

This morning, I am continuing my sermon series through the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible. Revelation was written by a man named John: either the apostle John who wrote the gospel and the letters 1,2, and 3 John, or another John, an elder in the early church. It was written to 1st century Christians, and is primarily concerned with encouraging believers who were undergoing intense persecution and suffering at the hands of the Roman Empire.

As I have said every week, one of the keys to reading and understanding Revelation is to read it according to its genre. Revelation is apocalyptic literature. In apocalyptic literature, matters of the future or the spiritual realm are unveiled, usually through the agency of angels, in visions, lurid colors and with many crazy symbols. Apocalyptic literature is very visual. Revelation is not meant to be taken literally the way we would take a historical book literally. What I mean by that is that I believe John wrote down the visions as he actually saw them, but the visions he saw were highly symbolic and not literally what is happening in the material world. For example, instead of saying “Jesus is the judge” it shows Jesus with a sword coming out of mouth. Instead of saying Jesus is sovereign over his church, it shows him holding seven stars in his hand, which are the angels of the seven churches. John actually saw this scene, but that does not mean that when we see Jesus, we’re going to have to come in from a side angle in order to avoid getting stabbed by a sword coming out of his mouth.

This morning, we will be looking at Revelation 15:5 – 18:24. I have been going through longer passages than usual during this series because a lot of the themes repeat themselves as John sees visions of what will happen from the time of Christ’s ascension to the time of His return – seven seals, then seven trumpets, then seven signs, and now seven bowls. I have also tried to focus on the main point of each passage instead of engaging in what I feel is pointless speculation about the end times and what each symbol or character might represent.

Before we even read, let me sum up what I think the main point of this passage is, and then after I read, I’ll unpack what I mean by it. The main point is: Come out of Babylon, for her destruction is coming, and all who belong to her will be destroyed along with her. Let’s read Revelation 15:5 – 18:24.

Revelation 15:5 - 18:24 - After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. ⁶ Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. ⁷ Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for

ever and ever. ⁸ And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. ^{NIV} **Revelation 16:1** Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." ² The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. ³ The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died. ⁴ The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; ⁶ for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." ⁷ And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments." ⁸ The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done. ¹² The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. ¹³ Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴ They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. ¹⁵ "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." ¹⁶ Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. ¹⁷ The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" ¹⁸ Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. ¹⁹ The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰ Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. ²¹ From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible. ^{NIV} **Revelation 17:1** One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the

great prostitute, who sits on many waters. ² With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." ³ Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ 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. ⁵ This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. ⁶ I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. ⁷ Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. ⁸ The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. ⁹ "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. ¹⁰ They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. ¹¹ The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. ¹² "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. ¹³ They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. ¹⁸ The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." ^{NIV} **Revelation 18:1**

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. ² With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. ³ For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." ⁴ Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "**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; ⁵ *for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.* ⁶ *Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup.* ⁷ *Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.'* ⁸ *Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.* ⁹ *"When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her.* ¹⁰ *Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!"* ¹¹ *"The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more--* ¹² *cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble;* ¹³ *cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.* ¹⁴ *"They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.'* ¹⁵ *The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn* ¹⁶ *and cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!"* ¹⁷ *In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"* *"Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off.* ¹⁸ *When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?'* ¹⁹ *They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!"* ²⁰ ***Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.**"* ²¹ *Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.* ²² *The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again.* ²³ *The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.* ²⁴ *In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."*

The main point is this: Come out of Babylon, for her destruction is coming, and all who belong to her will be destroyed along with her.

I want to talk about four main messages from this passage:

1) God will judge all who oppose Him and His people

This section begins with some serious judgment. In the Revelation 8-9 trumpet judgments, 1/3 of the people were affected, meaning that there was judgment on some with an opportunity for repentance, but now all the wicked are affected. There is complete and final judgment, as God's wrath is poured out on all of "the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image," as it says in 16:2, all who belonged to the devil.

Revelation 15-16 contains vivid images of judgment. **But it is not what will literally happen.** John is drawing on the Exodus plagues to communicate the final judgment that will come on those who opposed God and oppress and persecute God's people. Notice the similarity to the Exodus plagues – sores, sea becoming blood, darkness, frogs, hail. In Exodus, God told Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron to "let my people go so they might worship me." Pharaoh stood in the way, oppressing and persecuting God's people. God brought plagues but they would not repent, until the final plague. They went out to worship God on their way to the promised land. Similarly, God's people are being oppressed and persecuted. God brings plagues, but they will not repent. Now comes the final judgment, and then the people will be brought into God's presence to worship Him.

We have already discussed God's wrath and judgment in previous sermons in Revelation, but let me touch on them again. In the Scriptures, **divine wrath refers to God's holy displeasure and righteous indignation directed toward the sinner and his sin.** God is holy and so he is repulsed by evil. God is love and so he zealously loves all that is good, and intensely hates all that is evil. God is righteous, and therefore He must judge wickedness and condemn it.

***Nahum 1:2-3** - The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. ³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet.*

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 - *He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.*

And in the gospels, we read this:

John 3:36 - *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."*

This is not pleasant to think about, especially in America. How do you make sense of a God of wrath? It is part of His love. Rebecca Pippert – “Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might towards strangers? Far from it... God’s wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer... which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.”

God intensely hates all sin. What if he were a God who was not troubled by sin? Or who delighted in sin? He would not be worthy of worship. Sin is hateful and worthy of being hated.

First of all, **take this as a serious warning**. Czeslaw Milosz, a Nobel Prize winning poet, wrote a poem called “The Discreet Charms of Nihilism” in which he responded to Marx’s comment that religion was the opiate of the people because the promise of the afterlife led the poor to put up with unjust social conditions. Milosz wrote this: “*A true opium of the people is a belief in nothingness after death – the huge solace of thinking that our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders are not going to be judged.*”

He gives opportunity to repent and turn away, but for those who choose opposition to God, there will be a final, irreversible judgment.

2) Babylon – the kingdom of this world – is a prostitute trying to seduce you away from your true lover, the Lord

17:1-6 - *One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. ² With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." ³ Then the angel*

carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ 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. ⁵ This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. ⁶ I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

Remember that John uses OT language all over Revelation in a figurative way – Jezebel, Balaam, etc. Babylon is not literal Babylon. After all, Babylon had no significance when John was writing. It refers to all kingdoms and countries of this world that try to seduce and destroy the saints through their luxury, vice, and glamour. Babylon is the system of godlessness that leads people away from the worship of God and to their own destruction. This is what is known as **typology**. Think of Babel in Genesis 11:4 - Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." Babylon is driven by self-interest, willing to sacrifice the good of others in order to promote itself. Killing unborn babies because it is not convenient. Oppressing the workers to fatten the CEO's pockets. Genocidal dictators promoting their own interests while killing others.

Think of ancient Babylon, oppressing God's people and seducing them into idolatry and immorality. Rome was certainly a type of Babylon. Peter calls Rome "Babylon" in his letter, 1 Peter 5:13, and it was called "the city on seven hills," referenced in this passage. Rome was a pleasure mad city, where the saints were torn to pieces for the amusement and entertainment of the public. Think of the nations throughout history, kingdoms seducing and oppressing God's people. And more than likely, there will be an end-times type of Babylon which will fall as the Lord returns for the final judgment.

John sees a vision where Babylon is described as a prostitute, a whore. In a book filled with vivid images, this is one of the most vivid. As Eugene Peterson wrote in his commentary on Revelation, "Flannery O'Connor, in answer to a question about why she created such bizarre characters in her stories, replied that for the near-blind you have to draw very large, simple caricatures. The Great Whore is one of these large, simple caricatures. It is an image that can bring to never-again-to-be-forgotten awareness the powerfully seductive presence of those who would obstruct or subvert our worship of the slain and risen Lamb... Whoredom is sex

connected with money. The coupling is sexual, the relationship is commercial... The promise of success, ecstasy, and meaning that we can get for a price is Whore-worship. It is the diabolical inversion of “you are bought with a price” to “I can get it for you wholesale.”... It stands in contrast to the virgin Bride, for whom sex is a life commitment, an offering to her husband. Bride-worship is always at an immediate disadvantage in competition with Whore-worship, for Whore-worship is indulgent and lusty getting, while Bride-worship is sacrificed and faithful giving.”

John uses the imagery of a prostitute to emphasize the seductive quality of the world. As C. J. Mahaney said, “Today, the greatest challenge facing [evangelical, Bible-believing] American [Christians] is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world”

1 John 2:16 - 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 is trying to seduce you away from the worship of God: commercial, sexual, cultural, the American Dream – give your heart to the things of this world.

As C. S. Lewis put it, “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who goes on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.”

Nothing in this world can satisfy you:

Ecclesiastes 5:10-12 - Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. ¹¹ As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? ¹² The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.

Greed is a fat demon with a small mouth, and whatever you feed it is never enough
– Janwillem van de Wetering.

Even lottery winners tend to be worse off and more depressed after winning. Money does not make someone happier.

Let's get practical. The point is not that the US is Babylon. The point is that the City of Man and the City of God dwell together. Come out of Babylon, the city of man, and be separate.

As John Piper put it: "Do not be seduced by the world, but give yourself as a virgin bride to your love. Don't worship the wealth of Babylon, don't worship the power of Babylon, don't worship the pleasures of Babylon, and don't even worship the holy messenger who brings you the news that Babylon has fallen forever. WORSHIP GOD!"

3) Come out of Babylon and find your satisfaction in the Lord

18:4-5 - *Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "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; ⁵ for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.*

The merchants weep, the sailors, all who depended upon Babylon and found their life in her weep as she is destroyed. But those who have been oppressed and persecuted rejoice.

²⁰ *Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you."*

How do you do this practically? Do not store up treasures on earth, thinking that it will satisfy you

1 Timothy 6:6-12 - *But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

Seek first God's kingdom

Luke 12:29-34 - *And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

John 10:10 - *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

As John Piper put it, “Corporate worship at Bethlehem is the declaration in the midst of Babylon that we will not be drawn into her harlotries, because we have found in God the satisfaction of our souls. In his presence is fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore. Corporate worship is the public savoring of the worth of God and the beauty of God and power of God and the wisdom of God. And therefore worship is an open declaration to all the powers of heaven and to all of Babylon that we will not prostitute our minds or our hearts or our bodies to the allurements of the world. Though we may live in Babylon, we will not be captive to Babylonian ways. And we will celebrate with all our might the awesome truth that we are free from that which will be destroyed. Corporate worship at Bethlehem is the blatant, public savoring of God in the midst of a very seductive Babylonian culture. Worship is the flagrant, open enjoyment of God as the fountain of life. And therefore it is a public declaration that God is more to be desired than all the pleasures of Babylon.”

4) We can resist the seduction of the world when we see the attractiveness of the love of Christ

Thomas Chalmers put it this way: “No one changes a habit just by trying – ‘oh, I shouldn’t be like that.’ The only way to dispossess an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new affection.” One of the great phrases I’ve heard about what it means to come into a relationship with Jesus is this: **I’ve been seized by the power of a great affection.**

What is this new affection? **The love of Christ that is more attractive and beautiful and rich than anything this world has to offer.** Jesus took the wrath we deserved, drinking full strength the cup of God’s wrath on sin.

Now, all who turn and stop trusting in the things of this world to trust in Christ will be saved:

Romans 5:8-10 - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

What was the joy set before Him? It was you. Let His love for you compel you to leave the seductions of the world for the greater love.

Do not give your heart to the things of this world, and do not let the world seduce you. Give your heart to Jesus, and find your joy and satisfaction in Him. Let me close with a quote from The Valley of Vision:

“I will not love a world that crucified him, neither cherish nor endure the sin that put him to grief.”