

## Warnings From Babylon

After Sarah's sermon last Sunday I suggest you lower your expectations this morning. Sarah covered the seven bowls of wrath that are poured out in Revelation 16. So far we've had judgment coming as seven seals were opened, seven trumpets sounded and seven bowls poured out. I don't think these are chronological, i.e. I don't think they necessarily follow one another. **However, all of these terrible events serve a similar purpose: to cause the readers to realize their sense of security has been or will be stripped away!**

If you read back over the judgments John describes, there is danger and destruction everywhere in the natural world - in the sky with stars falling and the sun and moon effected; in the waters as the sea, rivers and springs turn to blood; in the earth as mountains and islands are removed from their places; there is nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. It feels hopeless when nature implodes and you can't escape the planet. In spite of the fact these are judgments, that the seven bowls are spoken of as God's wrath, there is another purpose in all of this. **All of these events serve as a call to repentance.** God still offers a way to escape the judgment. God still gives a choice. Look at the response to the fourth bowl of judgment. **"They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him."** Revelation 16:9. After the fifth bowl was poured out, the response was the same. People cursed the God of heaven, **"...but they refused to repent of what they had done."** Revelation 16:11 The only choice, the only response is to turn to God and repent, surrender to him and call on him for mercy but the people stubbornly refused. God is giving everyone who reads the book of Revelation, everyone who recognizes the signs a warning: there are consequences for our actions, judgment is coming, but God is still giving opportunity to repent. Mercy, grace and forgiveness are still available if we will turn to him in repentance and faith, even when nature and the planet are convulsing and crumbling around us.

Not only will the earth, sea and sky fail us, but also society's structure, its economic and political strength and power will falter and fall. The world's system, all that people rely on, all we reverence and idolize and long for, all of that will crumble to dust and ash. Our wisdom, intelligence, wealth, ambition, strength, pride, independence, all we have built and devised and prided ourselves in, all we have created and trusted in, it will fail us, it will be gone, judged, destroyed. Why? Because we made the world and its culture our god. We surrendered to the allure of wealth and fame and popularity and sexual immorality and moral compromise. We

traded a relationship with God for access to money and political power. We betrayed our covenant with God and loved the world more than we loved him. We loved money and things more than we loved God or loved people. John warned us in one of his earlier letters. **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” 1 John 2:15-17** John’s describing Babylon and it will pass away! He knew it to be true and he sees it happen in this vision on Patmos.

Revelation 17 and 18 portray the world’s system first as an immoral woman, a prostitute in fact. The woman is the personification of a city, Babylon and Babylon is a portrayal of the world’s corrupt, broken, sinful system. Babylon is empire, man’s system, apart from God, in rebellion to God. It is our political, financial, social system that sees no need for God, including a false spirituality that excludes God in favor of worshiping the spirit of man. Babylon is civilization without God, rejecting God, humanism. **Babylon: the woman, the city, the empire, the system.** (Just a note here. Typically when we read Revelation, by the time we get to this part of the book, we aren’t thinking of ourselves, the church, being anywhere in the picture. We are in heaven, eating a big meal with Jesus and waiting to come back to watch him take care of all the sinners who missed the rapture. But remember I said I don’t think you can take all of this as chronological, one thing following after another. I think when John’s churches read this, they heard a warning coming directly at them and we would be wise to listen as well.)

In chapter 12 we saw a woman clothed with the sun who was pregnant and gave birth to a son. We said this woman represented the virgin Mary and it represented the church. Now, in stark contrast, look at the woman in Revelation 17. **\*\*Use screen in sanctuary for livestream\*\***  
**“There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names...The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead:**

**Mystery**

**Babylon the Great**

**The Mother of Prostitutes**

## **And of the abominations of the Earth**

**I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.” Revelation 17:3-6**

The woman described in Revelation 12 is being chased by a seven headed monster whereas the woman in Revelation 17 is riding a seven headed monster and drinking the blood of the martyrs. As I said, this woman is the personification of Babylon and Babylon is the world’s system, the empire in opposition to God, seducing God’s people into compromise and spiritual adultery, or threatening them and persecuting them until they give in and renounce God or die as martyrs. This was understood by John’s readers because both seduction and persecution by the Roman empire confronted them every day. John writes about nations and kings, again, a picture of the world’s system and empire, warring against God and his people. **“They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.” Revelation 17:13-14** It was good news to John’s readers and it’s good news for us! The world makes war against the Lamb but the Lamb will overcome and we are with him in his victory!

John’s description of the woman in Revelation 17 and the city in 18 expose her for what she really is. Remember the devil, the beast is a deceiver, trying to persuade us that foolish things are wise, that wrong is right and evil is good, that cheap imitations are better than the real thing. Chapter 17 and 18 show us the truth in an effort to persuade and convince us to not be deceived or led astray. Tempted, compromising, we are drawn to the woman, the city, the empire, the world’s system. But John exposes her and shows us this woman is no dignified lady, beautiful and elegant, instead as Sinatra sang, the lady is a tramp, a harlot, a prostitute, stumbling along in a drunken stupor, dressed in the most garish clothing. There is nothing elegant about her. Instead of riding on a beautiful horse, she sits astride a seven-headed monster. Lifting a golden cup that we expect to contain the finest wine, instead John says the cup is filled with “abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.” Perhaps while she was passed out, drunk, to make sure everyone knew who she really was, to mock her, maybe with lipstick or an eyeliner, someone wrote on her forehead: “Babylon the Great, Mother of Prostitutes.” Now take a good look. See what we’ve been sleeping with, committing adultery with, compromising with! This is part of Revelation’s warning: Open your eyes to see who you’ve been with. We are disgusted when we see our sin!

Revelation 18 moves from speaking of Babylon as the woman to speaking of Babylon as the city and empire. The city is described in the same way as the woman, clothed in purple and scarlet, gold, precious stones and pearls (18:16). This city, the seat of the world's power, wealth, influence, commerce and military might, this city that never sleeps, where every kind of sensual thought and pleasure is indulged, where every kind of immoral behavior is glorified, where greed and excess are celebrated, in one hour her wealth and glory are gone, in one hour she is brought to ruin, her boasts are silenced, in one hour she is consumed and all that loved her stand back in fear and declare, **“O great city, O Babylon, city of power, in one hour your doom has come.”**

**Revelation 18:10** It is stunning devastation and loss.

John's first century readers would have read this with Rome and its empire in mind. The possibility that the great power of that empire, the military power that threatened them and the economic might that tried to seduce them to compromise, that it could all be gone in an hour was unthinkable. At the same time, it would be a warning to them: Don't put your hope and trust in an empire, in a world system or economy, in anything but rather keep looking to the Lamb. The warning is the same for us. Let me quickly point out three additional warnings from Babylon.

**Don't try to deal with the devil.** You would think we would know this by now, but you can't negotiate with the devil. The warning from Babylon shows us that evil turns on itself, it consumes itself. The woman in 17 wars against God's people. John says she is drunk with the blood of the saints. Then she makes a deal with the beast and they together war against the Lamb (17:14) but then the bible says the beast will turn on the woman, the prostitute. **“They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.”** **Revelation 17:16** Evil is consumed by evil. You can't trust the devil. You can only count on the devil to be the devil. You can only count on a deceiver and a liar to deceive and lie to you. You can't deal with the devil. It never ends well. The thing to do is to resist the devil, flee temptation, turn to Jesus and give yourself to him. A second warning...

**Don't compromise with Babylon.** This is the ultimate warning from all of 17 and 18. John warned that **“With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.”** **Revelation 17:2** The pressure to compromise was everywhere. John's readers understood the warning. Craig Koester in his commentary on Revelation writes, **“Many of the inhabitants of the earth, including some Christians, became intoxicated with the prosperity that the Romans provided and were**

**willing to commit fornication with the cult of the emperor. In the most basic sense, however, fornication means not only participation in the idolatrous worship of Roman gods, including Caesar, but accepting Rome as the point of orientation for life in this world, that is, making Rome herself a god.” ...Craig Koester**

The temptation is to commit spiritual adultery and idolatry with the world. Have we made this world our god? Have we compromised with the spirit of this world? Are wealth, position, power, success, happiness more important than God? More important than pleasing God and obeying him? John heard a warning voice from heaven in the midst of this: **“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, for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.”**

**Revelation 18:4-5** The warning is to come out of her, to separate ourselves from the sinful practices and values of the world. Throughout the Scripture God calls his people to “come out from among them and be separate.” We are to be a holy people, set apart to God, in the world but not of it, not buying into its values and a system and lifestyle destined for destruction. If we lust after the world and compromise with the world, we will suffer judgement with the world. Where is your allegiance? Is it to Jesus or to this world? The call of this world is loud and bold. Babylon is unrelenting in its pressure and its call, but we are citizens of another kingdom, looking for another city. Compromise with the world is fatal. It’s time to come out of the world so we won’t share in her sins or her judgment! Remember, Babylon is destroyed in one hour!

**Don’t fall asleep!** Not only does Babylon try to destroy us, to seduce us, to get us to compromise, there is also the danger of us being lured to sleep. We just put our heads down, close our eyes, ignore the clear warning signs and go to sleep. In the middle of this scene of judgment we hear this warning from Jesus. **“Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.” Revelation 16:15**

He comes as a thief, unexpected by the world, but not unexpected by us. Jesus has already told us when we see the signs we are to lift up our heads because our redemption is nearing. As we see the events happening, the call is for us to stay awake, to stay ready, prepared, keep your clothes nearby, in fact, stay clothed in the garments Jesus gave us, clothed in garments of his righteousness, otherwise you will be caught naked, your shame exposed and there’ll be no

time to get ready then. Jesus is coming and he shouts it to us in this warning from Babylon. “Behold I come as a thief.” Get ready! Wake up! Stay alert!

One last word from Revelation 16: **“Out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘It is done!’” Revelation 16:17** Jesus said from the cross, “It is finished” meaning the plan of redemption was completed and salvation was open to all who would turn to Christ, repent of their sins and make him Savior and Lord. There is mercy and grace available today. But a day is going to come when God himself will say, “it is done” , finished, completed, and the time and opportunity for salvation will be over and all that remains is judgment and eternity without God.

The warnings are there. How will you respond? Do you need to come to Jesus today and be saved? Do you need to come out from the world, stop compromising? Do you need to wake up to some personal warnings the Holy Spirit has been speaking to your heart? Today is the day and now is the time! Hear these warnings from Babylon and let them move you to action!