



A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

I love rivers. My best memories of boyhood were about my experiences with the rivers in the towns where I lived. I learned how to swim in a raging river in a small barrio in Zambales. I became good at paddling and maneuvering an outrigger canoe in the brackish water river that flowed out to Subic Bay. I still remember the tree house I built one summer by that river. It became my private retreat during low-tide nights. Rivers were significant in my life experiences when I was growing up.

Rivers are also important in the Bible. The book of Genesis says that a river flowed out of Eden, watering the garden and dividing into four branches (**Gen. 2:10**). The pristine beauty of the original paradise home of the first human family was nurtured by a flowing river. As a boy I tried to imagine how pure and clear that Edenic river must have been. Before the curse of sin, rivers were to be enjoyed, not feared or avoided. Today, rivers have not only become contaminated but also unsafe. Fallen humanity failed in their stewardship and dominion over the earth. Nowadays, unpolluted and unspoiled rivers are virtually nonexistent.

The river of my boyhood years in Baesa ("Low Rock" River) has disappeared. Industrial pollution and irresponsible abuse have taken their toll. Local boys in grade school can no longer have a refreshing dip in it during their truancy. Women can no longer wash clothes in its shallow pool by the rocks. Low Rock now only exists in old men's memory lane. Pasig River, the river that ran through Manila even before the Spaniards came, now carries the stench and pall of dying nature. I wonder if we'll ever see and enjoy beautiful rivers again in our cities in our lifetime.

In the earth made new, a river also runs through the City of God (**Rev. 22:1-2**). The crystal-clear river flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. It flows down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grows the tree of life. The river carries the water of life. The river is the center of the universe.

When Paradise is restored and the curse of sin is finally eradicated, the city of the saved will be nurtured by the river of life. Some biblical scholars have posited that this river will not be a physical one but it will be symbolic of Jesus Christ, the true source and nurturer of life. They also teach that the tree of life is a symbol of the life-giving ministry of our Lord. I don't agree with their position.

I believe that the New Earth will be Eden restored. If a river ran through the original garden home of Adam and Eve, the garden home of the redeemed human race will also have a river running through it. In the same way the first humans were to rule and care for a physical world, the saints will also have dominion over a renewed physical earth. The river will be real. I will be able to touch it. I will be able to drink it. I will be able to bathe in it. And best of all, I plan to dive and swim in it.

The river that runs through our eternal home will be pure and life-giving because it flows from the throne of our Heavenly Father and Our Lord. The Spirit invites us to come and drink the living water. It is offered without charge to anyone who is thirsty (**Rev. 22:17**).

Even now I can see myself swimming in the river of life every morning for exercise. I can imagine myself coming up from underwater (just like in the old days, yelling and spitting out river water) right in front of God's throne. And then I would hear divine laughter booming and filling the entire city.

Someday, soon, this familiar refrain of the old hymn shall come to pass:

"Yes, we'll gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river.

Gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God."

I love rivers. So I can hardly wait.