

Text: Rev. 18:20 – 19:5

Title: "Heaven's response to the fall of Babylon"

Time: 7/8/2018 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: One of the signs that summer is back is the fact that we are beginning to get some visitors in our parking lot who are looking for Purgatory Falls. That happened for the first time this summer last Thursday. Evidently, certain GPS systems, for some reason, direct cars to our parking lot when searching for Purgatory Falls.

I like when that happens, because John Henderson has created a nice little card for us to give someone asking us for directions to the Falls. On one side he has directions from New Boston Baptist Church to Purgatory Falls, and on the other side he has Bible verses which tell these folks how to get from New Boston Baptist Church to heaven without ever having to go through purgatory.

The Book of Revelation is a prophecy about how this world is going to get to the Second Coming of Christ. We have seen that, although the Book never mentions purgatory, it does speak of a great tribulation that all the world will have to go through before the glory of Christ's Second Coming.

Church-age believers are going to escape this hour (Rev. 3:10, "Because thou [the local church at Philadelphia] hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth"). That hour of temptation is called *the great tribulation* in 7:14, where we find the saints in heaven who have escaped it. Almost exactly one year ago, we began in Revelation 5 our study of what will happen during this 7-year period of future judgment.

Now that we have come to the end of chapter 18, we have come to the last passage in Revelation about the Great Tribulation. Babylon, the empire of antichrist, lies in smoldering ruins, and earth's response has been one of great sorrow at the lost of their riches, great surprise at the speed with which all was lost, and great fear about this judgment.

And now heaven gets its turn to respond to the fall of Babylon. Here we find a very different response than the one we found on earth last week, and it is the response with which our hearts should find solidarity this morning, for we are citizens of heaven and not of the earth. Note with me 3 things about heaven's response to the fall of Babylon.

I. Heaven responds with great joy over the fall of Babylon (18:20).

Illustration: On September 17, 2006, Robert Pape and Cristin Smith murdered Pape's 18-year-old ex-girlfriend, Becky Friedli, her mother Vicki, and her stepfather Jon Hayward. This past June, the court's guilty verdict finally was announced, and the men were sentenced to multiple life-terms in prison.

The news report I saw about this was titled, "ANGER AND JOY AFTER GUILTY VERDICTS IN PINYON PINES TRIPLE MURDER CASE." That joy was experienced by Becky's father, who said this: "I waited 11 years, nine months for this day, and I'm very happy. I'm glad to see that they were found guilty, and I think that the whole Coachella Valley can sleep better now."

Application: When we read a news story like that, we can appreciate the joy that a verdict like this creates in the heart of a father. That kind of joy is the joy that heaven experienc-

es when Babylon falls, because this future empire of anti-christ will have murdered many thousands of saints, apostles, and prophets. The fall of Babylon is a just and holy Judge's answer to the question raised by the tribulation martyrs of Rev. 6:10, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

None of us have become martyrs for Christ, and we may not know anyone who has, but we know the need to ask this question at times, "How long?" "How long must I be faithful when others are not? How long must I put up with their mocking and ridicule? How long must I speak when people do not listen? How long must I pray without an answer? How long must I suffer without a cure or relief? How long before we see that brother or sister in church again?"

I do not know why you may be asking the Lord, "How long?", but I do know that you are probably asking the Lord that question about something, because the Psalms are filled with this question on the lips of God's saints:

6:3, "My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long?"

13:1-2, "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?"

35:17, "Lord, how long wilt thou look on? Rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions."

74:10, "O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name forever?"

79:5, "How long, Lord? Wilt thou be angry forever? Shall thy jealousy burn like fire?"

80:4, "O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?"

89:46, "How long, Lord? Wilt thou hide thyself forever? Shall thy wrath burn like fire?"

90:13, "Return, O Lord, how long? And let it repent thee concerning thy servants."

94:3, "Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?"

94:4, "How long shall they utter and speak hard things, and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?"

So we must not be surprised, as those called of God to walk by faith and not by sight, if we find ourselves asking the Lord, "How long?" But as we ask that question, the fall of Babylon informs us that we must always know that one day the answer is going to come back to us, "No longer!" "That was long enough!"

The joy these martyrs feel as God answers their question, "How long?" will be ours, perhaps to a somewhat lesser degree, if we are faithful in spite of the difficulties that cause us to ask, "How long?" Heaven responds with great joy at the fall of Babylon. We shall respond with great joy someday at the fall of whatever opposes and discourages us in the will and work of the Lord.

II. Heaven responds with great clarity about the fall of Babylon (18:21-24).

Illustration: Last month it was announced that the Justice Department had arrested 600 people, including 76 physicians, for allegedly scheming to make money by overprescribing opioid pain-killers to their patients. The Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, made the following accusation in a statement, "In many cases, doctors, nurses and pharmacists

take advantage of people suffering from drug addiction in order to line their pockets.”

Application: Our word *pharmacy* or *pharmacist* comes from the Greek word translated *sorceries* in verse 23. In the ancient world, drug abuse was an important part of sorcery and cultic worship, as it is today.

It is with the sorcery of antichrist’s Babylon that all the nations of the earth are deceived (v. 23). What are the drugs of choice for this act of deception? They are listed in verses 21-23 – lyre-players and musicians, flute-players and trumpeters, technicians and their technology, the sound of factories and the light of electricity, and just plain good times, like weddings. These are the things that deceive the nation to draw them away from Christ and toward antichrist.

We would not say that any of these things are sinful, but notice that it was Babylon’s trick to use the good things of life to rob people of the best thing—Jesus Christ. Antichrist uses good things to deceive the nations and turn them against Christ. Jesus explained that this happened in Noah’s day, and it would happen in the day of His return (Matt. 24:37-39), “But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

The same is happening in our day. The spirit of antichrist keeps us occupied and deceived with the good things of life so that we neglect the best thing—Jesus Christ. Have we been deceived to ignore the best thing – salvation in Jesus Christ and living for His glory? Someday, heaven will call

all the good things that Babylon had to offer her deceptive sorceries, and it will respond to the destruction of these things with great clarity. Heaven is not deceived. As the people of heaven, we need that clarity about these things now. They are good gifts from God to be used for the glory of Christ, not for disobeying and neglecting Him.

III. Heaven responds with great worship over the fall of Babylon (19:1-5).

Illustration: Norman Rockwell is a beloved American painter. In 1943 he crafted four paintings that he titled, "The Four Freedoms," which were a follow up on Franklin Roosevelt's four-freedom state-of-the-union speech. "Freedom of Speech" depicted a common citizen standing in a town meeting speaking his piece. "Freedom from Want" depicted a family sitting down for a Thanksgiving turkey dinner. "Freedom from Fear" depicted two parents tucking their boys safely into bed at night. And "Freedom of Religion" depicted a number of Americans from various religions with looks of solemnity and devotion on their faces. Only this last one included a caption: "Each according to the dictates of his own conscience."

Application: One of the wonderful things the theology of the Book of Revelation does for us is provide for us a depiction of worship according to the conscience of heaven. We believe in freedom of religion, that worship is a matter of a man's conscience before God. But worshipping the God of the Bible is one of the things our local church must do correctly and well, because we are people of heaven. We find out how to do that in passages like this one, where heaven worships over the fall of Babylon. Notice with me three things about this worship.

1. We learn from heaven the meaning of worship. – *To worship is to ascribe worth to correctly.* In the case of worshipping our God, we must ensure that we ascribe to Him the work of salvation, the wonder of glory, and the might of His power (v. 1); we must say that His judgments are true and righteous (vv. 2-3); we must do all this while falling on our faces, humbled before Him (v. 4). It is all about “Hallelujah” – praising the Lord.

So worship is authentic, not when it reflects my own self-expression or when it is something familiar and comfortable to me, but when it involves a heartfelt honoring of God for all that is true about Him and what He has done. We do not desire to please ourselves or man in worship (contrary to the seeker-sensitive philosophy). We are correctly “seeker-sensitive” only when we are sensitized to the truth that it is the God of heaven who seeks to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

2. We learn from heaven who may worship – They are given labels here: *His servants* (vv. 2, 5); *24 elders* – OT and NT saints (v. 4); *living beings* – cherubim and angels (v. 4); *those who fear God* (v. 5); *small ones and great ones* (v. 5). We need not have great status to worship, except status in Christ.

3. We learn from heaven what worship will be like some day – unison (vv. 1, 3). Today, our churches are plagued by “worship wars” because believers are focused on crafting a worship style that is more pleasing to man. The thought is that this is necessary for worship to be truly from the heart. “I need my music to worship my God from my heart.” The day will soon come when all of us see that we have never needed any preference of our sinful human heart to worship authentically.

Conclusion: The voice from the throne says, "Praise our God." This is the Lamb (Rev. 7:17). As God He speaks of the Father as His God, for as God He became a man (Rev. 3:12). This one on the throne of heaven became a man to die for our sins (Ps. 22:1-21), and He ever lives as a man on the throne of heaven calling his brethren to praise His God, whom He has made theirs too (Ps. 22:22-31). When He calls God's servants and those who fear Him, both small and great, to praise His God, is he speaking to you?

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*