

Revelation 17 & 18 The Big City Falls

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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There are a LOT of details in the book of Revelation. We've seen a lot already and we're going to see more this morning. So, let's start with a quick review of the big picture.

We started with a look at Jesus in Chapter One. It is after all, The Revelation of Jesus Christ. And then we moved on to see His evaluation of seven churches in Chapters 2 and 3 where He had some good things to say, some corrections to issue, but always a promise as well for those who were faithful. This was all outlined to John in Revelation 1:19 as: the things that were (that's Chapter 1), the things that are (that's Chapter 2-3), and the things that shall take place after this (chapter 4 to the end of the book).

Those things that should take place, "after this" we understand to happen after the rapture - an event in which God removes Christians from the earth as the final judgment is poured out. And yet, even as judgment is being poured out, the gospel - the call to turn from sin and toward God - is still being spread. We've seen that.

We've seen that even under judgment some people come to faith, which is God's desire - Scripture tells us He gets no joy from the death of sinners. And yet, though God is still graciously reaching out, most people simply will not believe and repent. They will not come to God and find forgiveness.

But they will give their loyalty to someone else...

We've seen that as the days of earth draw to close a seven-year period of Tribulation begins and the unholy trinity of Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet rise to prominence to lead a rebellion against God. Meanwhile, God's wrath is being poured out slowly, but in increasingly more devastating ways: we've seen the breaking of the seven seals, the sounding of the seven trumpets, and the pouring of the seven bowls.

This morning begins the culmination of the final conflict. In Revelation 17 and 18 we find the destruction of Babylon, the capital city of man's rebellion. Next week in Chapters 19 and 20 we see the destruction of Satan and his armies as Jesus rides out to battle on a white horse, defeats the armies of Satan, then chains the devil and casts him into a pit for 1000 years. And then we end it all with a look at the glorious hope of the future in Chapters 21 and 22 as we finish the book and see the new heavens and the new earth given to us by God.

That's where we're headed, there's a great ending to the 'good book' - I encourage you to read ahead. Check it out - you don't want to look like a tourist when you show up in the New Jerusalem.

So, now that we have the outline in mind, let's dive in to Chapter 17 where we find another mountain of details and we'll do our best to see the big picture of what we really need to know.

1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."
3 So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. 5 And on her forehead a name *was* written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.
6 I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

Here's one thing you need to know – sin is attractive and seductive and at times, it seems like those who sin are getting away with it all.

John sees a woman decked out in beautiful colors and expensive jewelry with a golden cup in her hand – it's the ultimate picture of a carefree lifestyle, right? This woman has no concerns. Everything seems to be going her way. She's on top of the world. She's doing whatever she wants and seems to be not only getting away with it, but she's flaunting it all too. And John marvels – he can't believe it – how could she be so flagrant?

We're told the woman's name is Babylon and she is described as sitting on many waters with all the kings of the earth coming to her. As we move on it will become clear that the woman is actually used to illustrate a city that will rise to prominence as the leading city on earth – we'll be told later that the waters she sits on are many peoples, tongues, and nations. Now, there's a lot of debate over which city it will actually be, but whether it's the original Babylon, a revived Rome, or some other city, the ultimate point is: it will be a prominent city that rises above all others.

That's fitting, since the city of Babylon has born out of the desire for control and the pursuit of power and success apart from God and it's been used as analogy for those ideas ever since. Other than Jerusalem, no city is mentioned more often in the Bible. It traces its roots all the way back to the famous tower of Babel in Genesis 11:4.

Not long after God destroyed the world through the flood and then used Noah and his family to repopulate the earth, people began ignoring God again and going their own way. Some of those people moved out toward what is modern day Iraq. And there they decided to try and build a city and tower for themselves.

Genesis 11: 4 And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

They wanted to take control of the situation, to make a name for themselves. But, and here’s where things went critically wrong – they wanted to do it without paying any attention to God. So, God became personally involved in stopping the project by confusing their languages and they eventually left the work behind and went their separate ways.

But over time, it has been built and rebuilt numerous times. You’ve heard of the Babylonian Empire which conquered Judah in 586 BC. Later, Alexander the Great was intent on using Babylon as his capital but he died before making the transition. The city’s ruins still exist today - it sits about 30 miles to the southwest of Baghdad in modern Iraq. Archaeologists have been working to uncover it and Saddam Hussein famously sought to rebuild it but never completed the task.

It’s been a very long time since the actual city was a real seat of power, but the idea it represents continues with us throughout time – the idea of significant earthly accomplishment without God and then glorying, or boasting in that accomplishment – it’s the idea of human sovereignty, of being able to do whatever you please with no opposition and that’s why we see the city depicted as a partying prostitute here and why throughout the pages of Scripture we see Babylon portrayed as the center of paganism and idolatry as well.

Now again, the woman seems to have everything going for her. Notice, not only do we find her sitting on many waters, she’s also riding the beast. We met him back in Chapter 13 and learned that one day one man will rule the entire world as he increases and consolidates his power. The woman appears to be riding him, to be sitting atop, in a position of control over him, but we’ll see it’s all just a illusion – her world is going to come crashing down very soon.

But for now, she is preeminent. She is described as the mother of harlots and abominations on the earth. And again, she seems to be getting away with it all. She’s not hiding her sinful identity as a harlot. She’s flaunting it, and she’s showing off the riches she’s acquired in the process. Her clothing – scarlet and purple were made with extremely expensive dyes in John’s day, only the most wealthy could afford them, her jewelry, and the fact that she drinks out of a cup of gold are all indicators that the money is flowing in. She’s no cheap prostitute from the projects, she’s a seductive high-end call girl – the kings of the earth come to seek her out.

The money and the fame and the power have given this city the ability to do whatever it wants – she even flagrantly persecutes and martyr’s God’s people. She seems invincible. And so, when John sees it all, he marvels – how could it be? How is all of this happening? Well, he’s about to get an answer to that question, and see what God is going to do about it.

7 But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

Remember, one of the things we’ve noticed about Revelation is that there are a lot of different perspective changes, lots of flashbacks and fast forwards, and lots of new camera angles - sometimes we see events taking place on earth, sometimes things taking place in Heaven.

So, John is being told, this beast was and is not, but will be again – there’s something of a cycle to his actions. This is the same beast from chapter 13 – the one who will one day rule the entire world. He’s described here in geographical terms as well as personal terms, much like Babylon – it’s a woman and a city by the same name - well, here we see the seven heads of the beast are mountains, as well as kings.

9 “Here *is* the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. 10 There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, *and* the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. 11 The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.

12 “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. 13 These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. 14 These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those *who are* with Him *are* called, chosen, and faithful.”

Here’s something else you need to know. There is a conflict here between the Lamb – that is Jesus, and the beast. They will make war with Him, but they will lose “for He is Lord of lords and King of kings.”

They may be kings - plural, but He is THE King – singular - over them.

We talk about synergy sometimes – the effect you get by coming together with teamwork – that the sum of the parts is greater than the whole – that together we can achieve more than any of us could separately. Well, none of that matters when you’re comparing your ability to that of Jesus. Even the combined forces of the world, AND the combined forces of darkness will not be able to stand against Him in the final battle.

And you, Christian, will share in that victory – we see a mention made here of those who are called, chosen, and faithful. If you are a Christian today, then you know God has chosen you, called you, and you’re being proved faithful. If you’re not a Christian today, or if you’re not sure if you’re a Christian – then you can know for a fact that you *are being called* – respond to that calling and this will be you as well – on the Lamb’s side instead of standing

against Him and being overcome. He's going to be proven to be superior to all of us – the question is – will it be through our surrender or our defeat?

15 Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.

As we mentioned already, the woman sits on top of the world. She's the preeminent city – the global super city that every looks up to.

And that causes some problems.

16 And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. 18 And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

Revelation 18:1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. 2 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! 3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury."

This angel gives Babylon's eulogy announcing her demise – she who was once riding on top of the world, flaunting her dress and her jewels, celebrating her wine, is now a wasteland.

You need to know that it turns out the ten horns she was riding hated her, made her desolate and naked, ate her flesh and burned her with fire. They turned on her and stripped away everything she had enjoyed.

Think about that. God is behind the fall of Babylon, but He's not the direct instrument of her downfall – she's actually destroyed by those who once seemed to be in agreement with her. She's brought down by the envy and jealousy of others.

It's the classic stabbing in the back – the idea is that your back is open and vulnerable because it's only supposed to be friends back there as you face your enemy – but one of your friends betrays you and stabs you where your armor is weakest or perhaps you're even unarmed. It's a dirty, underhanded, sneak attack, and it's devastatingly effective – born out of jealousy and personal ambition.

If you've been through junior high and early high school you know all about these rapidly shifting loyalties and the willingness of some people to suddenly turn on one who had always been a friend. You know how quickly popularity can surge and then be withdrawn.

But did you also know that God wants to protect you from that kind of backbiting and jealousy? You need to know that sin will always eventually lead to division and fighting but God's greatest commandment is that we love Him and then love each other. He wants to use us to help build each other up and never to tear another believer down. John 11:35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples: by your love one for another."

4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. 5 For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6 Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. 7 In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' 8 Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her."

Would you take note of that? Something about it strikes me. For as much fun as she seemed to be having, for as flagrant and bold as she seemed to be – as invincible as she felt, she will fall in a single day, "for strong is the Lord God who judges her." There's just something stirring about that to me, something inspirational. "Strong is the Lord God who judges her." It's brief, it's compact, it's a tight little statement, but it's motivating if you're on the right side of it. "Strong is the Lord God who judges her."

She was boasting in her position and her freedom thinking it would go on forever, and suddenly, swiftly, without warning apparently, she was smashed. Like the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, or the attacks of Sept 11th – a devastating, crippling attack when no one was looking for it.

You need to know there's an important lesson here for all of us who live in the shadow of this city. Washington DC is not Babylon, but it acts like her in many ways. Cities are attractive because of what they seem to promise. Isn't that why some of you moved here? For the opportunities? And isn't that one of the reasons why people are moving back into the District in such numbers today, isn't it why urban life is seeing a resurgence all across America? It's cool to live in the city where you seem to have access to everything.

Yes, but not everything is good. And underneath that promising exterior lies a dark side – remember the city is portrayed as a harlot, a prostitute. And there's a reason for that. As delicately as I can express this – a harlot receives her wages in exchange for allowing another to experience indulgence without commitment. Indulgence without commitment.

I would challenge us all to consider – what are you getting out of living here, and what are you giving away in the process? I've seen this city and all of its attractions and temptations pull down person after person. Not always through hedonism and awful sin, though there is that – but this isn't Vegas, and it's not Fort Lauderdale beach at Spring Break; we may not

specialize in fleshly, sensual sin, but there are plenty of other allurements here that may be pulling you away from your primary relationship with God.

I challenge you to soberly consider it. To evaluate – is anything about this city nourishing your soul, making you a more godly person, deepening your relationship with Jesus?

Or, on the other hand, is there anything about this city and your life here that is suffocating your soul instead, that is pulling you toward things you ought not to or be a part of? And if so, what are you going to do about it? You need to know the voice from heaven called God's people out of the city before the judgment came.

Now, I don't think that means you need to get out of DC. It might, but that's not my point. My point is simply to draw your attention to it. I think God want us here, to be salt and light – to be an influence on the people around us in the places we live and work. He wants you there to see things you can pray for and connect with people to share with. But He also wants us to be aware of the seductive powers of the harlot and to not get caught up in her snares, because she's going to be judged – devastated suddenly, **“for strong is the Lord God who judges her.”**

9 “The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, 10 standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’

11 “And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: 12 merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; 13 and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. 14 The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. 15 The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, 16 and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! 17 For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance 18 and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’

19 “They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’

Kings, merchants, and shipbuilders weep, not because of what has happened to her, but because of what it means for them. And notice, they all stand at a distance. None of them rush in to help. After all, they're not really concerned about her; they're concerned about what this all means for them – what they're losing as a result.

Those who love indulgence without commitment weep, but those who love with a pure love are called to rejoice:

20 "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and *you* holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"

21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw *it* into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. 22 The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. 23 The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth."

You need to know the judgment against Babylon is swift, sudden, and complete. The war on terror has been going on for fourteen years now. Some of you were in kindergarten when it began. Some of you weren't even born when it began. Others of you have spent your entire time in the military or government service under the shadow of this nebulous war. You need to know God does not struggle to find or fix the enemy on the battlefield and there is no insurgency after His victory for His victory is complete.

Babylon falls "in one hour." Next week we see The battle of Armageddon which is equally anti-climatic. "for strong is the Lord God who judges."

So, as we wrap it all up this morning here's a reminder of what you need to know. You need to know that sin is seductive, and it may seem, for a time that those who sin are having a great time and getting away with everything, but it's only a momentary illusion. Their judgment will come swiftly, and they will be left all alone.

Meanwhile, God calls you out of their midst before the judgment comes. We may suffer at times as a result of sin on this planet – it may touch our lives through death or disease or disaster, but we who are found in Christ never, ever, suffer the wrath of God. Instead, we are avenged – Christ absorbs the suffering we deserve, and the suffering we wrongfully endure is returned on those who caused it.

Christian, you are a citizen of the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of earth. Fix your eyes on the Heavenly City and don't be seduced by anything here on earth. You weren't called to find satisfaction in a harlot – indulgence without commitment; you've been called to be the spotless bride of Christ – given over completely to One who is completely given over to you.