

Summary of talk by Steve Thomas at 28:18 (2007) Thursday 2 August 2007

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The river going out!

In Ezekiel 37 the prophet is being shown something to do with the future of the people of God. They do not look very promising – like dry bones! But God has a future for them, and Ezekiel's prophetic ministry is instrumental in that.

The church in the UK is declining. Most of our churches are *just* holding ground and not growing enough. We're not keeping pace with the growth of our communities. Can these bones live?

(I sense that what God is doing is slimming down the unbelieving church, until it becomes a community of faith once again: an evangelical community, who believe in the cross, the authority of scripture and the power of the gospel.)

God is determined to transform his people, from being a dreary dead-looking bunch – into a vast living army. Not for themselves, but to be a people, inhabited by God's glory – a temple from which the river begins to flow, out from the temple, into the desert in order that life may spring forth! Ezk 37's goal is Ezk 47!

In this chapter, Ezekiel is told to prophesy. His first prophetic thrust sees bones and joints come together. Ezekiel is told to prophesy again, and breath comes into all the bodies that have assembled.

However, even after God raises up the bones into an army, more is needed. They remain filled with self-doubt and hopelessness. In Ezekiel 37.11-14 God tells Ezekiel to speak *again* to the bones; a further transformation is required to cause them to be filled with faith for their future.

God's determination is to get his life into the world. But the river can't flow out until His people have been well and truly changed into a life-filled, life-giving people.

A new phase: adding 'mission' to 'family'

God has us in a process as the Salt & Light family. A number of years ago he brought us together as a family on very good foundations (many of which were laid by Barney Coombs and his teaching). It was life and hope for many of us, who had been orphans. We found fatherhood, family and belonging.

But that's not all that God wants to do. That was just the first prophetic phase.

A few years ago he began to speak words that he wants to do more within us. He wanted us to be not only a family, but a family together on mission. Many of our churches have been talking about what it means to become missional churches. It's imperative that we do – for the sake of God's world and for the sake of obedience to God's commission.

We're in that second phase at the moment. But we believe that God is saying to us something about further change and fruitfulness. In my own mind, I am convinced this is something to do with us becoming missional churches individually, and a church-planting movement corporately.

A new phase: a new banner

God has been speaking to us about army this week. We had a profound experience last night, when Andy Au started leading the battle cry with the men! (But men and women are included in that army, as Helen Norris was prophesying tonight.)

As Andy Au led us last night in the battlecry, we said 'YES!' – our spirits witnessed with the Holy Spirit. Rebecca Beese sang a song calling the church to arise as the army of God – there was a 'yes' coming from her spirit. Then Ally Kay started prophesying!

"On Saturday night when the flute was played it was as if there was a calling of the troops to battle. An ordering and an organising; a putting into ranks, into lines and the forming of the men into regiments and battalions.

And so the call goes out to line up alongside, to come under authority – a call to the banner. A call to structure, a call out of independence and a call into unity under the banner. The family become a movement; the movement becomes a regiment."

This very same word had come to the European Team about 18 months ago. Tony Gray prophesied a word as we were praying together:

"Gather the battalions. We have marauding bands here and there. But God said gather them; gather the battalions, with a trumpet call, for strength. The generals (by this he meant EAT) are the needle and thread, bringing a sense of cohesion to the troops, not just sitting at the planning table, but addressing the troops in the different parts of the army. Is this gathering perhaps behind a new banner?"

We started to wonder what it meant to have a new banner. A few months later we were praying again as a team, and a man who wasn't in the meeting that Tony prophesied at challenged us that

"We need to move from being 'static Salt and Light' to respond to the missional challenge. Although we have been trying to change over the last 5 years, we still need to 'rebrand'."

Many of us react to a 'rebranding' which can be a superficial process. But in the scripture God gives new names to signify a new nature. Does he want to give us a new nature, a new prophetic flow and signify that with a new name?

A new phase of summer events

One of the questions we have asked is whether we continue summer events such as 28:18. We have come to the answer "Yes, we must". But we must also change their nature and their momentum. God wants to sound a trumpet amongst his people, to clarify and reinforce his prophetic purpose and to take us to the next stage together.

The Welsh revival eventually became stagnant, because of a lack of outflow. God wants to take us further. If the river doesn't flow out and keep moving with the prophetic call and move of God, it will dry up. *We* must not stop here and disperse, but we're in a process where God wants to continue to gather us and inspire us.

We're going to meet again in 2009 at Ashburnham Place, as the beginning of a series of annual events. There is a fresh sense of momentum and gathering – not to be a happy family together, but to be inspired and provoked to be all that God wants us to be. It's not about us, but about his purposes.

An intergenerational spirit

One of the things we are convinced about is that there is something very special in our family of churches of good and fruitful relationships across the generations, and we want to keep walking in that.

Not an individualistic spirit

What God wants to do is not something individualistic – taking individuals into 'mission work' – but something corporate, where we allow our churches to be changed in the life that flows out – totally changed.

A new commitment

As we draw to a conclusion I felt God remind me of two key passages. In the first, at the end of the book of Joshua, Joshua says "as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord". He expresses his *personal* commitment to follow God.

But there is more. In 1 Chronicles 12, at a time when there was a motley collection of people around David, God brought together an army who said: "We are yours, O David! We are with you, O son of Jesse!" They expressed their commitment together to take territory for God! As well as *personal* commitment, God wants a commitment *together*.