

The Prostitute and The Beast

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[0 : 0 0] We're reading this morning from Revelation chapter 17, starting at the first verse. Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.

And he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.

The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.

And on her forehead was written a name of mystery, Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.

And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly.

[1 : 2 5] But the angel said to me, Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns, that carries her.

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life, from the foundation of the world, will marvel to see the beast, because it was, and is not, and is to come.

This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated. They are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen.

One is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come, he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was, and is not, it is an ape, but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.

And the ten horns that you saw, are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.

[2 : 4 4] These are of one mind and hand over their power and authority. These are of one mind and hand over their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the lamb, and the lamb will conquer them, for he is lord of lords and king of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

And the angel said to me, the waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages, and the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute.

They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose, by being of one mind, and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

And the woman that you saw is the great city, that has dominion over the kings of the earth. The London life. Health, wealth, prosperity, pleasure, satisfaction, security.

It's all available here, isn't it, in London, in a big city. You can spend your life reveling in career, pursuing success, climbing the status ladder, and you can enjoy all sorts of pleasures and nighttime excursions, from flirting and flings to the fine foods and wines.

[4 : 14] And it's London. And if it's not success or pleasure you're after, London's got you covered for comfort and safety, and security too. You can have everything and anything delivered.

And you can ask Bannam and Ring to look after your doorbells and your home security systems, and a Gale's cinnamon bun. The finest in the land.

All available in London. And what's not to love about the London life? You can have more money, more success, more security, more sex, more joy, more comfort, if you just give yourself to the London life.

But they will say, please don't bring too much Jesus with you. And it can seem so foolish to be fully committed to Christ when career and comfort are calling us.

So why would we live wholeheartedly for Jesus when London life has so much to offer us? Well, Revelation 17 wants to give us an answer.

[5 : 28] Revelation 17 wants to help us see London life for what it really is. And it shows us where it's heading so that we stand firm with Jesus.

Now in chapters 15 and 16, we've seen future judgment played out in advance. And now John is given a glimpse of what will happen on that judgment day to the great prostitute.

Let's have a look at verse one. The angel before John says to him, come, I'll show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters.

But who is she? That should be our question. Well, we get some clues. Verse five, John gives us her name. Babylon the great.

And then in verse 18, the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth. It's not a whole load to go on.

[6 : 31] Babylon has come up in chapter 14, verse eight and chapter 16, verse nine, and will be the subject of chapter 18 and will appear in chapter 19. But as with so much of the book of Revelation, the Old Testament helps us understand what's going on.

See, Babylon, all through the Old Testament, is one of the great enemies of God's people. It's the location of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, where humanity kind of set themselves up against God and try to prove that they don't need him by building a tower to the heavens.

They want to show that they can live without him. Babylon is the location of the whole of the book of Daniel, where having captured God's people, King Nebuchadnezzar, he stands on his rooftop and he looks over this great empire that he's created and he says in his arrogance, is this not great Babylon that I have built?

And so the prostitute, she is the great city that is set against God, ancient Babylon, but also stands symbolic of any institution or ideology set up against God.

It's not a good idea. Call it Babylon or Rome or London life. It is human society and civilization in rebellion against God. Any way of life that seeks to persuade us, we can be independent of the God who made us.

[7 : 57] And as we're drawn in by its call, John's vision helps us to see clearly that Babylon, this way of life without God, is attractive, but wicked.

Verse three. And he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast.

Verse four. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup. On the face of it, there is immense beauty.

She's clothed in purple and scarlet, rich colors, covered in lavish linens. And as you look at her, she shimmers. The gold sparkles, the jewels and the pearls, they glint in the light.

And she's so upmarket, isn't she? Who drinks from a golden cup but the most successful and extravagant of people? It is alluring.

[9 : 05] She draws your gaze. She's captivating. Look at the end of verse six. And I saw the woman. That's John. I saw the woman. And then I marveled greatly.

Even John is drawn in by her and marvels at her. And so it's no wonder that the kings of the earth, all sorts of important people, they're in her grip. She calls, come to me, eat, drink, be merry and prosper.

And off they go. And off we go too sometimes. But it's not just that they're blind fools when they go after her. You know, the thing, the jewels, her attractiveness, it is designed so that it's hard to spot what's going on beneath the surface.

It's got to be that way. Otherwise, nobody would fall for this tactic of Satan. Come to Rome, she says, rest a while, put your feet up. Then she offers a better sexual partner.

You deserve it, she says. She offers more money. You've earned it and your family won't mind the extra hours, she says. And she offers pleasures and freedoms. Have another glass of wine in Babylon.

[10 : 21] Come to Babylon. You be you. Don't hold back. And the offers, they seem good. Which of us doesn't want a more comfortable, pleasurable life or a more high-profile career?

She is attractive. And that is why she's so dangerous. She really is the white witch of Narnia, holding out to us Turkish delight and all sorts of other goodness if we'll just come close to her on her sleigh and turn our backs on Aslan.

But the clothing, the jewels that offers, it is all a facade. And seen from God's perspective, it's not a pretty picture. Look at verse 3 again.

See what John sees. And he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names.

And it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.

[11 : 34] And on her forehead was written a name of mystery, Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations. And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

Attractive as she might be, on closer inspection, it's horrid. See her mode of transport, verse 3. She rides on the Antichrist blasphemous beast.

We've met this seven-headed, ten-horned beast before. It is Satan. In chapter 12 and 13, he shows up as political oppression, seeking to crush Christians.

In those chapters, he shows up too as false religion, seeking to draw people away from the real Jesus. And here, through the puppetry of the prostitute, he offers prosperity and success if we'll just leave Jesus behind.

Have a look then what's in her golden cup in verse 4. It's not homemade lemonade, it's a cup full of abominations and sexual immorality.

[12 : 48] She says, come, drink from my golden goblet. What I have to offer you is better than what Jesus offers you. But the reality is, she is the source for so many of sin and rebellion against God.

And it all comes out in her name, verse 5. Mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations. And of earth's abominations. Trace the sin of the world. Trace adultery and abuse and the wicked revelry that's found in London or any city.

She is the foundation. And last and worst, see what she's drunk with. Verse 6. I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints.

She delights in the persecution of Christians. Her aim is to draw people away from Jesus so much so that they turn against him and persecute him and his people.

She wants Christians crushed. She is hideous and wicked and evil. Babylon, London life. Call it what you want.

[14 : 01] Life without God against him. It is not fluffy and fun. It is seductive and deceptive. It seeks to lead people away from Jesus into sexual sin, drunkenness and the persecution of Christians.

And the overall aim of this great prostitute is to lead people into spiritual adultery. See, that language of spiritual adultery or sexual immorality that people commit with her, it paints a vivid image of the horror of choosing anything over the Lord.

Jesus, he comes to us and offers us himself in a glorious union at the cross. He takes all of our sin and guilt and shame and gives us his perfection and status before God and to leave Jesus behind, to reject his proposal, is to go elsewhere.

It's like going after a prostitute on your honeymoon. And it can happen so subtly. We live and breathe this temptation all the time.

It looks so innocent but it's wicked. Everything seems to be on offer to us if we just drift from Jesus a bit, make a few compromises and go to Babylon.

[15 : 24] Now it's possible it might be a kind of rash moment of indulgence but for most of us it's much more likely to be a subtle shift in our thinking. It's a million tiny little compromises day by day, year by year and then she draws us in.

Take that promotion, work the extra hours, it won't do any harm. Click the next link, take another look at that image, stay for another drink, smile that way at him again, just see where it leads.

Indulge your desires, she says. And before we know it, we're having an affair or sacrificing our families and we've essentially climbed into bed with the great prostitute.

And so we need to pay attention so watch out for her. Now of course there's so much that's good and wonderful about life in London. There's so much that's good about sex and wine in its proper context.

But she desires to use those things, good things, to draw us away from Jesus. But if we take heed of Revelation 17, we'll see it for the facade that it is and we'll be strengthened to stand against her nonsense and her lies.

[16 : 47] Let's not pretend that the world we live in is all kind of nicey-nicey. we live in Babylon and it wants to devour us and drag us away from Jesus.

And so whoever we are, Christian or not, we need to see London life for what it really is and ask ourselves, have we been seduced by it all? I was trying to come up with a helpful illustration to help us feel what this, how this happens and what it's like.

And as is often the case, God has already provided one. If Revelation 17 is the prostitute viewed from God's angle, Proverbs chapter 7 reads like a real-life example of what she seeks to do to people.

I'm going to read it, maybe you want to read it properly later. Slight paraphrase, Proverbs chapter 7. The author writes, I've perceived among the youths a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness.

And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart. At every corner she lies in wait. But she seizes him and kisses him.

[18 : 13] And with bold face she says to him, I've come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly and have found you. I've spread my couch with coverings and coloured linens from Egyptian linen.

I've perfumed my bed with myrrh and aloes and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love till morning. Let us delight ourselves with love, for my husband is not at home.

With much seductive speech she persuades him. With her smooth talk she compels him. And all at once he follows her.

He does not know that it will cost him his life. Let not your heart turn aside to her ways. Do not stray into her paths. For many a victim has she laid low.

And all her slain are a mighty throng. She's attractive but wicked. Friends, don't go to Babylon. It will cost us our lives.

[19 : 18] Now, from our point of view, London looks impenetrable and never-ending. And back then, Rome would have looked the same way for them and back then, Babylon would have looked the same for Daniel and his people.

And it is why we need John's vision that helps us see clearly, secondly, Babylon will come to an end. I'm just going to read a few verses from verse 7 onwards and make one big statement.

Chapter 17, verse 7. But the angel said to me, Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.

The beast that you saw was and is not and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast because it was and is not and is to come.

This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated. They are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen.

[20 : 30] One is, the other has not yet come. And when he does come, he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth, but it belongs to the seventh and it goes to destruction.

And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour together with the beast.

These are of one mind and hand over their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the lamb and the lamb will conquer them for he is lord of lords and king of kings and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.

Got that? There's a lot there, isn't there? But the big picture, despite Babylon and the beasts perceived power and authority, they are headed for destruction.

The seven beasts, the seven beasts, the beasts' seven heads are seven mountains and seven kings. The mountains are symbolic of power and authority their Rome or Babylon or London sense of permanence and strength and they give the prostitute her seat of influence and the kings, they kind of rear their heads at various points in history through various regimes popping up to draw God's people away from Jesus.

[22 : 06] But in the end, verse 14, despite their making war on the lamb, the lamb will conquer them. So like Babel in Genesis 11, like Babylon in the book of Daniel, like Rome in the first century, humanity set up against God will not last.

Ultimately, every Babylon will come to an end because Jesus conquers, he wins. and those who stand firm with him are safe.

Now we get the beast's demise fleshed out for us in the coming chapters next week in chapter 18 and a bit in chapter 19, but the end of the prostitute comes in rather pathetic fashion in verses 15 to 18.

They paint a picture of a sort of civil war. The prostitute will cease to be useful to the beast and the kings and so verse 16, they will hate the prostitute.

They'll make her desolate and naked and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire. God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose. The London way of life will not last.

[23 : 30] God's word will be accomplished. Babylon and all it stands for will come to an end. Now just imagine the church in the first century in Thyatira.

We read about them back in chapter 2 a couple of summers ago, maybe a long way back, but have a flick through chapters 2 and 3 later this afternoon if you want to remind yourselves of them.

The church in Thyatira, they are reading Revelation 17, this vision of the prostitute and her end. And some of them have been indulging deeply in sexual sin.

And as a church, they've been allowing it. And so this chapter, when they get to it, when they read it, comes as a massive rebuke and warning.

As if the Lord Jesus says to them in their sexual sin, see what you're really doing. you're sleeping with Babylon, repent, get out of bed with her or it will end badly for you.

[24 : 37] And where we've been wooed ourselves, where we're indulging where we shouldn't be, we need to heed this vision's warning too. We need to get out.

We need to turn back to Jesus and find full forgiveness in His grace. It is their only place of safety. Or perhaps we can imagine the wake-up call this vision would have been to the church in Laodicea in chapter 3, verse 14 to 22.

They are drifty, lukewarm. They think they're rich and prosperous because they've got all they need. It's just like living in London.

But slowly and surely, they're drifting from Jesus, sleepy and lukewarm. And so with this vision, He calls them to wake up and warm up to see what is going on.

They think they're drifting towards Jesus, but they're drifting away towards Rome and all of her trappings. She is like a great prostitute and they need to see that clearly.

[25 : 47] She doesn't love them or want them. In fact, she wants to get them away from Jesus. And so it's as if Jesus says to them, make a call. Are you going to live for Rome or for Jesus, the prostitute or the lamb?

And we need to make the same call. Where we're lukewarm individually or as a church, will we choose to live the London life, embracing all that London has to offer, or will we choose to live for Jesus?

Where we're tempted by the great prostitute's offers of pleasure and comfort and excitement. We need to see this vision so we see her for what she really is and see her end.

We need this vision in our heads and our hearts individually and personally so that we stand firm as individuals, but we need it clear as a church so we stand firm collectively. And of course, as much as we want the best for our children, we need to tell them and teach them, this is what life is really like.

The world wants you to drift from Jesus, but instead stand firm. So how do we stand firm for Jesus when the world is so attractive?

[27 : 03] The answer of Revelation 17, we need to see Babylon, Rome, London life for what it really is, a wicked prostitute, determined to seduce and draw in God's people.

And so we need to stay away from her. And instead, we need to live as people who know the ending. Even as people all around us prosper, we rest assured, Babylon will not last.

The Lamb will conquer. And so we stand firm with Him for safety. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our Father, we thank you so much that you are blunt with us at times where we need it.

And we pray, please, where we're drawn to living for all that London has to offer instead of living for Jesus, we pray that you would help us to see that clearly.

Please expose that in us and help us turn back. And Father, we pray that you would help us to rejoice that Jesus wins.

[28 : 16] He will conquer. And we praise you so much, our Father, that those who stand with Him are eternally safe. Amen.