

**The Fall of Babylon (Part 2)**  
(Sermon 25 – Rev. 18)  
4.6.25

Please turn in your Bibles to Revelation ch. 18.

In this series of visions that the Lord Jesus is giving to the Apostle John, we find ourselves in the midst of God's final judgment of mankind being portrayed.

And with all of these depictions of God's judgment, maybe you've wrestled with this question: "Is it ok to rejoice when God judges the wicked?" Or maybe you've read in the Book of Psalms where David is praying for his enemies to be crushed and their teeth broken. Those are called imprecatory prayers – those prayers and songs that long for and celebrate God's judgment upon His enemies. But how do we reconcile that with Jesus' teaching to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us?

The answer is, we are to do both. We celebrate God's grace in forgiving sinners through Christ, **and** we long for the day when God's justice removes all sin and judges the wicked.

In fact, that's the main thought of the message today:

<p><b>Prop: As followers of Christ, it is good to celebrate both the mercy and the judgment of God.</b></p>
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Another way to ask that question is, "Which of God's character traits are better – his mercy or his justice?" One is not better than the other. Both traits in God are perfect because God is perfect. God is not merciful some of the time, and then judging sin other times. Because God is not fickle and reactive as we are. God is always perfectly merciful, and always perfectly just. Because He's God, His wrath against sin is always just and right, which never conflict with His perfect love and grace.

So what about you and me? Since we're not God, how should we respond? Here's a helpful distinction I use in my life:

If someone has personally done me wrong, I pray that God will give me the grace to forgive them and show them the kind of mercy God has shown me. But when it comes to God's enemies, those who are unrepentant and will remain so, those who do the devil's bidding in harming the innocent

and wreaking havoc in the world, I join with the psalmist and pray for God's just judgment to come soon. Both are biblical. And both reflect the nature of Christ. After all, Jesus not only forgave the woman caught in adultery, but He also declared "woes" or judgment upon the Pharisees calling them a bunch of hypocrites and snakes.

***So, as followers of Christ, it is good to celebrate both the mercy and the judgment of God.***

With that, we're going to cover all of ch. 18 today. But let's begin by reading just the first 8 verses, and then we'll pray.

**Rev. 18:1-8**

***[1] After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. [2] And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.***

***[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." [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;***

***[5] for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. [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. [7] As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.'***

***[8] For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her."***

***(PRAY)***

The Apostle John is being shown a number of heavenly visions revealing God's judgment being poured out upon sinful man, referred to as the "fall of Babylon".

And we see in our text today, we not only have the details of this judgment, but how both heaven and earth respond to God's judgment. First we see...

### ***I. Heaven rejoices over God's Judgment***

From previous chapters, we know that phrase, the "fall of Babylon" has a double meaning.

-For John and the 7 churches he was writing to, Babylon referred to the Roman Empire.

-And because these visions are also pointing to the end times, just before Christ returns, Babylon also represents all of sinful mankind, all those individuals and institutions that reject Christ, and will be judged when He returns.

Back in ch. 17, we saw sinful mankind represented as a prostitute, dressed in expensive clothing, wearing fine jewelry, appearing to be in control and tempting others to engage in her sin. But by the end of the chapter, the beast turns against the prostitute and rips her apart, a visual of sinful man thinking he's in control, but in the end, his sin will destroy him.

Here in ch. 18, for much of the chapter, we see the fall of Babylon depicted in the form of a poem, as lyrics in a song, with some rejoicing and others lamenting or mourning its fall.

John first sees this mighty angel come down from heaven, and in a loud, booming voice, announce that Babylon has fallen. In the timeline of John's life, the Roman Empire had not yet collapsed, but in the vision, it is being depicted as having already happened.

Rome had fallen, and instead of being the picture of power and wealth, it is now described as a dwelling for every dark and wicked thing. One commentator says that even though Babylon at first resembles "*a confident and beautiful queen, in reality she is a hag, a hollow husk, and the haunt of demons*" (Dennis Johnson, p. 254).

This is a picture of the total desolation and destruction of its fall as a result of God's judgment.

And this announcement in heaven is being made as an assurance of God's justice, and as a warning for the Church...

Here in v. 4 we see the heart of this chapter.

***[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...”***

For John and the 7 churches he’s writing to, this would God’s warning for them not to become cozy and comfortable with the Roman lifestyle, with the loose morals and embracing idolatry that was common in their time. In the midst of this judgment, God is calling His people to be in the world, but not of the world - to be living examples of holy, grace-filled lives.

A biblical word for that is “sanctification” – to be set apart. When Jesus saves us, He calls us out of the sinful life we once lived, and He calls us into a life dedicated to Him. That doesn’t mean we never sin. But it means we no longer live in patterns of sin. When we do fail, we repent, we get up, we learn from our mistakes, and we grow in faith and obedience to God.

But not everyone sees that. Those who reject Christ and live for themselves are blind. Notice at the end of v. 7 we hear Babylon speak. It’s the voice of the prostitute back in ch. 17, both representing sinful mankind. She says, ***‘I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.’*** She thinks she’s invincible. She thinks her sin will never catch up to her.

In our moment of temptation, the devil whispers, “You’ll never get caught”, “no one will find out”, “go ahead and give in, you can repent later”. That’s why verse 8 says, ***“For this reason her plagues will come in a single day.”*** Just when we think we’ve gotten away with it, our sin is revealed, and the consequences hit us. “In a single day” means this usually happens a lot faster than we expect.

If we think we can live however we want, one day our sin will catch up with us. In fact, that’s God’s mercy to us - when we are brought to our knees, where we realize how our own sin has brought destruction, and we cry out to the Lord and He saves us and forgives us.

Some of us have testimonies like that. Through the destruction of your own sin, you hit rock bottom, and God opened your eyes to His mercy and His grace in Jesus.

So this is a warning to believers, not to fall into the temptations and lifestyle of our sinful culture. And it’s a warning to unbelievers, that God’s

judgment is coming. And it is unbelievers and their reaction that become the focus in the next part of this vision...

## ***II. Sinful man grieves God's Judgment***

The Bible teaches that there are two kinds of repentance: There is a godly repentance, when someone is genuinely broken over their sin, they turn from it, and follow Christ. The other is called "worldly sorrow". That's when a person is only sorry because they got caught. They're sad because of the consequences.

That's the kind of grief we see here from sinful men, shown in three different laments: from kings, from merchants and from sailors...

### ***Kings lament***

***[9] And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. [10] They 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."***

As the symbol of ancient Rome in John's time, these "kings", all those rulers and governors who kissed the ring of Caesar, who stayed silent while he and the Roman empire slaughtered Christians, all those men full of worldly ambition for power and prestige, who sold their integrity for title and position, they now stand and watch in horror as the very thing they put all their hopes in, the very system that propped up their little private kingdoms, it all crumbles to the ground under God's judgment.

The Bible is clear – all authority ultimately comes from God. There is no authority that is self-sufficient or independent from God and what He is pleased to delegate. And what God gives, God can take away.

We fall into a dangerous trap when we forget this. Not only as a warning to the rich and powerful, to the presidents and CEOs. But this warning is for every person who walks in authority.

Parents, our authority over our children is not because we brought them into this world. Our authority is not based in biology or DNA – or in our talents or intelligence or parental know-how. Our authority as parents is directly delegated from God.

That should humble us, to know that God gives us authority to reflect Him, to reflect His nature, to our kids. I want to be a good dad, not just so that my kids will be blessed and think well of me, but more than that - so that they will see a reflection of their heavenly Father, and glorify Him. And when I fail, I want my kids to see a dad that repents and finds his identity, not in my own performance, but in Christ alone.

But when we forget where all authority comes from, when we think our authority is our own, we will hoard it, we will lord it over others, or we will abdicate it and be passive. Like these kings lamenting Babylon's fall, we will find out that whatever is man-centered and not God-centered will one day crumble.

Next we hear the lament of the merchants, the businessmen...

Merchants lament

***[11] And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, [12] cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble,***

***[13] cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. [14] "The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!"***

***[15] The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,***

***[16] "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!***

***[17] For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste."***

All of Rome's wealth, all her self-sufficiency, all her commercial and economic power, would soon crumble. And all who invested in Rome, all who depended on Rome's wickedness to make a living, they would weep because their fortunes would be lost.

These merchants are not crying over the destruction of Rome because of their love for Caesar or for the city. They are grieving because their own meal ticket is destroyed right in front of them. Businessmen witnessing the judgment of God, and instead of repenting they mourn the loss of money, the loss of stuff, and it shows what their hearts truly worship.

The Bible says, “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Money is not sinful in and of itself. Money is a tool. The wise stewardship of money – providing for your family, giving to the poor, and giving to the spread of the gospel – that glorifies God.

But the pursuit of money and the love of money, like every other sin, comes down to our motives. Are we chasing money because that’s where we find our comfort, our security, our identity? Or do we live from a place of faith and contentment, knowing that my comfort and security and identity are all found in Christ alone? Am I living for “self”, or am I living for the Savior?

And then John hears the lament of the sailors...

*Sailors lament*

***[17b] And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off [18] and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, “What city was like the great city?” [19] And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, “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. [20] Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!”***

Now, on one hand, this lament of the sailors and sea captains is similar to the one before, wailing and mourning over lost wealth, lost business when Rome collapses. But this lament is different for a couple of reasons:

First, it illustrates the wider effect of sin. You see, one of the biggest sources of wealth for the city of Rome was sea trade. It was strategically located, not only with major seaports, but also with major rivers running through the interior. These trade routes connected the rest of the world to Rome, and Rome to the rest of the world. When Rome fell, its effects were felt across the globe.

In our private moments of temptation, one of the lies the enemy whispers in our ears is this: “You’re not hurting anyone.” But sin, no matter how private, no matter how hidden, always hurts someone.

First and foremost, our sin is offensive to a holy God. In Psalm 51, King David confesses to the Lord, “Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” Our sin brings reproach on the name of Christ.

Sin also hurts the one sinning. To profess that we are Christians, but to lower our guard and allow our hearts to be drawn away, that damages our relationship with God. That causes distance in our walk with Christ.

But it doesn't stop there. Our sin usually hurts others as well: our family, our friends, other brothers and sisters in Christ. It's a wonderful promise to know that when we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But the effects of our sin, the consequences of our sin, often remain.

That's not to condemn us. That's to sober us. Our sanctification is not automatic. We do not grow in the holiness of Christ by being passive. It's an active fight - starving sinful passions while cultivating godly desires. We do not grow in sanctification by simply attending church or doing religious things. Sanctification is a daily struggle. It's an ongoing spiritual battle that we fight with the strength that Christ provides, seeing Him as the greatest treasure.

And this lament is also different in that the sailors and sea captains know why the destruction of Rome is taking place. They say in v. 20...

***[20] Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!"***

These ungodly men recognize that Rome's collapse is not the result of coincidence or chance. It is the direct result of God's judgment upon the wickedness of men, and how sinful man has persecuted God's people.

Even in the midst of their own idolatrous, self-centered grief, they recognize that God's judgment is just, that all the atrocities done to God's people by Rome are being vindicated by Almighty God. But sadly, in all their grief, they still do not turn and repent. They're too blinded by what they think they've lost to see all that they could gain in Christ.

The target in our struggle for sanctification is always the heart. In our fight for sanctification, we are always in a tug of war between valuing self or valuing Christ, between the fear of man and the fear of God. Between letting my hurts define me, or letting Christ define me. The more we see the truth of God's word, the more we depend on the Spirit for help, the more we will grow in sanctification day by day.

(Transition): Now, in the last remaining verses we come to one more section. One more vision the angel gives to John...



### **III. The Devastation of God's Judgment**

***[21] Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; [22] and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, [23] and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. [24] And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."***

The angel gives John an illustration, a visual aid to depict this fall of Rome, and in the last days, the judgment of all sinful man, using a millstone. In biblical times, a millstone was a large circular stone that was used to crush grain so they could make bread. The average millstone could weigh a ton or more.

So, this mighty angel in John's vision picks up this huge millstone and throws it into the sea, and says this is what Babylon's judgment will be like - something that was once great and powerful, will now disappear before your eyes.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus used a similar illustration...

*Luke 17:1-2*

*And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin."*

This is meant to paint a graphic picture, a clear message to show us just how offensive sin is to a holy God, and just how serious it is when we tempt others to sin.

So the angel throws this giant stone into the sea to show John how Babylon will disappear – all of Babylon's music and art, all of its craftsmen and economy, all of its power and influence – will all be destroyed, never to rise again.

To John and his readers, this would be a prophecy of the coming fall of the Roman Empire. Jesus is showing this to John to encourage the suffering church, to remind them that God sees their pain, He sees the injustices done to them, He knows their suffering, and He cares.

And not just caring from a distance, but this vision is a promise, that God will not let evil remain forever. Christ will come and judge the nations, and those who have rejected God and persecuted the Church, they will face the fearful judgment of the Lamb, and everything they have built, everything they would point to and say, “Look what we’ve done, look what we’ve accomplished”, it will all disappear like a stone sinking in the sea, never to be seen again.

And God has put this in His word for us today. As this fall of Babylon also represents all of sinful man’s influence and culture, God is reminding us of the difference between the temporary and the eternal, what will last and what will be destroyed. He is reminding us of His faithfulness, in both the the fearful judgment that awaits His enemies, and the unspeakable joy that awaits His Church.

We need this kind of contrast, this clarity. In a world full of grey areas, full of moral relativism and lack of any conviction of right and wrong, we need to be reminded of the black-and-white truth of God’s word.

This warning is for the benefit of sinful man to hear and repent. It is the kindness and mercy of God that He delays His judgment – so that more will hear the truth and be saved.

But remember, these visions were given primarily for the church – to be encouraged. But this is also a command of God to His people to “come out”. He is calling us out of lukewarm-ness, to be awakened from our slumber, to be reminded that we are called to live holy lives, to live transformed lives.

We are saved from our sin and saved into Christ. We are brought out from the world, to live lives that look different from the world. Not to be isolated from those who are not Christians, but to be equipped to go into the world, into the darkness, and shine the light of Christ with our lives.

But we can’t shine a light if it’s hidden. We won’t impact others if we walk in fear, or if our lives look like everyone else’s. God is calling His church to live holy lives. Those whom Jesus has saved will look less and less like your old self, and more and more like Christ.

## **Conclusion**

And as we grow to be more like Christ, we will be able to forgive our enemies, while at the same time, join with the psalmist and with the angels of heaven and rejoice at the judgment of God's enemies.

But this challenges us to first take inventory of our lives today. Without making excuses or minimizing sin, every believer needs to ask:

-What are the areas of my life that I know are not reflecting Christ as they should?

-What are the hang-ups, the habits that I know do not honor God?

-What are the desires and the behaviors, the entertainment and the influences that I've allowed to creep in, that I've begun to tolerate, that God is calling me to reject, that God is calling me to pick up and throw into the sea of His forgiveness?

God's justice is good and right. But for the one who trusts in Christ, God's justice has been satisfied on the cross. Let us live in the good of that grace, not only causing us to be grateful for forgiveness, but also to be empowered by that grace, that we may live lives worthy of the gospel, for the glory of our Savior.

***(Let's Pray)***