

11. A VISION OF RENEWAL FOR EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Opening meditation based on Ezekiel 47: 1–12 for IRS Course in Christian School Education, 22–24 February 1988

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Do grant me the opportunity to open up these verses which I have just read — even though this might only offer a few flashes of understanding.

A MIRACLE STREAM

It is important to remember that this miracle stream rises in the temple, that is, where in the Old Testament God revealed his greatness.

It is also not just a little water disappearing in the sand, but a stream, a sign of abundance. A stream is not stagnant, but flows, so that the stream is not limited to the holy temple — instead, it flows throughout the world, from Jerusalem through the barren Judean landscape down to the Dead Sea.

It is remarkable that this stream of water also does not, as is the case with other streams in barren areas, become progressively weaker until it dissipates and disappears. No, Ezekiel is astonished when he sees how it grows within 1575 metres from a depth of 10 cm until it is so deep that he cannot cross it any longer — a mighty river.

The stream does not only grow itself, it also causes growth. It has wonderful life-giving force. Examples of this are the following:

- When Ezekiel walks upstream, he sees trees lining the stream — trees which had not been there when he was walking downstream. The

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water is so powerful that trees have in the meantime flourished.

- How many rivers do not end in our seas — and yet the sea does not lose its salt — rather, it becomes more salty. The water of the Dead Sea is so salty that one can float on it. And all the water of the Jordan River that has always flowed into it has not in the course of thousands of years made it drinkable or even any less salty. This wonderstream, however, makes a miracle take place: the water becomes sweet and drinkable.
- This sea is called the Dead Sea because, as a result of the high saline content, it cannot sustain any life. Ezekiel sees, however, how the sea changes from a dead into a living sea when the stream from the temple flows into it. Fishes of all kinds now occur in such abundance that fishermen can make a life from fishing them.
- While before nothing would grow next to the Dead Sea, there are now shadowy trees. These are not simply decorative trees but fruit trees. They also do not only bear fruit once a year, but there is an abundance of fruit throughout the year for man and beast to enjoy. They are also truly trees of life, because even their leaves have healing powers.

In one word: the erstwhile Dead Sea region becomes a magnificent garden, a paradise of life — such as Eden must have been like.

WHAT THIS MEANS

These few verses that we have read are just a small part of the powerful vision which Ezekiel had seen (which is described to us from Chapter 40 onwards). We cannot attach meaning to each tiny detail of this great vision — then we do allegorical exegesis. In the light of the symbolic meaning of water in the rest of the Bible we can understand the essence of Ezekiel's vision. The stream starts with God, indicating the beneficial and renewing force of his grace. This is directly linked to the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. (Cf. John 4:10; 7:38 and, as regards the Old Testament, Isaiah 55:1: "... every one that thirsts, come to the waters".) This can also include the work of the believers — God's work.

Ezekiel's vision is not unique in the Bible. We find this theme throughout the Bible. Think of the paradise with the river and the tree of life

in the first book of the Bible (Genesis 2:9 and 10; 3:22). Repeatedly this recurs in the Bible to reach a climax in Revelation (the last book of the Bible): a river of life, crystal-clear, translucent, without any impurities. Also, here is not only one tree of life, but a whole stand of trees, which bear fruit every month so that nobody need go hungry any longer. To eat from these trees also does not entail death, as when Adam ate from the tree of knowledge in Paradise, because even their leaves have healing power. And this is not applicable to individuals only, but also to nations.

In New Testament terms we could say that this stream of life symbolizes God's kingdom. (The fact that He is King, the region of his sovereignty and the blessing which the citizens of his realm enjoy.) Because his realm already came into being with the advent of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit, we can already today see something of it and experience some of the glory of it. We are still waiting, however, for the new earth which John had seen in his vision on the island of Patmos.

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS MEETING

Nobody could possibly say that education in South Africa is at present on the crest of a wave. To the contrary. It has been politicized left and right. Indoctrination with Scripturally-alien thoughts is taking place on a large scale. True Christian education (which would reveal itself in the content of the subjects and the perspective from which they are offered) is a very rare commodity indeed.

And this while our young people have a very strong need of a Biblically reformational vision of life. The well-known Kairos Document had a terrific impact among young Blacks, for the simple reason that it offered them a conceptual framework, a new perspective. Unfortunately the polarization that it preaches is not Biblical. A Biblically justified vision of life and analysis of society will be needed — for our South African education situation as well.

I do not think that I am exaggerating if I say that the educational situation in our country makes me think of the Dead Sea. It is so salty, so ideologized, that all true vitality has disappeared from it. My fervent wish is therefore that this education course, as well as the conference which preceded it, will pump cleansing and renewing water into it.

We are very grateful to all those from all over the country and outside the country who took trouble to attend. We are also very grateful to our three overseas course leaders, as well as those who will be presenting the case studies, for the fact that they sacrificed valuable time to come to the southern tip of Africa to enrich us with their knowledge and insights.

May in this work something emerge visibly of Ezekiel's powerful vision:

- It may not spring from us, but should emanate from God's revelation.
- We should not lose heart because we are so few. God's work grows in ways that are different from what we might think. He can turn a little into a great deal (cf. Christ's miracles in Matthew 14:13–21 and 15:32–39) — He can turn a small stream into a mighty river.
- The pools next to the Dead Sea remained saline marshes, even though they were so near the stream of life. Let this be a warning to us. We as believers, who have drunk of the life-giving water, are called to bear fruit. Fruits of the Spirit, which will truly nourish our schoolchildren and our students. (Not stones in the place of bread or snakes instead of fish.) Like the leaves of the miracle trees we must through education bring healing to a sick educational situation. Then our sons and daughters will be like strong plants growing vigorously in their youth (Psalm 144:12).

I sincerely hope that during this course you will be able to quench your thirst with the real living water (John 4:13, 14). But also that, when you go from here, "streams of living water shall flow from you" (John 7:38), so that you can offer your students and scholars water which will really quench their thirst for knowledge and direction.

Let us pray God that He will bless our labours of the next three days, and will take us up into the powerful, renewing stream of his incomparably glorious kingdom which cannot be halted by anything.