A Tale Of Two Women

Revelation 17:1-5
1 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:
2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been 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 sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.
4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:
5 And upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon The Great, The Mother Of Harlots And Abominations Of The Earth.

Revelation 21:9-10
9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.
10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

A Tale of Two Cities

• In 1859 Charles Dickens published a literary masterpiece entitled A Tale of Two Cities.
• The book was an instant classic and, to this day,
  ▪ it contains the most famous opening line in literary history.
• “It was the best of times,
  o it was the worst of times,
    ▪ it was the age of wisdom,
      • it was the age of foolishness,
    ▪ it was the epoch of belief,
      • it was the epoch of incredulity,
    ▪ it was the season of Light,
      • it was the season of Darkness,
    ▪ it was the spring of hope,
      • it was the winter of despair…”
• Those lines are so memorable because of the powerful contrasts that they invoke.
Notes by Pastor Tony McCall

The Pentecostals of Lake City

- Dickens touched on the most common disparities
  - that define the realities of our world:
    - good times and bad times;
    - wisdom and foolishness;
      - belief and doubt;
    - light and darkness;
      - hope and despair.
- The juxtaposition of so many opposites
  - is a foreshadowing of the way
    - that Dickens tells his tale.
- The narrative of the story,
  - which takes place before and during the French Revolution
    - and is set in Paris and London,
  - is carried by contrasting figures
    - from contrasting worlds.
- Everything good thing in the book
  - has an antithetical evil opposite.
- So it is that is that the reader encounters
  - love and hate,
    - life and death,
      - and good and evil,
  - as Dickens weaves a story of two different cities
    - that is conveyed through the lives
      - of individual characters
        - who represent moral opposites.
- If you really take the time to dig into the book,
  - the message of Dickens’ story
    - is conveyed in the contrasts
      - between the characters.
        - That is the story within the story.
- In the closing chapters of the book of Revelation
  - God reveals the broad sweep
    - of redemptive history to John.
- He does it in much the same way
  - as Dickens related his story.
    - God tells his story by sharing with us
      - a tale of two cities.
- In God’s story,
  - two vastly different women
    - represent two very dissimilar cities.
  - God uses the dramatic contrast
    - between these two women
  - to illustrate the scope of redemption,
• the finality of judgment
  • and the eternal choice
    o that every person must make.

• The stories of these two women
  o are told in different chapters
    • but they contain some startling similarities.
  o Both stories start with an angel saying,
    • Come, and I will show you.
  o And in both stories,
    • John is then carried away in the spirit.
  o But there vast difference
    • between where he is taken
      • and what he is shown
        o in the two stories.

The Harlot
• The first angel carries John away in the spirit into the wilderness.
  o The wilderness has a special meaning in prophetic literature.
• It is a a dry barren dessert.
  o It is a place of trial and testing.
• Good things rarely come from the wilderness.
  o Blessing rarely flows in the wilderness.
• Life doesn't spring up there.
  o Green things don't grow there.
• It is dead,
  o it is desolate
    • and it is barren.
      • It is a wilderness.
• And there, in the wilderness,
  o God shows John a woman
    • who represents a city.
• She is given no proper name,
  o but there was a name written on her forehead.
• It was:
  o Mystery,
    • Babylon The Great,
      • The Mother Of Harlots
        o And Abominations Of The Earth.
• Here's the thing that you need to know
  o about the harlot Babylon,
    • she was beautiful in a sensual sort of way.
  o John describes her
    • as being dressed
      • in fine garments

A Tale Of Two Women
• Here, the colors have significance.
  o They represent very expensive dyes
    ▪ that symbolized social class.
• Purple represents royalty,
  o and only the royals wore purple,
    ▪ partly because no one else could afford it.
  o The scarlet cloth was also extremely expensive
    ▪ Because of that, it was a symbol
      • of wealth and prosperity.
• Only the rich and famous
  o could wear scarlet and purple.
    ▪ In addition, she glittered
      • with gold, precious stones, and pearls.
  o She has gone to great trouble
    ▪ to make herself attractive.
• In her hand she holds a golden cup
  o and this cup is central to her seduction.
• For we learn from the angel
  o that through the intoxicating elixir in that cup
    ▪ she has seduced the kings of the earth
      • to commit fornications with her
    ▪ and has caused the inhabitants of the earth
      • to become drunk
        o with the wine of her fornications.
• With her sensual,
  o come hither spirit,
    ▪ she draws men and women to her
  o and she slowly and methodically
    ▪ tears away their inhibitions,
      • seducing them to drink
        o from the cup in her hand.
• But the thing about this harlot
  o is that what she promises
    ▪ is not what she delivers.
  o She promises blessing
    ▪ but she delivers curses.
  o She promises prosperity
    ▪ but she delivers desolation.
  o She promises health
    ▪ but she delivers disease.
  o She promises wealth
    ▪ but she delivers poverty.
  o She promises the best of drinks,
the sweetest of wines,
  • the very nectar of life
  ▪ but she delivers the foulest of poisons,
  ▪ drawn from the dregs of despair
  • and laced with the very substance of death.

• Her siren song,
  ▪ her seductive call,
    ▪ is an invitation to one and all,
  ▪ She makes pleasure seem so immediate,
    ▪ she makes satisfaction seem so near,
    • she thrives on an image of instant gratification.
  ▪ Her message is so well received
    ▪ because she is marketing
      • the shortest path to happiness.
  ▪ Her emphasis is the immediate.
    ▪ There is no concern about the future,
      • there is no worry about tomorrow,
    ▪ there is only the concern about the present,
      • her song is all about here and now,
        ▪ the pleasure of the present.

• She lives in the moment.
  ▪ She sells a shortcut to satisfaction.
    ▪ She softly whispers
      ▪ about present blessing,
        ▪ present prosperity,
        ▪ and present pleasure
          ▪ is deemed to be far more important
            • than any future cost
              ▪ that one may pay.

• Indeed she operates
  ▪ much like any harlot operates.
    ▪ The cost of a few moments in her presence
      • is minimized,
        ▪ and the pleasure of immediate gratification
          ▪ is maximized.

• When John saw her, he was amazed.
  ▪ But the angel asked him, “Why are you amazed?”

• Don't be fooled by her beauty.
  ▪ Don't fall under the spell
    ▪ of her seductive voice.

• Make no mistake about it,
  ▪ her companionship comes
• with a steep price tag.
  • Much like the loan shark enslaves his debtors,
    o she enslaves those
      • who surrender to her gentle
        • and serene voice.
  • And she is cruel taskmaster.
    o Behind the sensual facade,
      • behind the thin veil of beauty,
        • there is death and destruction
      • and those who fall into her open arms
        • are immediately wrapped up
          o in brokenness, pain and despair.
  • Hers is a spiritual deception.
    o She entices men and women
      • to trade eternity
        • for a few moments of pleasure,
      • to sacrifice the coming world
        • for this present world,
          o to trade eternal life
            • for never ending death.

Come Out

Revelation 18:3-5
3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.
4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.
5 For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

• In the midst of that prophetic story
  o of this seductively wicked harlot,
    • a second voice cries out from heaven.
• This voice is directed
  o to whosoever will hear.
    • It cries with passion,
      • come out from among her.
• Don’t fall under her spell.
  o Don’t give way to her influence.
    • This is the voice of the spirit
      • pleading with men and women,
        o save yourselves
          • from this untoward generation.
  o Save yourself from the dreadful judgment
that awaits this woman
  • and all who have fallen
    o under her sphere of influence.
  o Even to those who are caught in her grip,
    • those who have been intoxicated with her promises,
      • the spirit speaks of hope,
    • her bondage does not have to be permanent,
      • her influence does not have to extend to eternity.
  • Her slaves are hers
    o because they owe a debt
      • that they cannot repay
    o but the spirit speaks hope and life,
      • the spirit announces the power of the cross,
        • the virtue of the precious blood of Jesus,
    o the spirit declares,
      • the price has been paid,
        • come out!
  • Indeed there is a call going forth in this house tonight,
    o a call to the weak and weary
      • to the bound and broken,
        • to those who have been caught in sin's snare:
          o you don't have to stay there.
          o You can leave it all behind.
  • Come out from among her.
    o Don't partake of her sin
      • so that you will not be subject to her judgment.
    o Lay it all down at the cross,
      • and let the blood of Jesus make you free.

The Bride
  • Suddenly the scene shifts.
    o Once again an angel says,
      • come and see.
    o And once again, John is carried away in the spirit.
      • But this time,
        • instead of going to the wilderness,
          o the spirit carries John to a mountaintop.
  • There's a great contrast
    o between the wilderness and the mountain.
      • One represents bondage and despair
        • the other represents victory and hope.
  • It was there, on the mountain,
    o that the spirit showed John
      • that heavenly city,
• the hope of the ages,
  o the New Jerusalem.

• Like wicked Babylon,
  o this holy city was also represented by a woman.
    ▪ Only this time,
    • instead of a harlot,
      o we find a bride.

Revelation 19:7-8
7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.
8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

• Once again the woman is dazzling,
  o she is absolutely breathtaking
    ▪ In her splendor.
• But there is a significant difference
  o between her beauty
    ▪ and the beauty of the harlot.
• The harlot had arrayed herself
  o in wealth and riches,
    ▪ with all kinds of baubles and trinkets
      • to increase her attractiveness.
• But the bride possesses
  o a simple,
  o honest,
  o pure beauty.
• The kind of innocent beauty
  o that the harlot has never possessed.
    ▪ She has made herself ready,
      • she has prepared herself for this moment.
• But her preparations did not involve
  o the rich trappings of wealth,
    ▪ with its gold and jewels.
• She has been arrayed in fine linen,
  o clean and white.
    ▪ And, lest we miss the point,
      • John tells us,
        o her fine linen was the expression
          ▪ of her righteousness.
• This is the great contrast.
  o The harlot in her seductive beauty,
    ▪ embodied everything
that is wicked in this world.

- The Bride however,
  - is stunningly attractive
  - and she represents all that is right,
    - all that good,
    - all that is holy
      - and all that is pure.

- She has kept herself.
  - She has reserved herself.
    - There are some things that she will not do.
      - There are some places she will not go.
  - She has not foolishly squandered away her virtue
    - but she has reserved herself for eternity.
- While the harlot promises liberty
  - and freedom in this present world,
    - the bride recognizes
      - that the liberty of this world
        - leads to bondage
      - and that the pleasures of the immediate
        - are shallow and meaningless
          - compared to the heavenly award
            - that awaits her.
- She has determined
  - to save herself for her bridegroom.
    - She has resolved to keep herself
      - pure and chaste,
        - a righteous woman,
          - in every sense of the term,
        - a symbol of all
          - that is good and innocent.
- The bride of Christ is composed
  - of those who have answered the call of the spirit,
    - those who have come out from among her
      - and have separated themselves
        - from the harlot of this world.
- This is the image of the church.
  - She has kept herself pure.
    - Her garment is unspotted.
  - She has not mingled her purity
    - with the tarnishing influences of this world,
      - she has not watered down
        - her commitment
          - with the shallow meaningless
\begin{itemize}
\item She lives in this world
  \begin{itemize}
  \item but she recognizes,
    \begin{itemize}
    \item in her heart of hearts,
      \begin{itemize}
      \item that his world is not her home.
      \end{itemize}
    \end{itemize}
  \end{itemize}
\item Her treasure is in heaven
  \begin{itemize}
  \item and she is living for a city
    \begin{itemize}
    \item whose builder and maker is God.
    \end{itemize}
  \end{itemize}
\item In a final move to clarify
  \begin{itemize}
  \item the complete the contrast
    \begin{itemize}
    \item between the harlot and the bride,
    \end{itemize}
  \item we learn that she also
    \begin{itemize}
    \item calls the world to come and drink.
    \end{itemize}
  \end{itemize}
\item Only she doesn’t call them drink
  \begin{itemize}
  \item from a cup filled with abominations.
    \begin{itemize}
    \item She does not call them to drink
      \begin{itemize}
      \item from the poisoned fountain
        \begin{itemize}
        \item of earthly pleasure.
        \end{itemize}
      \end{itemize}
    \end{itemize}
  \end{itemize}
\item No. She calls the world to drink
  \begin{itemize}
  \item from springs of living water.
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

\textbf{Revelation 22:17}

\textit{And the Spirit and the bride say, \textbf{Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.}}

\begin{itemize}
\item Joining her voice with the spirit
  \begin{itemize}
  \item who calls to all men
    \begin{itemize}
    \item to separate themselves from the harlot,
    \end{itemize}
  \item the Bride invites all who will hear her voice
    \begin{itemize}
    \item to come and drink freely
      \begin{itemize}
      \item from life everlasting.
      \end{itemize}
    \end{itemize}
  \end{itemize}
\item Let the thirsty come
  \begin{itemize}
  \item and let them take of the water of life freely.
  \end{itemize}
\item There are no strings attached to her drink.
  \begin{itemize}
  \item There is no hidden bondage in her invitation.
  \end{itemize}
\item There are no destructive abominations
  \begin{itemize}
  \item waiting in her cup.
  \end{itemize}
\item There is only the promise of life everlasting.
  \begin{itemize}
  \item The bride calls every thirsty
    \begin{itemize}
    \item man, woman, and child
      \begin{itemize}
      \item to come and drink
        \begin{itemize}
        \item from the riches of heaven
        \end{itemize}
      \end{itemize}
    \end{itemize}
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}
• Here the contrasts reach their climax.
  o Here we see the whole picture:
    ▪ two cites,
      • Babylon and Heaven;
    ▪ two women,
      • the harlot and the bride;
    ▪ and two invitation,
      • one to death and one to life.
  o a foretaste of life everlasting.

  o Here we see the bride
  o as the antithesis of the harlot.

• Where that sensual harlot entices you
  o to invest yourself
    ▪ in the temporal, fleeting pleasures of this life,
      • pleasures that last but a short season
        o and leave you broken and empty,
  o the bride invites you
    ▪ to come and drink freely
      • from springs of living water,
        o from the fountain of eternal life.

Living Water
• Water is one of the fundamental building blocks of life.
  o It is the fuel on which our physical bodies run
    ▪ and is absolutely necessary for our survival.

  o The critical link
    ▪ between water and life
      • provides a rich and meaningful
        • emblem of the Spirit
          o in scripture.

• That which is essential for physical life
  o is used to represent
    • that which is vital to spiritual life.

• From the opening pages of the Bible,
  o where the Spirit of God is first portrayed
    ▪ in the act of creation
      • as moving “upon the face of the waters”,
  o the Spirit is characterized
    ▪ in terms of a fluid
      • that is poured out,
      • sprinkled upon,
      • rained down,
      • flowing like a river
• and springing up like a fountain.

• Likewise, the Psalmist often likens
  o the human desire for God to thirst,
    ▪ comparing the inner desire of every heart
    ▪ to the involuntary compulsion
      o that drives every person
        ▪ to seek out the life-giving refreshment
        ▪ that can only be found in water.

  o In this way, water represents everything
    ▪ that we long for
      • deep in our heart of hearts.

• Perhaps it is Jeremiah
  o who best establishes the significance
    ▪ of this water-oriented language.

• While he does not explicitly reference the Spirit,
  o he points out that we need God
    ▪ in the same way that we need water
      • for physical life.

• When people turn away from God,
  o he says that they abandon
    ▪ “the fountain of living waters”
    ▪ and choose instead
      o to hew out “broken cisterns,
        ▪ that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13).

  o That’s what happens when you fall
    ▪ under the harlot’s spell.
      • You find yourself drinking
        o from a cup that will never satisfy you!

• Using language that is especially meaningful
  o in a culture that lives and dies by water,
    ▪ Jeremiah demonstrates
      • that there is life and vitality
        o to be found in the Spirit
          ▪ that cannot be found anywhere else
          ▪ just like there is no substitute for water
            ▪ to sustain physical life.

• Jesus, in harmony with the words of Jeremiah,
  o relates the Spirit to living water
    ▪ at two pivotal moments in his ministry.
    o The first occurs in Samaria
      ▪ during a conversation
• that, quiet appropriately,
  o begins with the request
    • for a drink of water.

• In the course of that exchange,
  o Jesus introduces the subject of “living water”
    • as he gently turns the conversation
      • away from Jacob’s well,
        o and the less satisfying water that it contains,
      • to a “well of water
        o springing up into everlasting life” (John 4: 10,14).

• It is not, however, until the feast of tabernacles
  o that Jesus further clarifies what he means.

• The feast of tabernacles celebrated
  o the provision of God in the wilderness
    • and was accompanied
      • by the daily pouring out
        o of water upon the altar.

• As this water sacrifice was observed
  o the words of Isaiah 12:3,
    • “with joy shall ye draw water
      • out of the wells of salvation”
        o were recited by the people.
    o This reminded the Jews
      • that God caused water to flow from a rock
        • to satisfy their thirst.
    o It also reminded them
      • that God was the ultimate source
        • of all their blessings.

• When John makes reference to the last day,
  o the great day of the feast,
    • it is generally recognized
      • that he is referring to the Sabbath
        o following the feast.
  o On this eighth day of celebration,
    • the water was conspicuously absent.
  o It was the absence of the water
    • that served as a further reminder
  o that the promised refreshing
    • of a spiritual outpouring
      • had not yet been fulfilled.

• It is against this backdrop of recitations
  o about drinking from the wells of salvation
and the stark reminder
  • of a spiritual refreshing
    o that had not yet been given
  o that Jesus,
    • in one of His most iconic moments,
      • uses the water motif
        o to speak of the coming outpouring of the Spirit.
  • Standing to his feet
    o he extends the same invitation
      • that he extended to the woman at the well,
    o saying, “If any man thirst,
      • let him come unto me, and drink.
    o He that believeth on me,
      • as the scripture hath said,
        • out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).
  • Later, as John recorded his gospel,
    o he added a parenthetical explanation
      • that Jesus was speaking of “the Spirit,
        • which they that believe on him should receive”
          • further noting that the Spirit
            • was not yet given
              • because Jesus had not yet been glorified.
  • Indeed, when the fullness of God’s time was come,
    o prophecy was fulfilled
      • and the Spirit fell like refreshing rain
        • on the thirsty souls
          o of the men and women
            • gathered in the upper room
          • on the day of Pentecost.
  • When Peter began to preach that day
    o he immediately made the connection
      • to the promise that God
        • would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh
          • and assured the crowd,
            • “this is that which was spoken
              • by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16).
  • For the very first time
    o men and women experienced
      • the promised rest and refreshing of the Spirit.
  • Finally that which had only been spoken of
    o as a prophetic promise
became a life-changing reality.
  o The Spirit became the wellspring
    ▪ from which their spiritual vitality flowed.

• It is just as true today as it ever was,
  o our spiritual need for God
    ▪ is very much like our physical need for water.
• Without water our physical body will die
  o and without the renewing of the Holy Ghost
    ▪ we are all relegated to spiritual death.
• In keeping with that truth,
  o the bride of Christ is seen,
    ▪ at the end of scripture,
      • extending the same invitation
      ▪ that Jesus first extended to the thirsty,
        • “Come and drink from the water of life.”
• And that is, really,
  o the point of the contrast
    ▪ between the harlot and the bride.
      • It is all about the drink
        o that they offer to the thirsty.

CLOSE: The Choice
• The closing chapters of the book of Revelation
  o is not just a story about the contrast
    ▪ between two women.
  o In reality, it is the story of a contrast
    ▪ between two choices
  o and the stark reality
    ▪ that every individual must choose
      • one or the other.
• Either drink deeply of the harlot’s poison
  o and remain enslaved to the appetites of your flesh
    ▪ or come to fountains of living water
      ▪ and filled with the spirit of God
        o and drink from springs of refreshing
          ▪ that will ever satisfy your soul.

• This evening I come to join my voice
  o with the voice of the Bride.
    ▪ Let the thirsty come and drink.
• There is fountain springing up in this place tonight
  o that can satisfy your soul
    ▪ like nothing in this world ever could.
  o Come and taste of the goodness of the Lord.
• Come and experience the richness of his presence.
  • There is rest here.
    o There is refreshing here.
    ▪ There is freedom from guilt and condemnation here.
  • Everything that your soul thirsts for.
    o Everything that the harlot fails to deliver
      ▪ All that you need is found
        • In that spring of living water.
  • Come and drink!