**The Breath of God: Sprinklers All**

**8-30-20**

As I was watching my sprinklers run this past week – and no, that is not a frequent pastime in my life – it occurred to me just how impossible it would be to have a yard around here without some kind of sprinkler system.

* Maybe its because we were teased a couple of times this past week with dry storms of lightning, thunder and wind that I was amazed yet again of how long its been since we had a good rain.
  + When was it? Late June? Early July?
  + If it weren’t for our sprinkler systems all our yards would be desperate, pleading, crunchy crops of stubble and goatheads.
* So different from where I grew up in the Midwest.
  + There, it rained often enough that most people didn’t have any kind of sprinkler system, aside from a hose and a couple sprinklers.
    - Not that we never had to sprinkle our lawns.
      * The area we lived had pretty sandy soil that didn’t retain moisture well.
      * So it only took maybe a week without rain before things began looking pretty dry.
    - But usually, the rains would return, so sprinkling was kept to a minimum.
  + But I do remember some drought years where we had to sprinkle a lot.
    - And unfortunately, for a couple of those years, we lived on 2 ½ acres of land – about an acre of which was our lawn and garden.
    - Which is a lot of area to cover when you only have a 150 feet of hose and a couple of impact sprinklers.
  + Suddenly, I became the sprinkler system.
    - Going out every couple of hours or so,

to move the sprinklers – which during drought seasons got to be quite the chore.

* + - * Day after day, in the mornings before work and in the evenings after, I would be moving hoses and sprinklers.
        + Trying to remember where I was last and where I needed to go.
        + Changing the rotation of my two sprinkler heads for maximum effect.
        + And trying to figure out how to get to the far reaches of the yard without buying more hose.
      * It wasn’t just inconvenient and time-consuming – during drought seasons it got to be both exhausting and discouraging.
        + Because no matter how often I went out or how much I watered, I kept falling behind and larger patches of grass would lose it color and wither.
        + The job was just too big for one man with 150 feet of hose and two sprinklers.

I think sometimes that must have been a bit of what Moses felt leading the people of Israel in the wilderness – like a man trying to water the desert with a garden hose and two sprinklers.

* And for him, that wasn’t always just a metaphor! There were times he literally had to provide water for the people in a desert!
* Can you imagine having to lead this horde of people through a barren wasteland?
  + In vs. 21 of Numbers 11, Moses tells the Lord how frustrated he is trying to feed about *600,000 men on foot.*
    - Numbers 1:45-46 giving the exact number of 603,550 not counting women and children.
    - Including women and children, that would be a population roughly the size of Idaho and Wyoming combined traveling through one of the driest regions of the earth – each one in need of adequate food, water, shelter, medical care, a justice system and so on.
      * And Moses was responsible for all of them.
  + Now by Exodus 18, it became obvious to some that this simply wasn’t going to work.
    - Moses, we are told, was serving as the sole arbiter of disputes for the entire company and, according to his father-in-law, Jethro, it was wearing out both Moses and the people.
      * So, Jethro suggested developing a judicial system so that rather than being the sole court in Israel, Moses would serve as the Supreme Court.
      * Lower courts were created for mediating simple disputes and only the most difficult cases would move up the line to Moses.
      * Suddenly, when it came to dispensing justice, a few more sprinkler heads were added, and the system suddenly worked much better.
    - But apparently all the logistics, public works, religious leadership, health and safety and so much more were still being watered by one sprinkler head: Moses.
      * And he was beginning to buckle under the pressure.
  + By the time we get to Numbers 11, the Israelites were complaining about the food.
    - Now remember, God had been miraculously supplying the entire company with manna since entering the wilderness, but it seems that they were no longer satisfied with manna.
      * Even though the Scriptures say that manna tasted like honey, the Israelites longed for something different.
      * So, Numbers 11:8 we are told that they began to prepare the manna differently:

*8a The people went about and gathered it and ground it in handmills or beat it in mortars and boiled it in pots and made cakes of it.*

* + - The trouble is, they managed to take something that tasted delightfully sweet, like honey, and made it taste like something heavy and oily.

*8b And the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil.*

* + - This only made them lust all the more for something different…meat! They wanted meat!

*4 And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.*

* + - * Once again, they began to romanticize their lovely experience in their “all-in-one accommodations” in Egypt, where they got a variety of food AT NO COST!
      * Well, aside from their slave labor that is, but was that really so bad?
* Well, Moses had had it! He was fed up with the complaining, the threats of insurrection, and having a million people to look after and care. So HE complained.

*11 Moses said to the Lord, “Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? 12 Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,’ to the land that you swore to give their fathers? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat.’ 14 I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. 15 If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.”*

* + Moses is pretty close to burning out here, much like Elijah would decades later.
    - And like Elijah, he takes his eyes off the Lord and firmly plants them on himself and his own “innocent” position.
      * 14 times in just 4 verses, Moses refers himself and what a raw deal he has gotten.
      * Indulging himself in a four-verse pity party that finally ends with him calling upon God to just end him so that he doesn’t have to feel so bad all the time.
    - But just as with Elijah, God does not respond with anger, but with something to refresh and renew His servant.
      * In this case, bringing a little New Testament into Moses’ Old Testament world.

*16 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. 17 And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.*

* + God decided that Moses could use a few more sprinkler heads.
    - And, in vs. 24 we find that Moses does as God instructed him:

*24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent.*

* + - These were the men that were going to share the burden of leading the people with Moses.
      * Moses would still be in charge – He would still be moving the sprinklers, so to speak.
      * But he would no longer be the only sprinkler head!
  + But Moses’ leadership was derived from his close connection with God himself.
    - That’s the only reason a couple of million people followed him into the desert in the first place.
    - So if the people are going to accept the leadership of these 70 men, then God was going to have to demonstrate His calling and empowerment of these men as well.
      * So watch what God does:

*25 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to [Moses], and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders.*

* + - Now don’t misunderstand the text here: it doesn’t mean that Moses had been full of the Spirit but then God reduced the amount of Spirit in him and spread it around to the others (as if there was a limited supply).
      * Rather, it means that the same Spirit that Moses had received for leadership was given in a smaller measure to those 70 men so they might help in leading the people.
    - Which is consistent with how God’s Holy Spirit interacted with human beings in the Old Testament.
      * The Spirit would fill a person – a prophet, a leader, or even a donkey – in order to accomplish a particular purpose at a particular time.
      * But the Spirit remained on that person only so long as was needed to accomplish the task at hand.
        + So a prophet would be filled each time God desired to deliver a prophetic message.
        + Leaders, like Moses or David, were filled according to what was needed at that time, such as for parting the Red Sea or bringing water from a rock.
        + And then there were single instances of the Spirit coming upon someone, such as with the 70 elders or even with Balaam’s donkey.

Instances in which the Spirit fell upon them to make a point to those around them.

So…

*25b …as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.*

* + - Note how clearly we are told that the Spirit coming upon these elders instigated a one-time event – they began to prophesy.
      * That’s not to say that they began to foretell the future, but rather that they suddenly and without warning began to engage in some kind of ecstatic worship experience that may even have included what the New Testament calls the gift of tongues.
        + We have a description of it in 1 Samuel 19 where King Saul three times sends men to arrest David, but each time as they arrive where David is they are distracted and overwhelmed by the Spirit of God and begin to prophesy.

A state in which they lose control of their own volition and enter into an experience of ecstatic worship.

In other words, the Spirit came upon Saul’s men, giving them a truly wonderful experience, in order to keep them from arresting David.

* + - * + Well, after three attempts (and three spontaneous worship services), King Saul himself goes to get David, but we read 1 Samuel 19:23

*23 And the Spirit of God came upon [Saul] also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. 24 And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel…*

* + - * Thus, “prophesying” was an observable experience, which in this case, was meant to protect David.
    - Now it is unlikely that the ecstatic experience of the 70 elders included stripping out of their clothing (as it apparently did for Saul), but their ecstatic worship did likewise serve a specific purpose.
      * Namely, to demonstrate God’s choice of these men to help Moses lead the people.
        + Clearly, this was God’s doing, and no one else’s.
  + And God reinforces this point by going even further outside peoples’ boxes. Look at vs. 26

*26 Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp.*

* + - Now why Eldad and Medad stayed in the camp when all of the other elders had gone to the tent of meeting we don’t know (doesn’t matter).
      * But when the 68 that went to the meeting began prophesying, much to everyone’s surprise (and alarm), so did these two guys – right in the middle of the camp.
        + But how? God’s cloud had clearly descended on the tent of meeting outside the camp.

That’s where God was, that’s where Moses was, and that’s where these religious things all happen.

But Eldad and Dodad (Medad) were no where near God or Moses or the tent when the Spirit of the Lord fell on them.

* + - * + But they were two of the men God had chosen to help Moses lead the people, and God demonstrated that to everyone by filling them, too, with His Spirit.
  + But Joshua, Moses’ aide and future leader of the nation, didn’t like how God was throwing around his Spirit so freely.
    - When he heard about Eldad and Medad, he was upset:

*28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.” 29 But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”*

* + - * Joshua apparently liked the idea of Moses being God’s only sprinkler head, dispensing God’s wisdom and direction.
        + He liked having all the authority concentrated in one place.
        + It was just easier to keep control of everything.
  + But Moses had had enough of being the only spicket from which God poured out his blessings.
    - And as he expressed to Joshua his joy at what God was doing, he also prophesied what was to come centuries later when he said:

*29b Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”*

* + - * Or in the wording of the New Living Translation:

*I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them all!”*

* + - * Moses longed for a day when instead of one sprinkler head, or even 71 sprinkler heads, God would fill all his people with His Spirit, so that there might be 2 million sprinkler heads in the desert.
    - And roughly 1400 years later, that’s exactly what happened.

So why talk about this story? Because like Moses, Jesus was also God’s Spirit-filled chosen one who was having to move the sprinkler around all by himself.

* Every corner of the yard was his to water:
  + He chose his disciples and trained them.
  + He revealed the coming of the Kingdom of God and authenticated it through miraculous signs and wonders.
  + He resisted the temptations of the devil himself and threw Satan’s demons out of others.
  + He fed the hungry, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, brought hope to the oppressed, and spoke truth to the wealthy, corrupt and powerful.
  + All this he did at God’s direction and by the power of the Holy Spirit within him: but he did it alone. Because…
    - The people were hapless…
    - His disciples were helpless…
    - And the religious leaders were hopeless.
* But Jesus had a plan that Moses could only dream about…
  + And, according to John 7 he revealed it on the last day of a Feast of Tabernacles which, interestingly enough, also focuses on watering the land and the people.
  + On that last day of this feast, the priest would go to the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem and fill a great pitcher with water and carry it back to the altar of God.
    - Once at the altar, he would pour it out on the ground while reciting Isaiah 12:3 and 55:1:

*3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

and

*1 “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;*

*and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!*

*Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

* + And in that very solemn moment, John tells us…

*37 …Jesus stood up and cried out, “Is anyone thirsty? Let him come to me and drink.* *38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”*

* + In this one statement, Jesus declares two earth shattering truths.
    - The first is that he IS the long-awaited Messiah.
      * These passages from Isaiah looked forward to a time when the Messiah would bring life *from the wells of salvation*.
      * A salvation that will be free to all who long after it.
    - Just as in the synagogue in Nazareth, when after reading from the prophet Isaiah Jesus said, *Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*
    - So now, after the priest speaks of *drawing water from the wells of salvation*, Jesus said:
      * *If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.*
      * The claim could not be clearer.
        + He is the source of this *water from the wells of salvation.*
        + He is the fount from which it flows; the only sprinkler head from which this life-giving water proceeds.
        + If you doubt that Jesus claimed it, just look at the argument that ensues among the people in vss. 40-43 about whether Jesus could actually be the Christ.
  + But Jesus’ statement of verses 37-38 includes a second earth-shattering claim as well, one that Moses would welcome.

*38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”*

* + - Now at first glance, it is difficult to know exactly what this means, but John explains what Jesus was talking about in the next verse:

*39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

* + - Jesus was continuing to utilize the analogy of water (as in the water of salvation)…
      * But now he shifts his imagery from the contained water in a single well to a life-giving river pouring out from the hearts of all who drink of this well.
    - And this inexhaustible, life-giving river that overflows out of the hearts of all who believe, John tells us, is the Holy Spirit.
      * That same Spirit that empowered Jesus ministry and raised him from the dead would now be placed on ALL OF GOD’s PEOPLE.
        + That they might take on the Messianic ministry of spreading the Jubilee of God to everyone they come into contact with.
        + Like a river flowing over the whole earth.
        + Like millions upon millions of sprinkler heads watering the whole earth.

Moses’ desire and prophetic words have come true – that the Holy Spirit would fall upon all of God’s people.

* Not just on a chosen few (like the 70 elders) and not just for a single moment in time.
  + But for all time, in every generation.
* In fact, this is why Jesus said it was better for him to leave this earth.
  + On his last night with his disciples before his passion he explained in John 16:7-8

*7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:*

* + - Jesus was just one man in one place with an impossible task – much like Moses leading the children of Israel.
    - But while Moses was given 70 Spirit-filled elders to assist him in his task, Jesus infuses millions of his followers in every generation with His Spirit that flows out of their inner-beings.
      * Convicting the world of sin…
      * Proclaiming righteousness and the day of the Lord’s favor…
      * And guiding all who will listen into the truth that will set humanity free.
* Our Christ is still is in control – He still strategically places his sprinklers in every corner of the globe, pouring out his Spirit; bringing life-giving water to a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.
  + But he has millions upon millions of little geysers pouring forth the life-giving Spirit who draws humanity to Jesus.

But here’s the thing: not all sprinkler heads work.

* After six full summers in our house, I have found that some of my sprinkler heads are failing.
  + It’s not that they stopped throwing water, its that they stopped turning.
    - They only threw water in one direction – overwatering one spot in my lawn, but leaving other areas to begin to dry out.
      * Which is really the only way I came to know that they were broken in the first place.
* I think we in the church can sometimes fall into the same kind of brokenness, pouring out the living waters of the Spirit that flow out of our hearts in only one direction.
  + We love to pour out these blessing on our families or on each other – expending all of our time pointing our blessings on those we love or those most like us.
  + But in so doing, we leave parts of God’s earth unwatered – bereft of God’s Spirit.
    - Not remembering that the Lord’s placement of his sprinklers are to ensure that every square inch of his yard is covered.
    - That the river of living water that flows out of our hearts is to be disseminated in every direction.
  + As we do this in tandem with all the other sprinkler heads pouring forth the Spirit of God on the earth, then the Messianic work of God’s Jubilee will cover the whole world.
    - Spreading the evidence of the Kingdom of God to all within our reach.
    - And offering life-giving drink from the well of salvation to all who will turn to Jesus.