

The Fall of Babylon
Rev 17-19, John 17:14-18

Friends, there is a popular saying which goes “*when in Rome... do as the Romans*” which basically advises outsiders to go along with the local customs and traditions and fit in by doing whatever everyone else is doing so they don’t stick out like oddballs.

But.... there is also the passage of scripture that we just read where Jesus says that his followers “*are not of this world*”

So... for us, that popular saying is actually more like “when in Rome... do what Jesus would do instead”

And friends, doesn’t the contrast between these two statements precisely capture the essence of what most of us experience the Christian life to be all about - the constant struggle between our desire to follow Jesus and the allure of fitting in and becoming like the world around us, or at least flirting in it.

And it is becoming more and more obvious that Christians are different than the world around us in how we think and act and in what we value because of our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

And as the years go by that contrast will become starker as the particular “head of the Beast out of the Sea” that is our Western Civilization - heals from its wound of Christendom and becomes increasingly secular, pluralistic and intolerant of true Christianity – and more authentically reflects the true nature of the Dragon who empowers it.

And as it does so we can expect to see an increasing occurrence, participation, and legitimization of decadence, opulence, extravagance, immorality, debauchery, and violence in Western societies.

So in line with that - I’m sure that you’ve noticed that Western Civilization and Democratic Capitalism are not only becoming more hostile to authentic expressions of the Christian faith...

but also that they are offering increasingly more seductive and alluring non-Christian lifestyles and worldviews that invite us to *“do as the Romans since we are in Rome”* and not stick out like a sore thumb.

So more and more the temptation is for us to become like the non-Christian world around us, to avoid persecution and also because there is a certain allure to it and it looks attractive and fun... but in the end it is a deadly poison which destroys our loyalty, faithfulness, and obedience to Jesus.

This is why the angel shows the apostle John the symbol of the great prostitute, the whore called Babylon - sitting on the beast.

The 6th Vision of Revelation shows us in graphic visual terms how sin twists and warps God’s good gift of civilization and society and turns it into something which calls us to be unfaithful to Him, how all the benefits and trappings of civilization are actually pursue in opposition to God.

Thus the reference to Babylon not only brings with it the challenge which God’s people of old had in trying to stay faithful and attempting live according to the Mosaic Covenant when they were exiled in Babylon...

It also reaches back into Genesis, to the story of the tower of Babel – where the people of earth gathered together to build a city and a tower that would reach to the heavens, connect them to the divine... in other words that would give them life and security and power.

The development of civilization – the city and all it contains for the purpose of being able to say we have made our own gods!

And notice that the prostitute sits on the beast with seven heads and ten horns – the beast from the 4th Vision which came up out of the sea – and it was summoned from the sea by the dragon – the devil....

And remember the devil had whispered to Eve – take the fruit... you shall become like gods...

What a most seductive and alluring notion for we who have been created to be God's stewards – we who have been given the creational mandate to *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."* (Gen 1:26)

We are to represent God – but we are not to be God and yet... the devil suggested that we could become like gods – and suddenly that is an attractive option, it is alluring, seductive...

And our hearts become fickle and our loyalty to our Creator and to our Redeemer falters... Babylon beckons to us – and like the fool in Proverbs 7:21-23 we are *"led astray; seduced by her smooth talk. We are like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost us our life."*

So the whole point of the 6th Vision is to show us what our fate will be if we allow ourselves to be seduced by Babylon in whatever form it presents itself to us in our day and age.

Thus John hears a voice from heaven saying *"come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues..."* (Rev 18:4)

So friends – what beckons to us these days, tempting us to be unfaithful to Christ? We talked a little bit about this at our Thursday night Christcare Group and some of the things that came up were "making it as a success" "having the most toys" "self-fulfillment" "everything that Las Vegas offers" some good examples...

Let me add to that list this morning friends – there is also the allure of determining our own individual truth, the attractiveness of fitting in and agreeing that all spirituality and religions lead to God, the desirability of expressing our sexuality however we want with whomever we want, and the appeal life liberty and the pursuit of happiness...

Friends these are all things which sin has taken and twisted into something which tempts us away from God, away from Christ, away from the true source of life, liberty and happiness.

So, if we understand this, if we see Babylon in its present form for what it really is – something that makes us unfaithful to Christ – and we reject it and turn away from it – we have another problem – persecution.

Listen to what the apostle Peter writes *“you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do— living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.”* (1 Peter 4:3-4)

You see friends, when this world invites us to participate in their indulgence and immorality and we refuse – then we get accused of thinking we are better than they are and they attack us.

Notice that the apostle John sees the prostitute is drunk on the blood of the saints.

You see for those Christians of John’s day who were in Rome and did not do as the Romans did, a number of them ended up being fed to the lions in the Coliseum for the entertainment and amusement of the masses.

If you refuse to go along with the Romans the abuse could cost you your life as it did for Christians in the Roman Empire.

This is why the angel says to John – the seven heads that the woman sits on are seven hills. In John’s day Babylon was manifested in all opulence, debauchery, violence and persecution that existed in the ancient city of Rome, which sits on seven hills.

And a Google search on Roman history will quickly reveal to you the sordid details of what that opulence, debauchery and violence entailed and how it was publically celebrated – Western Society isn’t quite there yet...

So this was a warning for the Christians in John's day not to become enamored with all that Rome had to offer, to live as followers of Christ instead and not do as Romans did - even when they were in Rome.

However, the angel says that the seven heads of the beast are also seven kings – who were, are now and will yet come – in other words Babylon will continue to show up in all the major civilizations of this world as they rise and fall until our Lord returns.

And so as part of the reoccurring pattern of events that we see happening in this time between times we can add to it “the allure and destruction of Babylon.”

So a very condensed summary of this cyclical pattern would now go like this;

Vision 1: churches are established, the light of Christ's lampstands shines out.

Vision 2: The Church endures earthly trials and persecution.

Vision 3: God sends warning judgments upon persecutors to warn them to join the church, not persecute it.

Vision 4: These conflicts which the church faces reveal the deeper spiritual battle between Satan and Christ.

Vision 5: What God sends as warning judgments for some function as final judgments for others.

Vision 6: The allure of Babylon is a constant threat to the saints – both for their loyalty and for persecuting them - but she will always fall in self destruction.

You see friends because of how Babylon facilitates and motivates the persecution of the Church and the followers of Jesus Christ - and because of the gross immorality and decadence that she manifests in each age, God brings judgment upon Babylon again and again until that judgment is completed at the return of Christ.

But, note how this judgment comes about. The angel tells John “*The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.*” (Rev 17:16)

And if you study the history of the rise and fall of anti-Christian civilizations, governments, political movements – all those things which we characterized as the Beast out of the Sea in the 4th Vision, you will notice that extreme corruption, debauchery and immorality more often than not come to characterize the regime or society that is overthrown and replaced by the next one.

For instance we see this happen when the city of Rome was sacked by the Gauls, then the Visigoths and then the Vandals.

We see it happen in the French Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution where the peasants and lower classes rose up against the extreme corruption and extravagance of the ruling classes that was crushing them into extreme poverty.

We see it happen when the Nazi's came to power in Germany in 1933 and cleaned up the moral decay that had come to characterize the city of Berlin during the 1920's.

The Beast and the Ten horns turn on the prostitute and tear her to bits...

God uses and allows anti-Christian gov'ts or political movements to execute judgment upon the decadence, the immorality and decay of Babylon that surfaces again and again as civilizations rise and fall in this world.

And this will continue friends until such a time as God determines Babylon's judgment is complete – as symbolized by the mighty angel hurling the millstone down into the depths of the sea just before our Lord returns.

The great city of Babylon will eventually go down one last time and will never be rebuilt again.

Never again – will there be music there

Never again – will there be building and trades

Never again – will there be food production

Never again – will there be warmth and light

Never again – will there be human relationships and society...

Six “never-s” friends, man’s number... and the meaning here is that these human activities can never establish a lasting eternal kingdom, like the Kingdom of God.

And friends I’m going to give you a sneak peak with regards to the 7th Vision here – the city of Babylon must be demolished... to make way for the heavenly city of Jerusalem that John sees in the final Vision – a city that will last forever.

This is why all the saints and angels in heaven break into praise at the fall of Babylon – not only because vengeance has been taken, but because something better is coming to replace it – the Holy City, the New Jerusalem!

A city where music is used to worship and praise God, a city where the Kings of the earth bring their riches in worship, a city where the Glory of God gives light and the Lamb is its lamp, a city where the tree of Life provides food and healing, a city where the streets are paved with gold... (Rev 21:22– 22:5)

You see friends – it’s important to remember that the Holy City takes everything that was used for immorality and unfaithfulness in Babylon and provides a context where it is now used to worship and praise and give glory to God and to the Lamb.

And that means we can get a head start on that now – the faithful Church, the faithful Christian remembers that everything belongs to God and doesn’t shy away from working to take that which can lure our hearts away from Christ and use it to lead people to Christ instead.

The faithful Christian, the faithful Church, stewards every area of civilization – business, arts, music, sports, politics, education, and so on... so that God is honored and glorified and the gospel proclaimed.

And friends, once you’ve experienced what that is like – Babylon loses her appeal. As the saying goes “When you know you’ve got tenderloin steak waiting for you at home – why bother stopping for a hamburger on the way.” Amen?

Ok – so Babylon is destroyed in preparation for the New Jerusalem which our Lord will bring at his return, so it is at this point the 6th Vision moves to the end of the time between times by describing the return of our Lord Jesus Christ and how that will be experienced by the faithful and the unfaithful.

For those, who have forsaken all others, as one does when you are engaged to be married, those who have not committed adultery with Babylon – he comes as a bridge groom to meet his fiancé, and get married. And there is a great celebration – the wedding feast of the Lamb.

But there is also another feast – the great supper of God, where the birds feast upon all those who have been destroyed in their attempt to make war against Jesus Christ at his return.

It's not even a contest, no swords are drawn, shots fired – instead the two beasts are immediately captured and thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, symbolizing the destruction of anti-Christian gov't and anti-Christian philosophy and religion.

And all those who followed these beasts are destroyed when the truth of Jesus Christ reveals that they have committed adultery with a lie, and there is no life in that lie and so they perish along with what they believed in.

And thus the 6th Vision concludes.

So - for the sixth time - we've looked at the period of time between the first coming of Christ and his second coming.

And the visions have given us different insights and understandings on what to expect until our Lord returns.

So the sixth vision reveals to us that no matter how attractive a sinful life appears, no matter how impressive the Beast from the Sea looks, no matter how harmless the Beast from the Earth sounds – DO NOT, I repeat DO NOT give your loyalty to them or allow yourself to be seduced by them – in fact don't even flirt with them.

And it also encourages us not to give into the temptation to draw a line through our society and say church activities are good, but sports can keep kids away from church so they are bad... that charity work is good, but the arts can be too self-focused so it's bad and so on...

Instead friends – we must stay faithful to our created purpose – to multiply and fill the earth, to rule over and subdue it for the honor and glory of God and to give praise to Jesus Christ who has redeemed us from sin.

So friends, when in Rome – let's seek the destruction of Babylon and reform Rome for Christ. Amen - Let's pray.