

# "Babylon Falls"

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[ 0 : 00 ] In 1817, Percy Shelley wrote this famous poem. I met a traveler from an ancient, from an antique land who said, Two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert, near them on the sand.

Half sunk, a shattered, rigid lies, whose frown and wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command tell that its sculptor well read, well those passions read, which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things. The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed, and on the pedestal these words appear. My name is Ozymandias, King of kings, look on my works, ye mighty and despair. Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away.

Shelley was a poet during the height of the British Empire, and he was not a fan of the empire. And so he wrote this poem to talk about the ephemeral nature of the kingdoms of this world.

[ 1 : 31 ] I've had the privilege of being in Berlin at the Pergamon Museum. If you've ever been there, it's a great museum with lots of stolen treasures from the rest of the world. That's not a good thing, but it's just true.

And one of the things that is there is something called the Gate of Ishtar, or the Ishtar Gate, which is a reconstruction of one of the gates of the city of Babylon.

And it's about 30 feet high, a mosaic with symbolism of dragons and lions and the greatness. But friends, where is that great city of Babylon today?

We wonder what happens to the kings of this world. The church has always thought, what is our relationship to these kingdoms?

In the first century, as we turn to the book of Revelation, we remember that during that time, the great kingdom of the world was not Babylon, but it was Rome.

[ 2 : 34 ] And they battled to know, how do we respond or how do we relate to this? How do we resist the allure of becoming a partner in these kingdoms that will fall?

So we've read at the beginning of the book of Revelation, remember the letters. This is way back in the fall. Some of you weren't even here yet. Way back in the fall, we looked at the letters to seven churches.

And to the church of Thyatira, the Lord said this, but I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat foods sacrificed to idols.

There was false teaching connected to the Roman Empire that was inducing Christians away from worship of God to serving Rome.

Similarly, to the church in Laodicea, chapter 3, Jesus says this, Because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

[ 3 : 46 ] For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing. Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

In the first century, there was this pull to be a part of the Roman Empire because it would give you what seemed to be wealth, security, prosperity, and power.

The pressure to be a part of this church, part of this world, if you remember, was a pull on the church. And one of the reasons why the book of Revelation was written was to remind us that we are to resist that pull.

Maybe some of you feel that pull in the kingdoms of this world that we live in today. The pull of pride in the wealth of your accomplishments, connections, or belongings.

Your investment in building a world here and now, thinking that you might become one of those who would be immortal by the things that you achieve.

[ 5 : 10 ] Your hope in this life is for more comfort, more pleasure, more success. Or your desire for acceptance and meaning becomes wrapped up in conforming to the world around you so that you will fit in and be recognized.

Friends, as we turn to Revelation 18 today, God has words for us. Revelation 18 is on page 974 in your pew Bible.

And God has something to say to us as we think about living in the worlds, the kingdoms that we live in today.

So if you're there, Revelation chapter 18, we're going to read through the whole chapter, and then we're going to make a few observations about it before we go to the Lord's table.

So let's read together God's word. After this, I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory, and he called out with a mighty voice, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.

[ 6 : 25 ] 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.

For all the 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.

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 her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 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. As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning.

[ 7 : 30 ] Since in her heart she says, I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see. 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. 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.

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.

And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn for her since no one buys their cargo anymore, 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, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, and sheep, horses, and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and all your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again.

[ 8 : 59 ] The merchants of these wares who gained wealth from her will stand far off in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud. Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels and with pearls.

For in a single hour, all this wealth has been laid waste. And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors, and all those who trade on the sea stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, what city was like the great city.

And they threw down, 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.

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her. And then a mighty angel took up a stone like a giant 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.

And the sound of the 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.

[10:26] And the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more. And the light of a lamp will shine in you no more. And the voice of the bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more.

For your merchants were the great ones of the earth and all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in her was found the blood of the prophets and of saints and all who have been slain on the earth.

Well, let's pray and ask for God's help. Lord, thank you for this word. Lord, we know that your word is living and active sharper than a two-edged sword.

And I pray that as we consider this word to us this morning that you would help us. Lord, give us minds to understand and hearts to receive. Lord, help me to speak clearly as I ought.

Lord, that we might sit together under your word this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, what are we to make of this? I believe that the point of this chapter is to give us one command and three reasons.

[11:38] So, if you're taking your outline, there it is, four points, one command and then three reasons for it. And the command is simply this, come out. Come out from among her. Come out from Babylon.

Come out from the world systems. come out for three reasons. Because you will lament all you will lose if you don't.

Second reason, because you will face God's right judgment if you don't. And thirdly, because you will be filled with great joy at God's greater kingdom.

We'll repeat those as we go. So first, let's consider the command. Come out of her, my people.

We've talked about her, Babylon, already. And if you haven't been here before, I'm going to encourage you to go back and listen to some of the earlier sermons, particularly Nick's sermon last week, or not last week, but about Revelation 17.

That was three weeks ago because he spent a lot of time talking about the nature and contours of Babylon and we don't have that here. So I'm not going to spend a lot of time but just to say her big picture, you can see it in verse three, right, that the kings have drunk of her sexual immorality and her pleasures and her wealth and what we see is that Babylon is a symbol for the world systems, political, societal systems that entice or seduce us to put our hope and find our life in this world rather than in others.

[13:18] And remember, again, you can go back for the full explanation but in the Old Testament and here we see the images of sexual immorality is also a clue to say this is about idolatry, this is about worshipping other things more than we worship God and making other things ultimate in our affections.

and the command is to come out of her because she has fallen. This is what's announced in verse 2 and this is what is described in chapter 17.

Fallen so completely in verse 2 that it's become a desolation that the only living things that would remain would be wild animals and wild spirits.

nothing good. So the command is to come out of that but what does it mean to come out? In the original context going back to Jeremiah 50 and 51 you would see that the prophet was speaking to the people of God who were literally living in Babylon and they were predicting the fall of Babylon as the Persians would come in and overthrow their kingdom and he's literally saying you need to leave the city before it falls under destruction.

But that is not what's happening here in Revelation. That historical event has now become a symbol of coming out from participation in a world to forsake a land, a culture, and its religion.

[15:00] Now listen, we need to be very careful in this because there have been times when the church has heard this call and thought we need to totally separate ourselves out. So monks would go live on pillars in the desert in the 4th century, right?

Or in the early 20th century we would create the great holy huddle fundamentalist movement that would separate from everybody in every way. And so we would only eat at Christian restaurants, only read Christian books, only attend Christian schools, only listen to Christian music, only have Christian friends, and live in this completely separate bubble that was not in the world.

But friends, listen to what Jesus prayed for his disciples and for the world in John 17. He said, I do not ask that you would take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one, for they are not of this world, just as I am not of this world.

And again, go back to Pastor Nick's sermon three weeks ago, these kind of pair because he talked about we're called to be a city within a city. We're called to be a different community within the community of the world while we live here on earth.

Nancy Guthrie had a really helpful way of phrasing this that I thought was really good. It's not separation that requires physical distance, but distinction, a difference in how we live, in what we love, and what we worship.

[16:31] It's not about where we do our life, but how we do our life that makes us those who come out. So again, the Apostle John writes this in his first letter, 1 John 2, verse 15 and following.

He says, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world.

And the world is passing away along with its desires. But whoever does the will of God abides forever. So coming out is a matter of what we worship and what we love.

What do we value above all things? What authority do we seek to ultimately please? What do we set our hearts on in devotion?

What do we invest our time, our money, our relationships in? And what is the meaning of our success? I'm sorry, the measure of our success or the source of our meaning.

[17:53] Do we get these things from the world around us? We get this from God in heaven. This is the word. Come out. Come out from this world and your dependence upon and your investment in this world.

Be distinctive so that the aroma of the kingdom of Jesus would capture our hearts more than those of this world. Why does he say this?

Well, he gives three reasons. We'll look at these briefly, hopefully. See how we do. First, come out because you will lament of all you lose if you don't.

Starting in verse 9 and going through verse 19, there is a picture of three peoples. They're kings, merchants, and seamen. And each of them were full participants in the world of Babylon.

Right? In this picture of this, they're investing in the world. The kings invested in the power and the wealth. The merchants with the luxury and comfort of their wealth.

[18:58] The seamen and the accumulation of wealth. And what happened was they see Babylon fall. The things that they had set their hearts on and invested their lives in were gone.

And you see a pattern. Each of them stand far off, somehow trying to distance themselves at the last minute from this cataclysmic destruction. They stood far off.

They wept and mourned aloud for the ending of the things they had invested so much in. And they trembled in fear that they too might burn along with it.

I don't know if you heard it but as we read through did you notice it happens in an hour? In a day? Like that? You think of the parable that Jesus told in Luke 12 about the man who had great barns and they were getting so, he was so wealthy that he didn't have enough barns so we had to tear him down and build more ones and Jesus comes to him that night and says, you fool.

Tonight, your soul is demanded of you. He had invested his soul in the pleasure and wealth of this world and yet, as we all know, we don't take it with us.

[20:23] And so, this is why we're called to be distinct from this world because God wants to spare us from the lament and from the loss but even more than that, well, from the lament and the loss that we will experience when we invest in things that won't last.

When we build our house on a foundation of sand that gets washed away in the stresses of life, there will only be woe and mourning and lamenting if we've invested in these things.

So, that's the first reason because God wants to spare us from this loss, from being in this but there's more behind it than there isn't there because what we see is that in the midst of this lamenting and loss, there is also again the picture of God's judgment, God's right judgment.

There's a commentator that said, to share in her wickedness is to reap her recompense. If we invest ourselves in the lives of this world then the judgment that God has proclaimed and pronounced against the world that stands up against him, we will be those who will suffer that as well.

And it's a terrible judgment. You see this in verses 5 through 8 as it describes this, says that their sins are heaped as high as heaven, even as tall as the Tower of Babel way back in Genesis 11, reaching up to heaven.

[ 22 : 08 ] Verse 7, did you hear the pride where she says, I'm a queen, I'm not going to suffer any consequences, I am going to live in this place of power and privilege forever, I will have no mourning, I won't lose my husband and be a widow and be in vulnerable positions, I have all of these things and I will never give them up.

And then if you heard at the very end, verse 24, recognize that this world system that we so easily invest in is always at war against the church.

Not always literally, not always physically, but certainly throughout the ages and as we've seen, more likely as we continue that those who live for the kingdom of God will die at the hands of this world because they're following Jesus.

And so our, and these people, those who have died, cry out, remember Revelation 6, 10? Oh sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

Babylon has earned God's wrath. It is a right judgment against them and it will come upon them like the plagues of Egypt came upon Pharaoh.

[ 23 : 33 ] You see the language of plagues being used here. Plagues of mourning and death and famine in verse 8. Just like Pharaoh who said, I will not bow my knee to this king.

I will seek to maintain my kingdom. God will say no and he will bring judgment in order to show that these world's kingdoms will not last and will not stand forever.

And then as we look at the end of this passage, we see how complete the destruction is. This kingdom that's characterized by wealth and pleasure and power such that people are drunk with it, what does it look like?

Starting in verse 21, 22, there will be no music. There will be no work. There will be no food. There will be no light.

There will be no love and no celebrations of marriage. There will be desolation. When we invest in Babylon, we will get the dividends that Babylon will earn.

[ 24 : 55 ] We tend to think that God doesn't care what we do with our everyday lives, how we spend our time, our money, our sex, our power, our possessions, our social capital, but all of our investments will bring some return somewhere.

God will be sure to make it so. Let us invest well, my friends. Let us set a heart on not this kingdom that will ultimately end and fall.

Did you see the threat of hope? Did you hear it? Because there is another kingdom. There is a greater kingdom and a greater one, a greater king to love and worship.

And this is the third reason to come out of Babylon. It's in verse 20. You will be filled with joy in God's greater kingdom. Now the ESV is really unhelpful here because it looks very much like verse 20 is a part of the speech of the seamen and the merchants.

But many commentators think this is not, this does not make sense. This is not consistent. Instead, they separate this out and say, this is a thread where the voice says something not to, not in the mouths of the seamen, but the voice from heaven is now speaking to the heavenly realms, to the angels and the saints and saying, rejoice.

[ 26 : 30 ] Verse 20, rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her.

Come out because you will be filled with a joy that comes from being a part of God's kingdom, a song of praise. When we look ahead in the first five verses of chapter 19, we'll start to see what will happen as Babylon falls.

I don't want to steal Nick's thunder, but it's a beautiful picture where God's going to invite us to a great wedding feast and it's going to be, we will be the bride of Christ and he will invite us into this victorious, triumphant, eternal glory of being his people.

We've seen the first five verses. I'm going to summarize this, but just compile the songs of praise that will be sung at that moment. Hallelujah, salvation and glory and power belong to our God for his judgments are just and true for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.

Hallelujah, the smoke goes up from her, goes up forever and ever. Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.

[ 27 : 58 ] friends, this is the great triumph and the great kingdom that God promises and as we continue in the series in Revelation, we will see what God will do for as he brings low the Babylon,

the kingdoms of this world, as he judges the serpent and the dragon and the devil and the beast and the prostitute, as you see all of them finally experience the fullness of recompense for all of the evil that they have done.

You will also see God recreating the heavens and the earth. He will make all things new and there's a kingdom that is worth living for and a kingdom worth dying for.

For friends, here's the thing, we worship a savior and on Good Friday, just a week ago, we celebrated something unbelievable because he fell for us.

He, as he went to the cross, experienced and took upon himself the sin of the world so that all who believe in him would know that he has fallen for us and yet on Easter Sunday, we worshiped him because he did not stay dead because his desolation was not forever but was for a moment and then God raised him from the dead so that he might be the eternal one, the lamb of God slain, the lion of Judah risen, the one who sits on the throne who is worthy to open the scrolls and bring judgment against the evil of this world, the one who comes and says, behold, I am making all things new.

Oh, friends, let us not continue to invest our lives in this world but let us see that both out of avoiding lament and judgment and because there is a greater kingdom for us, let us come out and be distinct so that we might love him rightly.

[ 30 : 13 ] if you are here this morning and you haven't put your faith in Christ, know that you live in the kingdom of this world. There are only two kingdoms.

There is no in-between space. And Christ says, come out. Put your faith in me. Enter my kingdom. Become one of my children. And for those of us who have been Christians and followers for Jesus, we know how easily we fall into that proverbial pot on the stove and like frogs we will become like the place around us and be burned up.

Friends, let us consider and examine ourselves to see whether we have entered into partnership with this world. And may God give us the grace to bring clarity to our devotion and to our worship and to our loves because of what he has done for us.

Let's pray together. Oh Lord, we came to you now. Lord, this is not an easy word to read and it is sobering for us.

[ 31 : 44 ] Lord, for we do live in this world and we confess how often and how easily our hearts, our attention, our affections are turned away Lord, from you.

Lord, to love the things of this world more. But Lord, we pray, we pray this morning that by your spirit we would be renewed Lord, so that we might see the glory of your kingdom.

We'd be renewed in our commitment to and desire for living for you in this kingdom. Oh Lord, we ask for you to help us Lord, as we go to the Lord's Supper, that you would shine your spotlight on our hearts, reveal where there may be wickedness and unbelief, compromise in our hearts.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.