

Sermon – 02/03/2008 pm

Prostitute Put Down

Study Text: Revelation 17:15-18

Have you heard the name Jezebel? Does that name bring certain images to your mind? Jezebel was a queen in Israel, a wicked queen. She brought idols into the palace of the king. She sought to kill the prophets of God. She conspired to murder the poor man Naboth just so the king could have a veggie garden. In the end dogs licked up her blood and ate her flesh.

The name Jezebel appears in the book of Revelation. It is the name, real or symbolic, a woman calling herself a prophetess in the church at Thyatira. She led the Christians into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. She told them to compromise with the world in the face of persecution.

The prostitute shown to John by one of the seven angels having seven bowls was the mother of all prostitutes. She was the great seductress *with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication* (17:2). She carried the name ‘Babylon the great’. She was ‘dressed to kill’ we might say, wearing lots of fine jewellery and make up.

John marvelled at the sight of this woman sitting on a scarlet beast which had seven heads and ten horns. But the angel told him not to marvel. All that glitters is not gold. And even gold perishes, as Moses showed the people of God in the desert. The angel had in fact come to show John *the judgment of the great prostitute* (17:1). This is what we see in the closing verses of this chapter.

City on the Waters

The great prostitute was sitting on many waters (17:1). Yes, he saw her sitting on a beast also – that is part and parcel of apocalyptic writing in which images are quite fluid. The woman is identified as *that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth* (17:18). She is Babylon the great.

Babylon was a great city in the days of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and took the Jews, including Daniel, captive to Babylon. Babylon was on the river Euphrates. Actually it was literally on the river for a canal ran under the city. In the year 539BC the Medes and Persians managed to divert the water and enter the city via this canal. They found King Belshazzar drunk at a massive party he had thrown for his friends. He was slain that very night, some say by his own people (Daniel 5:30). That was the end of the mighty kingdom of Babylon. Jeremiah spoke of this moment in history – *O you who dwell by many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come, the measure of your covetousness* (Jeremiah 51:13).

John was living centuries later in the time of the Roman Empire, but the world had changed little. Rome was in power and was just as corrupt and violent as Babylon. In fact the Jews referred to Rome by the epithet ‘Babylon’. Babylon is so typical of worldly kingdoms that it is used in a universal sense in this vision.

The great prostitute symbolizes economic and/or religious systems of this world which make alliances with political or state authorities. There was no distinction between the state and religion in Babylon or Rome. The emperor could make himself god if he wanted, and some did. Business and trade was tied up with idolatry. Trade guilds had their patron gods or saints. Such associations were in direct opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The word 'covetous' appears in Jeremiah 51:13 with reference to Babylon and its end. We do not hear this word much these days, but that is not to say it is a thing of the past. Coveting is one of those sins with lots of euphemisms. Coveting is no longer seen as a sin but is actually encouraged. Even Christians see nothing wrong with desiring something their friend has. 'Why do you want such and such a thing? – because my friend has one'. The Bible calls that coveting.

See the tenth commandment 'you shall not covet your neighbour's house or his field or his wife or anything that is your neighbour's'. Like the rest of the world many Christians are so busy acquiring the things of the world that they look like and act just like the people of the world. The prostitute has seduced them into seeking the things of the world rather than the things of God.

Harlot off the Horse

What happened to Ahab's wife Jezebel in the end? In II Kings 9 we read that while she was powdering herself and making herself seductive Jehu rode by. She called out to this new king of Israel. He looked up at her briefly and called upon her servants to throw her down. They threw her down, and her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses, and Jehu trampled her underfoot (II Kings 9:33). Her own servants cast Jezebel to her death.

In village India a woman found to be a prostitute may be stripped naked and made to march down the main street. Those she seduced, those 'made drunk from the cup of her fornication' will be among those stripping her naked and parading her down the street.

The great prostitute sitting on the scarlet beast with ten horns was turned upon by those ten horns. They *will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire* (17:16). The very horse that carried her suddenly becomes the horse which tramples her to death.

'The political side of the ungodly world system will turn against the heart of the social, economic and religious side and destroy it'. This world is a fallen world; it is an evil world and those who live by the rules of the world will die by those rules. Evil is self destructive in the end. Infatuation with the things of the world and gratification from such things is short lived. The world will devour its own, just as most criminals die at the hands of 'their own'.

Compromise with the world may save the life of those persecuted by Babylon or Rome, but in the end such Christians will lose out. They will be devoured by the very system they sought to make peace with. Listening to Jezebel and following her teaching is appealing. There are many so called prophets who offer an 'easy gospel', a gospel that does not upset the world. But in the end such a gospel will be shown to be one of straw. It will be burned up.

The Lord made a covenant with his people when he brought them out of Egypt. He said ‘you shall have no other gods before me’. He told them not to make graven images and not to covet things. The Lord has made a covenant with us today, a covenant in the blood of his only begotten son Jesus Christ. We must flee from idolatry (I Corinthians 10:14). *Pure and undefiled religion is this* writes James (1:27), *to visit orphans and widows in their trouble and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

God’s Eternal Purpose

While the great prostitute was hated, abused and killed by the very ones she drank and fornicated with, it is also true that God *put it into their hearts to fulfil his purpose* (17:17). We might say that evil is by nature self destructive, but nature and all creation is under the sovereign power of God. God can and does control the hearts of men.

Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem; this is true but Daniel tells us that *the Lord gave the king of Judah into his hand* (Daniel 1:2). The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, to command the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple (Ezra 1).

The world we live in is blind to this truth and some Christians are also. People fail to see the hand of God in anything that happens – except to curse him when things go wrong. Sometimes we fail to see the big picture that God presents in his word. We fail to see the hand of God moving to raise up kings and put down kings. We fail to see him moving in the hearts of men and women. We may even lose hope that he will save his chosen people.

Let us look to the Lord and pray for revival. Let us pray ‘your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven’. God is not sleeping. He has not gone into retirement. He has a great plan and purpose for the salvation of men and women, for his own glory.

In the fullness of time he sent his son Jesus into this fallen world. He sent him for the purpose of redeeming man and women who are born in sin and are bound by sin. God raised Jesus from the dead to sit as the Lamb upon the throne in heaven. God has set a day when he will judge the world in righteousness by this Lamb. In the meantime he is building his church.

Satan and his cohorts are striving to destroy the church but they will not prevail. They may appear to do so from time to time (11:7, 13:7) but the Lamb will overcome them by the breath of his mouth (17:14). Indeed he has already overcome at the cross of Calvary. Babylon the great is fallen. The beast of the sea and the beast of the earth will be next, and then finally Satan, the great deceiver himself.

Will you stand firm to the end? Are you standing in the Lord Jesus Christ today? In him you have sure and certain victory over the world, the flesh and the devil.

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