



Fallen, Fallen is Babylon (part 1)

Revelation 18:1-8

1. Overview (verses 1-3)

2. Preview (verses 4-8)

I heard this week of a pastor of a local church who loved to play golf. He would try to golf as much as possible whenever he could. One day he woke up to a beautiful, sunny Sunday morning, perfect for a round of golf. So, he pretended that he was sick and convinced his associate pastor to preach for him that Sunday morning. He then drove to a golf course more than an hour away from his hometown, so that he wouldn't run into anyone from his church.

As he lined up on the first tee, all was beautiful. The temperature was perfect. There was a small breeze, just enough to cool you off. The trees were in full bloom. The fairways were perfectly groomed. The greens were beautiful and freshly mowed. The first hole, a par four, was just waiting for him to play. With many others in church on that day, seemed as if he had the entire course to himself.

Watching from heaven, there was some protest from the angels, who said to God, "Are you going to let him get away with this?" Just then, the pastor swung his club for his opening drive. He had never hit a drive that far before! He had never hit a ball that straight before! It was headed straight for the pin. It landed just short of the green and bounced onto the green and rolls right up to the hole, and falls in. A 420 yard hole in one! It was absolutely amazing! It was a miracle shot! Michael, the arch angel, as a representative from all the angels, said to the Lord, "Why did you let him do that." The Lord smiled and said, "Who's he going to tell?"

Well this morning, I am here. And have a story to tell. Like the pastor in the story, I have a game I like to play. For me it's pool. This past week, I went to Davenport, Iowa to play in the American Cue Sports Midwest Tournament. Being on the border of Illinois and Iowa, that's where most of the players in the tournament come from. But there were others there from Nebraska and Wisconsin and Indiana.^[1] At the event there were about a hundred pool tables. I'm guessing 1500 people came to play!

I left early Wednesday morning to play in the Senior's 8 ball tournament, which is for those who are over 55 years of age. There were 29 guys signed up for the double elimination tournament. Each match was a race to 4, which means, the first guy to win four games of 8 ball wins the match. My first match was at 10 in the morning, and I lost 4 games to none. I texted Yvonne, saying, "And just like that, I lost my first round match 4-0 in 40 minutes. He whooped me. He was clearly better than I am. I play again at 2:30, so I'm off to a coffee shop or McDonald's." She texted back and said, "Ouch. Well, enjoy your study time."

On the loser's side, I was up 3 games to 1, needing just one game to win the match. I ended up losing three games in a row, which lost me the match 4-3. Again, I texted Yvonne after the match and said, "and just like that, I'm out of the tournament. I'm buckling down, hoping to do the heavy lifting of my sermon tonight." I called Yvonne that night from a hotel room in Davenport very discouraged, thinking, why should I travel this far, pay the \$80 entry fee, pay for a hotel room, to be all by myself for the night, away from my family, only to play in the Standard 8 ball tournament the next morning? Well, at least I did get a lot of sermon prep done that night.

The next day were the three main tournaments. There's the Advanced division, the Open division and the Standard division. I was entered in the Standard division, the lowest of the three. There were about 120 guys who entered the tournament. I won my first match 4 games to 0. I won my second match 4 games to 1. I won my third match 4 games to 0.

With these wins, the tournament continued on Friday. My match was scheduled for 10am the next morning, so I found a hotel room and stayed another night. I had played in the Iowa tournament once before a few years ago and was finished before the day was up. I figured this would be the same. But God had different plans for me that day.

So, I get a hotel room. I had a Zoom meeting that night with some of you, to talk about what we read in our Bible Reading this week. After that, I'm Facetime with Yvonne, soon to go to bed. While I'm on Facetime, about 10:30 that evening, I received a text that said I had just lost my match! Unknown to me, my 10am match on Friday morning had been rescheduled to 10pm on Thursday evening! I did not know anything about this. They waited for me to show up for half an hour. When I didn't show, I forfeited the match.

This meant that I was in the losers bracket. One more loss and I would be heading home. I went from the high of winning three matches in the morning, to being kicked to the losers side for not realizing about a schedule change. I didn't even have a chance to play the match. I went to bed discouraged. You can talk with Yvonne about how disheartened I was.

Anyway, I came back in the morning and my first match was scheduled for 11:30. If I lost, I would be finished from the tournament and going home. I won that match, 4 games to 1. In the next match, I was down 2 games to 3, which means that I had to win the next two games to stay in the tournament. I came back and won that match by banking the 8 ball, a difficult shot. If I miss that shot, I'm out of the tournament, but I made it and went on. I felt a bit like that pastor who had a hole in one.

Then I won again and again and again. Two other times during my run, I was down 3 games to 2, and two other times I came back to win two games in a row to win the match. On another occasion, I was tied 3-3, and won the deciding game of the match. Matches were coming one

after another. I did not even have time to eat lunch or dinner. After a few of the matches, I walked over to the concession stand to grab a granola bar to eat during the next match.

To make a long story short, at 11:30 in the evening, after 12 hours of playing match after match, after winning all nine of my matches that day, I was handed a trophy: American Cue Sports 2024 Midwest 8-Ball Championships Davenport, Iowa: 1st Place Men's/Mixed Standard Singles. In other words, out of 120 competitors, I won the Midwest 8-ball championship (of the lowest division). And, I was given a check!

It's amazing how different my perspective was changed from the two days before. On Wednesday evening, I was discouraged from losing twice and being eliminated from the Senior's division. On Thursday evening, I was discouraged about forfeiting a match because of a schedule change that I knew nothing about. Then, on Friday evening, I had the exuberation of winning the Midwest championship.

It was a great day. After winning, I received a few texts from a few other of my pool friends who were following the scores online. I talked with one of them on the phone at 11:30pm. On Saturday, one of my friends posted my results on Facebook, and I received some messages of congratulations from a few others who heard about my accomplishment. I was told to bring my trophy on Monday night to our pool league to show everyone, as I went representing our league. Guys are looking forward to me talking about it. Pray that as I will be the center of attention on Monday evening, that I would be winsome with the gospel.

So, why did I tell that story? Because I couldn't not tell the story of winning the Midwest 8-ball championship. But it's also a broad picture of Revelation, the text we have been working through for the last nine months.

The book of Revelation is written to Christians, who were discouraged and going through some difficult times. Some even are questioning whether it's worth it to endure the persecutions they were facing as followers after Christ. But by the end of Revelation, Christ returns and all of Creation is restored, and all is well in the world.

On Wednesday and Thursday evening, I was down and discouraged. I was questioning whether I should be off in Davenport playing pool at all. But, as it all turned out, I experienced something that was way beyond anything that I could ever have imagined. I never imagined that I would win a pool championship of this caliber. It's really a once in a lifetime event.

The book of Revelation is headed to a place that we can hardly imagine. It's headed to a place of no more tears or death or crying or pain. It's headed to a place golden roads and pearly gates. It's headed to a place where God dwells with us. And that won't be "once in a lifetime." That will be for eternity. In the book of Revelation, however, we are not there yet. That will all come in chapter 21.

Right now in our progress, we are Thursday evening, feeling discouraged and defeated over the forfeit. This is where we are in the book of Revelation, at a point of discouragement at the wickedness of the world, and the judgment of God that is coming upon the world. I wish that I could simply skip forward and tell you the good parts of the glory of Revelation. But the goodness of the ending of the story, only builds as we see the judgment that precedes it.

This morning we are in chapter 18, one of the darkest chapters of Revelation. So, if you have your Bibles, now would be a good time to open them to Revelation, chapter 18. As a reminder, this chapter really flows from chapter 16, where the seven bowl judgments were poured out on the earth.

These bowl judgments, if you remember, are part of the backbone of Revelation with the seals, trumpets and bowls. These are the judgments of God that are poured out upon the world. The bowl judgments come in chapter 16. The trumpet judgments come in chapters 8 and 9. The seal judgments come in chapter 6. Now, I remind you, there are seven of each of them. Seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, and they all get worse and worse.

Chapter 16 brings an end to God's judgment upon the entire earth, against those who refuse to bow the knee and repent. It brings sores upon people, and damages the water supplies, and scorches the people of the earth with fire. We see the hardness of people, when they refuse to repent at the judgment coming upon them. Instead, they curse God, who had power over the plagues (Revelation 16:9). With the pouring out of the last bowl, God says, "It is done!" (Revelation 16:17). But that doesn't mean that God is done telling the story.

To that, we have Revelation 17 and 18. They are giving the details of what happened during the seventh bowl. It's like these chapters are the evening news, telling of what happened during the day. These chapters are like Sportscenter on ESPN, showing the highlights of the day's sporting events. Revelation 17 and 18 are telling the same story, from two different vantage points. These chapters expand upon Revelation 16:19 which says, "The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath." That is, finishing the wrath of God upon those on the earth who refuse to repent! pouring it all out

Revelation 17 gave us the picture of God judging the great prostitute, which is easy to understand, as prostitutes are often the symbol of evil women, who work to seduce and satisfy the lusts of men. This prostitute is not an individual, and we aren't talking about sexual sin. The prostitute is often employed in the Old Testament Scripture as one who has forsaken God. Just as a prostitute forsakes her husband, so also did Israel forsake the Lord.

Now, this morning, we come to the second segment on the evening news, the judgment on Babylon. This judgment is recorded of us in Revelation 18. My message this morning is entitled, "Fallen, Fallen, is Babylon." This is the major announcement of the text. It comes in verse 2, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" This isn't the first time that we have seen this. It was the message of one of the angels in chapter 14. The second angel to be precise. In Revelation 14:8 we read, "Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." Way back in chapter 14, we hear of Babylon being fallen. Chapter 18 gives a greater description of what this means.

Now, like the image of the prostitute that we saw last week in chapter 17, Babylon has an Old Testament precedent as well. In fact, there are several times in the Old Testament when the fall of Babylon is prophesied. In Isaiah 13 we read of judgment on Babylon that Isaiah saw in his

day, years before Babylon was defeated. In Jeremiah 50 and 51, we read of the judgment on Babylon that Jeremiah saw in his day, just before Israel fell to Babylon. These prophesies came to pass. In Daniel 5, we read of the death of Belshazzar, the last Babylonian king. Soon after his death, Cyrus, the king of Persia conquered Babylon (in 539 BC).

So, why does Revelation 18 describe the falling of Babylon, which fell more than 500 years earlier? Because Babylon is a picture. In Biblical times, Peter talked about "Babylon" in 1 Peter 5:13, probably speaking of Rome in his day. Now, in the proper sense, Babylon is a country. Yet, we see here in Revelation 18 that Babylon is represented as a city!

Again, it's not past Babylon that is being talked about here in Revelation 18, it's a picture of the future sinful worldly system. Just like the prostitute of Revelation 17 was a picture of the sinful world that is finally judged, so also is Babylon in Revelation 18 a picture of the sinful world that will be finally judged. Babylon is a picture of the greatest powers of the world. Before God, there is no match. God will crush Babylon.

Another big question here is this: What is the sin of Babylon? What is this final judgment pictured to us as a judgment against a city? The answer is that Babylon is a representation of the powerful and corrupt worldly system that stands in opposition to God. We can see this today in our government. It wants nothing to do with God. It wants separation between church and state. In the United States, we are fortunate enough to have "In God We Trust" on our currency, but such is hardly the case. We hardly trust in God. We are the most powerful nation on the planet, we don't need God.

As a people, our nation is against God. Our government is actively trying to persuade people into sinful living, either through laws that allow the death of babies, or through laws that demean the meaning of marriage, or through indoctrination that pushes an anti-God worldview. But also tied to the corruption of Revelation is its immense wealth and luxury, which has turned the hearts of the people away from the Lord and to the sinful pleasures of the world. We will get to this in due course, as it has much to say about all of us who live in the luxuries of the richest nation that has ever been.

So, with that as a long introduction let's jump into our text: Revelation 18. It's always helpful to read the text, so that you get the big picture in mind.

Revelation 18

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!
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 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,
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 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 your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!"

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,
in 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 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?"

And 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!"

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great 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 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,
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 bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,
for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.
And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth."

My first point comes in the first three verses:

1. Overview (verses 1-3)

That's what it is. It described the big picture of chapter 18. Babylon as already defeated. It's a bit like Revelation 16:19, which tells of the big picture of the destruction of Babylon. Before we get to the overview, let's look at the one giving the announcement.

Revelation 18:1
After this I saw ...

Again, I remind you that the visions that John sees aren't always sequential. They are sequential from John's point of view. He sees one vision and then another and then another. That's why he says, "After this." But there is overlap of time in the meaning and fulfillment of the visions themselves.

Revelation 18:1
After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory.

In Revelation we have seen many angels, but none like this one. He has "great authority." He also has "great glory."

Revelation 18:1

... the earth was made bright with his glory.

Some think that this is Jesus because only he would have such glory. This is probably not the case, as the Revelation seems to indicate that this angel is in the stream of all of the other angels, which are the ones bringing the message in Revelation. Perhaps this angel is given so much authority and glory because of the magnitude of the announcement in verse 2.

Revelation 18:2

And he called out with a mighty voice,

"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,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

This describes the desolation of the city. No longer is she inhabited by people. It's now inhabited by demons and birds and beasts. This is what happens when buildings are abandoned. I remember touring my mother's old childhood home. She grew up on a farm in a big, old farm house. At some point, it was abandoned, as her parents moved to a smaller, one story home about 100 yards away, right there on the farm stead. They neglected the old house. And over the years the windows were broken, and the doors caved in. Pretty soon, raccoons came to rule the roost.

I remember entering the home shortly before they burned it to the ground. It was dangerous even to walk in it. I remember the dust and the dirt and the filth. I remember the piles of raccoon poop that came from the attic. This is a bit like what happens here to Babylon, this city. The people are gone because they are judged and destroyed. All that is left is the demons and the animals. Then, we have the reason given for why such judgment came upon Babylon.

Revelation 18:3

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."

This is almost exactly what we saw last week in chapter 17 with the great prostitute. Revelation 17:2 has the prostitute seated upon the many waters, "with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." This shows the similarities of these two chapters. The prostitute is Babylon! They are both guilty of the same things. Sexual immorality and drunkenness.

This is similar to the angelic announcement in Revelation 14:8, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." So, it's not merely that Babylon committed sexual immorality and drunkenness, but that she used her influence to bring all the nations of the earth under the same influence. It's like the influence Paul speaks about in Romans 1, when speaking about the terrible sins of people that bring upon themselves the wrath of God. At the end of his long list, he says, "Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:32).

Such is the doing of Babylon as well. Not only has Babylon committed these sins, but they have brought all the nations of the earth along in their wickedness. Again, like the prostitute, we are not talking here about literal sexual immorality and drunkenness. These are pictures of unfaithfulness to God. They are pictures of pursuing the pleasures of the world. But there's one more sin that's listed here in Revelation 18, beyond immorality, beyond drunkenness, it's wealth.

Revelation 18:3

... and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

We don't often think about wealth as a sin. We don't often think that those who have "grown rich" are sinful. But there is something about wealth and living in luxury that draws us away from God.

Do you remember the parable that Jesus told? He said, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21).

This is precisely the error of Babylon. Though she is rich in the world, she is not rich toward God. That is the great sin of Babylon. Babylon is the great anti-God city, which, of course, are most cities. Here, Babylon is pictured as the chief city, bringing all into its influence.

Now, I don't believe that America is in the book of Revelation. However, when you look at the world, there is one place that dominates the world scene today. It is the United States of America. We are the envy of the world. By all measures, we lead the world in wealth and power. We have an immigration problem precisely because we are the wealthiest nation in the world. People come here to find wealth, because they too are captivated by the "deceitfulness of riches" (Mark 4:19). Let us not think that our wealth is not dangerous! Oh, it is. Jesus said, "Only

with difficulty with a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:23). Riches will turn your heart away from God. Riches will lead you to depend upon yourself and your own power.

Do you remember the pride of the most prominent king of Babylon said? King Nebuchadnezzar was out "walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon" (Daniel 4:29). And he said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty" (Daniel 4:30)?

There are plenty of those in America who offer up the same, exact sentiment. God hates such thinking, because it is prideful and anti-God. This is what America is offering to the world! Further, by all measures, we lead the world in exporting our sin. Hollywood exports immorality and idolatry in almost every movie it produces. Never under-estimate the power of movies upon the world. They export our cancerous worldview. It wasn't until America embraced homosexuality as normative that the world followed in kind, and judgment will come upon such a world.

Let's move on to my second point.

2. Preview (verses 4-8)

Revelation 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;

This is a call for repentance before the destruction of the city. If you don't come out of Babylon, you will be destroyed along with Babylon. If you take part in her sins, you will share in her plagues. Again, we are giving the reason why Babylon is in danger of judgment:

Revelation 18:5

for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

Here is fundamentally why judgment comes upon the world: because God remember sin. He can't sweep it under the rug. He can't purge it from his mind. He will remember sin, and he will do what is required of that sin. He will punish. This, by the way is where the gospel is so precious to us. In Christ Jesus, God took away the punishment that is due us because of our sin. He will remember our iniquities no more! He won't sweep them under the rug! He won't ignore them. He has dealt with them in Christ. He punished Christ on our behalf. We simply need to trust this by faith. We need to trust that the death of Jesus was sufficient to satisfy God's wrath against us. But here with Babylon, we see that she hasn't trusted in Jesus. Instead, she has been defiant.

The voice continues in verse 6.

Revelation 18:6

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.

The double is the full portion of what she deserves.

Revelation 18:7

As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,
'I sit as a queen,
I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.'

You can see her sins here: Self-glorification, indulgence of the flesh, pride, ignorance of God's judgment. Such are the sins of our day. Social media is filled with "self-glorification." Social media says, "Look at me! Look how great I am!" By informing you of my pool tournament victory, I may well be guilty of this as well.

The indulgence of the flesh is all around us. And by in large, our society is ignorant of the judgment of God. Judgement will come and judgement will be swift.

Revelation 18:8

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.

These are terrible words, but such is the judgment of God that is coming upon the world, coming upon those who hate God and are indulging in the pleasures of the world. This judgment is coming upon those who neglect to give of their resources to help the poor. "We must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35). We must

help the week. We must help the poor.

Having said that, I don't think that there is anything wrong with wealth. But wealth oftentimes captures people. It leads people to live the luxuriant life, rather than the life of service. It comes to those who trust in themselves, rather than trusting Christ that all comes from him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 21, 2024 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] "You can see some pictures of the event here: https://qctimes.com/news/photos-acme-2024-ac-s-midwest-8-ball-championships/collection_c2206f50-b6f7-11ee-82ea-077e74084980.html.