We’re Called to be Light During the Church Age

Revelation 18

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| **Natural Divisions** | * Revelation 18:1-3 A glorious angel announced that Babylon had fallen
* Revelation 18:4-19 God’s people must guard against being seduced by her Babylon’s wealth and power, because God will bring her to torment
* Revelation 18:20-24 Heaven rejoices at the utter destruction of Babylon
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| **Summary Sentence** | God warns his people not to be seduced by Babylon, for God will bring utter destruction on her. |
| **Central Idea** |  We’re called to shine forth the light of Christ during the church age |

We’re in the home stretch in our study of the book of Revelation, and we’re coming to the final chapters that describe God’s ultimate judgment against evil, and the glorious chapters that describe the coming of God’s eternal Kingdom—a Kingdom where Christ will rule forever. God is building His Kingdom.

We know that our world today is not the way it’s supposed to be. We know that our world today is corrupted by evil. And yet the Bible teaches that this is only a temporary condition. One day God will make all things new. In that day, God will judge evil. One day God will destroy all of the enemies of God’s people. One day God will bring to pass a new, re-created earth where Jesus will reign for all eternity. That future Kingdom is our eternal home. We are God’s people, and we will live with Him forever in His glorious Kingdom.

We know that we have this glorious future, but that future day has not yet come. For today, evil still exists. For today, God’s people suffer hostility and rejection and even martyrdom in some parts of the world. In today’s world, life for God’s people is hard. We suffer illness and death. We encounter opposition and injustice and betrayal.

The book of Revelation was written to God’s people to *comfort* them as they live their lives in a world that’s not the way it’s supposed to be. The purpose of the book of Revelation is to *comfort* the church in its struggle against the forces of evil. As I said last week, it’s not a book of horror; it’s a book of comfort. It’s not a book that’s intended to scare you; it’s a book that’s intended to reassure you that God is sovereign; God is always in control. God’s Kingdom will surely come.

There are many scholars who see the book of Revelation as a description of the last seven years, or the last 3½ years prior to the return of Christ. That is not my view. That’s a very popular view in America; it’s a view that is reflected in the *Left Behind* series of books, but that is not my view.

My view is that the book of Revelation is descriptive of the entire church age.

(What do I mean by *the church age*?) The church age is the span of time between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the future day of His return. We are living in the church age. The span of time in which we’re now living is called the *church age*. The church age began in the first century and it will extend until the return of Christ and the day of final judgment.

During the church age,

* the people of God are those who have placed their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord
* Christians have forgiveness of sins and eternal life because of Christ’s death on their behalf
* the gospel is spreading throughout the world as salvation is offered to every tribe and tongue and people and nation
* Christians have the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower godly living

When Christ died on the cross, His death accomplished a significant victory over the forces of evil, and so, during the church age, Satan’s power in this world is under restraint. God’s people are *not* enslaved to sin. God’s people are *not* a part of Satan’s domain of darkness. The Bible teaches in Colossians 1:13 that through Christ, *“God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son.”* We are citizens of God’s kingdom.

Nevertheless, we continue to live in a world where evil exists. We live in a world that rejects God’s authority; but we’re not here just to bide our time. We’re to be God’s people during the church age. We have a God-given responsibility during the church age. We live in a world where Christians may be mocked, persecuted, or even martyred; nevertheless **we’re called to shine forth the light of Christ during the church age**.

My view of the book of Revelation is that Revelation is descriptive of the entire church age. Revelation was given to *comfort* the church as they seek to live godly lives in a world where evil is still prevalent. Revelation was given to *encourage* God’s people to stand firm even in the face of opposition. Revelation was given to *challenge* God’s people to hold fast to their faith even as they live in a world that is characterized by godlessness and hostility toward God.

I see the book of Revelation as composed of seven sections, and each of the seven sections has application to Christians throughout the church age. The seven sections are *not* presenting a *chronological* sequence of events; rather, the seven sections are parallel views of life in this age. Each section reveals some important aspect of life in the church age, and each section contains information that should *encourage* us as we live our lives in anticipation of the future day of Christ’s return and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

I’m going to do a quick recap and review of where we’ve so far come in our study of this book. We’re almost at the end.

In the first section of Revelation, in chapters 1-3, we studied seven letters sent by John to seven churches in Asia Minor. Christians in those seven churches, like Christians today, faced hardship and persecution. They faced the temptations of wealth; they faced the deception of false teaching. The practical message of this first section is that we’re not alone. Jesus stands with His church, and during the church age, it’s the responsibility of the church to hold fast to their faith and **to shine forth the light of Christ in the darkness of this fallen world**. Revelation 1-3 challenges the church to be light in the world.

In the second section of Revelation, in chapters 4-7, we saw a panoramic view of the church age. We learned that God’s people cannot expect a trouble-free life; rather, God’s people will face suffering throughout the church age.

We live in a fallen world. The prevalence of evil in this world means that God’s people throughout the church age experience the impact of that evil. God’s people will suffer from the ongoing existence of evil.

This is a sobering reality, but this section of Revelation also contained a great deal of *encouragement* for the people of faith. In chapter 4 we saw a vision of the glory of the throne room of God. We were encouraged to remember that God is sovereign over all the events that take place on earth.

In chapters 5 and 6 we saw a scroll, which is a figurative picture of God’s sovereign plan, God’s blueprint for cleansing the world of evil and establishing the Kingdom of God. We saw Jesus take the scroll and begin to open its seals. God’s process of establishing His Kingdom is proceeding on course throughout the church age.

Jesus accomplished victory over Satan by His death on the cross. Jesus accomplished redemption for God’s people by His death on the cross. Because of Christ’s death on our behalf, we live as the people of God in the church age. We live in the age of redemption and grace and salvation. We live in the age of the spread of the gospel. **We’re called to shine forth the light of Christ during the church age**.

As the people of God, we have a glorious future, but the fullness of the Kingdom of God has not yet come. In chapters 4-7, we saw a dramatic picture of what’s happening in the world around us during the church age. In chapter 6 there was a vision of four horsemen. These four horsemen represent the characteristics of the course of the church age. Because of the depravity of man, the church age has always been characterized by conquest, war, economic hardship, famine, illness, and death. We see that all around us. The church age is characterized by suffering.

The practical message of chapters 4-7 is that the responsibility of the church in this age of suffering is that we’re to stand firm in the faith; we’re to proclaim the message of Christ. We are God’s people in the age of the spread of the gospel. **We’re called to shine forth the light of Christ during the church age**.

In the third section of Revelation, in chapters 8-11, we were given another panoramic view of the church age. Chapters 8-11 revealed that there will be judgment events throughout the church age. These are trumpet judgments; they’re warnings. At various times and at various places there will be a breaking out of God’s judgment on this fallen earth.

These trumpet judgments are limited in scope, but these judgment events demonstrate to the ungodly that God is sovereign, and that God controls the forces of nature. These judgment events are given throughout the church age to challenge the ungodly to turn from their rebellion and repent.

The practical message of this section is that the church is to serve as God’s witnesses especially during times of disaster. This is our calling. This is our responsibility. During the church age, we may find that chaos is erupting around us as these judgment events occur, but we’re to stand firm in our faith. We are God’s people in the age of the spread of the gospel. **We’re called to shine forth the light of Christ during the church age**.

This third section of Revelation described the entire span of the church age, including the happy day of Christ’s return. In chapter 11:15 it says, *“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever."”* We as God’s people are to be encouraged to know that after the final trumpet judgment, God’s Kingdom will come and Jesus will reign forever.

Then in the next section, in chapters 12-14, the book of Revelation rewinds again to the beginning of the church age and pictures for us the nature of the enemies we face as we live our lives during age of the spread of the gospel.

We saw in this fourth section of Revelation that Jesus was victorious over Satan at the cross. Satan has suffered a mortal wound, and his time is short. Satan has been restrained in his ability to deceive the nations, and so, during the church age, we see the spread of the gospel to every tribe and tongue and people and nation. God is building His Kingdom as the gospel spreads, and Satan is not able to thwart the good purposes of God.

Nevertheless, during the church age, Satan still has the power to exert influence on the earth, and we learned in Revelation 12-14 that godless political institutions and secular philosophies are enemies of the people of God. Even so, God’s people are called to stand firm in our faith. We are God’s people in the age of the spread of the gospel. **We’re called to shine forth the light of Christ during the church age**.

This fourth section of Revelation encouraged us by revealing what will happen at the end of the age. In chapter 14 we saw the harvest of the earth. We saw that one day Jesus will return to judge the wicked in preparation for the coming of God’s promised Kingdom.

The practical message of this section is that the church is to continue to serve as God’s witnesses even in the face of worldly opposition. We may be unpopular; we may be ridiculed. During the church age, this world is not our friend. Nevertheless, we are God’s people in the age of the spread of the gospel. **It is our responsibility to shine forth the light of Christ during the church age**.

In the fifth section of Revelation, in chapters 15-16, we saw the long-awaited vindication of God’s people. We saw God’s wrath against evil at the end of the age. We saw that God’s plan is to remove evil, to cleanse creation, and to make all things new. Until that day, the church is to continue standing firm in the faith, knowing that one day God will make all things new. One day God will make all things new.

Now we come to the sixth section of Revelation, chapters 17-18. Open your Bibles to chapter 18.

In this section of Revelation, in chapters 17-18, we zoomed in on another of the enemies of the church. This enemy is Babylon. She is figuratively called *the harlot Babylon*.

Babylon represents the seductive allure of hedonism, of worldly pleasure, of materialism, of power and fame and luxury. Babylon represents the false view that security and fulfillment may be found in prosperity and success and power. Babylon represents a godless, self-serving lifestyle. Babylon also represents the things that may distract us—things that may distract God’s people—from whole-hearted commitment to the things of God.

Last week, as we studied the nature of Babylon, we saw that Babylon is also called *“the great city,”* and that Babylon is the paradigm—the archetype—of every godless culture in history. Last week we considered the contrast between the city of Satan and city of God—the contrast between the community of people who reject the authority of God and the community of people who love the authority of God. We saw last week that one day, the city of Satan will be destroyed, but the city of God will last forever.

This week, in chapter 18, we see the fall of Babylon. Look at verses 1-3 of chapter 18. *“After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with the angel’s glory. And the angel 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."”*

Babylon is seductive. Throughout history, nations and kings and titans of industry have pursued the rewards promised by Babylon. They committed adultery with her. This is figurative language to refer to the fact that they focused their affections on the pursuit of worldly pleasures rather than the pursuit of God. They centered their lives on attaining worldly goals rather than on serving God and worshipping Him. Babylon is seductive, but one day Babylon will fall, and those who found their security in her will find that they are left with nothing.

Every now and then I wake up from a dream that I would characterize as a *“wish-fulfillment”* dream. I’ve had dreams like this since I was a little girl. When I was a child these dreams would usually be about candy or money. In my dream there would be some circumstance that would result in my having all the candy I could ever imagine, or piles of money to spend however I chose. Sometimes in the dream I would be struggling to keep from dropping all the candy I’d been given, or I might be struggling to find enough containers to hold all the money I had found. And so, it would be a high-adrenaline dream as I would be working hard to manage this happy situation I found myself in, and then I would wake up. I would wake up, and there was no candy. I would wake up and there was no money. There’s a significant let-down when you wake up from a *“wish-fulfillment”* dream.

The seductive allure of Babylon is kind of like a *“wish-fulfillment”* dream. People look to Babylon as they chase their desires. Suppose your desire is for luxury. A luxurious lifestyle looks really good, but when we pursue a luxurious lifestyle, we may find even when we achieve that desire, it isn’t fulfilling. There’s no real substance to it. We may attain our goal, but it’s like a *“wish-fulfillment”* dream—in the end, there’s nothing satisfying about it.

And so God warns us about the seductive allure of Babylon. Look at verses 4-8. *“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."”*

We learn in this sixth section of Revelation that God judges godlessness. God will judge Babylon.

It’s important to realize that the judgment of Babylon is not a condemnation of earthly wealth. God has blessed many of His people with abundant wealth.

The judgment of Babylon is judgment against the pursuit of wealth as the grounds of one’s security. It’s a judgment against trusting in any earthly advantage to the exclusion of trusting in God. It’s a judgment against giving your life to any earthly achievement while refusing to submit your life to God.

And God says to His people, *“come out of her, lest you take part in her sins.”* Don’t be caught up with our godless culture in the pursuit of worldly goals. Don’t be seduced by Babylon. Don’t wake up one morning to find that your life has been nothing more than a *“wish-fulfillment”* dream.

In the day that Babylon falls, kings and merchants and industrial magnates will weep and mourn. They will be terrified as they see that all they have invested their lives in has come to nothing.

But in heaven there will be rejoicing. Look at verses 20-21. *“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.”*

True fulfillment will never come purely by the work of your hands, or by the accumulation of your wealth, or by the power of your position. True fulfillment can only come in the context of a relationship with God.

During the church age, Babylon, the city of Satan, offers fulfillment through hedonism or luxury or fame or power, but God’s people are not to be seduced by her apparent beauty. In this section of Revelation we learn that God will judge godlessness. God will judge all godless affections. During the church age, Babylon is calling to us, but the practical message for the church is that we are to come out of her. We are to stand firm in our faith. We’re called as God’s people to be light during the church age. **We’re called to shine forth the light of Christ in times of suffering, in times of judgment, and in the time of the end of the age**. And we know that God’s Kingdom will come.