

The Fall of Babylon

Revelation 18

If you've been paying attention to the news this week, you know there is a hurricane slowly making its way towards the southeast coast. Hurricane Dorian is over the Bahamas today with 150 mile an hour winds, a 15-foot surge, and possibly 50 inches of rain. It is a catastrophic storm and it is moving inexorably closer by the hour. Not surprisingly, people in Florida are making preparations. Most of those in the path of the storm are leaving, moving north or farther inland. A storm like this can kill you.

In Revelation 18 Jesus tells us about another storm that is coming – a storm of divine judgment. It's a storm that will impact every single person on earth. It is a storm that will devastate everything we call "life" in this world and sweep every person into eternity. Our text is a divine forecast from the lips of Jesus, the faithful witness. While there are no radar images of the approaching storm of God's wrath, Jesus draws us a picture here in symbolic language so that we can understand that what he says will most certainly take place – and make preparations. Revelation is a picture of the great, final judgment of God upon this world.

I. The Decree of the Angel

Rev. 18:1-2 *After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!"*

As we noted last week, Babylon stands for the sinfulness of this world. It stands for all that is contrary to the nature and purpose of God. It stands for all the passions and crimes of men, all the lusts of the flesh, the pride of life, and the arrogant living for one's own person and pleasure in rebellion against God. That's Babylon, the wicked city of man – and God is going to judge her.

When there is news of a coming storm, the question people most commonly ask is, "When will it arrive?" The disciples commonly asked Jesus questions like this, and Jesus told them, and us, "No one knows the day or hour except the Father." But the angel sent from heaven wants us to know that it most certainly WILL happen!

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!"

It is stated in the past tense because the judgment of God on this world is so certain that it can be spoken of as though it had already happened.

If you've ever watched your team getting soundly beaten, at some point you say, "It's over." It's not actually over – there is still time on the clock. But the outcome is so certain that nothing can change it. It's over.

That's what the angel is saying about Babylon, about the kingdoms of men in their opposition to God. It's over. The outcome is so certain that nothing can change it.

The angel immediately ties the terrible sentence to the nature of the crime. Why will this world be judged by God? Notice the character of Babylon.

She is Demonic – *"She has become a dwelling place for demons..."* (v. 2)

How do you explain the godlessness of ancient Rome or the rush to deviancy in our present day? People allow their culture to become the home for the demonic. As our culture defiantly casts aside the rule and word of God, it is inviting the demons of the abyss to come and make themselves at home. And they will.

She is Defiled – *"a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast."* (v. 2)

"Unclean" is Old Testament language for what was unfit for the presence of the Holy God. God is holy, and his house is holy and nothing unclean is allowed in.

Boys and girls, do you ever run into the house with muddy boots and your mother says, "Outside, take your boots off! Your boots are muddy and need to be removed before you can come in"?

That's what God was teaching the Israelites with the category of unclean things. He was inviting them into the living room of his holy presence, but they needed to first be made clean. The sacrificial system made the point that every person was "unclean" and needed to be "cleansed" to come into the presence of God.

The angels show us that the fundamental problem with the spirit of our age is that it is unclean and defiled before the living God. It is not fit for God's presence and must be taken outside. And the biblical word for "outside" is "hell." The world laughs at the notion, but what is unclean receives the judgment of God. In Revelation 21:27 we are shown the holy city, the new heaven and earth, and are explicitly told, *"Nothing unclean will ever enter into it."*

She is Defiling – the spirit of Babylon is both defiled and defiling, corrupt and corrupting.

Rev. 18:3 *For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.*

These words mimic closely words of **Jeremiah 51:7**, where he says of wicked Babylon, *"The nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad."*

Evil has an intoxicating power that makes nations and peoples go "mad." Those who participated in the massacre of Rwanda 25 years ago describe the murderous rampage as a "madness." People simply lost their mind in a lust for blood.

Here, we are told that the nations have become intoxicated by drinking the wine of her sexual immorality. When the evil powers of the abyss are granted freedom to work in the world, one of the evidences will be a spiritual madness, a loss of spiritual senses – so that people, a culture, a nation is given over to what is base and defiled.

Isn't that precisely what is happening today? There is a spirit of derangement, of total irrationality and madness when it comes to sexual identity and practice. There is a psychosis to the powers of evil. Rational people lose their senses, lose their mind, as they drink the wine of the spirit of the age. God allows it. God ordains it. But it is already a sign of his judgment and will usher in the great and final judgment. That is what Jesus wants us to see as he shows us the end of this world.

II. The Experience of Judgment

A. Just Retribution

The first thing we see about the judgment of this world is that it is perfect, retributive justice. You see this clearly in verse 6:

Rev. 18:6 *Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.*

The word translated "double" is actually "duplicate." In other words, the judgment of God is in perfect accord with the sin committed. No one in hell will be able to say "That isn't fair." The perfect fairness of hell will be evident to all. No one will suffer an ounce more misery than their sins deserve. And their miseries will be in perfect accord with the nature of their sin. Notice, mix her a duplicate *"in the cup she mixed."* I don't know all that that means, but at the least it means that the nature of God's judgments will be a reflection of his perfect knowledge of a person's crimes.

B. Immediate Devestation

The judgment of the last day will be immediate, in a moment.

Rev. 18:8, 10, 17, 19 *For this reason her plagues will come in a single day... [The kings of the earth] ... will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come."*

[The merchants who gained wealth will stand far off, weeping and mourning aloud] ... "For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

[All the shipmasters and seafaring men] ... "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste."

The final judgments of God happen in a moment. Think about Sodom and Gomorrah. One moment everyone was going about their morning routine – going to work, taking the kids to school, making plans for the weekend – and then fire fell from heaven. In a moment judgment was upon them, and it was over.

C. Irremediable Destruction

There is no fix for judgment day.

Rev. 18:8 *She [the great harlot of this world] will be **burned up with fire.***

Rev. 18:14 *All your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, **never to be found again.***

I read this week of a new polymer that disappears when exposed to sunlight. It looks solid. You can touch it. You can even build things with it. But the chemical bonds holding it together come apart when exposed to sunlight.

The kingdom of this world is like that. It's real. You can see it and touch it. But when it is exposed to the light of Christ, it will come apart. In a moment, the mighty nations of this world – Russia, China, the United States, and all the powers, principles, and peoples of this world – will be brought to nothing in the presence of the Great King, never to be found again.

The irreversible nature of this judgment is perhaps seen most clearly in verse 21, as a great angel hurls a millstone into the sea. This mimics a prophecy by Jeremiah when he prophesied the destruction of the original, historic city of Babylon. He wrote a book of all the disaster God was going to bring upon that wicked city, gave it to his servant, and commanded the servant to take it to Babylon and read it to the citizens of that city.

Jer. 51:63–64 When you finish reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, and say, "Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her."

Here in Revelation 18, a mighty angel takes a great millstone and throws it into the sea.

Rev. 18:21 "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more."

And that refrain ("no more") is repeated 5 times in verses 22-23:

The sound of harpists and musicians – no more

Craftsmen, business, Wall Street, Silicon Valley – no more.

The light of a lamp – evening reading, city lights, Times Square – no more.

Bridegroom and bride – marriage, family, celebrations – no more.

It's the end of this world.

III. Christ's Call to His People

A. One Command

What are God's people to do in response to this?

Rev. 18:4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues."

These words mirror the words of the prophet Jeremiah as he forecasted the destruction of the ancient city of Babylon and called God's people to flee:

Jer. 51:6 Flee from the midst of Babylon; let every one save his life!

The reality of impending disaster requires action! That's why Jesus is telling us these things! Remember, the book of Revelation is a message for the church. Jesus isn't telling us these things simply to inform us, but to move us to action!

If you received a message from the Lord that your house was going to burn down tonight, would you put your kids to bed like every other night? Would you proceed as though everything was fine?

The reality of God's judgment on the world is meant to be a strong encouragement for the church to "come out from the world." Now, of course, this doesn't mean we flee to the desert and form a commune. It DOES mean we pursue holiness and flee from worldliness. The church is called to be in the world – but not OF the world.

B. Two Reasons (v. 4)

The First Reason – "Lest you take part in her sins"

There is the constant temptation for the church to become as much like the world as possible – usually in the guise of being relevant or avoiding being a fundamentalist. What does that look like today?

- Churches affirming homosexuality as normal.
- Churches that assume that the American dream is the goal of life.

What does it mean for US to “come out”? It means don’t “take part in her sins.” Wake up to the cultural current and resist! Resist the omni-present sins of consumerism and materialism and eroticism and individualism. Everything in our culture is pressing us to bend to its will and be formed to its principles. The church **MUST** resist. We **MUST** be different. Distinct. Bent to a different will, molded by a divine power, and pursuing a divine purpose! We cannot call ourselves citizens of heaven if we are unwilling to be marked as distinct from the kingdom of this world.

I’m not going to give you a list of rules. You figure it out as you prayerfully live your life with your Bible open and your heart set on eternal things. But it is essential that you figure it out – because failure here means death.

The Second Reason – “Lest you share in her plagues”

In the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, the angels of the Lord told Lot that God was going to judge the city and that they needed to flee. In **Genesis 19:14** we read,

So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, “Up! Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city.” But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

These young men might have professed to believe in Lot’s God. But the idea of God being offended by the sexual perversion and crass consumerism, so offended that he would destroy the city, that didn’t seem possible. That’s not the God they believed in. They believed in a God of love and compassion. So, those young men stayed. And when the real God of heaven rained down fire, they died.

In the days of Moses, God told his people to place blood on their doorpost because the Angel of Death was going to strike every firstborn of every household – except those with the blood. And so it came to pass. When that angel passed over, it didn’t matter what you said you believed. It didn’t matter if you were an Israelite or an Egyptian. All that mattered was this one thing – did you obey the command of God and place the blood on your doorpost? If you did, you were safe. If you didn’t, you weren’t.

What does it mean to “flee”?

It means first and foremost to flee to Christ Jesus. Jesus died, the sacrificed Lamb of God, to make you clean, to protect you from the judgment you deserve. He suffered the day of Judgment in our place, bearing our uncleanness, so that he could give us his robe of righteousness and invite us into the eternal house of God. You will never be able to flee this world unless and until you first flee to Christ.

Secondly, it means to realize that we don't belong to Babylon, we belong to Jerusalem, the city of God. We weren't made for the American Dream. We were created for eternal glory. And Jesus simply calls us to live like it. Amen.