

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOD DOING: REVELATION, VISION 5

Vision 5. The Church and the Seducer

Ch 17 The Great Prostitute. The great prostitute and Babylon are one and the same. See that vs. 5. But who is Babylon the Prostitute? Revelation is a tale of two cities. Two woman. Jerusalem - bride, Babylon the whore. Babylon was used symbolically by the OT writers. It is the place where the people of God were taken captives and was deeply burned on national consciousness. Babylon was a foreign place, foreign values, totally removed from God's purposes and values.

To the early Christian Babylon meant Rome. This was obvious to them. Rome was the economic and military system that ruled the world and was hunting down Christians. (that might be confusing as we said Rome was the beast as well. Clearly Babylon is not the beast because the Woman is sitting on the beast) The text tells us that Babylon is beautiful, seductive, dressed in purple color of high class prostitution. Some have claimed that Catholic church is the prostitute. But symbolism is wrong. If writer was looking at version of Christianity that he thought had gone wrong, he would use the image of adulteress. Totally inappropriate today to suggest the Catholic church referred to but it is a useful scapegoat to avoid the true meaning.

What seduces people. Not the beast. People want to escape the beast. (i.e. oppressive governments) In the West we have been seduced by the prostitute. Money, sex, power. Materialism and sexual sin. These are the things that make it difficult for people to follow Jesus.

Simplest definition is that Babylon is seduction. Church grows under the beast, which generally fails to suppress the church. We see that throughout history. But it struggles under the seduction of the prostitute. Church in West is in decline.

The Prophetic cry is found in 18:4 Come out from it. Is 52:11 The prostitute will destroy your faith.

V 9-10 Rome was often referred to as the city built on seven mountains. This is a very clear reference to Rome, not so much as a state, but as a corrupting influence. The Roman empire was so influential that it exported its immorality and idolatry around the world

Some see 7 kings as emperors of Rome. This is a possible fit but it is not easy as there are far more. Some as 7 kingdom from past and future but this is tricky to figure out which.

Seven is the number of completeness and ten of power. It talks of influence in the past, as well as the future. Better way of seeing this is the kings come and go but the power of

the beast continues on. Bit like the 666 symbol from last week.

V12-13 Some see the 10 horns as those in alliance with Rome. Roughly ten at various times. Some see it as 10 future kings. The EEC was favorite literal interpretation until it grew bigger.

If we see it as symbolic, it is those who align themselves with the values of Babylon. Lots of people have put a lot of effort trying to figure this out because of v9 saying it is a mystery. We think it is to be solved but the Bible uses the word to mean a revelation of great truth.

V16-17 Told the 10 kings represent 10 kingdoms of future. Hold power for periods of time. See that evil powers prostitute and the beast end up fighting each other. It is possible that at the end of time the state somehow ends up destroying the economic system and other influences that make up Babylon. Evil self destructs. God reigns.

Ch 18. The fall of Babylon Why is the city called the prostitute. Economic power has always been linked to cities. Rome was the city of the day. 200 years ago London was the heart of world's largest empire. British Empire could be argued to be Babylon of the day. Today you could make a case for the American empire as the Babylon. Text says it is the hideout of demons, evil spirits. Drunk wine of her immorality Merchants of world grown rich as a result of her luxurious living. Desire for material things Trading of human flesh. Shedding of innocent blood.

The British empire was built on trade of luxury goods, on slavery and on oppression of native peoples in the colonies. Today the cities of the West are in a sense merging into one economic system. Its centre is still America but the economies are linked. World is run as much by corporations as it is by countries. The world is increasingly urbanizing. But the wealth is held by fewer and fewer people.

If you contrast what is described here with God's view of economics, you find something very different. The Old Testament gives some very interesting clues. The Year of Jubilee was decreed for every 50 years. Slaves were freed, all debts cancelled, all land returned to its original owners. It is a radical system. What tends to happen over time is the money and power end up in the hands of a few people. This was designed to correct that. Scholars doubt this was ever put into practice.

Currently in world it is estimated 16% of world gets 84% of world's income. This is a call for us to get out of the system. But it is very difficult when we are born into it. It is the only values we have ever known. WE are called to not buy into the values of money sex and power. As Christians our live style is very similar to those who are not Christians which is a problem.



We have to understand how revolutionary this is. God sides with the poor and oppressed of this world. He sides with those who are ripped off by Babylon. He hears the cry of the weak and he will act. The abused and the persecuted will be vindicated.

There are multiple challenges here.

Collective judgment - we so individualistic but fail to see that God also judges nations. There is a collective guilt on our country for what it has done in the past, although we also see redemptive solutions. Ie Waitangi tribunal.

Economic injustice - we are part of a system trade, economics that exploits the poor.

Shedding of innocent blood. Abortion, violence.

Until God finally acts at the end of history we as followers of Jesus are to take sides with God against the false values of Babylon and her seduction of sex, money and power. We are to stand with those who are ripped off by her: the poor, oppressed and weak

Ch 19 The Wedding Banquet. These 10 verses in Ch 19 end this vision about Babylon. Babylon, - the systems of this world that work against the values of God - have been overthrown and the rejoicing begins. From heaven comes this shout Hallelujah.

Only place in NT find this word, find it four times. Hallelu means praise. Jah short for Yaweh. Heaven is rejoicing that the oppression and suffering has ended. God has triumphed.

The picture used is one of a wedding reception. We are invited to the marriage supper of God. Bridegroom is Jesus, bride is his followers.

Jewish weddings had 4 stages that are similar but different to our traditions.

Betrothal: Like our engagement. Announcement is made. But legally binding

Payment. A bride price is given to the brides father in the form of money and gifts.

Wedding day. The groom would go with friends to the house of bride. Ceremony. He did not announce when he was coming.

Celebration . This could go on for a week or more

OT prophets announced the wedding. A day was coming when God would pledge himself in love to his people. Then paid the bride price with Jesus death on the cross. Then one day Jesus wil come back, unannounced, and claim his bride. Then there will be a party in heaven for eternity.

Ladies are often worried about what to wear to such occasions. Here it Tells us our clothes are the the good things we have done. Our righteousness is a gift from God. Garment we wear is one of grace. Made by God. Even the good things we do are works of God's grace in us.

Unless we are clothed with grace of God, we will not be at the party. Jesus told parable about this. Matthew 22:11

Another story Jesus used about feast. Luke 14:15 A man Invited people to come but they made excuses. When the messenger returned, and told him he said. "Go out into the streets and lanes and bring in the poor, crippled, and blind and the lame." Heaven will be full of the nobodies: people that were not afraid to admit to their poverty and need.

Here we see the mission heart of God. Everyone is invited. God's guest list will be made up of those who respond. People who the world despised. People who were not afraid to admit their brokenness and poverty.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

What elements make seduction (of any kind) successful?

In the sermon it was suggested that in the West we have been seduced by money, sex and power.

- What evidence do you see of this?
- What else seduces in NZ?
- How has the church succumbed to the prostitute?
- Do you see yourself as being under this seduction? How could we know?
- What does it really mean to put 18:4 into practice

Does the fact the Babylon is called a city suggest that cities themselves are evil?

How does the picture of Jewish marriage help you understand our relationship with God? Can men relate to this picture?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

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