

A Tale of Two Cities // Revelation 14–18 // *Revelation* #10¹

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 and emphasize something your campus pastors have already told you about. I just want to put an exclamation point on that with these 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—we *can do*—leading up to the Dome is to pray. If you call TSC your home, I want to ask you to take seriously this call to pray and seek God on behalf of RDU, our college students, and those who don't know Jesus who will attend this event. We know that this is going to be a major event with a lot of people—and we want the fullness of the Holy Spirit to be there. Again, your campus pastors gave you all those details, but please—I'm asking as your pastor—yes, I want you to be at the Dome; yes, I want you to bring a bunch of people. But most of all, I want you to pray.

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

It was built by North Korea in the early 1960s, 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 great evangelistic awakenings in Christian history. North Korea, by contrast, went on to become one of the most totalitarian, oppressive dictatorships in the history of the world. Forty percent 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.

But if you stand on the South Korean side and look at this village, Peace Village, through binoculars, what you'll see is breathtaking. This city has delightful, colorful buildings with blue roofs. You'll see well-dressed street sweepers out on the road, keeping the roads spotless, and smiling

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, “[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.

pedestrians walking the streets. 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.

The problem is that it's all fake. The buildings are just facades; they have no actual rooms; even the windows are painted on. The lights run on timers. Even the street sweepers and the artfully clothed pedestrians are hired actors, 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? Because the final chapters of Revelation are about a war between two cities: “Babylon” and “The New Jerusalem.” [chart]

- Babylon, in the Bible, represents mankind united in opposition to God. Babylon has a long history in the Bible. Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, had been the world's **first truly global empire, and the armies of Nebuchadnezzar literally destroyed Jerusalem in the sixth century BC. And** 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” came to represent the kingdom of man, opposed to God. In fact, Peter, in his epistle to the church, uses “Babylon” as a code name for Rome.
- 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 will pursue and make your home in one of these two cities.

John writes the book of Revelation to pull back the mask on Babylon, so you'll see how she ends and that all her promises are fake. 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.**

- John knows that living the Christian life takes **endurance**, because 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; it's not here yet, and you can't see or feel or touch it yet.
- And that makes living for it hard, because it requires deep convictions that the things you can't see are real, more real than the promises of Babylon. And living that way is hard, especially because Babylon's propaganda machine is in full swing. It mounts its flagpoles 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.

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

- Babylon even has algorithms now designed to tailor its false propaganda specifically to you. 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 it will put into your feed. (One useful thing about these phones is that they will identify your idols for you. Whatever it's feeding back to you is what it's picked up from you that you think 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 wants to help you see how Babylon ends so you don't get taken in by her false promises.

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 three sets of judgments that define the seven-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 we've already looked at,⁴ but let me just make a few observations about the Bowl Judgments.

1. **The Bowl Judgments are the most intense of all the judgments.** Each round, the seals, the trumpets, and then the bowls, got 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 break out on people on earth, which is 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—which is similar, of course, to Moses turning the Nile river into blood. **In Bowl 5** darkness covers the earth, which also happened in one of the Exodus plagues, and one of **the elements of Bowl 6** is an explosion of frogs on earth: **Look at vs 13** 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 the frogs are demons, and these demons stir up the Antichrist and his 10-nation alliance for the battle of Armageddon.) **In Bowl 7**, gigantic hailstones rain down on earth, which also occurred, of course, during the Exodus.
3. **Like with the Exodus, mankind still won't 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 ... **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. Scripture always presents unbelief as first a heart problem—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 to be all-wise. We don't want to give him all the glory—we want it for ourselves.
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,

⁴ Remember, there two ways you can look at these: as successive judgments coming in the future that build on each other, or three angles describing life on earth now; the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments are all going on now, and basically you're seeing three different views of the same thing, like you're watching a replay of an incident in a football game from different camera angles.

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, what he was doing was demonstrating the depth of his love and putting on display for us the consequences of our sin. But it's simply not true that God has no wrath against sin and those who persist in practicing it. Passages like this one show you that. It's a fearful thing to stand before the living God in a posture of rebellion. God's hate is not in opposition to his love; it's an extension of his love. You see, **God** cares too much for his creation to just shrug at evil. When you love something, you **hate** the thing that destroys it. If something is attacking my children, I hate it. **J. I. Packer** explains that God's wrath is his "settled opposition to all that is evil." The late **R. C. Sproul** says that sin is cosmic treason that unravels the peace and prosperity of his creation, and for God to ignore it would make him complicit in that. God hates sin because he loves his glory and his justice and his creation. Wrath is not the opposite of love—wrath is love's demand for justice. Without wrath, love is really just apathy.

That's chapters 14–16. In chapters 17 and 18, the Apostle John shifts the camera angle. In chapters 15 and 16, he's gone over the order of events, and now, in chapters 17–18, he shifts the focus to what these judgments do to the Babylonian world order, which you remember is under the direction of the Antichrist and the False Prophet.⁵

The fall of Babylon occurs in two waves—first, the religious side falls, and then the 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 **17:1** 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 ... 16 And the ten horns [kings] that you saw, they and the beast [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 shock! 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 when they were finished with her, 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 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 told me this right after dinner.) 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

⁵ Remember, Babylon—as I interpret Revelation—is a reference to 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.

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, birds aren’t real, man. They’re tools of the Antichrist)

a haunt for every unclean cat ... (that’s not really in there, I added that. The Bible doesn’t need to say that: all cats are inherently unclean)

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.”

The imagery of “prostitute” applies to both sides of Babylon—both the religious side and the political/economic side. Here’s my question for you this weekend: Why? 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 two reasons:

- **First, it’s because sin, at its core, is spiritual adultery.** Adultery is a two-sided sin. When a man commits adultery on his wife, he is committing two 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? Two: (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 second reason Babylon is called a prostitute is that **she’s so appealing**.
 - All throughout these chapters she’s described like this: **“arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls” (17:4).**

- 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, by the way, 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"* (Proverbs 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 male butterflies can be enticed and trapped by using cardboard replicas of females. You ever try to catch a butterfly without a net? It's not easy. It's hard. But put a 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 her 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 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 is unfulfilling. Pornography is addictive. Cynicism rots your soul.
 - Sometimes the ones who 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 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."*

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?

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

- **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 sin behind when you become a pastor; you bring it with you. There’s a few things that sin promises me, things Babylon uses to entice me, and I have to constantly tell myself—to preach to myself. My first and best sermons aren’t delivered to you. They come 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. And what I tell myself is, using Scripture, *“It’s 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 tells me they are empty and fake and “her steps take hold of hell and her feet lead down to the grave.” ***Beware the sweet poison of the false infinite.***

Don’t be someone who wakes up one day to find that you found what you are looking for only to figure out it’s not what you thought it was.

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? 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,” he says, “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.

OK, so that’s the end game. What’s the command for us now? **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 ...”

Remember, there are two ways to read Revelation. These are prophecies about a time coming in the future. An actual seven-year period in the future where an actual Antichrist and actual False Prophet will reign. There will be a time during that seven-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.

⁸ By the way, for butterflies—monarch butterflies have a mating experience that lasts 16 hours and offload a discharge that is 13 percent of their body weight. Your experiences are not that good, and yet some of you are trading them for eternity.

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. I believe both readings are correct, because the Great Tribulation is just an intensification of the age we're already living in.

So this command is for us now too—“Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues ...”

So does that mean we should all flee this wicked world and live in communes? Well no, because in **Jeremiah 29:7**, God tells 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 ...”⁹
- Jeremiah 29:7 — “Settle in ... and seek the city's welfare”

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 stay 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/in Babylon but not of Babylon” 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.

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 from *The Brady Bunch*.

⁹ 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.

- 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 we 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! did that, and you didn't want to be like him.
- We didn't dance because dancing was the devil's foreplay.
- 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 are others of you, though, who aren't anywhere near that. You've deeply integrated your life here. You struggle with the other verse, Revelation 18:4: Your lives bear no virtual distinction from Babylon at all.

- Your values in your job are Babylon's values.
- Your goals for retirement are the same as Babylon's goals.
- 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 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 is like, "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 **Ephesians 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. **Colossians 3:14**, "And above all these put on love, which ..." (binds everything together in perfect harmony.)

Maybe you're a little bit more like Babylon than you think. And I know Taylor just got engaged, so congratulations, T. But I don't think that qualifies her to give you more instruction about marriage than **JESUS**. 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 three 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. Give a little so you look good, 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. 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 your 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 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."¹⁰

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.

¹⁰ Edited for flow

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.

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 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, 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 401ks 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 two things will remain, I tell you this all the time: the Word of God and the souls of people. There are only two 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 if 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.

It's like Jesus said, "What does it profit a man ...?" There's an illustration I've used over the years ... There are a lot of people giving up far, far more to gain far, far less. They are giving their soul to gain a mirage.

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 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 God hands to the human race. 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.”**

And that’s what makes what Jesus said when he died that much more significant. Jesus held up the cup and said, “This is the cup of judgment I am drinking for you.” He drank all seven of these chalices of judgment in our place. 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.

At the cross, as this cup was being handed to us, Jesus stepped in, 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 - small chalice

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

Take Communion

Go to Worship