

Vision of Triumph

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[0 : 0 0] I read the story recently of a butler who served for a number of years in the grand 17th century Belton House in Lincolnshire in England. As part of his duties, he regularly dusted, in fact I think he dusted daily and he polished pretty regularly, a World War II bomb that had been dropped on the grounds of Belton House by German bombers. One day, while polishing this thing, he actually managed to even knock it over and it fell on his foot while he was cleaning, so it caused him a great deal of damage. Anyway, one Easter weekend, something like 24 years after it was put on display at the house, an army officer was visiting Belton House and this officer noticed to his horror that this bomb was in fact still life and was capable of levelling the entire estate. The place was evacuated, as you can imagine, and the Royal Air Force, the bomb disposal unit was called in and the bomb was disposed of. But imagine discovering that you've been cleaning this thing with chemicals for 24 years, polishing a live bomb that, and you've even dropped this thing on your foot, and at any point this thing could have exploded. It's possible to live with danger and to be totally unaware of it.

In fact, we can even convince ourselves that we are indestructible, that things will go on as they are forever. The number of people that I've dealt with as a pastor over the years, who even in their senior years, still assume that they are indestructible. And it takes an expert analysis, a medical specialist, or an apocalypse to persuade us of an alternative view. Apocalypse is a Greek word, which means revelation. It means unveiling of things that were not previously known and which cannot be known unless they are unveiled to us. And that's what the book of Revelation is. This book is not given to us to satisfy our curiosity about events in the future. It is given to open our eyes. to prod us to come awake to reality and to stimulate reforming actions in our lives.

What the book of Revelation does for us and what it's been doing for us in these past weeks is opening our eyes to the Christian worldview. And that worldview, very simply, is that the crucified, resurrected Jesus of Nazareth, who was in history, died in history, rose in history, is the one who now has ascended and reigns over all history and time in eternity. His people suffer on earth with joy while being threatened and seduced by the powers and the cultures of their day, whatever it is and wherever they are in the world. And yet what we also discover is that this God is in control at every point throughout the chaos of history. And he has declared that he will come again and he will judge all humanity and wind up history as we know it. And the call of Revelation is for Christians to remain faithful to the good news. And the good news about Jesus and the good news about him as we wait for his return to wind up history and bring us into his perfect presence forever. And so the challenge of Revelation all the way through, on every occasion, as it is again today, live for the lamb, not for the beast. That's the challenge.

Live for the bride, groom, not the prostitute. Eternal things, not temporal, to please God rather than anger him for his eternal city rather than the lake of fire. That's the call right through Revelation as we have had right from the beginning. And so now as we come to the end, we get to the final destination. That's where we're up to, the final destination. So I've got an outline for today's talk on the St. Paul's app. It'd be good if you could go there. Also get your Bibles open. We're looking sort of across Revelation 17 to 19. You'll notice three points in the app. The prostitute and our problem, the lamb and our solution, and the bride and living for future hope. So first of all, and most of the time is on the prostitute and our problem. Chapters 17 and 18, we're introduced to a new figure in the storyline. It's a woman. She's mysterious, but her title captures for us who she is. 17 verse 5, [5 : 4 0] Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth. Now, it is possible for us to plunge into the extravagant imagery of these chapters to try and come up with an impressive display of convincing explanation of exactly who in history this woman is astride and who the scarlet beast is, as well as the seven heads, the seven hills, the seven kings, Babylon, and

all the rest. What we need to do with the book of Revelation, I said right from the beginning, is to step back. Just step back and have a look. Notice, as you read through the text, the seven of the book of Revelation, the seven kings, the seven kings, the seven kings, and the seven kings, the seven kings, and the seven kings, and the seven kings. The seven kings, the seven kings, and the seven kings.

This woman represents the problem with the world. Twice in chapter 17, verse 8, we're told that the beast once was, now is, and yet will come. In other words, this beast manifests itself in one form, then it passes away, and then it will come back in other forms. That is, this is just simply another one of the parodies of God that we've had right through, as we read in chapters 1, 4, and 11. In chapter 17, verses 10 and 12, the angel speaks of coming kings and transfers of power. In Daniel 7, in the Old Testament, the same language is used to describe successive kingdoms and empires. The symbolic numbers 7 and 10 in Revelation 17 don't refer to specific kings. Instead, John is highlighting the way that the beast manifests itself in power in reoccurring political empires and systems and societies throughout history.

Even though the woman, even though the woman rides on the beast and rules over the kings in 17, verse 7, and then again in verse 18, we see in verse 16 of chapter 17, that they turn on her and they destroy her.

[8 : 33] Such as the city of Rome itself. The all-powerful Rome, which is in the background here as John receives this revelation.

Rome itself will be destroyed by the very empire it built in AD 410. What we see here is Babylon. In chapters 17 and 18, it represents human society without God. Human society with all its violence and oppression and corruption and injustice and rejection of God.

And it's saying here, societies come and go. Kingdoms rise and they fall. And it will go on and on and on.

And each one in its various forms will do exactly the same. Stand against God as rule of all. See, what happens here with the book of Revelation is that the major themes that are set up at the beginning of the Bible sort of all get intertwined and come to their conclusion at the end of the Bible.

[9 : 55] The threads all come together. The theme of Babylon and society against God is drawn to a close here as well as they celebrate in chapter 19, the end of Babylon.

Babylon features in the Bible as early as Genesis chapter 10, verse 10. And it is likely linked to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11.

The symbol of the godless society, proud society in its attempt to storm the heavens, dethrone God and take glory for themselves and make a name for themselves.

Babel and Babylon are interchangeable. Throughout the Bible, Babylon came to stand for all that oppose God, all the empires and societies and peoples that oppose God.

Daniel chapter 4, verse 30 is a great example where we have the egotistical Nebuchadnezzar declaring, Is not this the great Babylon that I have built as my royal residence?

[11 : 09] By my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty. All this sin of human society, all of its rejection of God the creator is in chapter 19, verse 2, described as adultery.

Prostitution. Prostitution. All human sin is described as adultery. Prostitution against God. And this too is one of the great themes of the Bible from beginning to end.

What we see in the Bible is that God doesn't relate to people primarily as a king to subjects or even as a shepherd to his sheep, but as a husband to a wife.

God's plan from the beginning of creation was to have a solemn and a binding relationship with his people as binding and as comprehensive and as intimate as marriage.

It's the kind of relationship with God that we were created for. No other religion dares talk about a relationship with God like biblical Christianity.

[12 : 33] Human sin, therefore, is depicted as adultery. Sin is loving anything more than God. Sin is giving the title of our hearts to anything more than God.

Sin is giving the center of our emotions and our imagination to anything apart from God. God doesn't just want us to rely upon him like a shepherd.

He wants us to love him like a spouse. And sin is where we love anything more than God. Sin is where we love anything more than God.

Holidays, he takes long trips around the world with her. And finally, his wife confronts him about this other relationship. And he says, I really don't understand why you're getting so upset, frankly.

You know, you've got my name, got my surname. You've got my money. I pay the bills. I cut the grass.

[14:06] I seriously do not understand what the problem is and why you're getting so worked up. The wife says, but I don't have your heart.

Something else has your deepest affections of your heart. Now, most of us are sitting there and going, what sort of an idiot would say that?

Well, who would ever say, what's the problem here? So here we go. Do you say you believe? Are you baptised? You go to church. You pray the Lord's Prayer. You work at obeying the Ten Commandments. And yet something else actually has the affections of your heart.

There is something else that you are actually truly living for and has captured your imagination. Could be a career.

[15:06] Could be family. Could, in fact, be religion. It could be children, relationships. It could be a political cause. It could be your bank accounts. It could be a social cause. It is possible to give money to God our money.

It's possible to give God our money and to take his name for ourselves. And yet something else has the title over our hearts. For those who use social media, what do your posts and your likes reveal about what has captured your heart?

Now, surely, as mere creatures, we don't expect our creator to overlook this. Sin is spiritual adultery, which means it's more than just breaking the rules.

Very important for us to grapple with that. It is so much more than just breaking the rules. It's walking all over the heart of our creator.

Sin breaks his heart. It destroys his relationship with him. And unless we see human sin as spiritual adultery, we will never grapple with the seriousness of it or the emotional devastation it actually is.

[16:26] It is so much more than breaking a rule. It is crushing a heart, the heart of the God who made us for himself. When we see this prostitute here, we see the fatal attraction of the human race.

You see, it's one thing to be friends with someone. It's another thing to go to bed with them. That changes everything. And as James pointed out to us last week, Satan consistently parodies God. Evil consistently parodies good. The power and the affluence of society is seductive simply because it offers us what God offers us.

We love money because it offers us what God offers us. You've got a guilty conscience. You've got enough money to buy the right lawyers.

You can get yourself clean. It offers us what God offers us. Get really sick. Get the right amount of money. You can get the best doctors to heal you.

[17:32] Even John, the apostle, the one who from the very beginning received the vivid vision of the glorified Lord Jesus standing amongst his church.

The one who is said in John's gospel, the disciple who Jesus specifically loved. We are told here when he gets a vision of this prostitute riding the beast, he is mesmerized.

Verse 6, chapter 17. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Attracted. And then the angel said to me, why are you astonished?

The power and the glory of the human society is seductive. Even John needed the angel to grab him and slap him out of it. And so that's why it's crucial that we see in chapters 18 and 19 the end of Babylon.

With all that it promises, it merely seduces you into destruction. Reading from verse 21 of chapter 18.

[18:49] Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone, threw it into the sea, and said, With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.

Now this is not rising and falling. This is never to be found again. This is the end. Of all the rises and fallings, this is the end. The music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters will never be heard in you again.

No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of a bridegroom and a bride will never be heard in you again.

In other words, no continuing on in society, no joy, no celebration. Your merchants were the world's important people. The rich people were the important people. But by your magic spell, all the nations were led astray.

The point is, it will come to naught. It promises so much, and it delivers death and destruction. Revelation, this book, wakes us up to the fact that we are living with danger every single day, and we cannot see it, and the point of revelation is to help us see it.

[20 : 06] We are polishing the bomb every day of our life. And what this book tells us is the author of time itself had to be written into the very drama to help us to see it.

And he's calling us to evacuate. Evacuate, evacuate Babylon. Do you see the seduction? For instance, take... Here's an exercise. Just this next week. In this coming week, look at the advertising across various media platforms and engage with the message. Not just the pictures. Engage with the message. And notice the seduction. They offer power, peace, status, paradise, performance, freedom, spirituality, comfort, enlightenment, friendship, life, reconciliation, identity, escape, balance, and future.

That's just one week. And that's advertisements for coffee, cars, phones, holidays, cosmetics, and shoes. It's appalling.

[21 : 19] \$10 billion a year is spent on advertising in this country alone with quasi-religious promises of meaning and fulfillment and hope in items that are created and can never produce it.

It's all about what we worship. It's about what has captured our hearts. American Pastor David Platt observes that North American Christians give 2.5% of their income to the local church and that local churches give 2% of their income to world mission.

Now, we've got to bear in mind here that Revelation chapter 5, as we've already seen, is that mission to the nations is part of what it means to grapple with the cross.

It's part of what it means to come to Christ. And yet, every \$100 that American Christians earn, they give 5 cents to global mission.

5 cents. Surely, that's got to be a good measure to the extent by which we are seduced by Babylon rather than being captured by a biblical worldview of the end of Babylon.

[22 : 51] Now, as you're aware, we've been heard about it this morning. We're seeking to raise \$10,000 to support the Klintos family, our global mission partners in Africa, doing a very strategic ministry.

And as of 7 a.m. this morning, I note that we've raised \$5,584. Project finishes tomorrow. I think we've got some work to do this afternoon.

Secondly, the lamb and our solution. Now, this prostitute in chapter 17 represents our biggest problem, that is, spiritual adultery. We are given the solution to our biggest problem in the lamb. The only thing that can turn us from spiritual adulterers, prostitutes, into a pure bride, is the blood of Christ. The one whom Revelation has already declared earlier on as the lamb of God.

The lamb is the only one who can cure us from our fatal attraction to Babylon. Now, the John who wrote this vision, this vision was given to, also is the John who wrote the Gospel of John.

[24 : 05] And so, as we come to chapter 19, what is sitting in the background of Revelation 19 is John chapter 2 and the wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Now, this is the wedding where they run out of wine and Mary comes to Jesus and says, you might want to do something about that.

Now, this is crucial. You know, these are wedding feasts that go on for days and wine was essential, part of that celebration, the joy of the celebration. And all of a sudden, they've run out of wine.

It's a social crisis in the first century. And Mary comes to Jesus and says, verse 3, chapter 2, they have no more wine.

Woman, Jesus says, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come.

[25 : 04] So, crisis time, no wine at the wedding. And Mary comes and says, Jesus, no wine. And Jesus' reply is, I'm not ready to die.

That's what he says. Because every time he refers to this hour or his hour in John's gospel is a reference to the cross.

His death on the cross. And so he says to Mary, I'm not yet ready to die. And Mary's like, you know, what's that got to do with it? You know, like, we just need wine.

You know, Jesus, go to your room. I mean, what is going on here at the wedding of Cana? Well, throughout the Old Testament, especially in places like Isaiah 62, Ezekiel 16, Jeremiah 2, God reveals himself to be the bridegroom of his people.

And then, in Matthew chapter 9, the Pharisees come along to Jesus and they complain to him about his disciples because they're so loose with the Jewish rituals and practices.

[26 : 24] And in verse 15 of Matthew 9, Jesus says this to them, See what he's saying there?

He said, I am the bridegroom. I am the bridegroom. I am God. I'm the Lord of my people. So in John chapter 2, he's saying, at the wedding of Canaan, he's saying, Mother, you are right.

There is no joy at a wedding without the wine. It's part of the celebration. And if my people, if my bride is going to fall into my arms with joy, then I'm going to have to die.

The bridegroom is going to have to die for the bride. And so on the night that he was betrayed, he took the cup of wine and he says, this represents my blood.

This represents my blood. We have no joy. We have no hope of a marriage feast with God forever unless his blood is shed for the punishment of our sin.

[27 : 49] He drinks the cup of God's righteous anger and justice because we deserve for our adultery. That's the cup he had to drink for us.

And the only way that we will ever participate in a wedding feast of joy forever with Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is that he has to go to the cross in history and to take up the cup of justice and anger from God.

He had to drink the cup of God's wrath in history so that we could drink the cup of joy for all eternity. And that's why we have the victory cry.

That's why we have this roar of triumph from heaven in chapter 19, verse 6. Hallelujah! For our Lord God, Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory.

For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.

[28 : 58] His blood is shed and our sins are wiped clean, pure, as white as snow. And his offer of forgiveness of sins is simply that, it is free.

we didn't achieve it. We didn't launder our own sins. He did it all. Our filthy rags of sin and righteousness have been swapped by bright, clean clothes of linen made clean by Jesus.

The Lamb, the Lamb is our only solution. And this brings me to the final image that we have here. for all who put their trust in the Lamb are the bride.

Now there might be a few blokes here who are struggling with the idea of being a bride of Christ. You know, it's like it's messing with your masculinity or something like that. Then again, Galatians chapter 4 says that all of us are sons of God and so, you know, in the end we've all got some adjustments to make.

So let's just bear with it on this one. It changes a lot when you realise that you're in a marital union with God and not just simply a king subject or shepherd sheep relationship.

[30 : 20] Firstly, it means that you have a legal relationship. In every culture around the globe, if you are poor but you marry someone rich, you become rich.

although we are all spiritual adulterers, when we come to Jesus by faith and accept his death on our behalf, his perfect righteousness becomes ours.

He doesn't just cancel our debt against God and bring us back up to square zero. His pure record of righteousness becomes ours.

All of it is ours. And if you are a Christian, that is you now. That is your status before God now.

Secondly, being Jesus' bride means that we're in a comprehensive relationship.

Marriage impacts every area of your life. Everything. There is no such thing as his and hers. You cannot compartmentalise it in just a couple of parts.

[31 : 29] The marriage refers just to the bed, but, you know, not to my hobbies, for instance. The vows are very clear in the marriage ceremony.

With all that I am and all that I have, I honour you. The word all, all, is comprehensive as it always is.

So, relationship with Jesus touches every aspect of your life. Thirdly, it's an intimate relationship.

Relationship with Jesus requires contact.

It's the love of Christ poured into our hearts and our hearts being poured out to him. And so, I want to keep asking you this as we've done several times. What is your devotional life like right now?

Does it exist?

Is it just a matter of read the Bible, keep the devil away kind of thing? A chapter a day keeps the devil away? Or is it, you know, what is it? Is it, you're pursuing actual intimacy with your lover? Could your devotional life be described as intimate right now?

[32 : 34] Fourthly, our relationship with Jesus is to be fruitful. When we put our lives in Jesus' hands, we bear fruit. It's one of the absolute certainties. When we put our lives in his hands, we bear fruit.

And fruit is the outward working of an inner life. That is, when Jesus' love pours into my heart, it transforms who I am. It transforms my priorities, my life, my attitudes from the inside out.

So in such a way that I pursue Jesus' priorities and I pursue his character. Lastly, this relationship with Jesus is comforting. At the wedding feast in Cana, which is obvious now to us in John chapter 2, Jesus sat amongst the joy of this wedding feast and it was pretty obvious that he was pondering his coming sorrow on the cross.

That's obvious. But because he went to the cross, we can now sit amongst all the sorrow of this world with all the chaos and the carnage and the sin and the injustice of this world and we can ponder the coming joy of the wedding banquet in his presence.

It's comforting. So friends, whether you've got a good marriage, a bad marriage, you've got no marriage but want a marriage, or you've had a marriage but not anymore, whatever your status, that covers everyone here basically, whatever your status, there is only one spouse that can give you the joy and the fulfillment that you need.

[34 : 24] Babylon cannot provide it for you, only Jesus Christ. And this is what awaits all those who accept the invitation to the feast.

And this invitation is your invitation, every single person who hears these words. Chapter 19 verse 9, then the angel said to me, write this, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And that is your invitation right there, right now. It's like John getting out and he's writing the wedding invitations and dispersing it to all of humanity. The invitation is there, come to Jesus, experience his love, his acceptance, his relationship, and his eternal joy.

Believe in Jesus, trust in the work of the cross that he's done for you. Do it today. Get connected with us online, send us an email, speak to one of the staff or a friend who's brought you here today. In chapter 18, John calls us to leave Babylon. It's not a call to a new geographical location like, hey, you know, let's leave Sydney and move to Orange.

[35 : 37] He's not talking about that. It's an ideological shift is what he's calling us to. He's calling us to adopt a different set of values, a different set of priorities, a different allegiance, a different object of worship.

He is calling us to be citizens of the wedding feast of the Lamb. the message of Revelation is that that is the only alternative to the fate of Babylon, the city of God.

It is a call here to a new city, a different city, a city where there's no pain, no loss, where there is just gain and joy increasing forever.

Which is what you were made for. But I'm getting ahead of myself because we're going to talk more about that city next week.