

Prophetic pictures.

19 March 1998 – Afternoon Reef Elders Time Away – Alpha Training Centre

During the first time of worship at Alpha I had a sense that God was saying "Prepare for revival!" This was nothing new, but as we sat down for the first session I decided to write it into my diary and as I did this Ian got up and spoke about this very thing.

I had a sense then that both the pictures that follow are related to a preparation for revival.

Marcus Herbert – 19 March 1998

Marcus Herbert shared a picture of windmills on a riverbank in the same session that I read my story of the river. He also felt that an adjustment was necessary.

"God gave me a vision of windmills on the banks of a long winding river. The windmills could represent churches or individuals. The river represents the river of living water where God promises to plant us.

The unfortunate thing though is that the windmills were not relying on the wind to power the windmill's pump to draw up water. The mechanism, (the flat bit of metal at the back of the windmill), for turning the windmill in the direction of the wind could not move, the bearings it moves with were rusted up. This had taken place with many of the windmills because those windmills had found alternate sources of power and alternate methods to draw up the 'living' water.

Some had hand pumps that they would use when they saw fit to draw water. Others were more elaborate and had electric motors driving pumps, and looked very successful in drawing up water. Others had discarded the windmill and were using buckets to fetch water when they thought necessary. And others employed outside people, (who offered this service), to come and pump water for them.

In all the above methods and ways of drawing up water, no longer was God in control, but man was in control. We relied on our own ingenuity, own power, own expertise and even hired specialists to draw water for us. Because we are in control we can regulate the flow to our plans and purposes. But sadly, this is all contrary to God's will for us, is disobedience and is inferior to God's ways.

The counsel that God gives us from this is to develop a sensitivity once more to the blowing of the wind; i.e. the moving of His Holy Spirit. The bearing needs oiling, by the anointing oil of God's Holy Spirit. Even the changes we need to make to enable us to draw water God's way need to be made by the power of the Holy Spirit, (Zech 4:6). God wants to and needs to be in control. Therefore, when the wind blows we should have well oiled bearings that will allow the head of the windmill to turn, so that we can pick up the full impact of the wind, and then have water drawn up according to God's plans and desires. When we are in control there is no edge to what we are doing. God is looking to

establish His control once again, so that we can become a people flourishing in the power of His Holy Spirit.”

Gordon Hunkin

The picture I saw was of a man coming to a river that flowed strongly. Along its banks there were all sorts of machines and other constructions; all designed to draw water from the river.

All attention, all focus, was on the building and maintenance of these things that various people had made.

As I considered the detail of this picture, I felt clearly that God wanted to change this preoccupation with what we were building. The reason for this was that all the activity made us forget the power and life of the river itself. The challenge to my own heart was to turn and focus on the river. The things I was building I felt could be ministry, or personal vision and agenda, or it could be the structures I was devoted to. Any of these have a way of almost subtly taking up all my time and energy to the detriment of a life lived in the flow of God. There was also the danger that as I spoke to or worked with others, I would try to win their attention for that which I was building and not for what the river represented. The cause was my own rather than God's, although this was well disguised, hidden even from myself. Even though there was something of the Kingdom wrapped up in what I was building, the way in which I went about building drew more from my own personal strength and gifting than it did from the authentic life and power of God.

I felt that these constructions were in fact like the thresholds that are spoken of in Ezekiel 43 that had been erected next to God's thresholds. They have the appearance of being something that God has built, that have His life and power, but they are in reality something I have built to look that way.

What I was challenged to respond to, was the call to draw directly from the river itself, to live in this life and power alone, and call others to this.

I also felt that there was a flood coming down the river that would result in many of the things that we had made being washed away. From one point of view this may seem to be a loss, but from God's point of view it is purifying and refocusing. There is in fact no loss at all because we will actually gain more of the power and life of God than ever before.

When I sat down after that session to write out all I had felt it came as a story that went like this:

The River

As the man watched the buzz of new life all around him he thought back to the time when he had wandered through the dry, sparse expanse that was not far from where he sat now. His long search for water had been unfruitful and he had become more and more desperate as he wandered through the land. Every promise turned out to be just a dry well or a cracked riverbed. Nowhere in the entire plain was there any water to be found. One day, he heard talk of a river that flowed on the far side of the plain and with a wild hope beating in his heart, he set off to find this river.

He expected it to be a long, hard journey, but as it turned out the river was not far away. He was puzzled that he had never heard of it before, and even more puzzled that he had never seen it before, but he was so enthralled by what he found there that he soon forgot about these questions.

There was life everywhere. There were trees along the bank that bore many different kinds of fruit and the river itself teemed with fish. The river flowed strongly and its banks sloped quite steeply, just enough to make it difficult to drink. Not impossible though, just a little uncomfortable.

As he looked around, he saw that others who had found the river had constructed a variety of machines along the bank in order to draw water more easily. Some of these were quite grand while others were fairly plain. Many seemed to work well enough but there were those, even some of the grander ones, which had very little success in drawing water from the river. Still, there were camps around all of them where people had pitched their tents in order to be close to the water that was being drawn from the river.

The man tried some of these machines and at first he was excited by the water there was to drink, but after a while he grew dissatisfied with the way things were going. He felt that there must be better ways to draw water from the river. One day, in a spot where the riverbank dipped a little, he set about constructing a channel through which a constant stream of water could flow. As long as the water level was high enough, which it was most of the time, this worked very well indeed.

He took great care in constructing this channel; always making sure the flow of water was as unhindered as possible. He had built the channel along the bank so that it would almost be in the water were the level to rise high enough. This way he was also close to the trees and it wasn't long before there were many that had pitched their tents around his channel. It was not long either before more channels were being constructed wherever a suitable spot was found.

All the time the man continued to make improvements. He landscaped around the channel and added features that made it more attractive. Soon, all his time and energy was taken up by this work. He did not seem to mind though; he enjoyed the sense of achievement at seeing his creation grow. It was also very rewarding to see how those who had pitched camp with him were benefiting and enjoying what the channel had to offer them.

After a while though, the channel was not really visible anymore, and for many of the campers the improvements had become an attraction on their own. Some of the effectiveness of the channel had been lost as a result of these, but there was still water flowing through the channel and the thrill of the improvements seemed to make up for any loss.

No one knows how long this all went on, and no one knows how long it would have continued had it not been for the flood.

There had always been talk of floods and some of the campers knew of floods that had actually swept down the river before they had got there. At times there were some who seemed excited at the prospect of a flood even though they had little idea of what that would mean. In any event, no one was prepared when it came.

It started as a gentle rising in the water level that was quite welcome at first. Even some of the less effective machines along the river benefited from this and were able to draw more water than before. Many people got very wet as a result of the water level rising, but for some this was too much to cope with. They complained that they had never come to the river to swim; they had come to camp. Those who did not mind getting a little wet stayed, but those who did soon went elsewhere.

Still the level continued to rise and those who had camped close to the bank began to look anxiously upstream, but even they did not see the wave until it was too late. Perhaps if they had known what to expect they would have moved away, but most agree that the wave came too suddenly for anyone to have got out of the way in time. It swept along with such force that everything along the riverbank was engulfed by the torrent.

There was such uproar among the people. Some of them had been swept away altogether, but most of them, those who had clung to the structures and trees, stood along the bank of the swollen river trying to decide what to do next. The machines were all damaged and it was clear that many would not ever be restored to what they had been before the flood. Where there had been channels before there was now only the raging river. The man, the one who built the first channel, was not at all sure how to react. He was upset that so much of his work had been destroyed, but he could not help noticing the freshness and the vitality of the river as it flowed strong and sure past him.

There was an unexpected promise of new life that remained after the flood had swept past and this stirred up memories of all that he had longed for during his long search out on the plains. Now, before him lay the fulfilment of all that had become submerged in the activities of building. Should he be angry because of the flood? If so, with whom? Or should he be thankful and glad for the new life that was already springing up all around him?

Others began to notice the new life too and soon there was an excited crowd gathered on the river bank. The damage left by the flood was all but forgotten. Their machines now seemed to be such futile attempts to draw water from the river. One by one they began to realise that the river had always been accessible and the things they had built were never as necessary as they had thought. They could have got into the river to get water at any time they wanted to, had they only seen this. Most of them had really been looking for more comfortable ways of getting water, ways which enabled them to drink without

getting wet. As they talked with each other, one could hear many confessions that they had begun to think of their machines and channels as actually being the source of the river. Many, very ashamedly, admitted that they had enjoyed more than anything the praise they received from others for what they were building.

Slowly the realisation began to dawn that they had really forgotten about the river itself. Because of the flood they could do so no longer, and the whole crowd turned to look at the vast expanse of water flowing past them. As they did so, they began to notice many things they had not seen before. Most important were the places where there was actually easy access to the river. These seemed to have been hidden but the flood had made them much easier to see. In some places they had been lost among the many structures that had been built along the banks. These were once again visible because of the damage caused by the flood.

The camps had all but disappeared with the flood and they noticed each other more than they had before. There was a sense of everyone being together in the same place that had not been there before. There were also many more people coming to the river to drink than there were before. There was more than enough place for everyone now and the trees, which somehow had not been damaged at all, bore more fruit than ever.

As the crowd got bigger and bigger the noise of their excitement was heard further and further away. Often they would burst out in song as they discovered new things. It seemed to many that the river itself was carried into the barren land by these songs. The river continued to flow, full of life and power, just as it always had. The people along its banks were learning a new way; they were learning to live in the flow of its life and power.

All the time now they would go out together into the barren plains to tell others about the river. When they did this, they took with them some of the life and power of the river itself. All day, every day, there was a flow of appreciation and joyous singing because of the wonder of this new life and, as the news spread, many came from far and near to join in the song.