The Mother of Prostitutes — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 17:1–6 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, June 26, 2022 · *Mystery Babylon*

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All right, if you've got a Bible, you can open it up to the book of Revelation. We're going to be in Revelation chapter 17 this morning. I want to say thanks to the team for leading us in worship this morning. Did a great job. Where does this go? I'm missing my markers. I'm lost. There's no markers on the stage for the TV. I think that's about right. It doesn't really matter. If you're new to our church, we've been going through the book of the Revelation really since last year. We go line by line, word by word, because, as Taylor said in his prayer, the power for preaching is not in the preacher, the power for preaching is in the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit I believe inspired the Word of God so that when the Bible speaks, God speaks. It's how God speaks to us today, the primary way that God speaks to us today. And so my main goal is to try to just show you what the text says and help let the text speak and say what it's always said and for us to make a proper application from that. And so we just go through books of the Bible because we believe that God knows what's relevant for us more than we know what's relevant for us.

And if I was, you know, picking what I was going to preach on week after week after week, I'd probably just preach on, I don't know, the love of God, or the Psalms every other week, or whatever the case may be. But we're doing this and we're getting to a section of the book of the Revelation that is the most interesting, the most confusing, the most debated and so it's going to be a lot of fun. If you've been around for a couple of weeks, you know we had our VBS this last week.

It was really awesome, had a great experience. We were able to minister to a lot of young children and relay the gospel to them in a way that they could understand. And the big theme of VBS was about being created by God and that this creator God is a creative God

and he's created us in his image, which means we've been given creativity and expressiveness and we're able to take the gifts that God has given us and display them or display God to the world. Part of what it means to be created in the image of God is that we kind of mirror God or we reflect God to the world, to the culture.

The problem is that when sin entered into the world, it marred that image. It's kind of like a rock got thrown at the mirror and now the mirror reflects God's image to the world, but it does so imperfectly, and so we can look at all kinds of different examples for this, but we don't image God the way that we were made to image God. We don't glorify him the way we were created to. And as a result of that, the human heart has a tendency— because we know that we're not right, we know we're broken— and so we have a tendency, instead of worshiping the true God that exposes our weaknesses, to create our own gods, kind of make a god in our own image.

Or maybe we believe, we say we believe in the God of the Bible, but we kind of change the definition of the biblical God to kind of match our morality and our culture's standards of what's right and wrong. John Calvin actually said that the human heart is an idol making factory. I've always kind of been shocked by that statement, but I think it's such a helpful picture of how our little hearts are idol making factories. We're always trying to come up with ways to make God more appealing or to make God less severe or less intimidating.

And as a result, what we see in the culture, and not even just in the culture, what we see in the church is a lack of distinction between God's people and those who are not God's people, those who belong to the Lord and those who don't belong to the Lord. There's been all kinds of books written on this about how the church looks just like the world, how we spend our money the same way, we approach relationships the same way. We're just as immoral in our approach to sexuality. We're just as immoral in our language.

And it's kind of an indictment, if you think about it, as the people of God. If we say we believe in Jesus, we say Jesus makes a difference, we say that the Holy Spirit transforms us from the inside out, and yet there's no visible demonstration of the transforming power of the Spirit. It really silences the witness. And so over and over and over again the Scriptures encourage us to be distinct, to be different, to let the Holy Spirit help us to stand out, to be that light on a hill, the city on a hill, that light that cannot be hidden.

There's a passage in 1 John that is really a succinct summary of what we're going to look at today and in the next couple of weeks, wherein John talks about this world's system— how the things of this world, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life— he says those things are not from the Father, but they're from the world. And so, don't love the world. Don't love the world or the things in the world, because if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

And he says at the end of that passage, and what we're going to see the next couple of weeks in Revelation, that the world is passing away. In other words, God's toleration of our idolatry, God's toleration of our spiritual adultery, is what we're going to see in Revelation chapter 17. That toleration is temporary. Really, what we're going to see in Revelation 17 is John the author present the world in terms of this great prostitute. In fact, I think the title of the message is "The Mother of All Prostitutes." So if you have kids and you brought them into church, you've got to be thinking to yourself, You know, what have I gotten myself into?

But when he talks about prostitution, he's not talking about a literal prostitute having literal illicit sexual encounters. When the Bible talks about prostitution, sometimes it links it to the idea of spiritual adultery. This idea that God has called us— we have entered into a covenant with God where he takes care of us and we submit to him and his will and his design. But instead of doing that we reject God, we do things our own way. And the Bible talks about that in terms of it being spiritual adultery. And we've kind of cheated on God.

And what John's going to do in Revelation 17 is he's going to present that idea of spiritual adultery in terms of a great prostitute, a woman clothed in scarlet, riding a scarlet beast, and how this woman and beast, the epitome of spiritual adultery, crush the people of God and eventually invite God's judgment on the earth. And so those of you just joining us, you may hear those kinds of words and think to yourself, what have I gotten myself into? Why— what — I, you know, I've read the Bible before, but I never read anything about a red prostitute riding a dragon.

I must have missed that part. And you just didn't read far enough, okay? You've got to read all the way to the end. And the last book of the Bible is the book of Revelation. And what you need to know, especially if you're new to Revelation, is that it is what's called an apocalyptic book, meaning it uses pictures and metaphors and images to communicate true truths, or literal truths. And so it's presented as a woman riding on a dragon, but the idea behind it is that it's a literal city or literal ideology geographically centralized that influences the world and it's not just going to influence the world at the very end before Jesus comes, but it's even now influencing the world in very significant ways.

And if you're a believer, you need to be aware of that and be able to protect yourself against its pull and temptation. And so let's read our passage. Those of you new to the book of Revelation, 17 follows a series of seven what are called bowl judgments, where God's judgment on the earth climaxes and is completed. We see Jesus himself, I believe, dishing out these judgments on the earth. And you might think of chapters 17 and 18, which we're going to look at today as a parenthetical expansion of those bowl judgments that we looked at in our last series.

It's kind of filling in the gaps, filling in the details of what wasn't mentioned in Revelation chapters 15 and 16. So what are those details? Let's read it, chapter 17, verse 1: "Then one of

the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me: 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the notorious prostitute who is seated on many waters. The kings of the earth committed sexual immorality with her, and those who live on the earth became drunk on the wine of her sexual immorality.' Then he carried me away in the Spirit to a wilderness.

I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, jewels, and pearls. She had a golden cup in her hand filled with everything detestable and with the impurities of her prostitution. On her forehead was written a name, a mystery: BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE DETESTABLE THINGS OF THE EARTH. Then I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished." And so you read that and you think to yourself, this is why they tell you not to read the last book first. That's probably the first thing that you think of. And then almost everyone who reads this passage, the immediate question is, who is this woman? What does this woman represent? And for those of you who pay attention to the debates that go on in the study of the book of the Revelation, you know there's no shortage of explanations to define who this woman is.

Some say the woman's New York City. Some say the woman is Mecca. Some say the woman is the Roman Empire, the historical Roman Empire, some say it's going to be a revived Babylon. There's all sorts of theories, all sorts of different things, and we'll actually look at some of those in our next message. But today instead of trying to figure out who the woman is, I'd rather us focus on what the woman represents. And as you see, she's presented as a woman that is the mother of all prostitutes. And so you might think of this woman as the epitome and the physical embodiment of spiritual adultery.

And when I say spiritual adultery, what I mean is idolatry. She is the embodiment of saying God is wrong, I'm right. Maybe God doesn't even exist. So all those people who believe in God are fools. It's nonsense. We should do it this way instead of that way. You should do it your own way. It's not about him, it's about you. And she's presented as this mother of all prostitutes, this mother of all the detestable things that take place on the earth. And is she a literal city? Many people suggest so.

I tend to lean that it's a literal city, but it's not just a literal city. It's a literal city that represents something much wider, something much more influential, something that's even prevalent today, which is this system of idolatry, the system that sets itself up in opposition to God and in replacement of the one true God of the Bible. So to figure out what she represents, what I want us to do today is to kind of start with her name. And her name there at the end of chapter 17, verse 5,[1] it starts with the word mystery.

It's actually, if you look at the Greek New Testament, it's all spelled out in big capital Greek letters, *mystērion*. And then after that it talks about Babylon the great, the mother of all prostitutes, and all the detestable things on the earth. So the fact that it's a mystery probably means we shouldn't be too dogmatic about who we say she is or who she isn't. The Greek word *mystērion* means mystery, means something that's hidden. Oftentimes it's hidden and later revealed. But it's hard to know. So mystery, she's the mother of all prostitutes.

And when they say she's the mother of all prostitutes, I think what they're trying to say is she's the biggest prostitute of all. And again, not literal prostitute having illicit sex, but she's the biggest example of spiritual adultery. She's the most influential example of rebellion against God and rejection of God. We see examples of this all in our world today. But this one, when this woman comes about, she's going to be the greatest example, undeniable, a hater of God, trying to replace God, trying to lead people astray. So mother in that sense is like the mother of all fights, the mother of all wars, the mother of all battles.

She's not the mother that she reproduces little mini idols. She's the biggest, the grandest, the greatest of all. And the way John describes her is as Babylon the great. And if you know your Old Testament, you know that's not random. John has something in mind when he thinks of Babylon the great. And really, if you want to understand what this future city is going to look like, you got to understand what the Old Testament cities of Babylon looked like. And I say cities, plural, because the first mention of Babylon is really as early as Genesis chapter 11.

When God populates the earth, the people of the earth, the wickedness is great— and this is actually post-flood— but they try to centralize power and build this tower to heaven, overseen by a guy named Nimrod. And he kind of coordinates this effort to build this big tower up in Babylon. The graphic for the series, you can kind of see that tower in the background. And the reason that they wanted to build this tower according to Genesis chapter 11 is that they wanted to make a name for themselves. They said we've got to make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered among the earth.

In other words, this is an effort to glorify ourselves. This is an effort to steal the glory from God. This is an effort to show that God's not all that powerful. He's not all that great. We can be just as powerful, just as great. And as a result of that effort, God confused their languages and judged the earth. The next time you see Babylon show up, it's later on in the Old Testament. It's an actual literal kingdom, headed up by a literal physical king by the name of Nebuchadnezzar. And Nebuchadnezzar has the same spirit or the same kind of attitude that the first Babylonians did there in Genesis chapter 11.

You see this on display in Daniel chapter 4, verse 30, when the king says, "Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built to be a royal residence by my vast power and for my majestic glory?" In other words, just like the Babylon in Genesis 11, this Babylon was man-centered, stealing God's glory, hating any kind of humility or recognition that they were not

the sum and source of everything good in their life, this idea that man is the measure of all things, that's the spirit of Babylon. And actually God ends up judging King Nebuchadnezzar as well, but that's a different story for a different day.

What these two Babylons show us about the future Babylon is that the future Babylon will be a city and a movement that wants to steal God's glory and crush or destroy God's people. And this last piece comes if you read the book of Daniel, you see that Nebuchadnezzar is kind of presented as this antichrist. He's presented as this godless ruler who hates anyone trying to point attention to Yahweh or to the true God of the Bible. And he's the reason why the Babylonians come and invade Jerusalem and destroy the temple and all of this stuff.

It's kind of foreshadowing the destruction of God's people that will happen during the end of days. And so this Babylon in Revelation chapter 17 is a city and a movement that's going to attempt to steal God's glory and destroy God's people. How does she operate? Well, you actually see a description of her in the first six verses of Revelation 17. There's actually ten different descriptions of this woman. I'm not going to go through all ten. I'm just going to give you six because if she's satanic, why not six? I mean, six.

And when I say this, I don't want you to just think of false religion in the end of days, Revelation 17. This kind of stuff is actually prevalent in our culture today. This spirit of Babylon is already alive and well in our culture, and this is kind of how false religion operates in our world. The first attribute of her personality is that she's immoral and godless. Notice I say godless and not irreligious. You can be a very religious person and still be godless. It just means your religion has nothing to do with the God of the Bible.

You see this with, for example, Islam. Islam denies the truth about Jesus Christ as presented in the Scriptures. They don't believe Jesus to be God. It's godless in that sense. Anyone who does not have the Son does not have the Father. And so it's godless, not irreligious, but godless. And then it's also immoral. It's, Okay, here's God's design; let's do the opposite of what God says to do. So she's immoral and godless. Number two, she's attractive and influential. It says in chapter 17, verse 1, that she sits on many waters.

And that the kings of the earth commit adultery with her. When it says that she sits on many waters, you may think, well, she must be a port city next to the ocean. That's not what John means, and you know that's not what he means because later on he says the many waters represent nations and languages and peoples. And so the many waters refers to people, not actual physical literal water. So she's influential in that regard. She has sway over people. You might actually think of her as a religion that has its tentacles throughout all different places of the earth.

And maybe it's not like a literal, well-defined religion like Islam. Maybe it's just an attitude, a mindset, a philosophy, cultural assumptions that have kind of got their tentacles and

influence all throughout the earth, every nation of the earth. And then it says that the kings of the earth commit adultery with her. So she's attracting rulers, politicians, other national leaders to adopt her way of thinking, to say, you know, God's design, God's way, these Christians, let's have nothing to do with them. Let's actually crush them, and I'm going to join your movement.

If that's the price of admission, I'm more than willing to pay it. Number three, she's linked with the antichrist. You say, where did you get that? Well, she's riding on a dragon, right? She's a woman clothed in scarlet and she's riding on a beast who's also clothed with scarlet. That beast is the same beast that's described in Revelation chapter 13. And Revelation 13 describes that before Jesus returns, there's going to rise this godless government of sorts, this godless empire, headed up by a godless figure that elsewhere the Bible refers to as the antichrist.

Oddly enough, the word antichrist is never mentioned in the book of Revelation. It's always pictures. It's always the beast or something of that nature. But John elsewhere talks about this guy as the antichrist, and other places in the Old Testament you get the same idea. So this woman, this city, whatever the city is, this geographical center, is related to or in cahoots with this end-times government. Number four, she'll be extremely wealthy. Remember, it's not just an individual, it's a city, so it's an extremely wealthy city, maybe an extremely wealthy nation.

She gets a lot of imports. She buys a lot of goods. The kings of the earth are kind of attached to her because she makes them wealthy by buying all of their stuff. Number five, she has a sinful lifestyle. You see this where it talks about her having a golden cup in her hand. Everywhere you read the word hand, at least in the book of Revelation, the emphasis is on lifestyle, activities, behaviors. When you see the word head, like the marks that were on their head,[2] that's talking about their ideology, their religion, their worldview.

So head is ideology, hand is behavior, lifestyle. Her lifestyle is defiled, abominable, impure. That cup that she's holding is filled with those dirty deeds that she does dirt cheap. And then number six, she has murderous intentions. Those of you laughing, I know you're listening to music you shouldn't be listening to. No, I'm just kidding. My coach back in high school, my weightlifting coach, we had to listen to the AC/DC Back in Black album every single day when we were lifting weights. So that song is always stuck in my head. Literally, I wake up every day, it's stuck in my head.

Has nothing to do with the sermon. She's sinful in her lifestyle, and then finally she's murderous in her intentions. You notice at the end it says that she was drunk on the blood of the saints. It doesn't mean she literally drinks the blood of Christians and gets intoxicated. It means she wants to murder Christians. She wants to murder Jews. She wants to crush

anyone who follows the true God of the Bible. Now, is this going to be a religion? Is this going to be a city in the future, a literal geographical area with these kinds of attributes?

I believe so. Okay? Where is it? We'll talk about that next week. Is that relevant necessarily for us today? Yes, in some ways, but what's more relevant is these six things are actually prevalent even in our own culture. In seed form, even in our own culture, you have the system of the world that is attractive, it is seductive, it is influential, it is not pro-God. It is the opposite of that. It is defiant in its sinful attitudes. It's basically spitting in God's face and saying, You're a joke; I don't want anything to do with you.

Some of the more glaring examples you can see on things like social media and Hollywood and movies and things of that nature. The point is that system is already present today. And if we're going to be effective in resisting it in the future, then we need to know how to war against its influence even today. And so what I want us to close with are three ways that false religion operates, three warnings around the influence of false religion in our culture. Revelation 17 is about the demise of false religion. Jesus will finally and fully come back and abolish it forever.

But until that day comes, believers are called to be in the world but not of the world to beware of the influence of false religion. And the way to do that is to know how it operates. And so I want to give you three warnings around false religion. The first warning is the way that false religion sucks you in is by exploiting your natural human desires to disorder your love for God. Any sin in your life is a result of disordered love for God. Instead of loving God supremely, instead of putting him first, you've got him second, third, fourth, or whatever the case may be.

It's a disordered love. How does that happen? It doesn't happen automatically. Nobody wakes up as a Christian and says, I think I'll hate God today or I think I'll sin today. No, no Christian wakes up and does that. What happens is the enemy, using things like false religion, exploits your natural desires. And we all have natural desires. The Bible actually talks about them. We looked at a passage in 1 John, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life. This is what Satan uses to draw us in.

It's as old as the Garden of Eden, right? You can go all the way back to Genesis chapter 3 and the serpent in the garden. He's talking to Eve. And what does he say? Have some forbidden fruit, my lady. She goes, Oh, I don't know if I should have any. And the serpent goes, No, no, no, I know God said you can't have any. I know he said you can't even touch it, but he only said that because he doesn't want you to be like him. He doesn't want you to be wise.

He doesn't want you to enjoy life the way it's meant to be enjoyed. He's playing on our appetites. And then notice what she says when the woman, this is Genesis 3, verse 6, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, delightful to look at, and desirable to make

one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. Do you see it? Lust of the flesh, good for food, lust of the eyes, desirable to look at. And pride of life. Did you skip? Go back one more. Good for food, that's lust of the flesh; delightful to look at, lust of the eyes; and then desirable for obtaining wisdom.

That's the pride in one's possessions. Those are the same three things that Satan uses to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. Remember he says, if you're hungry, turn this rock to bread, lust of the flesh. If God really loves you, throw yourself off of this ledge and have the angels come and rescue you. That's the lust of the eyes. And then see these cities. They can all be yours if you'll bow down and worship me. That's the pride in one's possessions. It's the way the enemy always works. He exploits your natural desires to draw you in and disorder your love.

You can go to the 1 John passage now. This is exactly what 1 John said in the passage we read earlier, that this world and the things of this world are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride in one's possessions. Those things are not from the Father, they're from the world. So know this: the way that false religion hooks you is by exploiting natural human desires. And the crazy thing is the desires themselves are not bad, right? Most human beings have a desire for sex. Sex is not a bad thing.

Sex is a good thing. It was given by God. It's actually how the human race is propagated. It's a great gift from heaven. What false religion does is say, If you really want to be satisfied sexually, you can't do sex God's way. You need to do it this way. Marriage is too restrictive. One person, too restrictive. No, if you really want to be happy, you got to do sex outside of your marriage, not with a different gender, but with the same gender, not with one partner but with many partners. See, it's using natural appetites.

The appetites themselves are good, but Satan exploits them, draws you in to disorder your love. Don't do it God's way. Do it your way. Don't do it God's way. Do it that way. And sex is not the only example. The same could be said of money. The same could be said of power, the same could be said of food, the same could be said of so many other natural human desires. Satan's false religion exploits those desires and disorders your love and then it usually doesn't happen all at once. Usually it's small compromises.

It's a seductive woman, right? The illustration of a prostitute is so helpful because prostitutes — at least the ones presented in Scripture— they don't come on too strong too fast. It's a small compromise. It's a sweet invitation. It's little compromises over a longer period of time until eventually you're in a place you never thought you'd be, and then she hooks you, then she draws you in. And it's just like sin. When you do sin in your life, it starts out, sin is pleasurable, sin is fun. It's kind of innocent. It wasn't that big of a deal.

I didn't have these bad intentions, but then eventually you find yourself enslaved. You can't get out of it. You find yourself justifying it, whitewashing it, explaining it away, and miserable, trapped. You don't see any way out. It's a prostitute. It's false religion. It exploits your desires to disorder your love. Some of you may be caught in it right now. It was gradually, suddenly. The second thing false religion does is it exploits its influence to normalize sin. You see this principle at work in our passage. It says that this woman sits on many waters, right?

She has all kinds of influence all throughout the world. The kings of the earth commit adultery with her, meaning she's not just influential with, you know, dumb-minded people or gullible people. She's influencing the kings of the earth. She's influencing the power players. And that's what all false religion does. What it does is it starts out innocent, it seems harmless at first. It makes appeals that are reasonable. And then once it gets its influence, then it starts to squeeze. Then it starts to introduce ideas that are a little more grotesque, but, Well, I've already bought in; I don't know if I want to get out.

Then it presses a little further. And the more influence it gains, the more power it gets for itself, the more it begins to normalize actions and ideas that are clearly unbiblical, clearly violative of even good sense. You don't have to look far in history to see this. If you ask the question, how is it that Hitler convinced a whole nation of Germans to be okay with the idea of a genocide, I can tell you it didn't happen overnight. He didn't lead with that, right? What he led with is, Y'all are feeling a little bit of economic pain, are you not?

You all have these prejudices. He played on that sinful disposition that was in every human being and then slowly over time kind of reeled it in like you're reeling in a fish. And the more influence he got, the more he began to normalize terrible ideas and terrible behaviors until eventually a national brainwashing had taken place and people were doing horrendous actions. That's how all false religion works. And the crazy thing— like, for example, with Hitler, he was even using biblical language, Christian themes, to convey anti-Christian unbiblical ideas. And you don't just have to look to Germany.

You can look in our culture today. There is this religion, this cultural religion, that is justifying behaviors that are clearly unbiblical, clearly harmful, not conducive to human flourishing, and yet they're gaining more and more traction. And the more traction they gain, the more they attempt to normalize behaviors that are clearly sinful and violative of God's design. It's how false religion always works. And whether it's called a religion or whether it's just a movement, it's an ideology that's gaining traction, you need to know that's the way it works. It starts out slow.

And then it pulls the punch. In fact, this illustration of adultery is so helpful. I've counseled with people who have committed adultery and who've had adultery committed on them. And the way that they tell the story, the adulterer will usually say something along the lines of, I

didn't wake up planning to cheat on my wife. But what happened is I had put myself in positions where temptations were more appealing to me than they should have been. In other words, he wasn't watering his own yard. He'd kind of let his marriage deteriorate a little bit.

And the fact that you would even say something like that shows you the power of sin. You're not responsible. You're not the problem that other person was. You would have never done it had they done something else. If it wasn't for the stress at work, if it wasn't for X, Y, or Z, that's what sin always does. It normalizes— that's what false religion always does. It normalizes sin, justifies it, and what you used to think was unreasonable or unthinkable then becomes inevitable. And talking with people who've committed adultery, they'll say things like, once the act was committed, then I had to defend it because I couldn't own up to the truth.

I couldn't acknowledge the terrible thing that I'd done. So what I did was justify it. I excused it. I found other people who would affirm it. I found other people who would affirm my ideas that they were the problem or my work was the problem or X, Y, or Z. And so false religion, what it does is it takes what would otherwise be unthinkable and makes it inevitable. You see this politically in this passage. The kings of the earth who join this prostitute in killing the people of God, I promise you they did not think that to be a viable alternative when it first started, just like Germans didn't think killing the Jews was a viable alternative when it first started, and yet eventually it became inevitable.

Because that's how all false religion works. Whether it's Hitler's Germany or the sexual revolution. I also think the illustration of them being drunk, it says that they were intoxicated with her sexual immorality. That's another helpful illustration of how false religion works. I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand if you've ever been drunk, but for those of you who have ever imbibed alcohol, you know the way that alcohol works on your faculties is that it begins to desensitize you to your reasonableness. And you begin to say things that you wouldn't otherwise say, and you begin to do things that you wouldn't otherwise do.

And you drink enough alcohol, you begin to think you're invincible or you're unstoppable. You begin to think to yourself, I'm not the crazy person. All these other people are crazy. When you're actually the crazy person. You're acting super crazy right now, but you don't think you're acting super crazy because you're drunk. That's how false religion works. Slowly but surely. It deludes you into thinking you're not the crazy one. You're the moral one. You're not immoral. You're moral. You're not unjust. You're just. And that's how this woman deceives the kings of the earth.

And that's how false religion deceives us today. And then finally, the third warning about false religion is it will inevitably exploit political power to persecute and destroy God's

people. If you've ever done a study on the persecuted church, one of the things that you will see is that the chief source of persecution for the Christian church, it's not religious extremists. It's not other radical tribes. It's always the state. Usually atheistic, communistic governments. Like Communist China. You see this with, oh, who was the— Mao, Stalin. You see it even today in those godless atheistic governments, they're the chief source of Christian persecution in the world today.

Sometimes it's a religious government like Islam. It's got a political arm to it, and so it uses the state to crush the saints. But almost always throughout history and what will happen in the future is that this woman will corrupt a state power and persuade that state power to crush believers. Whether Christians or Jews, they will be persecuted and ostracized from pleasant society. And you see this in Revelation 13, anyone who wouldn't take the mark of the beast was under the threat of death, and they were not allowed to participate in the economy.

This is how Satan always works. False religion always exploits political power. That's why you've got to be careful of political movements that try to institutionalize a religion. That's why I'm proud to be a Baptist because most Baptists historically have recognized Christianity and political power are not always a good combination. Even with Constantine back in the 300s, that was not a great union. The only person righteous enough to create a Christian government is Jesus Christ Himself. And when he's ready, no one else is going to stop him. Until then, you should probably be suspicious of cultural religion, institutionalized religion, whether it says it's Christian or whether it's Islamic or whether it's any other thing or whether it's not an official religion at all, but it's a religious attitude that has captivated the hearts and minds of power brokers in politics.

Oftentimes Satan will corrupt that power and use the state to crush the saints. False religion, godless government, those are the two things Satan uses at the end. And so we should be ready. We should be careful. We should be careful of the influence of false religion in our world. It's subtle, it's attractive, and it's incredibly influential. The woman represents worldly seduction and the beast represents worldly persecution and we're reminded from Revelation 17 that it will not last forever. God's toleration of that spiritual adultery will eventually come to an end. So what does that mean for us today?

I think what it means for us today is first and foremost we should have hope, even in a godless culture that we're not alone and that the enemy will not win. It's also a warning for us to not be deceived, to not be drawn into the seductive pull of false religion in our own culture. And the examples we could point to all day. But as we come to a time of response as Taylor leads us, what I'd like to ask you to do is to spend some time examining your own heart for that sin.

Examining your own heart for those small compromises. If you're taking notes, I think the last line says sin is fun for a season. At least any sin I've ever done is fun for a season. But it always ends in death. Always. Eventually ends in death. But 1 John 2:17 says, "But the one who does the will of God" abides forever. And so this morning's an opportunity for us. I don't know where you're at. I don't know what you've been up to lately, but God knows. And there's an invitation from your Heavenly Father this morning to repent of that sin and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to put him back on the throne, to put him back at the center.

Maybe you've been living life your own way, doing things your own way. Maybe you're even to the point where you've convinced yourself, Religion's a joke, God's a joke, this is all false, this is just a straitjacket trying to keep me in. But you can already begin to sense how that sinful attitude and that sinful ideology is producing death in your life. It's producing bondage, it's producing brokenness. And this morning your heavenly Father is saying, repent and believe. Exchange your heaviness for peace. Exchange your brokenness for wholeness. And that's available through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, there's an opportunity for you this morning to surrender your life to Jesus as Lord for the first time. You admit that you're a sinner, believe that God sent Jesus into the world to die on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, and that three days later God raised him from the dead, and that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord can be saved. And so this morning if the Holy Spirit's calling you to put your faith in Jesus Christ, I want to invite you to come as Taylor plays and to say, I want to give my life to Jesus this morning.

Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you for your word. We thank you that even as false religion and sinful, seductive tempters raise their heads to draw us away from you. You speak a better word. Your design produces better outcomes. That the Holy Spirit is a greater power than the power that's at work in the world today. And so help us, as your people, people called by your name, to resist the devil and to be wise to what's going on around us. Give us a reason for the hope that is within us.

Give us a persuasive word back, a persuasive response to the people who ask us why we're so weird, why we live the way that we do. Why we think the things that we think. Help us not to be ashamed or to shrink back, but to stand bold and confident in the truth of your word because we know that will lead to life for those who follow it, and that the alternative inevitably leads to death. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "the end of chapter 17, verse 6"; the name "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes" is written in Revelation 17:5. Source: Revelation 17:5–6 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩

2. Transcript note: spoken as "on their hair"; in Revelation the mark of the beast is placed "on his right hand or on his forehead." Source: Revelation 13:16 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩