

# Living on Solid Ground

Revelation 18

I want to start out by giving you a nickname of a city, and ask you what city is represented by that nickname. OK? I'll give you a nickname of a city, and you tell me the city:

- The city that never sleeps is? [That's New York.]
- The next one, the Windy City is? [Chicago.]
- The city where Tony Bennett left his heart? [San Francisco.]
- And, the most famous one of all – the Sandstone Capital of the world is? [That's Amherst, Ohio.]

Now, as a piece of background information that is central to understanding today's sermon message, there were also nicknames or code names in John's day when he wrote the book of Revelation, about 100 a.d. Most scholars would say that the word "Babylon" is an image or a kind of nickname for Rome and the Roman empire.

One group of scholars put it this way:

"Ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia was the political, commercial and religious center of a world empire. It was noted for its luxury and moral decadence. The title, "Babylon the Great" is ... used in Revelation for Rome as the center of opposition to God and His people. But essentially it represents all the enemies of the church [, God's people,] at all times." Concordia Self Study Bible.

John is very concerned that Rome will lure people or pressure people or intimidate people into giving up following Christ. And he wants people to know what's going to happen to Rome, and by extension to any system, to any way of life that can lure people away from following God.

With that in mind, let's focus on Revelation, chapter 18, starting with verse 1: **"After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird."** Revelation 18:1-2

**"Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea and said: 'With such violence the great city of Babylon'" [- - again, you understand what John is referring to --] "'will be thrown down, never to be found again.**

**"The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again."** Revelation 18:21-23a



Not too far from here stands this abandoned farm house. The paint is gone. The windows and doors are all missing. But for generations it was a very fine home. For many, many years there were sounds of laughter in it. Delicious smells filled the kitchen. A family celebrated Christmas morning in that house. Once relationships were formed there, perhaps babies born within those walls. But now it's just empty. And we wonder, "What happened? Where did the life go? And if the people that had lived there had made different choices, could they still have a thriving life there?"

Just as that farm house is now empty, in our Bible text John is making a staggering prediction. He's saying the same thing is going to happen to Rome. And not only Rome, but every force that is against God will one day be completely destroyed. It's going to be a ghost town. It's going to end up a vacant building. It's a way of life that ends in destruction. And John's concern is not so much with what's going to happen with Rome and with all evil. His concern is that what happens to Rome can happen to you, to us, to believers.

Like an abandoned house, however, people can have promising beginnings, bright futures, thriving hearts, and then get detoured along the way and end up with vacant souls and vacant spirits.

Let's take a moment to see how this plays out in Revelation 18. John writes about three groups of people who were counting on Rome, but, in the end, greatly disappointed.

Let's look at verse 9: **"When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!'"**

These were people who were betting everything they had on power. There were a lot of peoples, a lot of nations that made alliances with Rome because Rome was the ultimate source of power. Rome promised that an alliance would let them accomplish every achievement their heart desired. Year after year, decade after decade, it looked like a winning strategy. And then in an instant it's gone, all that power. They're left with nothing.

Next, let's look at verse 11, the next group of people who were counting on Rome. **"The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more--cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages, and bodies and souls of men."**

John lists all these luxuries and then the bodies and the souls of men. The Roman Empire was built on slavery. Estimates are there were about 60 million slaves in a population much, much smaller than our day.

These merchants were people that bet everything they had on wealth. They were sure that enough success, enough money, enough stuff would put their lives on solid ground. They bet everything they had on material gain, and in an instant it's gone. Anything that leads you away from God is like that.

Then look at the end of verse 17, "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!'"

The sea was a very uncertain place. These were people who were certain that in Rome they'd found security. And now their security is gone. They ended up with nothing.

These days we live in a different era, and we have different categories of people. My guess is we don't have a lot of sea captains here today, and we don't have any kings. Yet friends, we have the same danger. We can get lured away from full devotion to Jesus Christ. We can get lured away from enduring in faith to the end, and receiving the crown of life in heaven. So I want to bring this talk all the way home. I want to get real personal with this. I want to talk about the allurements that are most likely to get us off track in our lives today.

#### OUR ALLUREMENTS AWAY FROM GOD

If you were to end up getting distracted from running the race God has for you, if you were to get lulled into a life that is less than spiritually flourishing, if you were to fail to live up to your full, God-given potential, what would the likely cause be?

Let me share a few with you that I think we can all related to. The first is **SIN**.

The devil will try to get you to fall for temptation. The evil one says, "If you'll just go down this road, this false road, the payoff will be tremendous, and you'll experience joy. It may get you into a little spiritual detour. It may be in the grey zone, but it's worth it."

That temptation for you might involve sexual misconduct. It might involve financial wrongdoing. Maybe it would be something that would be quite public. The evil one is going to try to derail a good number of people by that method.

A second one is **HURRY**. If Satan can't make you fall, he'll settle for making you hurried -- because either way you'll miss out on living in the power of God. Either way you'll miss.

Now understand, it's not a bad thing to have much to do. It's not bad to frequently move at a fast pace.

Jesus had many things to do. Yet, He never lived with a hurried inner spirit. He was always able to stop, and He knew when He needed to be alone with the Father, or be fully present with somebody who needed Him.

Friends, I'm going to be frank on this one. Many, many of us these days live at such a pace that we are becoming superficial. Life and relationships and faith are just on the surface. You skim.

You skim relationships. You skim worship. You skim prayer. You skim God. Eventually either you go deep or you wither up. A soul cannot skim forever.

Number three: some folks are going to get derailed by replacing God with a kind of an **IDOL**, a secret idol. This is the problem that many of John's people faced. They were under constant pressure: *"Bow down to Caesar. Then you'll have wealth and comfort and social standing."*

Our idols these days aren't bowing to a Caesar. Yet, idolatry is simply the root sin to replace God with something else that becomes the ultimate foundation that we're seeking after. Every one of us wrestles with idolatry.

I don't know what the idol is that tempts you. Maybe it's **SUCCESS**. You say you worship God, but if somebody watched your life, they'd know you were really betting on achievement. You were willing to sacrifice time that belonged to your family. You're willing to use people. You're willing to finesse the truth and manipulate co-workers all to achieve results because the truth is really that's your idol.

Or your idol could be **THINGS**. Maybe if you're honest about your life you'd have to say, "The truth about my heart is I really do

think that if I had enough stuff, then I would be content. That's what I'm really living for."

Your idol could be **RELATIONSHIPS**. Maybe you're counting on another human being to fill the hole in your heart that can only be filled by God, and you're betting everything on that person. Friends, the day is going to come when you'll see that idol was not worth building your life on. And you'll be left with nothing.

I'll tell you another factor that derails a lot of people. It's **ISOLATION**, experiencing relational disconnect or unresolved conflict that moves somebody into isolation.

Often I'll talk with somebody who *used* to be part of a church, but they're not anymore. And when I ask them what happened, often it was a relational wound that never got healed. So they left. Self- isolated.

Many people never grow in faith, never serve, never take risks for God because they held themselves back from engaging in a Bible study group. Other people choose a hobby, or choose some recreation so that they never worship God, and they have cut themselves off from Christ, from hearing His Word, from receiving forgiveness in the Sacrament of Communion.

That kind of makes sense because God values relationship. If we won't love one another then we can't love God. When we isolate, we destroy our faith.

John is so concerned that the people he loves are being lured away from God.

So he gives them this warning. This is really the pastoral heart of this whole chapter, Revelation 18:4, "**Then I heard another voice from heaven say: 'Come out of her, my people' [-- come out of her, run from Rome, flee --] so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.**"

Now, when this voice from heaven says, "Come out of her," obviously he's not talking about geographic relocation. He's not talking about a physical move. He's talking about spiritual relocation.

He's saying, "Don't live the way they live. Don't give your heart to what they give their hearts to." Resist evil. Fight on. You struggle with sin and temptation and evil now. But it won't go on forever. Evil has already been defeated. So, if you endure in faith with Jesus Christ, then your life is really on solid ground. You will not be disappointed.

Do you remember when you were a young teenager? You asked your parents to go somewhere – maybe a party. Or you wanted to wear certain clothes that your parents said were too revealing. Did you responded with that old argument, "But everybody else is doing it." You thought that would win your parents over. Do you remember that? Maybe you remember your children using that same argument with you. "Everybody else is doing it." I just want to – or feel I need to – go along with the crowd.

How did your parents respond to you back then? Did they say, "Oh well, if everybody else is doing it, how silly of me to say 'No.'" Please excuse my ignorance. Of course you can! Go ahead, do whatever everybody else is doing." Was that your parents' response? I bet not.

These days it sure seems that everybody else is doing what God said is wrong. And those who hold to God's truths are more and more called "ignorant," "backwards," "haters," or even "racist." I was very disappointed in our President's words on Thursday night when he said that those people who believe abortion is morally wrong, that homosexuality is a sin to be called out from and not to be celebrated, that marriage between a man and a woman is just old fashioned – he said those who hold these views are a minority dragging our nation backwards.

The media argues for these kinds of values all the time – in social media, news articles, TV, and movies. Politicians want schools to sell these values to our children.

College professors ridicule Christians for their beliefs in their classrooms.

It seems there is no way we can hold to a different view. It seems that our world is powerful and there is no room for God's truth or we get left out, put out, and shut up.

If you feel this rising pressure in America today to go along with the power of our world, if you feel pressure to keep your faith to yourself and keep it private, then can you imagine the pressure the Christians John wrote to in 100AD felt? They were so marginalized. Believers were shut out of society, lost out on employment, and often lost their very lives for their faith in Jesus. Going along with everyone else seemed like the best and only way to go!

But friends, it doesn't matter who or how many people say a sin is right, or say God's truth is wrong. What God says and does is right and true, no matter what anyone else – even the powerful, successful, wealthy of our world – say.

This world and it's values will fall. Count on it. Only God and His word, and His people will live in eternal heaven. Count on it.

Those who trust in this world will be disappointed. So friends, stay firm in your faith in Jesus. Even when it looks like everyone is against you, stay firm in faith in Jesus. You will never be disappointed!

Why will you not be disappointed? Because God's promises are not just wishes. You can take His promises to you to the bank!

**Payment of SIN is complete.**

**“He did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now,**



**once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.”** Hebrews 9:25-26 What Jesus did means you ARE forgiven!

Since Jesus defeated sin, that means **The ALLURE of sin is DEAD**. You don't HAVE to do what everyone else is doing. Paul says:

**“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”**

Colossians 3:2-3 You have been given a new and *different* kind of life. The power of this world has no effect on you. Your life is now tied to Jesus, or hidden with Christ in God. That's what matters to you now.

You will not be disappointed as you keep your faith in Jesus, because God has elevated you, made you a new and different kind of person. The Bible says: **New LIFE is a REALITY**.

**“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”** 1 Peter 2:9

And folks, the temporary power and good times of this world will all end. Living for those things will lead to a shocking disappointment. **HEAVEN is certain**. **“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”** Philippians 3:14 But your faith is certain. Paul wrote that he lived, knowing he was on his way to heaven. Heaven IS your certain destiny.

**Cling Firm in Faith to Jesus Christ.**

**HE'S SOLID GROUND FOR LIVING!**

Temptation is always a long-term loser. It looks good in the short run, but it's always a long-term loser. That's not solid ground for living. That life only ends up like a ghost town. Babylon the great is fallen. All the powers of evil have already been defeated, and soon victory over the enemy will be complete. Only Jesus Christ is solid ground for living. So cling to Him. Endure to the end, and you'll receive the crown of life that's waiting for you in heaven.

That's why, immediately after these harsh words of judgment in today's Bible text, John immediately turns to the fact that faith in Jesus never disappoints. Faith in Jesus leads to an eternity with God, our loving Savior. Let me close with this description of those who are never disappointed because they always trusted in Jesus, no matter what!

**Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder:**

**"Praise the LORD!**

**For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.**

**Let us be glad and rejoice,**

**and let us give honor to him.**

**For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb,**

**and his bride has prepared herself.**

**She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear."**

**For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God's holy people.**

Revelation 19:6-8

**AMEN.**