

**Sermon:** Mature Love – May 17, 2015 (Scripture is from the ESV)

**Location:** New Philadelphia Church, Sillim Campus – 3pm service

### **Introduction**

Good afternoon, Sillim. When Pastor Sky and I took leadership over this church last September there were three areas that I deeply desired for Sillim to be marked by.

The first area was hunger and appreciation for the Word of God. My third sermon at Sillim was “Promises for God’s People” and in that message I shared about Psalm 112 and the treasures that we have to claim in God’s Word. I know that if our church has a healthy appetite for God’s Word that we will be mature not easily shaken.

The second area was honor and awareness of the Holy Spirit. God the Father and His Son Jesus are currently enthroned in heaven. Before Jesus was resurrected He promised His disciples that the promise of the Holy Spirit would come to them and that they would do even greater things than Jesus had done because His Spirit would be with each of them. It is our ability to acknowledge God that gives us power, love, and joy. I want the Holy Spirit to be greatly honored by Sillim. I want His presence to be thick in this family. During our leadership retreat last fall I preached two messages on the Holy Spirit: Resting in the Spirit and Ministering with the Spirit. If you join leadership with our church you will have access to those sermons.

The third area that I desired Sillim to be marked by was an outward spirit. I have been a part of too many churches and ministries that were only worried about themselves. While it is important to take care of ourselves and minister to each other, I noticed that these ministries were making very little impact. I noticed that most of the people in these ministries were more worried about themselves than the world around them. I do not want this for Sillim. I want our church to be mature, living by faith, and actively being God’s hands and feet to those around us. I want our church to have an outward spirit, not wrapped up in ourselves but rather wrapped up in God’s heart and focusing on what He is focusing on.

Today’s message is going to be about this third area. If you are taking notes, which I recommend you do, the title of this sermon is: “**Mature Love.**”

Please turn with me to Ezekiel 47:1-12.

Ezekiel is one of the hardest books in the Bible. Ezekiel was a prophet at the time that some of God’s people were exiles in Babylon while others were still holding on back in Judah. Most of Ezekiel’s words were prophecies of judgment against Israel and Judah and also against their neighboring nations. If you flip through the chapters of the book you’ll see most of the headings are depressing, such as, “Abominations in the Temple,” “Idolaters Killed,” and “The Glory of the Lord Leaves the Temple.” The book of Ezekiel is not a book you want to read if you’re feeling down or depressed. But towards the end of Ezekiel the prophet is given many encouraging visions of the end times. A number of passages near the end of Ezekiel parallel with passages in the book of Revelation. Ezekiel 47 is one of my favorite passages and is part of Ezekiel’s visions. It’s a passage that John Park from here at Sillim preached about at a Friday Fire prayer meeting last September. His sermon was titled, “The River of Life” and I highly recommend listening to it. Some of what I share today will reiterate what he shared. Please follow along as I read this passage to you all...

Ezekiel 47:1-12 – Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.

Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen. It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. And he said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?”

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. As I went back, I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. And he said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

Before I preach, I want to teach the symbolism within this chapter. If you don't understand the symbols, then it will be difficult to understand the power behind the passage.

Ezekiel 47 starts with the prophet standing within the temple. The temple of God in the Old Testament was where God's presence rested. It was where sacrifices were made on behalf of the peoples' sins so that God would accept them and hear their prayers. There were greater degrees of holiness for those who wanted to go farther into the temple.

In the New Testament Jesus was not impressed by the temple. While his disciples marveled at its great architecture, Jesus compared it to a fig tree full of leaves but completely lacking fruit. Jesus prophesied that the physical temple would be completely destroyed. No longer would God's people look to a physical building to find God's presence, rather they would find God's presence living within them. 1Corinthians 3:16 states that we are now God's temples and that His Spirit lives within us.

While we are each temples of God's Holy Spirit, that doesn't mean that each of us are in tune with God or moving with His heart. Often we tend to operate out of our flesh. We are concerned with what we will eat next, who we will spend time with, and when we will sleep. While these physical needs are necessary to consider, we can't let the things of the world consume us. We need to keep connected to His Spirit. We need to keep God enthroned in our hearts.

There is a power when we come together like this on Sundays. All of us collectively are putting our focus on the Lord. That is why God's presence can get so thick during praise and worship. When everyone's eyes, mouths, and hearts are focused on our great God, His Spirit rejoices and moves with us. It's in these moments that we are truly connected with our Maker and with His Heart. We need to treasure these moments and desire more and more connection with Him. **It is as we connect with Him that we are given true strength to make a difference here on earth.** It's as we connect with Him more that we truly mature.

In verse 2 the prophet Ezekiel is led to a trickle of water going out from the temple. As the prophet journeys out from the temple the little trickle of water eventually became ankle deep, then knee-deep, then waist-deep, and then completely submerges him. This water symbolizes the Holy Spirit. And the direction of the flow of the water was to a sea.

Seas are large bodies of salt water that is undrinkable. **In the Bible seas often symbolize a mass of people or the nations of this earth.** It's often refers to those who are unsaved and unstable. In Revelation 17 we read about the great prostitute seated upon many waters with a scarlet beast. Revelation 17:15 reads, **"And the angel said to me, 'The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.'"** So the water from the temple that becomes a river is headed towards the sea. This water is headed towards the unsaved nations. The water is going outward from the temple, which is the presence of God, and is flowing toward the nations.

Now let me ask you: Who were the first disciples Jesus chose? They were fishermen working in the Sea of Galilee. Jesus told them, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." While these men, Peter, Andrew, John, and James had been working to catch physical fish in a physical sea, Jesus was calling them into a spiritual calling, to catch lost souls out of the sea of men.

**Understanding symbols is important to understanding the Bible.** Jesus always chose to teach through parables using all sorts of symbols. God also loves to speak through dreams using all sorts of symbols. For those who are truly hungry, they will seek answers from the Lord through prayer and through studying His Word, and God will reveal to them true mysteries. But for the lazy and disinterested they will never fully comprehend the full love of God.

Let's look at Ezekiel 47:8 again...

**Ezekiel 47:8 – And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah and enters the sea, when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh.**

If you read your footnote from verse eight you will see that the sea the river of the Holy Spirit wasn't headed to just any sea, it was headed to the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea is a salt sea located near Jerusalem that is the lowest place on earth. The Dead Sea is nearly 10 times as salty as ocean water. In fact, the Dead Sea is so filled with salt that if you enter it you will actually float without doing anything. The sea is so filled with salt that there are warnings all around the beach to not jump in the water, to not immerse your head, to not splash the water, and to not drink the water. The sea is called the Dead Sea, or the Sea of Death, because animals cannot live around its extremely salty environment. Looking at the Dead Sea through spiritual eyes, it would represent the lowest, most hopeless people on earth.

Let's look at verses 9 and 10 again to see what happens when the River of the Spirit touches the Dead Sea...

Ezekiel 47:9-10 – And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea.

The flow of the river of the Spirit brings life. What was once dead has been brought to life. And this move of the Spirit will bring forth many fish of different kinds that will be caught by fishermen along the shoreline. The flow of the river of the Spirit will bring forth a great catch of souls. **The nations will be saved by the flow of the river of the Spirit.**

But where does the flow of the Spirit originate from? Let's read the last verse of this passage again, verse 12...

Ezekiel 47:12 – And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, **because the water for them flows from the sanctuary.** Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.

The flow of the Spirit originates from the sanctuary. The sanctuary is meant to be a place of prayer and Hebrews 7:25 reads that Jesus is in heaven always praying for us. **So the sanctuary represents the presence and the heart of God. The river of the Spirit of life flows from prayer from the heart of Jesus and it goes outward to the nations.**

So in summary of the teaching I just gave you all: Ezekiel 47 begins with the temple, the very presence of God. From the presence of God is a trickle of water that becomes a shallow stream and then a great river. This river of the Spirit flows into the nations and brings the dead to life causing a harvest of the nations. The river's power and flow originate from the sanctuary, which represents God's heart. The river seems unimposing at first, but grows stronger and stronger with distance.

Now to the sermon...

### **The Outward Spirit**

What I desire for the campus of Sillim is maturity in knowing the heart of God. **Maturity in knowing the heart of God.** While the third mark of this church is meant to be an outward spirit, an effective outward spirit can only come from maturity in knowing the heart of God.

Many evangelists and charismatic preachers love to emphasize the depth of the river in this passage. There is a call from them to go deeper with the Lord and to not be content with just the shallow area of the river of the Spirit. Many of them will preach on themes like, "How deep with the Spirit do you want to go?" and "How far are you willing to go with God?" These are all great messages. But my focus for Sillim is actually not on the river. It's on the sanctuary, from where the river originates. **The river is wonderful, but if you don't start from the right place then you're going to drown.** Sillim must be a mature house. Not a house filled with zeal without knowledge, but a house that truly knows the heart of God.

When I was a young child I loved to go to the beach with my family. The waves were scary to me, so I would often play at the edges of where the water would reach. One of the games I loved to play with my sisters was running as close to the ocean before a wave would crash and then running away before the water from the crashing wave could touch my feet. I loved playing in the shallow area. I was too small to be a good swimmer though. If I had gone out in the ocean I would have drowned.

As I grew as a child my dad would take me out into the waves while holding my hand. This terrified me as a kid. He taught me how to jump the waves, but now and then when a big wave would come we would have to jump into it to avoid being crashed down upon. Sometimes the waves would crash on me and I would get tossed around, swallowing a lot of water and feeling hopeless for a moment. My dad would always pull me up, but those moments were terrifying for me. I was still too young and weak to swim well. My dad was training me and helping me get over my fears, but I was still too weak to go out on my own.

Soon I hit my growth spurts and my body began to mature. Soon I was no longer afraid of the ocean but rather loved to go far out in the water and jump the waves. To go deep in the water required my body to be mature, healthy, and strong enough. **It is the same in the ways of the Spirit.** Without maturity in the heart of God, your effectiveness is limited. You can try and swim out for the Lord, but you will likely soon find yourself drowning and in need of the Father to rescue you.

**Zeal without knowledge is not just foolishness, it's dangerous.** I've seen many young people have a couple of dramatic experiences with the Lord and feel a strong calling to a certain country or ministry. Then, without any covering or support, they have gone out to the nations to serve. But while they had experienced a couple of dramatic moments of the heart of God, their hearts never matured with God's true heart for their calling. And soon the waves become too much for them. I've seen many young people return to America or their home country exhausted, bitter, and jaded. Clearly God's heart was for the nations they went to, but they hadn't matured enough in God's heart to truly be effective.

At the same time I would say the majority of the western church operates with zero zeal. They are like little children in their faith, splashing in the shallow area but unable to go to the deep end. Most of the Christians in the western church have a conversion story: some retreat or conference or key moment in their life when they felt God's love and welcomed God into their hearts. But that is about the extent of their maturity in God's heart, so they remain babies and little children in the faith. While they may pray a lot and read the Bible a lot, they never truly connect with God's heart. They never experience a stirring in their lives. While they might be faithful with their work, their family, and attending church, there is little power in their lives. Their life decisions are more based on what they want rather than the stirrings of the heart of God.

Believers who are not mature in the heart of God are like children splashing in the edges of a river. As they splash small ripples appear in the water. While the ripples move across the surface, they don't go far and don't affect much at all. God loves children in the faith, but no one should remain immature for all their life.

Believers who are mature in the heart of God are different. They know God's heart and promises so deeply that they are able to go deep into the water. They're able to go into the deepest places of the river. And when they step they carry the weight of the glory of God. Their steps shake the ground underneath like an earthquake, causing a tsunami at the top.

**While ripples from splashes might go a short distance, tsunamis from earthquakes below can cross the entire globe.** Do you want to be a ripple maker? Or do you want to be a world changer?

I don't want Sillim to be filled with a bunch of weak believers who can only create ripples. I want Sillim to be filled with believers who are so mature in the heart of God that we can affect the nations and bring in an amazing harvest for the Lord. While some of you are called to North Korea, others to South Korea, and others to other nations, all of you are called to make a difference. None of you are meant to remain as children in the spirit.

### **How to Get Mature in the Heart of God**

So how do you get mature in the heart of God? It starts with basic communication: praying, reading the Word, and spending time with other believers. **But to truly mature means asking God for His love for others.** It means asking God, "God give me your heart. I want to know your heart. I want to know your heart for Elbert and for Joe. I want to know your heart for Sally and for Sharon. I want to know your heart for Sillim. I want to know your heart for SNU. I want to know your heart for Korea." **When you ask for God's heart you are opening yourself up to a love that is so strong that it can hurt. Jesus loved us to the Cross.** His love was selfless and endured rejection, abandonment, mocking, and pain. When we get God's heart for someone our feelings for them are no longer based on circumstances. We don't just smile and give them hugs when they smile first and hug us first. Catching God's heart for someone will lead you to ask them how they're doing, to spend time with them expecting nothing in return, and to genuinely care about their wellbeing.

Have you ever loved someone to the point that it hurts? Have you ever loved someone who doesn't return the love to you in the same way to the point that it hurts? That is the true test of maturity, the true test of being one with God's heart. Repeat after me, **"God, give me your heart."** **"God, give me your heart."**

Let me lay out some different measuring points for maturity in love and as you listen ask God to identify where you are at in this scale.

Babies are unable to love. They just need love. They need to be fed, to be clothed, to have their diapers changed, and to be comforted. Christians who are still infants in God's love simply need to be ministered to and to stay in God's presence. This stage of growth is critical for every believer. If you are new in your faith or have just returned to the Lord, then you are likely in this stage. You aren't ready to go out into the river at all. And that is fine. You need to receive and grow and develop healthily.

A little down the scale are Christians who have grown a bit in their love. Like children who can now love their parents and tolerate their siblings, such Christians are able to love the leaders and people who are feeding them and caring for them and they can tolerate their fellow Bible study group members or church members. These such Christians are still in the shallow part of the river, splashing and having fun. The main love and appreciation for these believers are just for the leader or leaders who feed them and look out for them.

A mark of growth is when a believer grows a heart for members of the church or Bible study, people who haven't demonstrated much love to them yet. We love because God first loved us (1John 4:19), so when a believer can begin praying for fellow believers and then start experiencing God's emotions for them, they are showing signs of maturity in God's heart. This is healthy and shows that the believer is getting stronger and can begin testing the deeper

waters of the river. Soon this church member will be strong enough to lead a Bible study and be a leader in the church.

Sadly most Christians end their growth at this point. They get so wrapped up in work and responsibilities that they stop connecting with God's heart beyond the small group they are leading or the group of friends they hang out with. But our maturity can't end here. We must continue to grow into full adulthood in our love!

The far end scale of maturity is a person who actively feels God's heart not just for those he knows, but for those he meets along the way and those that God reveals to him in the spirit. **A person mature in the heart of God will not despair upon seeing the broken or the hurting that God reveals to him. Rather, a person mature in the heart of God will know that God will give him all the love and strength and provision he needs in order to make a difference in their lives.** God's love is unfailing! A person mature in God's love has already experienced this unfailing love for his leaders, for his church family, and for those around him. Now he is ready to apply this love to the nations. He is ready to swim the farthest distance and make a true difference in the world.

Ask God for His heart. Start with His heart for your family and for those close to you. As you mature in His love for those close to you, then you can begin asking for His love for your co-workers, classmates, or students you are teaching. If your heart is burning for some other nation or distant people but is numb to those near to you, then something is clearly wrong. Your love needs to mature. Continue to ask God for His heart. Ask God to show you His love for the people you are numb to. Ask God to give you His love, a love so strong that it can hurt. You'll soon find yourself going deeper into the river. **The closer your heart is with His heart, the stronger you will flow with Him. No discouragement, no insecurity, no selfishness, nothing will be able to stop you and the love flowing through you.** You will experience an intimacy with God that you never imagined possible. You will experience living the way God made you to live. You will experience true, sincere love and joy; a love that is better than life.

### **\*Invite Praise Team Up\***

Prayer time...

- There is a small group of you who have a fire and zeal within you for the lost. You're ready to swim deep and you're longing to bring change to the nations. But God is wanting to test your heart in the shallower areas first. I want you to ask God to check your heart. Where are the areas God is wanting to grow you before you will be ready to flow out to the nations?
- For many of you, you know you are in the shallow part of the river, ankle deep or waist deep. You enjoy God's presence and fellowship is nice, but you aren't ready to go any farther. I want you to take some time and ask God if it's worth it to love to the point that it hurts. Ask God if it's worth it to lay your life down. And ask God to fill you with His love, strength, and grace.
- Last, for some of you who are wounded or hurting, you just need to rest in His presence and know God's heart is so big for you. Ask God to reveal His heart to you.