

“While Deciding Your Vote”

from Revelation 17 – 18

Revelation 18:1-14

November 2, 2008

How do you possibly find words to describe feelings? How do you put into words the joy of birth? Or any exciting moment in your life? The beauty of a sunset? The awesome images of color on trees, or standing on a high rock cliff over a river? How do you find the words to put on the pain and loss of a loved one? Have you listened to someone try to describe the devastation left by a hurricane or a tornado? How would you describe the horror of war?

Here is a picture of the Basque town of Guernica after it was bombed under orders of General Franco on April 28, 1937. If you could call this a picture. Look. There is nothing in it that would enable you to say - “Look, Guernica, Spain, 1937.”

If you see the picture, you can dismiss it by saying – well, that happened somewhere else a long time ago. But this is a painting by Picasso of the horrors of war. By painting in the way he has, he has taken the calendar away from it, and thus made it a universal experience. Guernica 1937, yes - but this is also a picture of the trauma of war for all people, in all time, and all places.

It speaks of 1937, or today, or tomorrow. It will never go out of date. If you look at this and try to find an exact picture you are headed for trouble. And so, this picture is easily compared to the book of Revelation.

John uses symbols to communicate a message, and keep it from being trapped in time. His book is not intended so much to tell how the world will come to an end or when – but it tells the Good News in Jesus Christ. It tells what thing will be like where God’s will is not done.

In chapters 17 and 18 he paints a picture that might be called “The Great Prostitute.” As a symbol, thousands of years after its demise, Babylon is remembered for its wickedness, and for everything it represents. Babylon was already gone before John even wrote about it. He pointed to Babylon so his message would not be trapped in time. Babylon is a symbol.

John called Babylon “the mother of all prostitutes and perverts in the world.” (17:5) Why? He tells us why in 17:3-6. Everything about her is “insulting to God.” (3) Her clothes – purple, scarlet, gold ornaments, precious stones - all alluding to wealth, glamour, sophistication, culture. In her hand, a gold cup full of obscene and filthy things.

In other words, Babylon is a symbol for anything and everything that seduces people into giving their love and attention and devotion to things other than God. Drawing their attention away from their first love, the One to whom their loyalty is ultimately due.

And who are the first people attracted to her? “The kings of the earth.” (17:2) Everything going on, says John, is comparable to a married man visiting a prostitute. He says the kings of the earth have “become drunk from drinking the wine of her immorality.” In other words, the things she represents – which are the things insulting to God.

The power-brokers of the earth are the first in line to get drunk on what she offers, as opposed to what God offers. What they love in Babylon is the power and authority and glory – and they are drunk on the stuff. **Are there any people in power, or seeking positions of power, that are like that today?**

Even worse than what she had done to them, was that she (Babylon) (verse 6) was “drunk with the blood of God’s people and the blood of those who were killed because they had been loyal to Jesus.” Babylon hates everything the church stands for.

As you browse down through chapter 18 three categories of people jump out:

- kings - who represent power
- businessmen - who represent money first, people last
- captains, sailors, people who earn their living on the sea - which indicates the global nature of the problem

But John sees a vision of One he describes like this: (18:1)

“another angel coming down out of heaven – He had great authority, and His splendor brightened the whole earth.” Know who that might be? Who was described somewhere else as “the bright and morning star?”

And He comes with good news! Great Babylon has fallen! There is some good news here and some bad news here. The bad news is for those who have visited this great prostitute and given themselves to her. Those who have fallen for her deception. Guess what? Your ship just sank.

The Good News is for those who have been run over by her, and lived under the terrors of what she and her kind have done to the world. Your ship has come in!!

Babylon has fallen.

There is no indication that it was accomplished by outsiders. Rather Babylon appears to fall under its own weight, its own corruption, its own mis-guided values, because of its consumption of the people. Modern movements organize to overthrow wicked regimes. John stands by to watch them collapse. Structures built on evil cannot stand forever, maybe not even for very long, because they have no foundations.

There is not just condemnation here, but also notes of tragedy.

The Kings (18:9-10) “weep over the city.” But “they stand a long way off, because they are afraid of sharing her suffering.” “In just one hour you have been punished.” Notice the quickness and brevity. Just one hour.

The Businessmen moan. (18:14) “All the good things you longed to own have disappeared, and all your wealth and glamour are gone...”

The Sea Merchants (18:18-19) cried out, “How awful for the great city ... and in one hour she has lost everything.”

But the mighty angel was not so gentle. (18:23-24) “With your false magic you deceived all the peoples of the world.” “Babylon was punished because the blood of prophets and of God’s people was found in the city.”

But a voice from heaven had cried out to the people (18:4) “come out, my people! Come out from her. You must not take part in her sins, you must not share in her punishment.”

It would be terrible to make this a message for only the ancient people of the world – or people in some distant future. So John has painted a picture after the manner of Picasso’s “Guernica 1937.”

This picture is true whether you call it Babylon, or Rome, or Hollywood, or Washington D.C. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is true in every age. The only safe place is “safe in the arms of Jesus.” Don’t drink of the values of the deceivers of this world.

Babylon could not survive under her own weight. Politicians claim credit for the dissolution of Soviet Russia, but it just could not stand up under its own corruption. No country or system or person is beyond that. We may be watching history in the making in our own country. A prideful country thinking it is god’s gift to the world, but crumbling under the weight of our own corruption and greed.

Our country cannot go on the way we have and survive. At least not economically, and I doubt morally.

The question is: Have you sold out to Babylon? Are you so tied into everything that Babylon represents that you will go down with it?

What if America comes to look like Moscow, or Bosnia, or Somalia? Will your ship have sunk, or will your ship have come in?

Come to the city that the Psalmist called “the city whose builder and maker is God.”

I sometimes feel a sense of futility concerning my country in this world. But the Christian is not overcome by a sense of hopelessness, or depression, or anything like that. Because we understand that this world is not our home. We know, through all the traditions of our Biblical faith, that history is moving in a direction. And while I may not know what tomorrow holds, I know who holds tomorrow.

The church has seen kingdoms come and go. Impressive power and vast fortunes have gone by the wayside. But the kingdom of God still stands, and will stand forever.

This is my father’s world, oh let me never forget,
That though the wrong seems oft so strong
God is the ruler yet.

This is my father’s world, why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King! Let the heavens ring!
God reigns, let the earth be glad.