invite you to read this book: Why Give? 40 Days from Getting to Giving, by John DeVries. \$2 Kindle version on Amazon.)
- ◆ So lets begin.
- ◆ **1. God made me to be a river, not a pond.** If you've hung around a Christian church for any time at all you already know the Bible tells God's kids to be givers. We start at 10% and go on from there. That's what the Bible says. God lovers have been doing it for thousands of years.
- ◆ A. You already know God is a giver. I mean, to create is to give life to something. It is God's very nature to give. You know that Jesus is by nature a giver, left heaven, only to lay down his life. And you know that God's primary purpose in you is to make you, and simple human creature, more like his very own self.

RIVER PEOPLE, EZEK.47:1-12

The Joy of Giving #1,

- ◆“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Romans 8:29;
- ◆*“And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.”*
1 Corinthians 15:49, NIV.
- ◆This, friends, is what sets people apart from the rest of the universe! We are image-bearers of the Maker!
 - ◆“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV.
- ◆So the real reason that you and I ought to celebrate the joy of giving, is because it's part of our purpose as humans. As DeVries puts it in his great little book, we were born to be a river through which the Spirit of God flows.
- ◆B. Most of our natural feelings lean toward being a pond. It's most helpful to actually see and say this, if ever we are to rise above it.
 - ◆You buy a new yard tool, or a new camper and your brother, whose house is always unkept, and who wastes his money on other kinds of things, asks you if he could borrow it. You think, “Are you kidding” while your lips say, “um, I don't think my insurance company will cover you.”

RIVER PEOPLE, EZEK.47:1-12

The Joy of Giving #1,

- ◆ Someone we know has a cool leather jacket. We have the money so we buy one too, even though we have altogether 5 different jackets. Sometimes you think that maybe you don't need so many. Or maybe so many pairs of shoes. But then you remember that one day when you were paintballing and got your one jacket dirty, and you remember that if you had kept that other one you gave away because it was slightly out of style, you could have worn it instead. So then you think to yourself, "No, I better keep all of them, cause I might need them... for a few hours..., some year..., before I die." Does any of this sound familiar? We lean toward being ponds.
- ◆ If I had a ladder I wouldn't have to ask to borrow my neighbors. If I had two guns, or two Xboxes, or 2 sets of wheels, or 2 cell phones, or 2 whatever – if have a back-up. In other words, I won't have to ever risk interruption of my continuous comfort! (It's soo natural, isn't it?)
- ◆ C. Pond People tend to live with greater difficulty. Did you know that fear tends to increase with the accumulation of wealth? Why? Because when we accumulate we easily become worried about maintaining it. Flowing river water is cleaner than pond water. It grows no scum. It washes away pollution. A pond collects stuff, and without a source of constant fresh water, becomes inhabitable. My sons worked over the years for the Parks Department in Highland, IN. Each summer they'd go over

RIVER PEOPLE, EZEK.47:1-12

The Joy of Giving #1,

to a little pond in town with the rest of the crew and drag it to clean it out. They found everything. The pond is a kleptomaniac! It has boots, fishing pools, thermoses, car chargers for cell phone, baseballs, T-shirts, garbage -these you might expect. But one time they even pulled out a picnic table. Thieving little pond! You wouldn't want to swim in that pond either.

◆When people live to get, and then they get, they also become more fearful. Now you have more to lose! Now you have more to corral. Now you have more to take care of. And now, you have taught yourself to rely on yourself and no one else. You have become "independent." But this is a fallacy. No one is independent. You cannot add a day to your life. More money or property never solves financial problems. In fact, it often intensifies them. It increases your inner anxiety whether you admit it or not.

◆Economists at the University of Kentucky, University of Pittsburgh and Vanderbilt University wanted to answer a public policy question: What happens when individuals in financial trouble are given large lump sums? So they collected data from nearly 35,000 winners of up to \$150,000 in Florida's Fantasy 5 lottery from 1993 to 2002, and cross-referenced this information with state bankruptcy records. Their **findings**, published 2011 in The Review of Economics and Statistics, show that a big lottery score does little to reduce the likelihood of bankruptcy. More than 1,900 winners went bankrupt within five years. That number

RIVER PEOPLE, EZEK.47:1-12

The Joy of Giving #1,

implies that 1% of Florida lottery players (winners and losers) go bankrupt in any given year, about double the rate for the broader population during the study period.

◆E. . Would you rather be living water or a dead sea? The classic illustration is of course the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Nothing flows out of the Dead Sea. It keeps everything it gets. It's so full of minerals and salts that nothing can live in it. It stings any open cut or soar on your body. And if you drink an once it can kill you -at least that's what our guide told us when we were there. The bible is constantly urging us to disagree with our natural, selfish, hoarding, accumulating tendencies and learn to be a river:

◆ "Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again." Ecclesiastes 11:1, NIV.

◆ "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." Mark 8:35, NIV.

◆ *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* Luke 6:38, NIV.

◆ God did not make you to hold his blessings. He made you to be a blessing carrier. To be a river. If he gives you more, it is so that you can bless more. Remember the choosing and promising God did to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Remember how it went?

RIVER PEOPLE, EZEK.47:1-12

The Joy of Giving #1,

◆ *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* Genesis 12:2, 3, NIV.

◆ It was part of Israel's calling to affect the nations! To be the distributor of God's goodness in the world! That's what Christians are. Same thing.

◆ **2. How do I be a river person?** Giving is so much more than financial.

◆ A. Give other people attention. When someone tells you an awesome story about how they caught the biggest bass you ever saw, hold back on telling one of your own. Live the fun with them! Ask about it.

◆ B. Hold back on increasing your standard of living. That's right, it is part of the Christian faith to collar spending so *that we* can be more giving people. Most people get a pay raise and then buy something more than before. Or move into a bigger house. But this is financially foolish. Now you have more liabilities than you had before. You might like to call it an asset, but an asset is something that makes you money. Your house is costing you far more than its price, so it's not an asset. You pay the owner. You pay the banker, and you pay the government in taxes. Sure you have cars, and sporting goods and what-not you call assets,

RIVER PEOPLE, EZEK.47:1-12

The Joy of Giving #1,

but if you needed to sell them to eat, you wouldn't get nearly what they cost you. That makes them money losing choices.

◆ *"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless." Ecclesiastes 5:10, NIV.*

◆ You can't be a river person until you develop a life-style that limits itself in some effective way.

◆ C. Share. That's right. Let people use your stuff. Don't make them ask, because you know most of us will never ask. So offer. In so doing you will be training your soul to be a river instead of a pond. See if you can avoid the words, "hey, that's mine."

◆ D. Start working for vision instead of preference. Most of the stuff church people argue about is preference. Do we get the songs we want? Do we get the schedule we want? "I don't want to do that project. I'm not into groups." I'll tell you right now, that kind of church will disappear like 1/2 the churches in America are right now. The ones that are living are the ones who die to self, who give up preferences for the vision of bringing in lost people, new people, people who don't know God's love in their lives.

◆ Conclusion: I've got a little slide show for you:

◆ 1) These are of the Temple in Jerusalem, on the east & south side. (Temple slide)

RIVER PEOPLE, EZEK.47:1-12

The Joy of Giving #1,

◆2) These are the land east of the temple on the way to the valley where the dead see is. Just look at the land. I mean, its like the surface of the moon! (To Sea 1-2)

◆3) These are the area around the Dead Sea. (Dead Sea0-2) The Arabah is the area to the right, or South of the Dead Sea. (Arabah 6)

◆4) Contrast that with this along the Jordan River. And this along the Sea of Galilee. I want you to notice the power of water. The growth were there is water. You didn't see any growth around the Dead Sea did you?

◆Now lets read a final text for today. I saved it until now. It's a vision Ezekiel assuring the exiles in Babylon that Yhwh would not forget them and that he would restore them. On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jewish priests would reenact this vision by pouring water out on the south side of the temple floor. One time they were doing this, and young teacher stood up and said "If any of you will believe in me, springs of living water will flow right out of you! That teacher was our savior, Jesus Christ. That's the kind of change he can bring us! He's where the joy of giving starts. He is the overflow of heaven. He came to make dead places and dead people alive again through the forgiveness of our sin!