

Are you ready for Christ's return?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 February 2025

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] So, we've been invited to think of a moment when the foundations of everything that is known are shaken. Let me take you back in history to 410 AD, as a shocking piece of news spread around the world that Rome, the eternal city, had fallen. Creating shock, this news spread in Europe and Asia, all the way to Africa, 800 years of security gone overnight. And this message reached a guy called Augustine. You may have heard of Augustine in North Africa. And people were panicking and fearful. And Augustine made it his mission to help especially Christian people to respond to this sense of fear and panic, to encourage believers to recognize, where is true certainty found? Where does true security rest? And he wrote a letter, and this is what he wrote to a group of Christians, there will be an end to every earthly kingdom. Do not be surprised that the world is losing its grip and is full of pressing tribulations. The world is passing away. The world is short of breath.

Do not fear. Do not fear. Your youth will be renewed as an eagle. And then a few years later, he wrote this massive book called The City of God. And he has this contrast between the eternal city, the city of God, versus the earthly city, which is doomed to destruction, like we just read in Revelation 18.

And so the question that we need to ask is, where is our citizenship? What is the foundation of our life built on? Am I focused on living for the here and now, or do I have a focus and a security that's based in eternity? It's this theme that Revelation keeps coming back to. The message of Revelation 18 follows the same lines as Augustine. It makes clear this world, the world system, Babylon, is passing away.

It makes clear that Jesus is coming back. There is a future day of judgment. He will establish the kingdom of God. And if we want to live without fear and insecurity, we need to trust in Jesus.

When our foundations are shaken, sometimes that happens as a society, sometimes in a family, sometimes personally, it invites the question, in what do I trust? Our standing or falling depends on the foundations that we build on. And so Revelation 18 comes in a sense as a word of encouragement to Christians, as a reminder, we don't belong to Babylon. Babylon, which stands for opposition to God in every age and generation. It says you belong to another city, and you belong to God. We're to go out to God, to be called out by God, to live with the value system of heaven, the value system of Jesus, and to wait for his return with hope. But for each of us, we can hear this as God's word to us, because Jesus here is telling us in vision form what is coming one day, inviting us to think, how should I respond to the reality of this message? Am I ready for this day? Two things that we're going to see. The first is this, that judgment is announced. It's there in the first eight verses.

[3 : 27] So the section begins with this loud voice from the angel, glorious angel that comes from heaven. And the angel's bringing the verdict from God's courtroom on Babylon. Babylon, through the Bible, sometimes it's a symbol of pride, Tower of Babel. Sometimes it's a symbol of wickedness, the Babylonian empire. And here it's become, attached to Rome, the city of Rome, a symbol for opposition and oppression. So it's used differently through the Bible, but with the same idea. And what we discover in Revelation 18, that before pride, pride comes before a fall. So in verses 2 and 3, when judgment is announced, we discover the cause and effect of judgment. So there is this picture of the great fall from glory. Fallen is Babylon the great. She's become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for the impure spirits. Here is a great city now captured as a ghost town. Here is a city that once was unmatched for power and wealth, but is now unclean and unfit for life. Here is a picture of a great civilization, a society that now lies in ruins. And so the question then becomes, well, why has this happened? And the answer is in verse 3, begins with, for, for all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. And we understand that here is a city that seemed to be at the center of a value system. And this city of man will fall because of its weak foundations. Here is a group of people that have the wrong focus and the wrong worship. And we see it in our text. The problem that we find in Revelation 18, the problem we so often find in our own human hearts, is that temptation and tendency to live for now and to forget there is eternity. The operating principles that we find in

Babylon, they make absolute sense if this life is all there is. You know, if it's just this, if we just live and then we die, then absolutely we should just try and squeeze as much happiness out of it and try and grab everything we can. But if there's eternity, then that changes everything. But we get a glimpse of what these people in Babylon have been living for. They've been living a life that's based on their power.

And they've been leading the kings of the earth to follow their way. The imagery of verse 3 reminds us that here is a society that values and uses, and often abuses, sex and pleasure. The maddening wine of her adulteries is not a positive image. Here is a society that's based on personal greatness, the name, the status, Babylon, the great. But now there is this fall. And it's the Bible's way of reminding us that there will be an ultimate fall if we give our hearts to those things. If we choose created things over the Creator. There's nothing wrong with power and sex and pleasure and luxury and status if we receive them as good gifts.

But there's everything wrong with them if we treat them as if they are God. If we pursue what is temporary over what is eternal. There's a text in Romans chapter 13, verse 12, that uses this image of the dawn. It says, the night is nearly over and the day is almost here. So, picture the dawn. You know that moment where there's both darkness and there's light? You begin to see the first glimpses of the sun coming, but it's still darkness. And Paul uses that imagery to say to Christians, to say to the world, don't be fooled. Recognize what's passing away, which is darkness. Recognize the light is coming, and therefore, he says, live in the light.

In a sense, that makes sense. In our context here, recognize that there is a world that is passing away. We're invited to live in the light. We're invited to live in God's light. John Piper, the Bible teacher, actually has a book called Living in the Light. And what he does in that book, it's a really helpful book, is he looks to expose some of these idols, these things that we live for in culture. So, he looks at the power of money and sex and the power of power itself, and understands that these are God's good gifts, which will either be to us a way to glorify God, a way to love and to serve others, a way to show whose kingdom we truly belong to, or those gifts will become a massive temptation. They'll become our source of identity, and they'll become, if we make them ultimate, a threat to our very souls. And so, there's this warning of the cause and effect. And then there's the call in verses 4 and 8. Did you hear the call, verse 4? Come out to escape judgment. Verse 4, come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so you will not receive any of her plagues. This is actually an old command. Jeremiah 51, verse 44 and 45, the people of God are told to come out of

[8 : 53] Babylon. Babylon's about to get judged, and so they're supposed to run for their lives to escape that judgment. And the call is the same. There's two good reasons. Did you notice the reasons in verse 4?

Come out from Babylon. Come out from that old way of life, because one, you don't want to share in her sins, and two, you don't want to share in her judgment. We don't want to share in her sins, those sins, verse 5, which are piled up to heaven. And again, I think that's drawing on the imagery of the Tower of Babel. Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, God's created beings who were supposed to worship God, who were supposed to fill the earth with God's glory. Instead, they pile together into this one city, and they decide they're going to make this great big tower as a monument to themselves, to the glory of self, to reject God, to replace God. It's like sin piled up to heaven.

And the warning comes, don't be part of the world that says no to Jesus as King. Don't be part of the world that says, I want my own glory rather than giving glory to God. Come out so you don't share in her judgment, is what verse 4 says. And maybe you notice verses 6 to 8, this idea of when God's judgment comes, the nature of its coming, give back to her as she has given.

There is this justice, God is just, and the idea what you do to others, God will do to you, is the warning. So, in verse 7, here is a people who, they should be giving glory to God, but they're taking glory to themselves. And so, there is judgment. Again, in verse 7, living in glory and luxury, this gift of resources that should be used to serve others is being hoarded, exploiting others to gain for oneself.

Trust and security that should be found in God. Instead, there is a group of people who are finding their security in themselves, in their status. Well, we've always been strong and secure and wealthy and influential, and that'll never change. In refusing God, they will face the judgment of God.

[11 : 10] And so, the section begins, ends with a warning, therefore, in one day her plagues will overtake her. Book of Exodus, all those plagues as God's judgment, the Lord's judgment, which is sudden.

And so, Jesus announces this coming judgment and gives it as a warning. It's very clear judgment will fall on those who oppose God, on those who rob God of glory, on those who seek pleasure and don't pursue life with God. And so, there's a warning to a city. Maybe we know the legend of another city, the city of Troy. Remember the story of Troy? The Greeks brought a wooden horse to the gates of Troy.

Troy opened the gates, thought this was a wonderful gift, wheeled the horse into the center of the city. Darkness came, night fell, some soldiers piled out of the horse, opened the city gates. By the next morning, Troy was destroyed. We need to watch our center. We must not get comfy with sin, invite anything into the center of our lives that is not God. We need to be careful not to push God out of the center to place ourselves there, because nothing else has the ability to satisfy like God, and only God deserves all true glory, the central place in our lives. So, what should we do?

We should listen to this warning. We should come out. Part of that coming out is to show that we belong to a different city. We belong to a different country. We come out to show, I belong to the Lord.

I want to live to show that my citizenship doesn't belong to this world and its values, but it belongs to the value system of heaven. We want to come out to show that we are different, to show that Jesus is our center. He is our source of identity. He is our true treasure. We want to live by His values, and we want to do that in such a way that we show the world that there is a different way to live.

[13 : 38] There is a better way to live, that we're invited to go out to love and to serve others in Jesus' name, because we've come out to Jesus, and we belong to Him.

We also need to come out to see the cross of Christ, to see Jesus dying outside the city in our place and for our city. We need to come out to recognize that He came to that place in order to rescue us, that by ourselves, each one of us, we have a pile of sins piled high to heaven, and Jesus was willing to come and to forgive those sins by dying for them on the cross.

We deserve to drink that cup of God's anger, but Jesus drinks it for us. We deserve to be overtaken by God's judgment, but Jesus is overtaken by God's judgment on the cross. He is ready to lose His life so you and I can experience and enjoy eternal life as citizens of an eternal kingdom with strong foundations. So, we need to come out to belong to Jesus and to find life from Jesus.

So, that's the first thing we see, that judgment is announced. The second thing we see is judgment in action. This is really from verse 9 to the end of the section. And again, just to get us into the mindset of this section, there was a terrifying book that was published at the end of last year by a journalist called Annie Jacobson called Nuclear War. You can read it, you can listen to her talking about it. She interviewed loads of policymakers, read lots of declassified documents, and she recognized this, that there's a very real prospect of if nuclear war ever happened, that in the time that we would spend in our church service, you know, one hour or so, that is as much time as it would take for the whole of civilization to collapse. For untold horror. She plays out this scenario, and all it would take would be a little over one hour. We hope and pray that that never happens. But within our lifetime, for most of us, there have been sudden and shocking moments that have utterly changed history.

Many of us, we will remember where we were on 9-11, when the planes crashed into the Twin Towers.

[16:17] Less than two hours for them to fall in their entirety, for 3,000 to be killed, for Western society, indeed the whole world, to be changed in a moment. And we don't even need to go that far back. Think about coronavirus. Remember how rapidly things change from absolutely normal to hearing a report or two about this kind of strange flu that was emanating from China. It seemed to be a problem over there. Within just a few days, we had global lockdown. We had the breakdown of everything that we'd ever known. Such a short time. So, keep those ideas in focus, because Revelation 18 prepares us for the reality that God's future judgment will come suddenly and shockingly. We get the sense of the shocking speed in verses 9 to 19 in these songs or laments of woe. The imagery here is really a funeral scene. And what's being mourned over is the death of a city, the death of this world system, the death of

Babylon. And so, you have people that are gathering around the smoking ruins, and they're singing these songs of lament, because everything that they've known and built their life on is now gone. So, we hear it from the terrified kings. Verse 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. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry, woe, woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon. In one hour, your doom will come. From power and wealth to doom in one hour. Verse 15, we find the merchants. So, you recognize this city was obviously a huge world trading hub, people coming in and out, bringing their wares. In one hour, verse 15, verse 16, verse 17, in one hour, such great wealth has been brought to ruin. Same for the sea captains. Those who've made their living, benefited from this trade, they recognize, verse 19, wealth to ruin in one hour.

It's Jesus' way of warning us of the reality. Here is a way of life, a world system, a set of structures. People had always built their life on it. It will be torn down in a moment.

Just like 410 AD, Rome, the eternal city, the empire that would last forever, gone like every other empire before it and since. Like every civilization in history, one day it will come to an end, either in history or the return of Jesus. So, there is this sense of the shocking speed when judgment comes in action. But the second thing to notice is to hear the sentence that's passed.

Verse 20 to 24, if we were at a funeral and lamenting over the death of the city, now we're back in the courtroom. Now, we've got the sense that God is the judge, and the prisoner is brought in to await sentencing, and the prisoner is Babylon.

[19 : 46] Babylon, which represents the world system, a group of people who turn their back on God and on Jesus, the Savior, those who choose to live for now in comfort and pleasure rather than to be right with God and live for eternity. And again, there's the sense of how sudden and shocking the judgment will be.

In verse 21, there's an angel who picks up a boulder like a big millstone and throws it into the sea. I imagine all of us maybe at some point have done that at the seaside, that sense of finding the biggest rock you can and fling it in, and you see the water come up, and you're trying to get the biggest wave and the biggest splash you can. It gives us a sense of the suddenness, the violence of this instant judgment. And then we get the sentence passed, here is the end of the world.

The crimes have been listed, now the sentence is passed. It begins with a reality of deafening silence. The music harpists, musicians, pipers, trumpets will never be heard in you again.

No more music, no more art, no more beauty, no more joy in this city. No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again.

No more business, no more trading, no more buying and selling, no more productivity. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. No more food production, no more making of the bread. No more lightness, the light of a lamp will never shine in you again.

[21 : 27] Voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. That happiness, those family gatherings, those weddings, that joy, it's gone on that day for the city that says no to Jesus. Jesus tells a story, maybe it's familiar to many of us, of two house builders. There's one man, he builds his house on rock, and there's one man who builds his house on sand. The two houses look the same, the foundations are very different. And then the storm comes. Ultimately, that storm speaks to us of the day of judgment. And when the storm comes, the foundations are revealed. The house that's built on the rock stands. The life that's built on Jesus and his word stands. But the house built on sand, without the solid foundation, it falls.

That's what we have in Revelation 18. One other thing we have in Revelation 18 when it comes to judgment is verse 24, in her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who've been slaughtered on the earth. Here's one other thing that's going to stop.

The killing of God's people will stop. The oppression of the church will stop. And that explains why there's the joyful song of verse 20. I wonder if you found it a bit jarring to come to that song, rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, for God has judged her. With the judgment she imposed on you, she has been judged. There's joy for the people of God because part of Babylon's reason for existing is to make life miserable for the people of God, to attack and to hate and to destroy.

And so there is joy because there is a day coming when God will step in decisively, when he will punish all wrong in the end. That the day of Jesus' return is both God judging the earth and also of Jesus establishing an eternal kingdom of peace. And so there is good news and there is hope because of that. So Jesus announces that judgment is coming, and Jesus pictures this judgment in action.

But why does Jesus do it? Why does he give this vision to us? It's because Jesus wants us to prepare for this coming crisis, and Jesus wants us to be ready for his coming, for his return.

[24 : 08] So remember in Matthew chapter 24, we read just that little section, Jesus teaching there, where he made plain that the timing for this final judgment is unknown. People be going about their business, just like they did in the day of Noah before judgment came at the flood. It will take the world by surprise, but it will come. And within his teaching, he gives us some instruction. What should we do?

Jesus, the one who came on a loving rescue mission to save people, to bring people to God and to eternal security, what does he say we should do? He said in verse 42 of Matthew 24, keep watch.

You don't know what time Jesus is coming back, so keep watch. Live with eternity in view. Don't settle down in Babylon. Don't get comfy in this culture and embracing the values of this culture.

Remember, heaven is our true home as the people of God. It's all too easy as a minority, isn't it, that we would just go with the flow of culture to be unthinking in the value systems that we take on.

It's very easy to be focused on self and to be focused on now, but we realize that's what brought Babylon into judgment. So, part of this keeping watch involves a daily determination by God's grace to be different, to be transformed by living for Jesus. But he also tells us in verse 42, you also must be ready.

[25 : 52] How do you and I get ready for the return of Jesus? The simple answer is we place our faith in him.

We trust to him and not to ourselves. We look to Jesus, the judge who came and was judged in our place, so that we don't have to be judged, so that when the end comes, we know that joy comes. When the foundations are shaken and everything that we know disappears, we still have security because we've built our life in this city that has foundations.

In just, I guess, in a couple of weeks, we'll be in Revelation 21. We get this wonderful image of a wedding, and there is Jesus, and he's the bridegroom. And the bride is the new Jerusalem, the city of God that comes down from heaven so that Jesus and his church are together forever.

To be ready means to be part of his people, part of that kingdom, by turning away from sin and trusting in him. Augustine, back in 410 AD, did the church in his day a great service.

Here is how to respond to a great crisis. Here is how to counter fear with faith. You know, he looked to point people away from the temporary and the fading to what is eternal.

[27 : 19] He reminded them, here is your eternal king. Here is the one you should give your love and loyalty to, and you don't need to live with fear when you're part of his kingdom. Jesus does the same thing for us here. In his love and in his kindness, he would make us shockproof. He would give to his church a solid foundation as we anticipate this coming crisis, his return, his judgment, his return to judge the living and the dead. If we trust in Jesus, if he is where we look for our greatest safety, our deepest sense of security, our most powerful hope in all this world, then we can live without fear. We can live with faith. We can live ready for Jesus' return.

Who or what is our foundation? What is our life built on? Are you ready for Jesus' return? Who or what is our foundation? Are you ready for Jesus' return? You know what it is?

You know what it is. You know what it is. You know what it is. You know what it is. You know what it is.