

**The River of Life**  
**Rev 20-22**

Well friends, it's been quite the past couple days with all this flooding hasn't it! Watching all this rain come down, seeing the initial damage caused up in Canmore and Banff, and hearing about all the people who had to be evacuated from their homes, and then seeing all the Facebook posts of downtown Calgary being flooded out...

And of course we're all sympathizing with, and praying for those who've suffered some significant losses from all this... it's been quite an intense few days.

And I have to say that I'm probably looking at this whole experience a bit differently than what I normally would because of what we've been learning as we've been going through the Visions of Revelation – perhaps that's something you are experiencing too?

Before, I would have figured that sometimes natural disasters just happen and that it reminds you of the power of nature

and how unpredictable it can be and I'd be glad that I have God to lean on and turn to in prayer to help us through the tough times.

But now – after what I've learned from Revelation... when I see these normally peaceful rivers turn into raging torrents of destructive water, I can't help but think about the third trumpet in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vision where God's warning judgment makes the springs of water and the rivers become bitter...

And so along those lines, I reflect on how we benefit and depend on these rivers for our drinking water, and how we've enjoyed walking alongside these rivers admiring their colors and the sounds of the water flowing and the riverbank scenery, how we've gone canoeing on them, rafting, fishing in them...

I am struck by how that same river is suddenly transformed into this dirty, destructive force that sweeps away everything good we enjoyed about it - and around it, and how it

submerges our lives in its chaotic consequences and how that will continue long after the river has subsided.

I saw someone post this statement on Facebook - *I had to evacuate out of Bowness - I'm ok I have a place to stay for the next couple days, but I'll be looking for a new place to live.*

I wonder how many people are re-considering living next to the river... because friends – now we've seen, we've experienced how the river can and has become bitter –

It's going to be a while before we forget how easily and quickly that which we enjoy and find so life giving can become something which destroys lives and takes away everything we've worked so hard for in a few hours.

Now... some people will simply see this as a reminder that we should respect the awesome power of nature, and probably not build homes in flood plains – but the Visions of Revelation have shown us that there is much more to this than just the

awesome power of nature – it is God's warning that we do not live by His good creation alone.

His creation is not the source of life - only HE is the true source of life...

And so friends, in the 7<sup>th</sup> Vision of Revelation we see this truth repeated once again, with imagery that is so very relevant to our current situation.

John sees a river... flowing down the center of the great street of the Heavenly City - but this is a clean, clear, river of life, not a dirty destructive force and it never will be - because it flows directly from the Heavenly Throne and from the Lamb.

And so friends, in the midst of this flooding disaster- we couldn't have a more appropriate passage of scripture to speak to us this morning, especially when we hear God say "*Behold I am making all things new*" (Rev 21:5)

I'm reminded of a quote by Albert Schweitzer who said *"When man finally learns to control the elements... When the winds will be quiet and the earth cannot be torn apart... When there will be no loneliness... no destitution...no war... When the last hungry man, woman or child is fed...Only then will there be no need for the Red Cross."*

And friends the good news is that day is coming, there will be a day when we will not experience any more disasters because Christ has returned and will make this world new - it will be a place where the winds are quiet, the earth is not torn apart, there will be no loneliness, no destitution, no war, no hunger...

Or as it is described in the vision *"The dwelling of God is with humans, and He will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away!"* (Rev 21:3-4)

Friends this is the most comforting promise that we can hold on to in times like these. This is the most comforting thing we can share with people when we go through times like these.

There is a better day coming when this sort of thing, when these kinds of disasters won't happen anymore!

There is a day coming when the world will be made new – and it will be wonderful and beautiful and amazing and nothing can ever change that. So that means that whatever losses we might suffer now are not ultimate losses – there is something better than what we currently have that is yet to come!

And this is not an empty promise friends – I know that it can seem that way to those who don't know, or perhaps don't believe, but this is **God's** promise friends.

He himself guarantees it. John hears the one who is seated on the Throne saying *"write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true!"* (Rev 21:5) In other words it will happen...

And friends – our actions and our response in times like these will help people to see that this isn't an empty promise. Our help and assistance for those who have been devastated by disaster is like an assurance, a guarantee that there is more to come!

Now I know that for us, helping people out physically and materially isn't going to be the challenging part – I've had more inquiries about how people can offer shelter, food, and such than I've had inquiries from anyone needing such assistance.

No... friends – what will be more difficult for us in the coming weeks ahead is going to be how we respond and converse with people about what has happened and whether or not we will help people spiritually by sharing the truth that one day these sort of things won't happen anymore.

You might be sitting in Waves, Good Earth, Starbucks – wherever... having coffee with a bunch of your friends, and they're all talking about how terrible it is for those who lost

homes and possessions, and everything they've worked so hard for – and someone says *“wow it really reminds you of what the most important things in life are...”* and everyone nods in agreement and takes sip of their lattes.

And right there is your opportunity, a moment set-up by the Holy Spirit where you can say a quick prayer for the right words to say and step in to that invitation to share what is most important in life.

You might say something like “I agree – and what I've discovered in this whole experience is how important it is to believe that the one day there will be something better”

And then keep on praying for the Holy Spirit to give you the right words to answer the inquisitive and puzzled looks from your friends

Or maybe you're discussing the situation at work with your colleagues and someone comments on how “we have to remember to respect the power of Mother Nature...”

And again everyone else will nod in agreement and this is your opportunity to share and say something like “I can certainly respect the power in nature but this reminds me not to trust my life with it, not to have faith in it...”

And again keep on praying for the Holy Spirit to give you the right words to continue sharing with those you’ve been conversing with about how nature doesn’t ultimately give us life but God does.

You see Friends, we’ll be tempted to let these kinds of opportunities just pass by... To simply nod in agreement with the acceptable pat answers and platitudes being preached and just take a sip of your latte along with everyone else.

In some ways it’s kind of like John being tempted to worship the Angel who’s been showing him these visions – Angels are beautiful and good and impressive and John is so aware of how He pales in comparison to this spiritual creature – so he is drawn to bow down before him.

In the same way friends, much of the pat answers and platitudes people put forward have some wisdom and truth in them - *we are reminded of what’s most important in life, we do need to respect the power in the creation...* and so we are tempted to bow to this wisdom, to say amen and leave it at that.

But the angel says – I am a fellow servant of yours, don’t worship me worship God! So too friends, the wisdom in these pat answers and platitudes is a fellow servant of ours – it opens the door for us to help people spiritually, to share the spiritual truth of Revelation with them.

Because the angel goes on to say to John – don’t seal up the words of the prophecy of this book...

And friends, that applies to us too – we can’t seal up the perspective we’ve gained from Revelation and keep it to ourselves – in this time of need it is part and parcel of what we have to offer to help people who’ve been affected by the floods.

And perhaps the most difficult conversations we will encounter are when we are listening to someone share how they are feeling about this disaster; the despair, the hopelessness, the frustration, the anger...

And we know that we can't give them back what they lost, we know we can't solve their problems, we can't put their life back the way it was for them... we wish could - who wouldn't, but we can't.

I mean it's a nice caring gesture to give people some meals, its sympathetic to listen to them share their feelings, but it doesn't put their lives back together again.

That's why the conversations can be so difficult and uncomfortable for us - it brings us face to face with our own limitations... we can only do so much.

So, not only are we experiencing that life does not come from the creation; in our efforts to help others we also experience

that it doesn't come from us either – it only comes from God, from Jesus Christ – and our efforts are only conduits for it.

So... what can we do and what can we say in the upcoming days and weeks ahead as we encounter people who have suffered some significant losses from this disaster?

Well friends, continue to be conduits in whatever capacity God has blessed you to assist others physically and materially – and as you do so you will get the opportunity to say something to them to help them spiritually.

So you might say “This is a horrible thing to have to go through – and I know what I can do isn't much... but I hope it helps you believe that one day things will be better, that eventually our world will be a place where no one will ever have to go through what you are experiencing again.”

Just put that out there and let them respond to it – and then pray for the Holy Spirit to give you the right words to continue to converse with them, so that you can share about God's

promise to make all things new, and how that will happen when Jesus Christ returns, and how we can respond in faith to be a part of that.

And with the Holy Spirit's power at work – maybe everyone around the table will nod in agreement with you and take a sip of their lattes – and they will be thinking “if this is true – then come soon... come soon Lord Jesus!”

Well friends, I hope that this has given you some ideas about practical ways in which you can take what we've been looking at and learning in this series on Revelation and apply it to what we are going through right now.

Because what Paul says is true - *“All scripture comes from God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that God's people might be fully equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim 3:16)

And if there was ever a time to be equipped for some good works – it is certainly here and now as we respond to this disaster in the days and weeks and months ahead.

So my challenge was to discern what does the 7<sup>th</sup> Vision give us that would help equip us – and because this is God's word I was confident there would be something that would speak directly to our current situation.

However – because I focused on what we could apply to our immediate situation with all the flooding, we skipped over a lot of material in the seventh vision and didn't look at it in the same way that we did in the previous six.

And even as we've gone through those other Visions I know that we've summarized and synthesized much more than we've expanded and gone into detail.

And that was to help us get an accurate sense of the overall structure and message of the book, because with Revelation

you need to see the forest before you start looking closer at the trees.

But it means that I wasn't able to go into detail and explore all of the traditional topics that are typically associated with Revelation – like The Great Tribulation, The Rapture, The 1000 Year reign of Christ, or how the nation of Israel factors into all these visions.

So for next week, as we wrap up this series on Revelation we'll come back to the seventh vision again to take a closer look at the details we skipped over this week and as we do so I can also address some of the questions surrounding those topics like the Great Tribulation, the Rapture and so on...

But – even skimming through this final Vision, just gleaning off what we need to help equip us to respond to our friends and neighbors in this time of crisis...

What an amazing picture we are given of what this world will one day be like, what a wonderful picture of the heavenly city and the river that flows through it.

And it's a timely vision for us to see as we are bombarded with all the dismal images and footage of the flooding that has happened in Southern Alberta.

Because this vision gives us hope, it gives us reassurance that God and Christ is our source of life – no matter what happens in this world!

And that helps us carry on - living in this time between times - responding to our world around us with the good news that one day things will be better, one day things will be brighter, one day – when Christ returns – so we say come Lord Jesus, come soon!

Amen - let us pray.