

“A Tale of Two Cities” // Revelation 14–18 // *Revelation* #10¹ (CPC 11:15)

Prayer for CATD

Welcome to all of our locations across the Triangle, including those Online... Before we dive in I wanna take one quick moment to put an exclamation point on something the Campus Pastors just told you about prayer opportunities leading up to Church at the Dome. We often say that prayer is not preparation for the ministry; prayer *is* the ministry. Arguably the most important thing you can do—that *WE can do*—leading up to the Dome is to pray. So, hear me: if you call TSC your home--whether you're an official 'member' or not--I want to ask you to join us in this call to pray and seek God on behalf of RDU, our college students, and our community. Church at the Dome is going to be a major event with a lot of people—and we really want the fullness of the Holy Spirit to be there. We're going to have prayer gatherings and days of prayer and fasting leading up to the event—and I'm asking you, as your Pastor, to join us. Again, your Campus Pastors will give you all the details, I'm just urging you to lean in hard here. It's like E.M. Bounds always said, **“More important than talking to men about God is talking to God about men.”** So please, join us. OK? Amen?

¹ Sources consulted: Tim Chester, *Revelation for You: Seeing History from Heaven's Perspective* (London: The Good Book Company, 2019); Tim Lucas, “Revelation in a Nutshell,” sermon on Revelation 13–21, preached at Liquid Church; Tim Keller, “[The Two Cities](#)”, June 27, 1993, Redeemer Presbyterian; Skip Heitzig, “[The Battle of Armageddon](#)”, July 9, 2023, Calvary Church; Matt Chandler, “Your Family in Faith” and “Your Cultural Caution,” Sessions 6–7 of The Overcomers Bible Study of the Book of Revelation, rightnow Media and Harper Christian Resources, May 7, 2024; Louie Giglio, “[The Lost City and the Last City](#)”, September 22, 2024, Passion Church; Jen Wilkin, “Seven Bowls” and “Seven Words of Woe,” Sessions 7–8 of Revelation: Eternal King, Everlasting Kingdom Bible Study, July 1, 2024; Dr. Conway Edwards,

Intro

Revelation 14, if you have your Bibles...

Just north of the demilitarized zone on the Korean peninsula sits a small, quaint village that North Korea calls “Peace Village” but South Korea has more appropriately dubbed “Propaganda Village.”²

“Peace Village” was built by North Korea in the early 1960's right after the Korean continent had been subdivided into North and South Korea. South Korea, of course, went on to become a place of freedom and prosperity, they've even experienced one of the greatest evangelistic awakenings in Christian history. North Korea, by contrast, has gone on to become one of the most totalitarian, oppressive dictatorships in the history of the world. 40% of the people there are malnourished, the official wage is less than \$10 / month, and more than 120,000 people are in political prison camps, often for nothing more than saying the wrong thing or hanging out with the wrong people.

But if you stand on the South Korean side and look at this little North Korean village through binoculars, what you'll see is breathtaking. This city has delightful, colorful buildings with blue roofs. You'll see well-dressed sweet keepers out on the road, keeping the roads spotless. Lights glow at night. (Back in the early 1960s, when this little city was first built, much of rural Korea didn't even have electricity, so looking at this little village through binoculars made it look like a utopian city from the future.)

“[Is God Angry with Me?](#)”, November 26, 2023, One Community Church. And others as noted throughout.

² A “Potemkin Village”: Grigory Potemkin, a Russian military leader and statesman in the late 1700s. The story goes that when Empress Catherine the Great toured newly conquered Crimea in 1787, Potemkin wanted to impress her with the region's prosperity. He allegedly had facades of villages hastily built along the riverbanks where she would pass, complete with painted houses and costumed peasants, to create the illusion of thriving settlements.

The problem is that it's all FAKE. The buildings are just facades; they have no actual rooms inside; even the windows are painted on. The lights run on timers. The street sweepers are paid government officials, going through the motions to impress observers across the border.

The spectacle doesn't stop there, either. In the 1980s, South Korea erected a 323-foot flag pole on its side, so North Korea responded with a 525-foot pole on its side—at the time, it was the tallest flagpole in the world. And this coming out of a country where people lack the most basic necessities! North Korea then mounted huge loudspeakers blasting propaganda about how wonderful life was under the regime there, and the South retaliated with its own broadcasts—until the border had turned into a sonic battlefield.

Why do I share that? Well, for one, it calls for our compassion and prayer; but, secondly, because the final chapters of Revelation are about a war between 2 cities: “Babylon” and “The New Jerusalem.”

Chapter 18 opens up saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!” (18:2) and then chapter 19 tells us about the coming of the New Jerusalem. [chart]

- Babylon, in the Bible, represents mankind united in opposition to God. Babylon, of course, has a long history in the Bible. Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon became the world's **first truly global empire, and the armies of Nebuchadnezzar literally destroyed the first Jerusalem in 587 B.C.** Fascinatingly, Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon had been built in the same place where the Tower of Babel had been erected, which had been the place of mankind's first united insurrection against God. *And so, in the Bible, “Babylon” in the Bible came to represent the kingdom of Man,* united in opposition to God. In fact, Peter, in his epistle to the

church, uses “**Babylon**” as a code name for Rome, even though the actual city of Babylon hadn't been around for 5 centuries by that point.

- **The New Jerusalem**, of course, is God's city, and Revelation ends with this city coming down from heaven.

Saint Augustine said that all of human history could be characterized as a struggle between these two cities. He called them “**The City of Man**” and “**The City of God.**” **The City of Man**, he said, Babylon, is founded on “**love of self, even to the contempt of God,**” and **the City of God** is founded on “**love of God, even to the contempt of self.**”³ You can pursue and make your home in only one of these 2 cities.

John writes the book of Revelation to pull back the mask on Babylon, so you'll see that all her promises are fake, and he does so by showing you her end. John tells us his motive for writing these things in **14:12:** **Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.**

- Notice the word ‘**endurance.**’ John knows that living the Christian life takes **endurance**, because to belong to God you have to live for something you can't see and feel yet. The New Jerusalem is something up in heaven that will descend down to earth one day. It's not here yet. You can't see and feel it yet.
- And that makes living for it hard, because Babylon is here, and her propaganda machine is in full swing. It mounts its flagpole higher than ours; it blares its propaganda everywhere. You turn on the TV and Babylon's propaganda machine hits you in the face: **shiny happy people** who look like they have it all.
- Babylon even has algorithms designed to tailor its false propaganda specifically to you now. (PHONE) If you think nice watches and expensive cars are the key to a happy life, that's the propaganda that will blare into your life. If you think romance or pornography or a lean body is the key to a happy life, that's what

³ Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIV, ch. 28

it puts into your feed. (One useful thing about these phones--we dog on them a lot, and we should, but one useful thing is that they will identify your idols for you. Whatever it's feeding back to you is what it's picked up from you is the key to a happy life.)

To forgo all the seductive promises of Babylon, you have to have a deep conviction that the things you can't see yet *are real*, and John knows that's hard, so he wants to help you *see how Babylon ends* so you don't get taken in by her false promises.

And so, chapters 14–18 are all about the final destruction of Babylon. They walk us through the bowl judgments, which is the last in a series of 3 sets of judgments that define the 7-year Great Tribulation. Look at **16:1** Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

I'm not going to go deeply into these bowl judgments, because they are fairly similar in character to the seal and trumpet judgments which we've already looked at,⁴ but let me just make just a few big picture observations about them.

1. **The Bowl Judgments are the most intense of all the judgments.** Each round of judgments has gotten more intense than the one before, and these represent the final destruction of rebellion on earth.
2. **Like the previous judgments, the Bowl Judgments bear striking similarity to the plagues of the Exodus.** We learn, for example, that in **Bowl 1** painful sores that break out on people on earth, similar to the Egyptian plague of boils. In **Bowls 2 and 3** the waters turn to blood (which is some kind of metaphor for a pollution of the water supply), and that is similar, of course, to

when Moses turned the Nile river into blood in the 1st plague. In **Bowl 5** darkness covers the earth, which also happened in one of the Exodus plagues, and in **Bowl 6** there's an explosion of frogs on earth. In fact, let's look at this one real quick, **vs 13** (look down in your Bible) And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. 14 For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. (This, of course, is similar to the Exodus plague of frogs, except this time John explicitly tells us the frogs are demons, and these demons go throughout the earth stirring up the nations for the battle of Armageddon. They make the Antichrist hoppin' mad. Sorry... They put the RIBBIT in TRIBBIT-ulation. I'll be here all week, folks. In **Bowl 7**, gigantic hailstones rain down on earth, which also occurred, of course, during the Exodus. And that leads me to...

3. **As in the plagues of the Exodus, mankind refuses to repent.** Look at **16:9**, "...and (yet) they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory... AND **Vs. 11** ...and they cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. Yet they did not repent of their deeds." Just like Pharaoh in the Exodus, the heart of man is so wicked that even after all this, they still won't repent. We always think unbelief is a head problem, but Scripture says it is first a heart problem--We are inclined not to believe HERE (head) because in here (HEART) we don't want God to be in charge--we want to be in charge; we don't want to acknowledge him as all-wise--we want him to conform to our wisdom; we don't want him to give him all the glory--we want the glory for ourselves. We always say that we can't believe because of problems here (head), and if God would

⁴ Remember, there 2 ways you can look at these: as successive judgments coming in the future that build on each other; or, 3 angles describing life on earth now; the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments are all going on now, and

basically you're seeing 3 different views of the same thing, like you're watching a replay of an incident in a football game from different camera angles.

give us just another sign, we'd believe; but the real reason is actually here (heart), and that means that it doesn't matter how many signs we get, until the Holy Spirit changes your heart you can't and won't believe. And the power of his Holy Spirit surrounds his gospel, which means if you won't believe and respond to my preaching, no amount of judgment or miraculous signs will change your heart.

4. **The Bowl Judgments are the outpouring of God's WRATH:** Look at vs 19: "...and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury *of his wrath*." (16:19) I point this out because it's gotten really popular among some today, even among Christians, to downplay any idea of God's wrath. We prefer to think of God as a gentle force for good. He doesn't really hate sin; he doesn't hate anything because that's unbecoming of God. Sin just makes him SAD because of what it does to us. Some even want to say that at the cross God was not pouring his wrath out on Jesus in our place; really all he was doing was demonstrating the depth of his love and putting on display the consequences of our sin. Now, it's true, of course, that at the cross God was putting on display his love for us, but it's simply not true that God has no wrath against sin. Passages like this one show you that. It's a fearful thing to stand before the living God in a posture of rebellion. And God's hatred of sin is not in opposition to his love; it's an extension of it. When you love something, you **hate** the thing that destroys it. If something is attacking my children, I hate it. God cares too much for his creation to just shrug at evil. **J.I. Packer** explains that God's wrath is his "settled opposition to all that is evil." Wrath is not the opposite of love—wrath is love's demand for justice. In fact, without wrath, love is really just apathy.

OK, that's chapters 14–16. In **chapters 17 and 18** the Apostle John shifts the camera angle. These first 3 chapters told us the order of events, and now; in chapters 17–18, the camera angle shifts to what these judgments do to the Babylonian world order, which is under the reign of the Antichrist and the False Prophet.⁵

The fall of Babylon occurs in two waves — first the religious side falls and then the political/economic side. Chapter 17 is about the fall of religious Babylon--the downfall of the false prophet--and ironically, his downfall comes at the hands of the Antichrist. (I say "ironically" because up until this point, they'd worked hand in hand.) But look at verse 1 of chapter 17: "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, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality... And jump down to vs. 16 And the ten horns (i.e. the kings) that you saw, they and the beast (i.e. the Antichrist) will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire,

At some point the Antichrist, who heads the political and economic side of the regime, turns on the False Prophet. It turns out the Antichrist was not all that interested in religion! What a shocker! He and the other kings used her, like a prostitute, to gain control—it's like Karl Marx said, religion is the opiate of the people—and then when they were finished with her, and she was no longer useful, they discarded her.

I wish Christian leaders today understood what John is trying to show us here. Not all politicians are bad, of course--there are many faithful men and women serving in politics and we need many more of you going into those fields. I'm praying that out of our church will come

⁵ Remember, Babylon--as I interpret Revelation--is a reference both a literal city coming in the future that will serve as the center of the Antichrist's reign, his capital

city, so to speak, and a symbol for "the city of man" that has been against God in every generation, including ours.

senators and a Supreme Court judge, and who knows? Maybe even a president. I'm all for serving in politics. But I'm just saying that the overwhelming trajectory of politics on earth (which is infiltrated to unusually high degrees by the dragon) is to use religion as its "useful idiot."

When I served as President of the Southern Baptist Convention, I would occasionally be invited up to Washington with other Christian leaders to meet with some of our nation's political leaders. And during one of those meetings, at the White House, one of my Christian leader colleagues made his way up to one of our elected leaders and told him, "Please know that we're praying for you." He said this leader looked back at him, paused, and said, "Thanks, but what I really need you to do is get your people out to vote for me." My colleague told me he persisted, "Well, Of course, just know that the most important thing we can do is pray for you." He said this leader looked at him and said, "Yeah... but what I really need you to do is get your people out to vote for me." That's often how it goes, on both sides of the aisle: political leaders wanting to use religion as a tool to help them wield control.

So, chapter 17 tells us how the Antichrist overthrows the False Prophet; **chapter 18 then tells us about how God overthrows the Antichrist and the political and economic order** he's established.

Interestingly, the Antichrist himself is also referred to with the imagery of a prostitute. Talking about the fall of the Antichrist, the angel says,

2 "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird... (I told you, man, birds aren't real. They're tools of the Antichrist) a haunt for every unclean cat... (that's not really in there, I added that in.

3 For all 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."

Notice: the imagery of "**prostitute**" applies to both sides of Babylon--both the religious side and the political side. In 17:5 she's called "**the mother of all prostitutes.**"

Here's my question for you this morning: Why? ***Why would the primary metaphor God uses for the Antichrist and False prophet and the world order they create be PROSTITUTION?*** Of all the metaphors for sin he could choose, why *that one*?

It's not because her main sins are sexual ones (although she certainly has a lot of those). No, this sexual immorality in **vs 3** is a metaphor for humanity's unfaithfulness to God. The Bible consistently uses prostitution as a metaphor for our unfaithfulness to God for 2 reasons:

- **First, because sin, at its core, is spiritual adultery.** Adultery is a 2-sided sin, right? When a man commits adultery on his wife, he is committing 2 sins: He is forsaking her, his wife; and second, he is using some other person to get something he has no right to. Jeremiah 2:13 says this: "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." How many sins? 2. (1) You forsook God, where you were supposed to find meaning, and fulfillment, and purpose and joy, and (2) you created an idol, a false god, to try and obtain those things that you no longer wanted to find in your heavenly Father. **A lot of times we reduce sin to bad deeds we do to others**, and that's certainly part of it. But the primary wickedness of sin is that we forsook God and replaced him with something else. We have a good Heavenly Father who loves us and created us to be full of him and we said, "You aren't good enough. You're not enough. I

don't trust you" and we turned to other gods. That's why the wrath of God is upon the human race, because it was ultimately blasphemy: "You're not really God. I'm God!"

- The 2nd reason Babylon is called a prostitute is that **she's so appealing**.
 - All throughout these chapters she's described like this (look at 17:4), "...arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls."
 - Apologies if you wore a purple dress this morning with your favorite pearl necklace, but in Bible times this kind of wardrobe signaled prostitution.
 - She looks so good, she's striking, she's beautiful. She promises you pleasure and love and acceptance, and she makes you think she's really into you, but she doesn't care anything about you. She's only interested in your money. It's not desire for you that drives her, but lust for your wallet. And you end up throwing away all the good things in your life--your family, your career, your peace of mind, everything, on an empty mirage. This is imagery, btw, from Proverbs 5-9, where Lady Folly, representing all of sin, is described this way. It says, "The lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil... but in the end she is bitter as wormwood... Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold of hell, and her feet lead down to the grave." (Prov 5:3-5)
 - This is all sin! It's a mirage. It looks so good, but all those who chase it find that it leaves you empty--more dead inside. And, even worse, under the judgment of God.
 - They say you can entice and trap a male butterfly simply by using a cardboard replica of the female. You ever try to catch a butterfly without a net? It's not easy. It's hard. But put a colorful cardboard cutout of a female butterfly in a cage and he'll trap himself. Think of the poor male

butterfly--out flitting around, lonely, looking for love--things aren't going well back at home, and there she is! "Oh, look at the beauty of those wings; I've never seen a pattern like that. I wonder why she's in that strange box? Oh, no matter. I'm sure her love is worth it!" Only to get there to find out after he's trapped that SHE'S FAKE and the next thing he knows he's on display at the Museum of Life Science with snot-nosed kids staring and poking at him all day.

- When will we learn that this is the trajectory of all sin? Those buildings, those party lights, those street sweepers, that fun sounding music coming out of Peace Village, it's all fake! Consumerism turned out to be unfulfilling, like a drug, you always needed more and more of it to be fulfilled. Pornography became addictive. Cynicism rotted your soul and just made you more and more bitter. When will we learn that all these false promises are FAKE? **Propaganda Village?**

Sometimes the ones reveal this **best are our comedians, the ones we pay to make us laugh:**

- **Robin Williams (pic)** (one of the funniest people of our generation, who ultimately committed suicide because his life felt so empty), "I think the saddest people always try their hardest to make people happy... because they know what it's like to feel absolutely worthless... All it takes is a beautiful fake smile to hide an injured soul."⁶ It's a mirage.
- Or **Dax Shepard (pic)** (you might remember him from the show "Parenthood" or his podcast, "Armchair Expert"): "They're paying me a ton of money. People recognize me at the airport. I am doing everything I'd dreamed of doing. And yet I am the least happy I've ever been in my entire life. I am closer to not wanting to be alive

⁶ These are from movies and from quotes attributed to him through interviews, conversations, etc. See www.theshot.com/actors/robin-williams-quotes-made-us-weep?

than I've ever been, and yet on paper I have every single thing that I've ever wanted...

"Previously, I could always tell myself, 'One day if I have money... when I'm doing the thing I wanted to do, that will solve everything.' I think a lot of us proceed through life thinking, 'We will be happy *IF*... We will have self esteem *IF*... We will know contentment *IF*...' **Those are illusions that most people don't get to find out are illusions. I got to find out.**"⁷

- **Jim Carrey (pic)** said the same thing: "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer."

From the mouths of our comedians--the people we pay to make us laugh--they're saying "*It's all a mirage; it's all a facade.*"

- **C.S. Lewis** talked about "the sweet poison of the false infinite." I love that phrase. *The sweet poison of the false infinite.* Babylon promises love and intimacy, but all you find there is heartache and trouble and brokenness. It's 'propaganda village'; nothing but empty supermarket shelves.
- **Listen, honestly, recently, not just this week, but the past few months, I've been thinking about my own battles with sin.** Unfortunately you don't get to leave temptation to sin behind when you become a pastor--when they hand you your diploma from seminary, they don't grant you "no longer susceptible to sin" license. Unfortunately, I brought all those old temptations with me. And there's a few things that sin promises me personally, things Babylon uses to entice me, and I have to constantly tell myself--to preach to myself. And what I have to constantly tell myself, each day, using Scripture, is "*It's all a mirage. Oh, it looks so good! It looks like such a sparkling city with lights and street*

sweepers, but it's all fake." It might be the promises of money or fame or forbidden romance. They are dressed up for me "in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls" but Scripture warns me they are empty and fake and "her steps take hold of hell and her feet lead down to the grave." (Listen, my first and best sermons aren't delivered to you. They are the ones I preach to me. It's why I do a quiet time every single morning, because the first guy that needs to hear a sermon every day is J.D.)

- ***Beware the sweet poison of the false infinite.***

When Babylon falls, John says: 18:15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, 16 "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! 17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

Are you going to be somebody who wakes up one day to find that you gave your life to chase one empty mirage after another, only to find that none of it was what you thought it was? That you spent your whole life climbing some ladder to get to the top of some building only to find out it was fake?⁸

What you're looking for is in Jesus. It's in the **New Jerusalem**. "In HIS presence," the Psalms say, "is the fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore." 'Fullness of joy' means joys that could not get any stronger; 'pleasures forevermore' means joys that could not last any longer. But those things are for those who wait, in faith, and seek the invisible city, the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem.

⁷ Lightly edited for clarity. [Brent Beshore Tweet](#), May 8, 2023

⁸ BTW, for butterflies--Monarch butterflies have mating experience that lasts 16 hours and offload a discharge that is 13% of their bodyweight. Your

experiences are not that good, and yet some of you are trading them for eternity.

OK, so that's the end game.

So, what are the implications for us NOW? This is a question we've asked every week.

Look at **18:4**, 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..."

Now, remember, there's 2 ways to read Revelation. These are prophecies about a time coming in the future. An actual 7-year period in the future where an actual Antichrist and actual False Prophet will reign. There will be a time during that 7-year period when God says to his people, "Get out of Babylon, I'm about to destroy it," and we will literally flee the premises."

But, I've told you, there's another important way to read Revelation, and that is to read it as descriptions of forces that are already at work in the world **now**. The spirit of antichrist is already here, John tells us.⁹ You should read this passage both ways.

This command is not only for a future generation, it's also for us now: "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues..." (And that's a command we find not only here, in Revelation--multiple times in the Bible, both Old and New Testament: "Come out from among them and be separate.")

But that presents a problem, because other places in the Bible tell us to stay put. For example, in **Jeremiah 29:7**, which was written during the time of Daniel, God told exiles in literal Babylon: "Build houses,

live in them; plant gardens... seek the welfare of the city [Babylon] where I have sent you into exile." And the **Apostle Peter essentially repeats that same instruction in his first epistle to the church**, 1 Peter. Peter tells believers in Babylon to "stay put, be a witness, and make a difference."

So we have two seemingly opposite instructions:

- Revelation 18:4 — "Come out of her, my people..."¹⁰
- Jeremiah 29:7 — "Settle in... and seek the city's welfare"

Summit: Is this a contradiction? Listen, whenever you see an apparent contradiction in the Bible, that's usually the place you'll find wisdom. What this means is that we are to live in Babylon, deeply integrated into life here, but distinct from her sins and her man-centered ways.

I've got a whole book about this coming out next month called *Everyday Revolutionary: How to Transcend the Culture War and Transform the World*. It's about how to obey Jeremiah's command to live in Babylon and Revelation's command to get the heck out; how to go from being a cultural warrior to a gospel witness. It's the whole "in the world but not of the world" paradox.

Christians always tend to navigate toward one of two extremes. For some people, the "come out from among them and be ye separate" thing is what they do.

⁹ The Great Tribulation is just an intensification of the age we're already living in.

¹⁰ While Revelation 18 may be describing a unique event at the end of history, this "be ye separate" principle is all throughout Scripture. Some of the more prominent, for instance: Leviticus 20:26 ("You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine."), Isaiah 52:11 (Depart,

depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord."), 2 Corinthians 6:14ff ("Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"), James 4:4 ("You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."), et al.

This was a key verse, by the way, in my Christian high school. I heard so many sermons on that verse. It's like the pastor, if he didn't know what to preach, just went back to this verse.

- **Christians should be different.** We didn't dress like the world: our dress code was straight out of Little House on the Prairie, with an occasional fashion flare that we picked up The Brady Bunch.
- As boys we wore our hair short, even though the style at the time for boys back in the '80s was long and wavy. And the men in our churches didn't have beards. Sure, in all the pictures of Jesus in our KJV Bibles, he had long hair and a beard, but those pictures were drawn by liberals because only liberals like art.
- We didn't get tattoos or wear earrings. Only gangs and pop stars did that. Only the lead singer of Wham wears an earring, and you don't want to be like him.
- We didn't dance because dancing was the devil's foreplay. In fact, we didn't have premarital sex because it might lead to dancing, because apparently that was the worst sin of all.
- We didn't listen to rock music, because that would make you want to dance, and we all know where dancing led. We were forbidden to listen to Christian rock, because Christian rock was mixing God's message with Babylon's rhythms. Like putting mustard on a turd. (I'm not making any of this up. These are literal things I heard dozens of times--although my dad, after the Thursday service, asked me to point out these were not the things he and my mom taught me--but things my Christian school emphasized). So, don't listen to rock music, even if it has Christian lyrics. If the beat gets to your feet before the lyrics get to your heart, it's sin. Plus, you never know what Satanists, atheists and sneaky liberals had back-masked into your music.
- 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate' was the command, and we took it seriously. **Social weirdness was proof of godliness.**

There's others of you, though, who aren't anywhere near that. You've deeply integrated your life here. You struggle with the other verse, Rev 18:4: your lives bear no virtual distinction from Babylon at all.

- Your values in your job are Babylon's values. Your modesty standards are Babylon's. Your goals for retirement are the same as Babylon's.
- Your social media behavior and posts are shaped more by CNN, Fox News, and the Daily Wire than they are the epistles of Paul. You don't challenge the world with your online presence, you mirror it.
- Your approach to relationships and romance is more influenced by... Taylor Swift **(PIC)** than the Holy Scriptures. I'll prove it. Let's play a little game, want to? It's a call and response game. It only works if you respond. And you have to do it at our campuses, even though I can't hear you. I'll start off, if you know it, complete:
 - "Cause baby now we've got...(?)"
 - "I knew you were trouble...(?)"
 - "Why can't you see-ee-ee...(?)"
- (*Very good! I didn't even have to give you the song name and you could finish it!!!*)
- OK, you know Taylor's "wisdom" about love and relationships. How about the Bible's? Here, try this:
 - **1 John 3:16**, "By this we know love, that... (?)" (It literally says, "I'm gonna tell you what love is. Love is..." And you don't know the verse. Jesus says now to us, "And baby now we've got..." (*"that he laid down his life for us, and thus we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."*)
 - How about **Eph 5:25**, "Husbands, love your wives, just as **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to...(?)**" Dudes, Paul literally, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is telling you HOW to love your wife, and you don't even know what it says? (in case you're curious: "...make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.")

- ***Is this painful enough yet?*** One more. **Col 3:14**, “And above all these put on love, which... (?)” (binds everything together in perfect harmony).”

Maybe you’re a little bit more influenced by Babylon than you think. And I know Taylor just got engaged so **CONGRATULATIONS, T.** Not trying to pick on you. But I don’t think that qualifies Taylor to give you more instruction about marriage than **JESUS**. Amen? In 10 years she may or may not still be married, but this will still be the word of God.

Who shapes your view of life, and how distinguishable are you from the world?

In his book, *The City of God*, St. Augustine said that Christians, citizens of the Kingdom of God, should be most distinguishable from the world around them in three primary areas. His “Big 3”: Money, power and sex. If you want to know if someone’s really distinct from Babylon, these are the 3 areas to look at:

- The City of Man, he says, sees **money as a tool for acquisition** and self-promotion. Get all you can, keep all you can, spend all you can. Sure, give a little so you look good and get a tax write-off, but otherwise, it’s for you! The Christian believes money is a stewardship from God to bless others and advance his kingdom.
- In the same way, **The City of Man says power** is to be grasped and leveraged for yourself. Power is the currency of self-promotion. The Christian, by contrast, believes power is something God entrusts to us to serve and build up others. You’re evaluated, in God’s eyes, not by how high you climb, but by how high you lift up others.
- Finally, **The City of Man says sex is whatever you want it to be:** you write my own rules, and if it works for you, it can’t be wrong. The Christian says sex is a gift from God to be honored within his

design. For the Christian, sex is about loving self-giving and glorifying God more than stingy self-gratification.

As Tim Keller notes: “Roman society was stingy with its money and promiscuous with its bodies. They gave nobody their money and practically gave everybody their body. By contrast, the Christians came along and gave practically nobody their body and they gave practically everybody their money.”¹¹

You’re supposed to be different from the world. Not because you don’t have earrings or tattoos or because you wear denim skirts and culottes. Your whole life is supposed to scream that you’re from somewhere else! People should look at you and say, “You ain’t really from here,” because you’re so out of sync with the rhythms of Babylon.

The way I’ve illustrated it over the years is like this: **Picture a huge marching band at halftime** — every single person moving in perfect sync, lockstep motion. But then you see one guy in the middle doing his own thing. He’s got the same uniform as everyone else, but he’s moving completely differently. When everybody goes left, he goes right. When they duck, he jumps. When they stand still, he shakes. He looks totally out of rhythm, like he can’t keep beat — until you notice he’s got AirPods in. And you find out he’s listening to a local radio station and they’re playing, “I don’t wanna wait” by David Guetta and OneRepublic. Turns out he’s perfectly in rhythm, he’s just tuned into a different conductor.

That’s the Christian life. To the world we look odd, even out of step, but we’re actually just watching another conductor. We’re perfectly in rhythm with the music of another City.

¹¹ Edited for flow

VAMP

And that brings us to the end of chapter 18: “And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off 18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

John uses this as a rhetorical question to set us up for the other city which he is about to introduce to us. The New Jerusalem, The City of God, coming down from heaven, like a bride prepared for her groom, whose pleasures are real and eternal and last forever.

You’ve got to decide which city you belong to. You’ve got to decide which one is the illusion and which one to make your home in.

- If this world is what the Bible says it is, then focusing your whole life on laying up treasures here--things like beach houses and 401K’s and worldly fame or Instagram followers or having your name on a building at Duke... **18:17**, “in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”
- Many of you are giving your whole lives for things that will burn up in an hour.

Listen, when it’s all said and done, when Babylon’s done burning, only 2 things will remain: I tell you this all the time: The Word of God and the souls of people. It’s like I often tell you: only 2 things in this world last forever, the Word of God and the souls of people. There’s only 2 treasures you’ll carry with you into the New Jerusalem: things built on the Word of God and the souls of people.

Only one life to live, will soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last. It’s pretty simple: Build your life on the Word of God and the souls of people, or it’s wasted. As has been said, “*Those who marry the spirit of the age will find themselves widows in the next.*” Some

of you are spending your whole lives building and investing in things that won’t matter!

Especially tragic is that some of you won’t fully give your lives to Jesus because you’re so enamored with chasing this mirage of Babylon. Friend, listen to plain reason, will you: Even if one day you could obtain every one of your dreams--the marriage, the house, the fame, more money than you know how to spend--even if you got it all and even it was everything you’d ever hoped it would be, but it comes at the cost of your soul, what good is it? You’ll wail with all these people in Revelation 18 how everything you lived for is destroyed in an hour and you’ll be left with nothing but the wrath of God. At which point, you’ll call on the mountains to cover you to hide you from the face of the One you set yourself in opposition to.

Two cities: **The City of Man and The City of God.** Babylon and the New Jerusalem. Which one do you think is the illusion, and which one have you made your home?

You say to me, “Well, J.D., that sounds great. But I just don’t think I’m good enough to qualify as a citizen of heaven. God would never accept me as one of his people.”

That’s probably the best news of all. Citizenship in his kingdom is a gift he gives you; not because you are good enough to earn it, but because he took your judgment in your place. You see, the problem is that all of us have adopted the posture of the City of Man—we’re naturally citizens there—and all of us deserve the wrath of these plagues--and more, eternity apart from God.

But the Lamb we see walking through Revelation is a lamb who was slain, and the reason he was slain was to suffer the punishment for our sin in our place. At the beginning of this message, we walked through the “**the bowl judgments.**” The word we translate into English as “**bowl**” is really the word for “**chalice.**” These are the

CHALICE judgments, the cup of judgment, the fury of God's wrath, against the human race for our sin.¹²

And that's why, on the night before Jesus, died, Jesus held up the cup and said, "This is the cup of judgment I am drinking for you." He drank all 7 of these chalices of judgment in our place.¹³

At the cross, as this cup was being handed to us, Jesus stepped in the way, took the cup, and drank the fury of God's wrath down in our place, drained the cup to the dregs, turned it over and said, "It is finished." It's paid! All the judgments are complete.

Sin will be judged. It will either be judged in the ways we see in Revelation, and through eternity in hell, and you along with it, or you can separate yourself from your sin by repenting and put your faith in Jesus' death in your place.

Have you received him?

Take Lord's Table: grab cups, bow heads

Invite people to give their lives to Jesus, raise their hands

Take Communion

Go to Worship

¹² That's why at the end of these judgments, the Apostle John says, 16:19, "...and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup [the bowl] of the wine of the fury of his wrath." (16:19)

¹³ The prophet Jeremiah talked about all of God's wrath being stored up in a chalice to be poured out on the human race. You see it happening in Revelation.