

Message - 05-22-22
Ps 67; Acts 16:9-15; Rev 21:1-10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29
Kingdom Above, Kingdom Below

Let's look at some heavenly geography. The river of the water of life flows there – this river has always flowed, flows now and will flow forever. It originates from the throne of God and the Lamb. God the Father and the Worthy Lamb, Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate in life-giving, refreshing water essential to every living thing. John of Patmos says this water is bright as crystal and flows down the middle of the city.

I went to New Mexico in late May of 2002, having come from Kentucky where it was about 72°. It was already 100° in Albuquerque. I kept saying, “Man it's hot.” I learned that you can step into the shade in the desert and it will be fifteen to twenty degrees cooler. Everybody said, “Drink plenty of water.” So, I did. I became accustomed to heat and the extreme dryness after about a year. Most of New Mexico gets 12-16” of rain a year. The mountains get much more. And the waterways, the rivers, streams and lakes are precious to the people. Sometimes the Rio Grande River is ankle deep in places – and just a mud flat in others. But vegetation clings to its banks – mostly brush and small trees – it's so refreshing to be near the river – the source of life.

Every river – perhaps you have made your life near a great river – every river is an earthly picture of the river of life that flows from the throne of God. Rivers give life. And rivers move constantly, much as the blood circulates in your body, bringing nourishment and carrying away waste. A vital source.

We discover in Luke's narrative of Paul's journey to Europe – his second missionary trip – that they arrived in the city of Philippi and they “supposed that there would be a place of prayer” by the river. I gather that there was not a large synagogue in Philippi. The women Paul and Silas found gathered by the river on the Sabbath were Jewish. Lydia of Thyatira, the dealer in purple fabric, was probably a Gentile convert, also called a God-fearer. She was there, and after the prayer service she invited Paul and his team to stay at her house.

Paul came to the place of prayer and simply began teaching and preaching. The message made an impression on the woman Lydia. We believe that she was a business woman – perhaps a patron in the community. She may even have conducted her business from her home. She was from another province, and so knew what it was to be a stranger in a new place.

The Scripture reveals that the Lord, the Holy Spirit “opened her (Lydia's) heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.” (v 14) Words of life! The story of God's love manifested in Jesus Christ, His only Son. This is the hallmark of the European mission. Remember, Paul had a dream that a Macedonian man was beckoning him to come and help. Paul knew he was called. He was to establish the church there. He learns on this Sabbath that he is to minister among women, not men. So, when you get to where the Lord sends you, take people as they come, right?

When they arrived in Philippi, Paul, Silas and Luke they didn't minister in a building, but by the river. The church is seen as it truly is – not a building, not a temple made with hands. When John of Patmos was transported to heaven by the angel, the angel said, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” (Rev 21:9) She is not a building at all. The bride appears as a group of women praying by the river. What does the vision of heaven have to do with the church here on earth? As it is above, so it is below. As the river of the water of life flows in the New Jerusalem, so the river flows on the earth. When the Word of God goes forth, a beachhead of the kingdom of God is established then and there. The Paul and Silas ministry team was allowing the river of life to flow into lives that had not yet been touched by its refreshment, its transforming power, its joy!

Such was the society and the culture in the 1st c that when Lydia was baptized – her entire household was baptized with her. The place became a Christian home. Nice, because surely there was plenty of room for worshipers to gather to be the church – and there would be great fellowship snacks as well. This was the first recorded house-church in Europe. Some historians believe that there were other ministry teams whose work was not recorded. They were doing

(Continued on next page.)

the same kind of outreach and church planting that Paul and Peter were doing.

Jesus says a wonderful, mysterious thing. He says, “I am going away, and I am coming to you.” (v 28) What? He says this at the time He was preparing to make the ultimate sacrifice for all of humanity. He makes it clear that He is departing this world – to live in His heavenly kingdom. He is leaving His disciples in this world to bear witness to Him and to spread the Good News. The best news in the universe is that He is sending the Holy Spirit to teach them (us) and to remind them (us) of everything He has said.

Because of the presence and the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, we have an Advocate, Teacher and great Comforter to be with us always. Jesus while still in the world says, “I am going away, and I am coming to you.” From His throne in heaven He says, “See I am making all things new.” (Rev 21:5)

It is God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – who changes all things by the blood of the Lamb. God gives the water of life. God moves upon human souls, human spirits, by the wooing of the Holy Spirit. The will of God the Father is that His kingdom is established everywhere – here on earth – in all possible worlds we don’t see or know about – in all places.

You and I have our part in this newness – by bringing the Word – refreshing, vital water – abundant life – everlasting life. Today and forever. He is returning and He is here by His promise never to leave or forsake us. Mention Jesus. Celebrate Jesus. Share Jesus. The water of life. Amen.