

## Sermon – 16/03/2008 pm

### Babylon Boomeranged

Study Text: Revelation 18:6–9

You will not find the word ‘boomerang’ in the Bible but it is a good word to describe the principle of repayment found in the Bible. When you throw a boomerang it comes back – and hits you in the face if you are not careful! ‘Whatever a man sows, that he will reap’ is how the Bible expresses this truth (Galatians 6:7). If you sow love, you will reap love, at least from God, but if you sow hatred, you will not reap love.

#### Pride

Pride is one of the seven mortal sins according to the Church of Rome. They have now declared several other deadly sins, sins which are merely an outworking of the evil heart of man. They continue to miss the mark with regard to sin, focusing even more upon the outward manifestations of evil instead of the seat and source of sin, the sinful heart on every human being.

Pride in the heart is what leads us to be selfish and self-centred. Because of pride we do not look out for others as we should. Because of pride we think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Because of pride men even exalt themselves against God.

In God-given wisdom king Solomon warned against the sin of pride. He said *Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall* (Proverbs 16:18). We sometimes say ‘the higher they rise the harder they fall’ which is largely true. It is true if that rise is the result of selfish ambition and pride.

In chapter 18 of Revelation we have already seen the fall of the mother of all prostitutes called ‘Babylon the great’. In this passage before us we see the reason for her fall. Her fall was ultimately of God, and it was because of her pride. *I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow* (18:7). It was because she exalted herself against Almighty God. She failed to understand the nature of divine judgment and the power of God.

She did not express this pride openly but said these things in her heart. Outwardly she was very flattering and seductive. She may even have appeared humble at times. Pride is a very sinister sin. It resides in the heart. It is in our hearts from birth. God tells us to keep it under control and with the help of the Holy Spirit we can. But Satan tells us to let pride rule in our hearts. He tells us ‘look after number one, you deserve it, you must have the best, you are strong and self-sufficient, you deserve to get all the praise’. You hear Satan’s voice in the media and in advertising all the time. But do you hear the voice of God telling you to keep a lid on pride.

*You said in your heart I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...I will be like the Most High* (Isaiah 14:13). Many understand these words as referring to Satan – called Lucifer in some versions. Indirectly this may be so, but in the context Isaiah is speaking about Babylon and its kings. In the book of Revelation Babylon becomes symbolic of evil and is closely associated with the beast and the dragon which represents Satan (20:2).

Babylon was the name of a literal city and kingdom in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC; in Revelation it takes on symbolic meaning. The kings of Babylon that we read about in the book of Daniel were full of pride. Nebuchadnezzar was a man whose *heart was lifted up, and his spirit hardened in pride* (Daniel 5:20). At one time he challenged God saying to Daniel's friends *who is the God who will deliver you from my hands* (Daniel 3:15). God struck him with madness, making him live like a cow, until he realized and acknowledged that God rules in all the earth.

Belshazzar refused to humble his heart although he knew all that had happened to his father Nebuchadnezzar. He exalted himself against God by drinking from the sacred vessels – a toast to his idols. He refused to acknowledge God and give him the glory. God struck him down without delay.

Many years later King Herod suffered the same judgment. He was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon but when he went down to that city the people praised him. They said he was a god (Acts 12). Because Herod revelled in this praise God struck him down without delay. Many others have come under such judgment even in our day – what of those who glory in the homosexuality which is an abomination before God? God will not give his glory to another. God will not be mocked. God will silence all who exalt themselves against him.

The proud and seductive prostitute representing the economic/religious systems of this world considered herself a queen. She lived in luxury, adorning herself with fine clothes and jewellery. She despised poor widows vowing never to become like them. She would never see sorrow she told herself. Widows in the past, and in some places still today, were reduced to begging to survive. God says to look after widows and orphans. The world simply vows never to become one.

The sin of pride, self-sufficiency and self-glory ruled in the heart of the great prostitute. She is behind this very sin. Our struggle says Paul is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers of the darkness of this age against spiritual hosts of wickedness (Ephesians 6:12). These rulers are exposed in the book of Revelation. We need spiritual help; we need God's help, in the fight against the seductive power of material things, and the praises of other people. Let us be encouraged as we read this passage that God has judged this seductive spiritual power.

## Payment

It is written, you will reap what you sow. The prostitute who made men drunk with the wine of her fornication, and who was drunk herself with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus (17:6), was made to drink the cup of God's wrath. Previously John heard the martyrs crying out for just judgment and for the Lord to avenge their blood (6:10). They were told to wait a little longer. According to this angel the sins of the prostitute had reached to heaven (18:5).

The cry goes out to repay her double according to her works (18:6). Double here simply means 'in duplicate', to render to her in full measure according to what she has done. This is the principle known as 'jus talionis'. It can be seen in the command God gave to Noah stating 'whoever sheds a man blood, by man his blood shall be shed' (Genesis 9:6). Whilst our society has turned away from this principle God has not. He will render each person their just punishment.

God will *render to her just as she rendered to you* (18:6). *In the measure that she glorified herself and lived in luxury, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow* (18:7). This reminds us of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. He lived in luxury ignoring Lazarus who lay sick at his gate. In the after life the tables were turned.

Daniel advised Nebuchadnezzar to repent, to stop sinning and show mercy to the poor (Daniel 4:27). Daniel knew the mercy of God towards those who repent. But he ignored Daniel's advice. He kept on oppressing the poor, building his great city. He was heading for greater heights of worldly glory from which he would surely fall. Even when men were scorched with great heat in the plague of the sixth bowl they did not repent and give glory to God.

It is the same today. Despite all the warnings – and I hope we are warning our family and friends of the coming judgment – despite the warning people go on living under the influence of Babylon. But God brought Nebuchadnezzar to his knees and he will do the same with every proud and selfish person. God is all powerful.

## **Power**

*Strong is the Lord God who judges her* (18:8). Nebuchadnezzar put out the challenge. 'What god will be able to rescue you from my hand?' There are many who shake their fists at God. There are many who mock and blaspheme the holy name of God. There are many who spurn the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Christ is for cripples' they say. 'We do not need a religious crutch' they proudly proclaim. But God will have the last word. *She will be utterly burned with fire* (18:8).

The great prostitute, the economic/religious system of this world continues to seduce people all around the world, not the least in our own nation. But the word of God has gone forth in our land.

At one time in giving missionary talks I would remind people that on almost every other street corner in our city is a church. But where are the people? In India there are thousands of villages without a single church. Nevertheless, God will render to each one according to his deeds (Romans 2:6). God has spoken and his words will not fall to the ground. He is powerful to save and powerful to judge.

Oh that the rich and powerful would heed the Word of God, that they would realize before it is too late that God will not be mocked or ignored. Oh that every man, woman and child whose breath God holds in his hand would hear and heed this word. How tragic to see even children mocking God their creator. But this is what they learn from parents and especially from the TV and movies.

Just as surely as the autumn days are drawing in, so the day of the Lord is drawing near. The end will come suddenly. The plagues will fall upon the prostitute in one day. It will be a day of unparalleled disaster and destruction. Everything the prostitute has given will go up in smoke as she herself will. All who blindly follow her will also be cast into the lake of fire. Only the kingdom of God will remain.

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*