

## Sermon – 09/03/2008 pm

### Come Out of Babylon

Study Text: Revelation 18:1–5

I received a prayer letter the other day from friends in Central Asia. They are in a remote valley bringing the gospel to these isolated people. One concern they shared was that these people were selling their wheat seed to put money into a pyramid investment scheme. The tentacles of some ‘Nigerian’ investment scam must have reached this remote place deceiving even more people.

Why do people put their savings into such risky schemes? We still hear of people putting money into these Nigerian schemes. They look so attractive but are in fact too attractive to be true. Such is the lust for money, such is the desire of some to get rich quick that they take the bait and get hooked. It is much the same with gambling of course. People dream of the big win which for most never comes.

This lust seems to override all sense and worldly wisdom. Tragically even heavenly wisdom is sometimes overridden by this powerful attraction of money. Even the people of God can be deceived and lead astray by lust for the treasures and pleasures of the world. The love of money leads to all kinds of evil.

### Heavenly Messenger

Babylon the great, the mother of all prostitutes is bold and boastful as she struts the world stage. She is seriously seductive, she is dangerously deceptive. She symbolizes the prevailing economic/religious systems of the world. She seduces even the kings of the earth, as well as the common man, making them drink the wine of her fornication. The merchants get a special mention in this chapter. They have *become rich through the abundance of her luxury* (18:3).

John saw *another angel coming down from heaven having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory* (18:1). For all the dazzling lights surrounding the prostitute, all the bright lights of the city she symbolized, there is a much more powerful light coming down from heaven. Her lights will one day go out but this heavenly light will shine for ever and ever.

All the glory of men in this world cannot be compared to the brightness and glory of this light from heaven. He illuminates the whole earth. Some think this angel is actually Jesus himself and that this is a Christophany. There certainly are similarities with the mighty angel of 10:1 who was Jesus in all his glory. Moreover the glory of God and the Lamb illuminate the city of the New Jerusalem (21:23).

As Jesus ascended into heaven in his glorious resurrected body he declared ‘all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’. This angel had great authority (18:1). He was more powerful than the great prostitute and even the beast on which she sat. He cried out with *a loud voice Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen* (18:2).

A similar cry has been echoing from stock exchanges around the world in recent days. The market has fallen, the price of stocks has fallen and many are getting their fingers burnt, as we say. Some had borrowed money to put into shares. Money lenders and financial advisers were encouraging this. It was a smart way to get rich quick. But with interest rates going up and share prices coming down some are very worried.

This is not the first time the market has fallen and it will not be the last – well it may be. The day is surely coming when all stock markets will close. Much activity on these markets is under the control of the evil one. In such places we see the great prostitute doing her work, luring men into bondage to money and the things of this world. We see it happening in religious circles also. Did you hear the comments of a pastor who went to a Benny Hinn performance? Here is a man who knows how to seduce the blind and the gullible.

One day these world systems will come to an end. John was being shown the judgment of the great prostitute. In the previous chapter we saw how the very beast on which she sat turned against her to *eat her flesh and burn her with fire* (17:16). God himself was behind this downfall of the great prostitute called Babylon the great.

### **Babylon Is Fallen, Is Fallen**

You will be saying to yourself ‘we have seen these words before’ – and you are right. When the seventh bowl was poured out God gave Babylon *the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath* (16:19). And before this in 14:8 we read *Babylon is fallen is fallen*. If you are reading this book chronologically you will be quite confused – how can Babylon keep falling! But we must read this book as a series of parallel visions, each giving another aspect or greater insight into the end time judgment of this world.

In the chapter before us we are given a closer look into the judgment and destruction of Babylon the great. The judgment is actually spoken of as if it has already happened – Babylon is fallen. This is called the prophetic perfect speech. It is God’s revealed will and God’s word never fails. So what God has promised can be spoken of as if it has already happened. How amazing!

This divine certainty is based upon God’s judgments in the past. God does not simply say ‘believe me’, though we do that because he is Almighty God, the God who does not lie. But God says ‘look at what I have spoken and done in the past’. Babylon literally ruled this world in the time of Daniel. No one could stand against this great juggernaut of economic and religious power. But God brought that great kingdom to an end literally overnight. God will bring this symbolic Babylon to an end in one day (18:8).

Do you remember the story? King Belshazzar was weighed in the scales by God and found wanting. In the scales of justice and glory he came up short according to the writing on the wall. He was guilty of idolatry, indeed of praising gods of silver and gold with the sacred vessels of God’s house. He was guilty of failing to glorify God, *the God who holds your breath in his hand* (Daniel 6:23). That very night Belshazzar was slain.

Long before the time of Belshazzar, God sent two angels to the city of Sodom. The outcry against this city had grown great before the Lord (Genesis 19:13). The people of Sodom were exceedingly wicked. God had given them up to vile passions, to lust for those of their own sex. The angels had come to warn the people of the imminent destruction of their city. We

might reflect on how many people in New Orleans were crying out to the Lord as they suffered under the sins of that city, famous as it was for its Mardi gras festival.

The sins of Babylon the great *have reached to heaven and God has remembered her iniquities* (18:5). The angel announces the fall of this great city. *It has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!* (18:2). The city was made desolate; it was like a ghost town.

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied the fall of Babylon and the language here is reminiscent of their proclamations. Isaiah spoke of the destruction of her *carved images* (Isaiah 21:9), and Jeremiah of Babylon becoming *a heap, and a dwelling place for jackals* (Jeremiah 51:37). The great city once revered by the whole world became a heap of ruins. The crows and the vultures fought with the jackals and the rats for the rotting bodies.

## **Come Out**

*Escape for your life, do not look behind you nor stay anywhere on the plain. Escape to the mountains lest you be destroyed.* Where would we find these words in our Bible? Were these words heard and heeded? Remember Lot's wife! The angels urged Lot and his family to leave the wicked city of Sodom before it was too late. But they had become accustomed to living in that city. They were reluctant to leave. They must flee if they were to live. Flee and do not look back. Lot's wife was fleeing in body but not in spirit. Her heart was still in Sodom. It was not just physical separation but spiritual separation that was called for.

Jeremiah called upon the people of God to get out of Babylon and escape the fierce anger of the Lord (Jeremiah 51:45). Daniel was not at Belshazzar's party but there may well have been some Jews among the 1000 guests. Some Jews had compromised with the world and joined the economic and religious system of Babylon. Daniel was of course living in this city and even served in the government, but he was not part of its idolatry and corruption as his life story clearly shows. He lived a life of integrity and honesty, praying three times every day. Like his friend he was ready to die before he would worship an idol.

The angel John saw called upon the people of God not to share in her (Babylon's) sins *lest you receive of her plagues* (18:4). If Christians want to live according to the rules of this world they will be judged along with the world. Too many want to have a foot in both worlds. They want to go along with the world, enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season, but also to keep in good with God. They will go to church if nothing else is on that Sunday. Have you come out of the world? Have you set your heart on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God? Remember the things of this world are all passing away.

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