

The River Runs Through It



Revelation 22:1-5

Open to Revelation 22 as we look at the first five verses and continue the series about the beautiful end that Kory has preached the last two weeks.

Scripture

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."

As we prepare to finish talking about the beautiful end, this morning will end our 20/20 Vision in 2020 series. Thank you so much for letting us take the first several months of this year and just make sure that all of us have the same vision, biblically, when it comes to certain things that God's Word teaches. Next week, we're going to begin the book of James, but this morning, we will finish out the series by talking about the beautiful end. The book of Revelation is written to seven churches in Asia Minor. It was written in a time of tremendous persecution. The type of literature Revelation uses is what is called apocalyptic literature, meaning it uses signs and symbols to convey truths. Many times, we struggle with the book of Revelation because of those signs and symbols. Sometimes, we do not know exactly what those signs and symbols are trying to convey, but to the audience that John was writing to, they fully understood the symbols. If you have followed my teachings on the book of Revelation, you will know that I liken modern day political cartoons as the closest type of literature we have to apocalyptic literature. I don't know about you, but I love political cartoons. I love them especially during a political season. You know that we are in a two party system in the United States, and one of our parties is associated as a donkey and the other is associated as an elephant. Sometimes, you will see the picture of a front door of the White House with a donkey and an elephant both trying to get in the door at the same time. That might be strange to someone who doesn't understand that's a political cartoon because normally animals don't live indoors, but you and I fully understand that symbol when we see it.

Apocalyptic literature might be strange to us, but it wasn't strange to John. It wasn't strange to John to actually see the new heaven and the new earth and then have an angel, one of the angels who bore one of the seven bowls of wrath that was poured out right before the second coming of Jesus on the earth, on the seas, on the rivers, on the sun, on the throne of the beast, on the River Euphrates, and then ultimately that last bowl was thrown up into the air. When it was thrown into the air, nature went berserk, Jesus comes back, and the angel shouts it's done. Life as we know it is over. Immediately, we see all of mankind standing before God on the Day of Judgment. After that judgment is over, John sees a new heaven and a new earth, and then the angel can't wait to show him the bride. Kory

has been talking about it the last few weeks; as the angel takes John up on a very high mountain and John is getting ready to see the bride of Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ, and when he peers over the mountain to see the bride, instead of seeing the bride, he sees a city, the holy city, Jerusalem. Now, many people who do not understand apocalyptic literature actually think John is seeing a city here and not seeing the bride of Christ. Actually, he is seeing the bride of Christ pictured as a city. That's kind of hard for us to imagine. You and I think we're going to see people, but instead, we see a city. That city is trying to describe for us who you and I are, the people of God, as we live in the presence of God throughout all of eternity.

This morning, we're picking up the story because, again, the angel is going to step forward and show John a river, the river of the water of life. The Bible says it is bright as crystal, and it's flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And, it's flowing through the middle of the street. Wow! Do you see this? The title I would give this message is 'The River Runs through It.' Get this picture. It's a picture of the river of the water of life running through the city of God, but the city of God is you and I, the bride of Christ. What this is trying to picture is that in eternity, on the new earth, under the new heavens, there's going to be a river. It's not just any river; it's the river of the water of life. It doesn't look like the muddy Mississippi or the dirty Amazon; it's bright as crystal. When you see the source of its river, it's flowing from the throne of God the Father and Jesus the Son, the Lamb. When you see its flow, it's not flowing in the bank of dirt; it's flowing through the middle of the street of gold. Wow! I can't wait for eternity to start to see this river. You already realize that this may not be a literal river, because if you listened to my introduction, I tried to tell you that apocalyptic literature uses signs and symbols to convey truth. So, what this river may be symbolizing is something else. We will try to discover what that something else is. What is actually going to be flowing in our midst that originates from God the Father and God the Son and is actually flowing through the middle of the street of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout all eternity? We've got to remember that biblically in the beginning of civilization, one of the things you've got to have to have life, one of the things you've got to have to have civilization or a city is water.

As a matter of fact, if you'll remember when God creates the earth and the heavens and gets ready to place Adam and Eve on the earth, He creates a special home for them. It's a garden paradise. When Genesis 2 describes the paradise of God, it begins to tell us about certain trees that are going to be in the garden to sustain life of that first couple. The next thing you know, Scripture teaches us in verse 10 that there's a river that waters the garden. As this river flows in the Garden of Eden and it actually flows out, the Bible is going to take the time to tell us and describe for us how that one river changes into four different rivers. It names those rivers so that Moses is letting the audience he's writing to understand exactly where the Garden of Eden was. The Bible takes the time to tell us there was a river that watered the garden. We understand from Kory's previous two messages that basically, the garden is where God placed Adam and Eve, and they are literally living in the presence of God in a garden atmosphere. All of a sudden, as we begin to see our eternity where we spend eternity with God, we see that what we lost in Adam in the garden, paradise lost, we will regain Jesus Christ. There is a source of life in eternity, and it's this river.

If you'll remember in reading the Old Testament prophets when you were in Sunday school, Ezekiel is writing to the children of Israel who've been taken into Babylon and their temple has been destroyed. Jeremiah is writing to the people in Israel while the Babylonians are surrounding the temple and getting ready to destroy it, but there's already been a group of people that's been taken into Babylon. Those Israelites in Babylon feel like they're the ones separated from God because they don't have the temple; they're not at home. What God is trying to do through Ezekiel is for Ezekiel to tell the people they are the exiles and they are where they are supposed to be because one day He will bring them back home to rebuild the temple and the city. Ezekiel sees the presence of God leave the temple in Jerusalem, even though he's in Babylon. Jeremiah is in Jerusalem ministering to the people and he doesn't see the presence of God leave the temple, so Ezekiel records how the presence of God leaves the temple in the beginning of his prophecy. Ezekiel encourages God's people to make their home in Babylon. They're going to be there for a while, but one day will go back home and be ready, and the end of the book of Ezekiel talks

about a rebuilt temple. The temple in the Old Testament stood for the manifested presence of God with His people, so the people view God living in His temple. So get this picture. The temple is being destroyed in Jerusalem and Ezekiel is getting a vision of a future temple, God's presence with His people. To summarize the 47th chapter, Ezekiel is getting a vision of this future temple, and he's taken to the door that is facing east. When he looks at the threshold of the temple, he starts seeing a trickle of water running out of the door of the temple. I don't know about you, but if I'm looking at a door of a building and see water running down the threshold, that's not good. That means we've got a leak somewhere. That means we've got something wrong, but praise the Lord it's just a trickle. But watch this. He sees this trickle coming out of the east gate flowing down toward the south foundation of the temple, then all of a sudden, Ezekiel is transported about five hundred yards from where that trickle is coming out of the door of the temple and all of a sudden that trickle is now ankle deep water. Then he's taken five hundred more yards away from the temple and that ankle deep water is now knee deep. Again, he is five hundred more yards away from the temple and the knee deep water is now waist deep. He's taken five hundred yards further away and the water is no longer waist deep; he can't even wade in it anymore. He can't walk through it because it's over his head. It's deep enough for him to swim in. Can you imagine this little trickle of water coming out the door of the temple that now hundreds and hundreds of yards away is now flowing so deep that you can't walk through it, you can only swim in it? All of a sudden, it is flowing to the seas and when it hits the salt water, it cures the salt, takes it out of the water, turns it into fresh water and everything that's in the water is healed. Whoa! This is some water! Get this picture. It's flowing from the temple, and it's a picture of one day everything this water touches will be completely healed.

Can we fast forward to that thought? There's a water source coming that's literally the water of life, and it's going to bring healing to those who have access to it. Now, Jesus appears. He has an earthly body, and like our bodies, it gets tired. One day, He got tired and sat down after He had set His disciples into town to get some food. While He was sitting there, this lady comes to the well there to draw some water. He looks at her and

says, ma'am, would you give me a drink? She didn't take too kindly to that because she was a Samaritan, and she knew He was a Jew. Before that conversation was over, He said, ma'am, if you knew the water that I could give you, you would ask me for a drink, and if you would drink of this water, it would in you a spring of living water that would well up into everlasting life. She said give me this water so that I don't ever thirst again!

Let's fast forward a few more chapters in John. In Chapter 7, it's the last day of the Feast of Booths. Jesus is not going to be talking personally to a woman who was living in sin; He's now going to be talking to the entire nation. He makes this statement that 'if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' He's just told a lady that if you'll drink, if you'll believe in Me, there will be a spring that will well up into you into living water. Now, He's telling the nation of Israel if you are thirsty and you'll drink (a metaphor for believe), if you'll believe in Me, out of your heart shall flow rivers of living water. Verse 39 says, "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." Are you with me? When Jesus told the nation of Israel if they believed in Him and out of their heart would flow a river of living water, according to John, Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit hadn't been given yet. He would not be given until the Day of Pentecost because Jesus had not been glorified yet. He had not died, been buried, rose again, or ascended to the right hand side of the Father. But when He ascended and sat down at the Father's side, from that moment on any person who believes in Jesus Christ they received the presence of God's Holy Spirit inside them the moment they believe. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter would stand up and preach under the power of the Holy Spirit, and he told the Jewish people 'you killed the Messiah.' Then he told everyone there if they would repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Years later, Peter would receive a vision and go to share the gospel to Cornelius and his household and the Holy Spirit would fall upon them. Peter stopped everybody dead in their tracks and said can anybody forbid water that we should not baptize these who

have received the Holy Spirit just like we? Immediately, they baptized every one of them. Do you see where I'm going? It's very possible that this river that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the street of gold is a picture of the presence of the Holy Spirit of God.

I don't know about you, but when I read Revelation 21 and 22, it talks about the Father, talks about the Son, but the Holy Spirit seems to be missing. The Holy Spirit of God is not missing! The Holy Spirit of God is everywhere the Church is! In eternity, He is flowing right down the middle of the street. He's available to each and every one of us! In eternity, we're going to enjoy the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, forever! Wow! If I could use an Old Testament illustration, for some of us Baptists, we're just going to get in ankle deep at first. The Holy Spirit scares us a little bit. There will be knee deep. There will be waist deep. It's going to be so deep you could swim in the presence of God throughout eternity. There's not going to be a place you're going to be where He is not going to be. He is not flowing in the bank of dirt; He's flowing in the middle of the street. What is this a picture of? It's a picture of the people of God as a city. Where would you expect to see on the street? You would expect to see people, people who are pictured as pure gold. What you and I wear on earth is so common in heaven that we actually pave the streets with it! In the middle of this street of pure gold, transparent as glass, is going to be flowing crystal clear water. It's a picture of our redemption. It's a picture of the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ when we are immersed with the person of God's Holy Spirit. I can tell you how much I enjoy going to Brazil. One of the things I love about it is when we go to those villages the people actually go down to the water and draw it to drink it, cook with it, wash their clothes, bathe in it, swim in it, and fish in it. It's their life! Do you understand what this is trying to say? Who is the life of the Church? The life of the Church is God's Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, exactly what John 14-17 teaches. When Jesus said when I get back to the Father, I will say to Him give them the Holy Spirit, and He will anoint you with the Holy Spirit. That happened on the Day of Pentecost. Throughout all of eternity, you and I are going to be in His presence forever and ever, enjoying Him. He is the source of our eternal life.

Now, on either side of the street, there is the tree of life. In my mind, this is contradictory. It's apocalyptic literature, because how can you have one tree on both sides of a river. That's kind of hard to imagine. If I can be totally honest with you, I think there's more than one street of gold in eternity. I think when the Bible talks about the street of gold, all the streets in eternity are gold. Based on Ezekiel chapter 47, there's not just one tree of life. Everywhere the Holy Spirit of God is in eternity, everywhere you are in eternity, you have access to the tree of life.

When you farm at LBL like our family has always farmed, you make sure you take food with you because when you run out of food, there's just nowhere to get food over there. My dad would let us come home to get food if we ran out. You made sure you took food with you. We won't have to worry about that on the new earth. There will never be a place where the tree won't be. You remember this tree, right? In Genesis 2, when God made the garden, He put the tree of life in it and told man to eat of the tree. Near that tree was another tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said don't eat of that tree or you'll die. If you eat of that tree, it's going to bring terrible things into the world. You know what we did though...we ate of that tree. When we ate of that tree, it changed man's relationship with God. It even changed the husband/wife relationship between Adam and Eve. Now God has a decision to make. In Genesis 3:22-24, the Bible tells us after man sinned that God said to Himself, what are we going to do with man now? He's now just like us; he has the knowledge of good and evil. If he has to take out his hand, and take of the fruit of the tree and eat, he would live forever. Whoa! Do you hear this? If we're going to believe Scripture, it was that tree in the garden that sustained man physically and allowed him to live. Now, man is in a state of sin and still has access to the tree. God knows if he eats of the tree continually, he won't die. He will continue to live in a state of sin, so God literally kicks them out of the garden. On the east entrance, which seems to be the only way you could get into the garden, God places a cherub, a mighty angel, and a flaming sword to keep Adam and Eve from coming back to the tree and eating and living forever in a state of sinfulness.

Do you get this picture? When Jesus comes back the second time and we experience this beautiful end, and we live on a new heaven and a new earth, as God's bride, as God's children, we are going to have unrestricted access to the tree of life all the time. The fruit on that tree is going to be different each month; it will be a new fruit. If you're a fruit lover, this is going to be good; fresh apples, fresh oranges, fresh strawberries; every month a different fruit for you and I to eat. We're even going to nibble on the leaves because the leaves are for the healing of the nations! If I'm understanding this correctly, when we get a glorified body, we're not going to just float around in heaven. We're going to live on this earth in a glorified body like Jesus had, we're going to drink of God's presence continually, and we're going to eat until we're completely satisfied from the tree that truly gives us the life God wants us to have! Woo! It will not just be for food; it will be for health. I have people who ask why we would eat a leaf for healing of the nations. I thought there would be no more death. That's right! When you eat from the tree of life, it keeps our bodies, our minds, and our spirit in a place of complete health.

Because we will have access to the tree of life and will be completely healthy, the next verse says, "There will not be any accursed thing." There are a lot of accursed things on this planet, and they make life miserable from time to time. Never in eternity will things be going good, and then take a negative turn. Why? Because we will be eating from a tree that's going to give you complete health. If I could say this, personally, I've been your pastor for a long time and I have decided that you and I bring a lot of cursed things on the people we love because of our state of unhealthiness. Many of us are not healthy mentally, spiritually, or physically. We cause life to be accursed to those we love. We are going to be completely healthy, whole, and healed in eternity. There will be nothing accursed because the throne is going to be in the midst of us. We're going to serve Him, serve Him as He's ordained us to serve Him. We're going to worship Him. We're going to see Him face to face. Can you imagine that? Right now, we know God by faith. There isn't one of us who has seen Him. The Old Testament is clear that you can't see God and live, but one day, you're going to see the God who chose you before the foundation of the world. You're going to see the God who put His Son on a cross for you because of His love. You're

going to see the God who saved you by his amazing grace. You're going to see the God who ordained you to be a trophy of His grace. You're going to see Him face to face.

On your forehead, God is going to write His name. You're going to be eternally secure for the rest of eternity. No more darkness. No more night. How many times down here have you thought you were right, only to find out you weren't? You really didn't know you weren't, and all of a sudden, the light comes on and you get it; you've hurt somebody really badly, and you've been hurt really badly because you just didn't see. In the new earth, God's bride is going to see perfectly because we're going to see God face to face, He's going to be our light, and we're going to know Him. There's never going to be a time when we're not going to do right because our life will be lived continually in His service. We're going to reign forever and ever.

When it says reign forever, it isn't talking about us battling Satan and being victorious. In my opinion, this means that in the new heaven and the new earth you're finally going to be who God wants you to be, and you're going to do everything He wants you to do for the rest of eternity. He's going to give us eternity to serve Him because it will take eternity to really get to know who He really is. Every day with God in eternity is going to be different! It's going to be dynamic because of who He is, an infinite God!

The last verses will say you are blessed if you've washed your robe because you'll have a right to the tree, and you'll enter the city. If you have not washed your sin in the blood of Jesus Christ, you'll not be in the city bride; you'll be in the lake of fire. It will only be a beautiful end for you if you've put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ.