



river west church

Discipleship in the City

Revelation 17
Pastor Guy Gray
5.29.2011

Two Cities

The Book of Revelation is about discipleship in the city. It opens with letters to seven churches in seven cities of the first century world. It closes with a major comparison and contrast of two “ultimate” cities: Babylon and the New Jerusalem. Which city do you belong to? God presses us with this question in the Book of Revelation.

The first city, Babylon, is the city of “this world,” city of “man.” The Bible introduces us to this city in the first few pages of Genesis. The story of the tower of Babel is the genesis of the city of Babylon in the Bible. The city of Babylon is a key theme that spans the entire story of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The Book of Revelation captures all this intense Biblical truth about Babylon and brings it to a pinnacle in Revelation chapters 17 and 18.

Here’s the bottom line, God wants you to come out of Babylon (Rev. 18:4). That’s why He put the spotlight on this city, which is more than just a city. God wants you to come out because God has something better for you. And yet there is a struggle, because Babylon pulls at each of us. If you are going to come out of Babylon you are going to have to make a choice and take action. The choice is huge and it takes a tremendous step of faith.

Abraham, Babylon and the City of God

Abraham chose. It was a monumental moment. God told Abraham to come out of Babylon and that’s exactly what he did (Genesis 12). It was a step of faith that changed the history of the world. Abraham’s obedience to the call of God is the premier Biblical model of discipleship. Abraham went out from Babylon and he did not look back. Abraham was looking for something better. He was “looking for a city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10). Amazing!

So here we are in the Book of Revelation, at the very end of the Bible, and God is still talking about coming out of Babylon. He’s also talking about His own perfect city, the New Jerusalem, which is beautifully described as the Bride of Christ (see Revelation 21 and 22). This is a comparison and contrast we can never forget. It’s one of the great master themes of the whole Bible, and one of the most important themes in Christian discipleship: a tale of two cities; two loves; two ways. This struggle of “two cities” has taken place at all times and places throughout human history, but it becomes more and more intense coming to its pinnacle in the final days.

What About Us?

Every follower of Christ faces a dilemma. We are each called to live as disciples of the “City of God,” even while we are physically living in the “city of this world.” When God calls us to “come out of Babylon,” He doesn’t call us to physically leave the city or the culture we live in. It’s more

complicated than that! God wants us to live as citizens of Heaven (the New Jerusalem), even while we still live in this fallen world. What does that mean? What does a discipleship of the City of God look like when you are living in the City of Man? These are the questions that will guide our study in Revelation 17 and 18.

Of course there are other interesting and valid questions we can ask about these chapters. These chapters point us to the future. The Babylon “pattern” that has unfolded throughout history will come to a pinnacle expression at some point in the future. The New Jerusalem is more than just an idea. It’s a future reality that we look forward to in faith and hope. We know these chapters are designed to speak to us about our discipleship right here and right now. Our quest is to hear the heart of God in these chapters. Our goal is to see our God, our world, our personal discipleship and our future hope, all in the light of what God is revealing in these final chapters of the Bible. May the Lord God open our hearts and minds to His Word!