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The Great Harlot and The Beast, Pt 1
Revelation 17

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PowerPoint Presentation included: None

SermonAudio Blurb: In Revelation 17 we witness the description of the spiritual power that has been flowing in and through nations and peoples since sin entered the world. But more importantly we are able to witness the dismantling of this system as well as its dwelling place.

I. Introduction.

- A. Read Revelation 17.
- B. Reminder about symbolic language.
 1. First, remember that there are many views and conclusions people make regarding this part of theology. Too often it becomes a point of great division and tension but this ought not be.
 2. There are four essentials for a true Christian to hold on to regarding biblical eschatology. These four are not negotiable in orthodox Christian doctrine.
 - a. Jesus is going to bodily return.
 - b. We will all be bodily resurrected
 - c. There will be a final judgment of all humanity.
 - d. There is a literal heaven and hell.
 3. Everything else that we deal with in eschatology touches on these four. But everything else is debatable.
 4. Second these next several chapters employ a lot of symbolic language, although not as much as some try to claim. Here are some simple suggestions in dealing with symbolic language.
 - a. First, look for key terms that help you determine the meaning of a phrase or term.
 - (1) Like/as is commonly used in Revelation.

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- (2) This means that we are not taking what comes afterward in a wooden literal manner.
 - b. Second, often the interpretation is given to you.
 - (1) Before you give up trying to understand what is going on, or you decide to come up with your best guess, just keep reading.
 - (2) Revelation 17:1 and the many waters and 15 is where it is explained to us.
 - c. Third, let the context guide you in how to approach the text.
 - (1) Too many simply dispense with any attempt to find the meaning in the actual text in front of them and are too quick to find a deeper or more spiritual meaning.
 - (2) What I mean by literal here is simply taking the text at face value in light of its genre.
 - (a) Narrative is not poetry and poetry is not prophecy; but each has its meaning within the text rather than forced upon the text from/by the reader.
 - (b) Example: we understand in the song/Psalm 98:8 that the waters clapping their hands is a poetic use of language to express the idea of the song that is calling all of creation to praise God.
 - (c) Or here in our passage: there is no reason to think that the frequent references to kings to be anything of kings; whereas it is clear that the Lamb in vs 14 is not a literal lamb because it then explains that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords.
 - d. If you practice these three simple points you will find the rest of Revelation much more accessible and understandable to you. And much of what I teach from this point on will be much clearer to you.
- C. Flow of text and observations.

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1. Chapters 17-18 are now an expansion and explanation of the statement already made in 16:19 where Babylon is now the focus of God's fierce wrath and judgment.
2. They deal with two different aspects of Babylon, the first (17) is the spiritual/religious perspective and the second (18) deals with it from a commercial perspective.
3. It will also help you understand how each of the seven bowls of judgment in 16 were laid out.
4. There are two main sections to this chapter
 - a. The first major section is vss 1-6 where we have a revelation of what is called a mystery. This mystery is of who and what is this harlot and this beast for they are tightly connected or intertwined.
 - b. The second is vss 7-18 is the interpretation of what was revealed.
5. I am going to take us through the chapter by simply making key observations and explanation of first the harlot and then the beast.
 - a. It is worth noting that the harlot is the focus in vss 1-6, with bare mention of the beast, then it flips in the second half with bare mention of the harlot.
 - b. It also will require two Sundays to do this in any reasonable manner.

II. The Mystery of the Harlot.

- A. BnOne of the angels involved with pouring out the wrath of God in chapter 16 now takes John and gives him a vision in some way of the judgment of this harlot.
 1. This is apparently at the end of the 7 bowls but it is not connected to the chronology of this section.
 2. Notice vs 3 where he "carries" John into a wilderness and there the vision opens up for him.
 3. It is important to note that term "judgment" because this is a **victory** chapter.

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- a. Yet again we are shown that God does not let these things go forever. He uses them for His purposes and then He vanquishes them.
 - b. As I said in the last few sermons, we are witnessing God dismantling the kingdom of Satan and then will establish His kingdom.
 - c. And you can only imagine how messy such a transition must be.
- B. In vs 5 this woman is given a name and title that we need to break down.
- 1. First, she is called “Babylon.”
 - a. I spent two weeks showing you two key ideas in the bible. The first is the reality of a constant spiritual oppression upon and in this world through demonic/spiritual forces. And second, is the importance of Babylon, the city, in the storyline of the bible.
 - b. Babylon here is speaking not of a physical city only. It is talking about something bigger in every way.
 - (1) A city’s influence physically is subject to come and go and rise and fall.
 - (2) Right now Babylon as a city is still in ruins. Though I believe it will be rebuilt in the final days as the centerpiece of worship of the Antichrist.
 - (a) Remember in chapter 13 where Satan gives the Antichrist his “throne.”
 - (b) This was not merely a position of power but it was also a place. In fact in chapter 13 you see that the people of the earth are coming to worship him.
 - (c) I believe that it is to this future Babylon. Note two passages:
 - i) 14:8 where there is the proclamation of the fall of Babylon.

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- ii) 16:19 where Babylon is now the focus of the wrath of God in a special way. It is described among the other cities there.
- c. So this is speaking of a city, but more than merely a city or even a city at a point in time. It is also a spiritual force of religious idolatry and evil.
 - (1) This is why I showed you last week how all the way back in Genesis 10 Babylon was the place of worldwide rebellion against God.
 - (2) Then remember I ended it in Zechariah where we say that yet future vision of the woman called “wickedness” is being transported back to Babylon where she would be worshiped.
 - (3) This is why I see Babylon as both literal and symbolic at the same time here.
- 2. So this woman, Babylon, is called the “mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.”
 - a. Being the mother speaks of being the source of something.
 - (1) Here she is the mother of both harlotry and abominations. They are basically one and the same.
 - (2) And here we see that we are not looking merely at one point in time but across time. Every and any occurrence of these things finds their source in religious Babylon.
 - b. The bible speaks of harlotry both in a literal way and a symbolic way. The second is what is in view here.
 - (1) Symbolically it speaks of idolatry and unfaithfulness to God.
 - (2) Israel is called this many, many times in the Old Testament by God in reference to its insistence to abandon God and go worship the false gods.

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- (3) Again throughout the Old Testament the idea of committing abominations referred to the participation in high-handed rebellion and often involved religious practices.
 - (a) So being a person who cheated people by having dishonest scales and measures was an abomination to God.
 - (b) Giving false messages in the name of God rather than the truth was an abomination.
 - (c) In worshiping false gods, the perversions that would accompany them all were an abomination to God.

Key Application

So when you see in the bible or even today twisted thinking and living. When lies are called truth and evil is called good. When every belief contrary to God's Word is trumpeted, ask yourself, "From where does this all flow?" And the answer is this fallen, spiritual destitute system of this age called Babylon.

If you get this fixed in your head you will scowl and grieve a lot more than you do right now.

- C. This woman is pictured as sitting on many waters (1b).
 - 1. Here again we see why this chapter is not primarily focused on a specific location.
 - 2. As is usual in Revelation symbolism is often interpreted and John, or the angel actually, does this for us.
 - 3. Vs 15 tells us that she sits, "are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues."
 - a. The idea of sitting speaks of influence and control.
 - b. Find a place in this vast world where people are. There you find her working her evil and lies.
 - c. Find a place in history, no matter how small and insignificant, there she sat among them.

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- d. Consider the Mayans. We have structures and a calendar of theirs. But far more questions than answers. However we know they did astrology, worshiped nature and participated in human sacrifice.
 - e. I might also add that if you were to do a comparative religion study you would find that the similarities of the countless religions are quite striking. They center around some sort of worship of nature/creation; sexual perversion, spiritism, asceticism, or some sort of merit/work based system where you earn your “salvation.”
 - f. It is worth noting that Jeremiah 51:13 we see Jeremiah speaking to Babylon as the one “who dwells beside many waters.”
- D. She works her influence in the authorities of this world (2).
- 1. Here we see what we know so often. To enter into a high level of power in this world you must make certain compromises. And this is what is pictured here.
 - 2. Essentially this is a trade off. The human powers want more power. The satanic Babylon wants to spread her corruption throughout humanity. A match made in hell.
 - 3. Here is why every human institution will ultimately become twisted and fail. In each instance those in power make compromises to gain greater power and this ultimately leads to their fall. Babylon then simply discards them and moves on to the next one. And that is human history in a nutshell.
- E. She has authority over the beast (3).
- 1. Now John is moved to a new vantage point and see her again.
 - 2. This is tightly connected to vs two. Sitting on the beast speak of power and control.
 - 3. Lord willing, we will go into the beast and its meaning in the next sermon so just a few remarks.
 - a. This beast is the same as in 13:1 and I would encourage you to re-listen to the sermons I did on that chapter.

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- b. It ultimately is the Anti-Christ but it also speaks to world powers and nations over time.
 - c. He controls the system politically but she controls the spiritual dimension that glues it all together.
 - d. Remembering that this chapter is about her judgment it is worth noting that later on we will see the beast rise up against her and destroy her.
 - e. As learned in chapter 13, the seven heads are seven key kingdoms in human history. The ten horns are ten kings.
- F. We find her described in the most ostentatious, elaborate of ways (4)
- 1. To spend a lot of time on the colors and possible meanings is of little value.
 - 2. Suffice it to say that this is an image of power and royalty. It is of fabulous wealth to the point that it is flaunted. Think of lighting a cigar with 100.00 bills.
 - 3. But it is worth comparing this woman with another — 19:8. I think the contrast is beautiful and stark.
 - 4. The gold cup is an image that evokes the depths of her sins.
 - a. It is part of her ensemble. It defines her.
 - b. It is ever present with her as she drinks from it over and over and over.
 - c. But it also is designed to take us back to Jeremiah 51 where it is part of a prophecy against both the Babylon of that time and a future anticipation of the ultimate destruction. There in verse 7 it is written:

Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the LORD,
Intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine;
Therefore the nations are going mad.
- G. Her destruction (16).

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1. I will address this again with the next sermon so I want to focus on the harlot rather than the whole thing.
2. In the yet future time there will be a point where the kings, which are symbolized as horns, will turn on her and destroy her.
3. The imagery of her destruction is very stark and shocking.
 - a. They will plunder her until there is nothing left but desolation.
 - b. They will strip her naked, which is a picture of ripping off every vestige of beauty and glory and leaving her exposed for what she really is—a harlot of great evil.
 - c. They will eat her and burn her. Again a violent and graphic picture of the sheer hatred for her. Nothing will be left of the once great power.
4. This is the way of man and this is most certainly the way of sin and Satan.
 - a. We tolerate until we don't. And then we turn and destroy.
 - b. Whatever you are calling a friend that is apart from the will and purposes of God shall eventually turn on you.
 - c. In the Old Testament this imagery is used of Israel due to her great sin of idolatry, pictured as being a harlot or an adulterer, in the book of Ezekiel.

Therefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD:

Thus says the Lord God, "Because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your harlotries with your lovers and with all your detestable idols, and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to idols, therefore, behold, I shall gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, even all those whom you loved and all those whom you hated. So I shall gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness.

Thus I shall judge you, like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I shall bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy. I shall also give you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of

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your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare. They will incite a crowd against you, and they will stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. And they will burn your houses with fire and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women. Then I shall stop you from playing the harlot, and you will also no longer pay your lovers.

III. Conclusion.

- A. In vs 17 we see the key to this whole thing. God accomplishing His sovereign will even through His enemies.
 - 1. Consider even the passage I just quoted out of Ezekiel. The horrors and destruction of Israel were not by mistake. Nor were they merely independent actions.
 - 2. It was God, raising up the many nations against Israel. All who she sought after and hoped in, instead of God. All who gave her comfort and pleasure and protection.
 - 3. In His time, for His purposes and reputation, He turned them against Israel.
 - 4. So too here in chapter 17. God puts it in their hearts to do this. Why, to accomplish His sovereign purpose
- B. The true King is roused.
 - 1. He has said that it is finished.
 - 2. He has said it is enough.
 - 3. He will now establish His King over and on the earth yet again.
- C. May you and I consider these words. May we fear the true God. May we find refuge in Him through Jesus Christ. May we warn others.

IV. Benediction/Doxology.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Small Group Questions

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- Spend some time just thinking about how many ways the spirit of Babylon is manifest in our lives. Think about TV, relationships, family, sports, money, politics, etc. Here is an example, news articles that will speak of a woman, who “identifies” as a man as “he.” It is done so much that it sneaks into our thinking. This is not “bash the system” time; it is a time to carefully think about the subtle and blunt philosophies that are constantly present.
- How are you, literally give concrete examples, resisting the pressure to have that mind set take over you? Push for actual ways you have in place in your individual and family lives that are non-negotiables. If this is hard then use these passages to help the process: Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 1:13-14; Ephesians 5:1-17; Titus 3:1-4.