Devoted - Living Immersed and Empowered

## (Ezekiel 47:1-11)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. I want to talk to you today about living immersed and empowered, caught up in the presence of God. This is important and so I’m glad you joined us today because time and time again in Scriptures we are invited to fellowship with God. He desires to be in a relationship with his church and we see from the very beginning, in Acts chapter 2, that is exactly what the church did. The Bible says,

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.”

“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

And so, this is where it becomes very personal, because we want to be devoted to the will of God, living immersed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. In other words, we want to be the kind of church that is devoted to fellowship with the Holy Spirit, having our mind set on what the Spirit desires, because we know that the world and its desires are passing away. And it is for that reason, as the apostle John said, that we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. Because ultimately our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

And so, my prayer is that we would be a church that is devoted to fellowship with God because I want to pastor a church that is keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. I want to be a father and husband that is walking with God, doing what the Holy Spirit is doing, and going wherever the Holy Spirit is going. I want to be like Moses who said to God,

“If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here” (Exodus 33:15).

In other words, Moses only wanted to be where God’s glory was, and so he was devoted to following God. He didn’t want to get distracted by fleshly pursuits, chasing after things of the world, because he wanted only to be in God’s presence.

You see, Moses understood what the apostle Paul would write many years later in Romans chapter 8. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, not to the sinful nature, not to live according to the flesh, because if you live according to the sinful nature you will die. But he says, if you live by the Spirit, putting to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God (Romans 8:12-14).

And so, don’t get caught up in he or she, because he’s not talking about gender. He’s talking about inheritance, he’s talking about destiny because the Bible says,

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

But those who are the sons of God are those who are led by the Spirit of God, not those who are led by their attitude, by their disposition, or by their worldly passions and desires. The sons of God are those who live their lives immersed, under the influence, empowered by the presence of God.

As I was thinking about being led by the Holy Spirit, reflecting on the Spirit’s influence in our lives as believers, I was reminded of the times my family used to spend boating on the river. When my eldest son Matt was just a little boy we had this little powerboat that we would take out to Western Maryland in the Potomac. And when we weren’t motoring up and down the river, tubing and enjoying the breeze, we would throw out the anchor or even tie to a tree branch and go swimming. Now, if you’ve ever been in the river, you know it’s nothing like a swimming pool. In other words, you don’t just get in and do whatever you want, because there is a current that pulls you. And so, even if you want to go in one direction, if you’re not a strong swimmer, you may find yourself going in the opposite direction.

And that’s the way it is with the Holy Spirit, if you start to go after things of the flesh, if you start to go in the wrong direction, the Holy Spirit will pull you back. In fact, that’s how you know that you are saved, when you go against the current you will feel the conviction, the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit. And so, the Spirit of God will prompt you to stop, to repent, to turn around and go in the right direction. But if you ignore the Holy Spirit, silencing the Holy Spirit, that loving gentle conviction, the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit will diminish, getting softer and quieter until you barely notice him at all. And so, that’s why the Bible warns us,

“Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19, NKJV).

Because if you do and you choose to go a different course, going against the flow of the river, instead of being devoted to God, living immersed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, you will find yourself literally dying a slow spiritual death separated from the Spirit of God. And so, we don’t want to go that way because we want to enjoy the benefits of fellowship with God, knowing his presence, and the influence of the Holy Spirit today and forever.

In fact, there is an amazing illustration of the influence of the presence of God that I want to share with you today. If you would turn in your Bibles to Ezekiel chapter 47, the prophet tells us of an experience he had where he is caught up in the Spirit and taken on a tour of the temple grounds. In the Spirit he explores the outer courts before being taken through the kitchens where they cook the sacrifices of the people of God. Then Ezekiel is brought back to the entrance of the temple, and he tells us in verse one,

“I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was flowing from the south side” (Ezekiel 47:1-2).

Now, contextually we understand this water flowing from under the threshold of the temple to be symbolic of a time in the future, because there was not a spring producing an abundance of water on top of this hill. In fact, Joel prophesied,

“A fountain will flow out of the Lord’s house and will water the Valley” (Joel 3:18).

But at this time the Gihon Spring was the only source of water in Jerusalem, and so the Bible tells us that Solomon,

“Made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees” (Ecclesiastes 2:6).

He also built a system of aqueducts to supply water for Jerusalem. And we know that as he was building the temple, the Bible tells us he also made 10 bronze carts with four wheels and axles of bronze for hauling water into the temple for cooking and washing.

And so, we recognize that this water was coming from the most unusual place. And it’s just a little bit, the Hebrew word Ezekiel used implies that it was merely a trickle, just a little stream coming from under the threshold, but watch what happens. This angel, Ezekiel’s supernatural guide, is going to take him, following the flow of water, and he’s going to do a little surveying. With a measuring line in his hand, verse three says,

“As the man went eastward… he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep” (Ezekiel 47:3).

And so, Ezekiel is following this stream of water for a thousand cubits, which would be 1,750 feet, and now he’s standing in water that is ankle-deep. In other words, that which began as just a trickle, gradually begins to increase, flowing, deepening, and widening.

Isn’t that so much like the ministry of Jesus? You know, he began with 12 disciples, it was just a little bit, just a few. But as he was in the temple with his disciples, he said to the crowds,

"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:38).

And so, he’s referring to movement, transformation, increase, and after his death and resurrection there was a deepening of the waters. The Bible says,

“In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)” (Acts 1:15).

And then on Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover, those believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. That which began as just a trickle, began to deepen and widen as the water flowed from the temple, and the Bible says,

“About three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41).

Ezekiel tells us that he saw the water flowing from the temple and the Bible says,

“We are the temple of the living God…” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

And as God has said, the Holy Spirit is flowing, living, and moving among us, but the greatest move of God is actually what is happening outside of the temple. These are those greater things that Jesus spoke of, because a few days later as the water continued flowing from the temple, deepening and widening, everything in its way was caught up in its current and the Bible says,

“The number of men grew to about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

And so, what began as just a little trickle flowing from the temple, just 12 disciples, soon became 120, then 3,000, and then 5,000 because the Holy Spirit was flowing. The Spirit of God was continually moving, and the Jewish leaders and Pharisees thought they could stop it, but they found themselves fighting against God (Acts 5:39). And the Holy Spirit kept moving, flowing, deepening and widening and there is no stopping God; because he is eternal, he is self-existent, he doesn’t need to be plugged in, he doesn’t need to be charged up, and he just keeps flowing and flowing.

In fact, that is what caught Moses’ attention when the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses was amazed because he saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up (Exodus 3:2).

Now, you and I, we burn out, we get tired, but the Holy Spirit never burns out. He is constantly moving, constantly flowing, constantly advancing, moving over and around obstacles. In fact, Jesus said it this way,

“The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing…” (Matthew 11:12).

In other words, the Holy Spirit is not stopping, he is making a way where there is no way. And so, it doesn’t matter how we feel, it doesn’t matter what the government says, it doesn’t matter whether your friends or family like the Holy Spirit, because he is forcefully advancing anyway.

Today, I want to encourage you to keep in step with the Holy Spirit, to get into the flow, to allow yourself to get caught up in the current of the Spirit of God in your life. Because the truth is that sometimes we will find ourselves in seasons of dryness, but it’s not God’s fault, it’s because we’ve strayed away, we’ve gone to the wrong source, or we were seeking the wrong things and we got out of the current. And so, we simply need to repent and do those things we did at first, we need to tap into the source, seeking the living water of the Holy Spirit, because he is constantly flowing, running, refreshing, and giving life wherever he goes.

I find this to be such an encouragement to me whenever I feel dry, because just because the brook dried up, just because I’m in a dry season, it doesn’t mean that the Holy Spirit has stopped flowing. It doesn’t reflect what is happening in God’s kingdom and so I just need to get down to the river, down where the water flowing, down into the presence of God like Ezekiel. You see, he had walked a long way, but he still had to go deeper, because the water was only ankle-deep.

The angel kept moving and the Bible says,

“He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep” (Ezekiel 47:4).

But it was still too shallow, and so they continued on.

“He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist” (Ezekiel 47:4).

Now it was getting difficult to walk, almost impossible to stand, because the current was moving them along. And so, things are beginning to happen now, it had been about a mile, and Ezekiel is trying to remain standing on his feet.

I can’t help but wondering if Ezekiel hadn’t been ready to give up, thinking that this was all there was, or even thinking that it would be so much more than this by now. In fact, there are some of you that thought you would be farther along by now. You thought that you would be doing more, serving more, ministering more. Some of you thought you would be seeing more of the Holy Spirit moving with signs and wonders, because you been wading through the water for so long. But I want to encourage you to keep going, keep walking, keep wading through the water, because God is preparing you, he is positioning you for greater things.

You see, this is an important season, you can’t skip it, you can’t pray yourself out of it, you can’t even pray yourself deeper, you’ve got to keep walking. You’ve got to keep walking, keep going deeper even when it feels like you’re not making any progress. Keep going when nothing seems to be changing, all you want is something new, something fresh, but watch what happens next. In verse 5, Ezekiel tells us, he measured off another 1,750 feet, and he says,

“Now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in — a river that no one could cross” (Ezekiel 47:5).

Now the current is really moving, Ezekiel is being moved along by the river, the water is deep, and the Holy Spirit has taken over. It’s been challenging for him to get this far, walking, wading, stumbling along, and now he can’t even walk in it, but he’s got to keep moving because he’s got another thousand cubits to go.

This is where all of us are called to remain faithful, because some of you have put in the time, you feel like you’ve gone far enough, but God is calling you to keep going, to keep giving, because you’ve got to go deeper. And you’re going to have to start swimming, keeping your head above water, you’re going to have to trust God now because you’re no longer in control. You are caught in the current, caught in the flow of the river, another thousand cubits and the Holy Spirit is carrying you along.

It’s important that you don’t skip the process. You see, as you trust the Lord, your faith grows, and his grace increases. As you remain in the flow, the river is getting deeper and wider, now it’s swelling beyond its banks, and you’re going to be able to move in the anointing, you’re going to be able to bring life to people that you couldn’t reach any other way. And the angel says to Ezekiel in verse 6,

“Son of man, do you see this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river” (Ezekiel 47:6-7).

In other words, he says, do you recognize how far you’ve come, do you see where you’ve arrived through the process? And so, now Ezekiel is standing on the bank of the river and he’s about to receive revelation from God. Watch what the angel says to him in verse 8,

“This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh. Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live” (Ezekiel 47:8-9).

This is what God was preparing to do on Pentecost, this is what God is doing in the church today, wherever the river flows it would bring life to a very great multitude. And so, we’ve got to keep walking, we’ve got to keep wading, refusing to get discouraged with the shallowness of what we’re experiencing right now. We’ve got to keep going, we’re almost there, and pretty soon we’re going to have to start swimming, because we won’t be able to touch the bottom anymore. Nevertheless, we’re going to keep swimming, being moved along by the flow of the river, because there will be times of refreshing wherever the river flows.

I love this picture because as the church, we’ve been called to go to the lowest places. The Bible says,

“(God) chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not” (1 Corinthians 1:28).

And we’ve been called to go to the places that no one else wants to go, the places that no one else has reached, and that’s exactly where the river is going. The Lord said, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea.” And the Dead Sea is the lowest body of water on the surface of the earth, it doesn’t get any lower, but if we don’t continue to move forward, walking, wading, and swimming we’ll never make it there.

If we sit back on the riverbank, just looking and celebrating what God has done, instead of being a part of what God is doing; if we begin to camp here, if we get comfortable here, we won’t see people getting saved and healed. In fact, the angel said it this way to Ezekiel in verse 11,

“The swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt” (Ezekiel 47:11).

In other words, we’ve got to stay in the flow, because wherever the river doesn’t flow it becomes stagnant and complacent. You see, we’ve got to follow the river, we’ve got to allow the presence of God, to wash away the silt and debris, to wash away the sin, refreshing us so that we don’t wake up like Samson, not knowing that the Spirit of the Lord had left him” (Judges 16:20).

You don’t want to wake up wishing that the Spirit hadn’t departed, because your love, your joy, and your peace is all about the river flowing from within, washing everything, removing those habits and things that have tried to contaminate our lives.

I’ve been praying this week that these words would settle deep into your heart, that you would step into the river, into the current of the Holy Spirit, because wherever the river flows it brings life. On the other hand, wherever we have allowed things to build up and block the flow of the Holy Spirit, where the river stopped flowing in the marsh and the swamp it becomes stagnant. And so, we all have a choice to make, we can stay where we are and die or we can step into the flow of the river and live.

That’s why the apostle Paul said,

“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:12-14).

We want to be led by the Spirit, living by the Spirit, because it’s the flow of the Holy Spirit that brings life to all of our relationships. No matter whether it’s you, your children, or your spouse, we desperately need to get in the flow of the river. Ezekiel got in it, it went up to his ankles, and to his knees, and then his waist, and when he couldn’t resist it anymore, he let himself get caught up in the current. Because the Bible says,

“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

That’s where the victory is, being caught up in the flow, being carried away by the Holy Spirit. And so, are you led by the Spirit?

Pastor John Talcott

Christ’s Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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(301) 447-4224

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

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