

05.16.21

Revelation

Chapter 17 - Revealing that Which Allures Men

The Scope of Seduction (vs. 1-5)

Revelation 17:1-5: Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.” And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

Usually when people share their devotional with me, they don't read out of this particular chapter. But there are so many wonderful things in this chapter because it is warning us and it is revealing to us things that so easily allure us. We're so easily dissuaded, aren't we? And persuaded to do the wrong things. And we realize that there is a force and a power that is at work. What's interesting about the Book of Revelation is that Revelation puts a face on it, whereas the tendency is to think of something basically innocuous because, "Gee, what's the big deal about going out and partying with friends?" And God says, "Okay, so you didn't see the face." So, what He does is He gives you the face, and you go, "Well, that's a monster." And He goes, "Right, it's a monster." You see that, and really, there's a parallel passage to this, and it's already been introduced to us, in Revelation 13, and it begins to describe this beast that is coming out. And when you see the description of the beast, you can't help but then parallel that to Daniel, and

you realize, "This beast is a conglomerate of all the nations that have ever existed as world powers." And God says, "Right." And you need to know that they are beasts, because they're here to devour. They're not here to help you. They're not here to make you feel better. They're not here to protect you. That's a beast that's here to devour you. So, the interesting description, as He starts off in Chapter 13 and then picks up again as we come now to Chapter 17.

As we've been going through the bowls of the wrath of God, what we've been seeing is what angers God. And what we've seen is really the things that have caused pain and hurt and heartache and division and strife throughout the years, and the bowls are just revealing that. God also has revealed to us that it was His desire to forgive these things, and probably one of the greatest reasons why you would be so upset is because you could have been saved. I could just hear Christ say, "I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you wouldn't have Me." And the sadness of that and the anger that comes from somebody rejecting, as the way it's put in 2 Thessalonians

2, the love of the truth so as to be saved. Why would somebody reject the love of the truth when you could be saved? And that's the great consternation within the passage.

As we come to this passage in this text, we begin to realize that there's a tie at the end of Chapter 16 to the beginning of Chapter 17. And that is, you have the seventh angel that pours out that seventh bowl at the end of Chapter 16.

And what happens, if you look with me in particular in verse 19, as a result of that is,

(Revelation 16:19) "The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations..."

Which is now describing to us really what Babylon is. Babylon is the "cities of the nations". That's the forces that have influenced us. And the places that we oftentimes run to as safe harbor, but really are the places of deception to us.

So, the way it reads is,

"... the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God..."

Now, as you drop on down to Revelation 17:1, it starts off this way,

"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters."

Of course, ultimately, verse 5, it's Babylon the great. So, the tie is this. And probably it can be read this way, "And the one of the seven angels who had the seventh bowl spoke to me." So, it's this angel that is actually revealing to us this final judgment of Babylon. And it is God's anger really over the seduction of His people. And the fact that there is a seducing and intoxicating influence that is coming in trying to allure His people away from Him.

Really, if you were to put the whole thing in a nutshell, it really is seen very clearly in James 4:4, as he says in that particular text, "Don't you know that friendship with God is like an adulterous relationship?" You're having an adulterous relationship. I mean, don't you love God? So,

John will say in 1 John 2, "Love not the world. Don't fall in love with the world because you're having a love affair with the wrong one. You love the wrong person." So, when it talks about things like adultery and harlotry, what it's talking about specifically is that you've played the harlot, you've gone from God, and you've gone into other things. You've literally sold yourself to the things of the world, and you've allowed the things of the world to allure you.

As we come to this passage, lest you forget and get so immersed in the imagery that you miss the point, the tie in all of this is, this is written to the church. Now, the point of this is that there's an arsenal of the world that endeavors to marginalize, mask, eradicate the church. The world is not going to be happy till it closes the doors of the church. This is why this practice run (with covid) was so important as we took a stand because we were not going to let the world close the door to the church. That's what the world wants to do. And it wants to, it'll start off by marginalizing by saying, well, it's not really that important. You don't really have to be there. But then it'll

“mask” you. It'll shut you up. But then ultimately the desire is to eradicate it. All of these things are happening as a result of the allurements of the church, and it's very easy for the church to get allured into the world's way of thinking. And so, the picture is that you have this great allurements that is calling the church out and away. This is why Scripture will say, "You've got to get out of there."

And in particular, if you look with me in Chapter 18, just by way of reminder, it says, if you drop on down to verse 4, dealing with Babylon, by the way,

(Revelation 18:4) "I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues.'"

And we know that He's talking about Babylon because of verse 2, "... "Fallen, fallen is Babylon...""

And you can virtually hear the same words in 2 Corinthians 6:14, as you go to the end of the chapter. He says, "You've got to get out of there. Come out from among and be separate. Don't be a part of these things." Because the world is trying to shut the church doors. And it is causing this to happen by virtue of the church

becoming like the world. And how does that happen? Well, all these allurements begin to come in. This is the tie, because once again, who is this book written to? The seven churches of Asia Minor. Right. Don't take my word for it. Go back.

Chapter 1. And we'll just read verse 4.

Chapter 1 starts off,

(Revelation 1:1) "The Revelation of Jesus Christ..."

And then,

(Revelation 1:4) "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace..."

Who is he writing to? The 7 churches that are in Asia, who are representative of the churches of the world, churches of this day and age, even today. So, he's writing to us.

Why is he telling the church this? So that they don't go in the tribulation? No, it has nothing to do with whether or not the church goes in the tribulation or not. It has everything to do with showing the church the face of evil.

So, this particular picture, as we come into Chapter 17, is the face of the allurement that comes in and the picture

of it. This picture has been being fostered throughout Scripture.

In fact, just take a moment, go to Proverbs 6, if you would, with me. One of the great themes of the Book of Proverbs is that this is a book of wisdom written to the naive. And the hope is we're going to suck the naivety out of the naive, right? Because he's just full of it. And the picture, of course, is found in Chapter 7 of just how stupid he is. The very place that he shouldn't be walking by is the very place that he goes. And he buys it "hook, line, and sinker," whatever words that are being said, because she's so pretty, because she promised him all kinds of things. And so, he's not thinking. He doesn't know that he's like a lamb to the slaughter. He's not thinking. But it's described probably best in this short passage, so we won't spend a lot of time going into that. But if you look in Proverbs 6 and the description is in the warning in verse 24.

Of course, if you back up to verse 20,

(Proverbs 6:20) “My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother.”

So, you kind of have this conference of mom and dad going, "Okay, we've got to warn you about this."

Drop on down to verse 24.

(Proverbs 6:24) “To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress.

(Proverbs 6:25) Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you with her eyelids.”

Even back then, they were doing that.

(Proverbs 6:26) “For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread...”

She just sees you as money. She just sees you as something that's a commodity.

"... And an adulteress hunts for the precious life.

(Proverbs 6:27) Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned?”

So, interesting passage of description, and of course, this proverb goes on to say, you can see the allurements of this woman and how the naive so easily go into the clutches. And really, as Scripture goes on to say, her bed is in Sheol. She's going to kill you. And you're going to die going down this path.

So, as we come to Chapter 17, it is that personification that is already understood within the passage. And what it does is, it puts a face on the allurements of the world. Now, we know according to 2 Timothy 3:1, that in the last days, perilous times will come. And here's the description: Men will be lovers of self and lovers of money. Now, it goes on and describes the love of other things, but those are going to be the great allurements. And what you know is that self-gratification is what people basically live for. And greed and avarice is certainly a part of the draw of men. I mean, you waive a dollar bill... It's strange what people do for money, isn't it? You know, I see this thing and go, "Really? You would risk your life for that? I mean, I can understand risking your life to go into the mission field or something like that, but for money, really?"

People do all kinds of stuff, and they'll embarrass themselves tremendously for money. All you have to do is ask them, "Would you do this strange thing?" "Oh, no, I'd never do that." "How about for \$1,000,000?" "Well, maybe." This almost instantly changes at that particular point.

So, in Chapter 17, he starts off with, you know, the seventh angel being connected with that Babylon, and it's splitting up. And of course, we talk specifically about the influences of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. And when you think of the influences of Babylon, those are the three influences of the great city of Babylon. It is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life that brings in that destruction in people's lives. It's an interesting picture.

(Revelation 17:1) "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me..."

That is John.

"... saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters."

And the first thing that he does is he separates John, he pulls him aside, and he says, "Come up here." And what he's doing within the text is he's separating him from the world. Now, this to me is a picture, once again, that we're getting, not only in Chapter 18, where it's talking about "You've got to get out of there. But he's also given that picture, as Paul gave us that picture in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 in particular, "Come out of the world. You need to get out of there." The point is that you and I can't see things clearly until you step outside of this realm. Look, you're in the middle of it. One of the reasons why the church is called "*ekklēsia*". That means "called out ones." Did you know that? So, what we're doing every Sunday is calling you out from the world. And then what we do is we sit back with you, and we go, "Okay, now look at the world from here." And when you can look at the world from here, you go, "Okay, it's not so good." When you're in it, you can't see it too clearly. You're so immersed in it, you're listening to the lies and you're believing them because that's all they're about. But we call you out. And we say, "Let me show you what it's about." And the description is not only making reference to the case that

there's a forensic case, there's a case that God has against this great harlot. But if you look at the passage, He's actually giving you the legal case, the indictment against Babylon. And the indictment is, great harlot. See the text? "*Pornē*" is actually the word that's used, which basically means that she sells herself for money. Yeah, it's just money. So, to understand that people are so willing to sell themselves. I know people that won't go to church because they have to make money. And I'm going, "Why would you keep selling yourself? Are you up for sale?" So, what the world wants to do is it wants you to think in terms of avarice and greed and all these kinds of things so that you would be pulled away from that which is really valuable. So, the great harlot is one who is being indicted here, somebody that's selling themselves. And if you look at the passage, the description is, "who sits on many waters."

Now, as we go through the description, each verse, verse 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, there is an allurement that's being described in each of the texts. So, the first allurement within the passage that allures not only the church, but

obviously you and I as individuals, is the allurement of mass affirmation.

The text reads,

"... who sits on many waters."

Now, at this juncture, you don't know what the many waters refer to, but I cheated. And I read ahead, and if you look with me in verse 15, you could cheat too.

(Revelation 17:15) "And he said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues."

So, we actually know what they are. So, the point of the passage is that she sits or she rules over many peoples. The emphasis is that you're dealing with mass. You're dealing with majority. I guess we could call it two-thirds majority, because two-thirds of the earth are what? Or close anyway. So, there's your two-thirds majority. I've always wondered where that came from. But it has nothing to do with being right. You see, we think in terms of, "Wow, look at all the people. All these people can't be wrong." Well, they were with Noah. So, it's actually

possible for a majority to be wrong. So, the emphasis of this is that this woman is taking her cues from the majority that are storm-tossed.

The way that's put in Isaiah 54:11,

"O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted..."

And that's the description of the sea. The wicked are like the tossing sea. It can't be quiet because there is no peace for the wicked. And if, in fact, you reside over the sea, what are you taking your cues from? Well, you're obviously taking your cues from storm-tossed, discomforted, capricious, confused, undisciplined, volatile people. "Let's vote on it." Well, it's not going to go well for you. But the allurements are popularity, is the mass. There's a mass affirmation. And what the evil one does is uses this to put pressure on people. I mean, you know yourself. You've probably walked in restaurants where you got some looks. And you could feel the pressure of the majority, couldn't you? You can feel it. I remember going to school, you know? I remember taking one class at Cal State, and it was a big class. It seemed like 1,000 people. I don't know how many people were there. But

the professor goes, "So, how many of you would call yourselves Christians? One. Mine started going like this. I'm looking around, I'm going, "There's nobody else in the class." Oh my goodness. I mean, you feel the pressure. And you can understand why people cave so much because that's a pretty powerful force, that mass affirmation. So, the passage is describing all the way through the things that come.

Now, what's interesting to me about this is that in many respects it's going to parallel to one of the seven churches. And one of the interesting things about the church of Sardis, which if you remember reading about the church of Sardis, I know it was a while back, but what you read specifically is that they are concerned about having a name. And it's about "mass affirmation." And God is saying, "You may have a name, but it doesn't matter because I'm against you." You know, as a church, we shouldn't buy into the allurements of the world. The world is trying to allure us to think like them so that we not only become marginalized, but ultimately, so we just shut up. And it's moving in such a way that there are

these pressures that come upon us, but we cannot think like the world.

So, the first thing is "sits on many waters." That's the emphasis of the passage. Now, we know that the description of the world is that it has already sold itself out. It's not wanting to do the right thing; sold itself out to his pleasures, to whatever he wants; the self-gratification; narcissistic desires. But that's verse 1.

Verse 2 then goes in to describe even in more detail, (Revelation 17:2) "with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality..."

That's basically an unlawful intercourse. Which, what's the unlawful intercourse? The unlawful intercourse is that you've loved the world instead of God. You've loved the world instead of God.

Once again, let's turn to James. It's just good to have these passages marked so that you can see the correlation between the two. If you look with me in James 4, once again, the whole issue about just being upset, talk about seas, right? Tumultuous seas. How does it start off?

(James 4:1) "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

(James 4:2) You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel..."

You obviously don't have any peace, so there's the tossing sea.

(James 4:3) "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives..."

Watch verse 4. What's the problem? You have a love affair. With what? The world.

(James 4:4) "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? ..."

You're dating the wrong girl. That's what's happening. You know, you put a face on it, and it gets more intense. You know, if you just said, "Well, you're getting mixed up with the world." You'd go, "So what?" But you say, "You're dating another girl and you're married!" Okay, that puts another face on it. And that's what he's trying to convey

within this particular passage of James. And what we're seeing in Chapter 17 is that the world has sold itself out, and it's trying to get you to do the same thing. And it's by mass affirmation or by presiding intoxication.

Because the passage then goes on to say, if you look in verse 2,

(Revelation 17:2) "with whom the kings of the earth committed..."

That's presiding. That's authority. Those are forces that are often influential.

"with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality."

Now, he's describing a presiding intoxication, that you're intoxicated. You're getting drunk. That whole thing of addiction, I think, in many respects, is an interesting metaphor for sin in your life. This is why Ephesians 5 uses it. It says, "Don't get drunk with wine. That's dissipation. You're just wasting your life." But that "drunk with wine" becomes a metaphor for any sin that is intoxicating to

you. And the experts, in their observations, have realized that intoxication has certain signs to it, and more specifically addiction kind of creates certain ways.

There are three things in particular they mention. One of the signs of an addiction is that you have an overpowering desire and compulsion. When he's talking about the earth being made to drink the wine of immorality, what he's basically saying is that they became obsessed.

Compulsion came in. Well, what is it that makes people want more? Well, maybe it's your neighbors. "Joneses have some, I need more." But there's something that begins to intoxicate, and before long you have this overpowering desire, and people just can't stop. You ever heard of workaholics? They just can't seem to stop because they can't have enough. It's kind of the picture of Ezekiel 27 and 28 where it's using Tyre as a description of the city that keeps going out and getting more. It's not satisfied with staying in port. And once again, there's that picture of the seas that are restless. You just have to keep going out and obtaining more. Of course, it ultimately

becomes a picture of Satan himself. But it's that presiding intoxication that moves us.

The second thing that they say it creates is a tendency to increase dosage. In other words, you're not just satisfied with the original compulsion. You now want to increase the dosage. It's just got to be more.

And the third thing that happens is a physiological dependence on it. Not just physiological in the sense of the alcohol, but now a psychological dependence on it, "I do need it." "Well, why do you need it?" "Because I've been doing this for a while and this is what I do." And that dependence is that which becomes intoxicating.

The signs of these things, they say, is, one, the inability to cope without it. "Yeah. I don't think I can make the day without it." "Why?" "I just can't. I can't." Or you have a problem, and what's the first thing you do? You have a problem, where's the first place you go? The world.

You're intoxicated. "Oh, I need the world." "Why?" "I just do. I can't cope without it." There's a neglecting, interestingly enough, and an alienation from family and friends. Isn't it interesting how people will abandon their

family and friends to make money, to go after careers? That's one of the signs of addiction. One of the signs of addiction is that you're unable to think or reason clearly. "You do know you're wasting your life." "No, I'm not."

The fourth is you're unable to control or stop your destructive behavior. "I wish I could stop." Why don't you? They say there are actually stages in stopping. The first stage is, you're plagued with guilt. "I feel terrible I'm doing this. I don't want to do this anymore." But what's interesting in that particular stage is, you still rationalize. So, though you're plagued with guilt, you know, "But hey, I've got to do this, right? I mean, there's nothing else I can do. I have no other choices, right?" Well, that's part of addiction; you're involved in rationalization. The second thing is you attempt to change your patterns, but you still consume the same amount. But you're trying to trick yourself. And they say the process is that you don't lessen your consumption, but you just change your pattern. But the third thing that begins to happen is that what used to be just something that would be done at night, now begins to happen in the morning. And then after that, you

begin to start binging. And then you know what the last stage is? Here's the last stage. You give up. That's the last stage.

The world is trying to get us to give up. It's trying to get us to stop doing what we're doing. It's intoxicating us. It's moving us. So, what it does is, it puts us in the realm of this authority, this power. It's no wonder when Paul talks about your sin, he says, "It's like you're in bondage." It's no wonder that he puts it in those particular terms because it's like authorities that are coming in and putting you in bondage, and the world has this authority.

Well, look at the passage,

(Revelation 17:2) "... the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality..."

They've already sold themselves. And now, they're trying to intoxicate the world with it. You sit back and you say, "Well, if these people do it..." That makes it more intoxicating, doesn't it? The more influential the people are, you get movie stars, you get other people, and you go, "These are people that we look up to," because that's the way you do it. I mean, in some people's lives, it's the

experts. But whoever it is, these authorities now begin to allure, and you have this presiding intoxication.

If you look with me in verse 3,

(Revelation 17:3) "And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness..."

The wilderness is this desolate, depraved place, and it really is a picture of a deprivation of aid, of any kind of protection. Now, the picture that He's wanting to give, if you look in verse 3, is that the woman, though sitting on a beast, is going to be deprived of any kind of protection or any kind of aid. So, that's the picture that's given.

If you look at the end, it begins to describe it,

"... and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast..."

So, the color itself is a very interesting thing because this color, red, and this word actually means "worm," or more specifically, "maggot". I'm trying to be nice about this. So, it's a maggot. The actual word for "scarlet," is the maggot head that is crushed and it becomes red. And that's what they use for dye. I don't think it's a mistake that Satan is called Beelzebub, "lord of flies," but what it's showing is

the sacrifice and the waste of sacrifice that has been used to adorn this god; that we have upheld this city, and this power, the powers of the nations.

And so, if you look at the passage, it goes on,

"And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast..."

Which, of course, the blood of the saints, you're going to see as we go on, has been certainly a part of, and the blood of mankind to actually have this on the beast.

"... full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns."

I'm trying not to get into too much detail with you. If you back up into Chapter 13, and you look with me in verse 1, here's the picture.

(Revelation 13:1) "And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore..."

There we are in the sea again, right? This ought to be telling you something. Where are the problems coming from? The majority of the world that are restless. You

think the world is peaceful? Then why are they going all over the place trying to get more stuff?

"... Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads..."

See him? Then he begins to describe, like a leopard, like a bear, like a... Well, you go back into Daniel, it's much like the nations that have been a part of the earth, the powers of the world, so to speak.

But in Revelation 17, this woman is sitting on the beast, full of blasphemous names, having 7 heads and 10 horns. Now, the emphasis of the 7 heads and the 10 horns, the heads making reference to authority, horns making reference to power, is that you have a controlling intimidation. 10 = fullness. 7 = completion. In other words, the authority is there and all of the power is wielded there. And that's intimidating. And that's one of the things that is alluring in the world. If you can get an intimidating force that is unquestionably in control, then you can't buck it, right? I mean, you got to ride with it. And you have this interesting picture of the world selling out, and then a force and a power that becomes, well, the

very thing that it rides on. And it becomes very intimidating and forceful.

I think one of the great pictures of this is found in Isaiah 14, where it describes Babylon as a great oppressor. And God finally says, "I'm going to take this oppression away from you." But that's alluring to the church in the sense of you get too much pressure on a church, I mean, you get lawyers coming after them and all kinds of things, the world coming after them, authorities coming after them, and you know, you're wanting to throw in the towel.

The fourth thing, if you look in there, verse 4, is that you have excessive affluence. And it's really a picture of tackiness or gaudiness, but hey, it's a lot of gold, right?

So, if you look in verse 4,

(Revelation 17:4) "The woman was clothed in purple..."

By the way, shellfish had to be crushed for that to happen. But it's obviously a picture of royalty has been granted to her.

"... and scarlet..."

Obviously, within the fact of much death has happened for her to be clothed in that.

"... and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup..."

You know, one of the things the world does very well is that they make evil look rich. They just do. And it's one of the great allurements. I mean, if you can put gold around anything, then you almost automatically go, "Well, that looks pretty." It could be a dragon or it could be a snake, "Look how wonderful that looks." Put a diamond in it, and everybody wants it. So, the point is that here you have abominations, unclean things, immorality, all looking alluring. Because, well, I'd like to say it's more complicated than this, but money's involved. And wealth and riches and affluence. And the excessive affluence and wealth of self-indulgence, the allurements of self-indulgence, are almost irresistible. It is, in many cases.

Now, it ends this way in verse 5,

(Revelation 17:5) "and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON..."

Now, the reason the mystery exists and really is the last and final allurements is that you have a mysterious attachment.

The passage reads,

"... a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.""

A harlot has become a mother of the earth. And what's bizarre is the attachment to this; that the world actually sees this as something to attach to. And you have this lewd, unbridled overindulgence. It really is described in more detail in Ezekiel 23. But the best way I can describe it is there's this inexplicable hold of endearment that people have with the world. "Why don't you let it go?" "I love it." "Do you know what the world is? Do you know what they're doing? You know how they're using you?" "Yeah, but I love it." And you go, "That's a mystery to me." That's one of the great mysteries.

Now, the context of this, once again, is it's written to whom? Seven churches in Asia Minor. And if you understand this, then you also understand that what He's doing specifically within the passage is warning these

seven churches. So, for instance, when you're dealing with the church of Sardis in Revelation 3:1, He's warning them about the allurements of popularity. I mean, I've actually known works in which they think in terms of, "We've got to fill these pews." And they do almost anything and everything to do that. And a church doesn't exist to do that. Now, should we be happy and elated over the fact that people come and receive Christ? Yes. And I would say, yes, the more the merrier, but they have to really want to love God. I mean, yeah, I'd want a big family, but I'd want to know that they were wonderful kids. I wouldn't want to raise bad kids. So, the point is that the world has so infiltrated the church that it's been allured into the thought that it's all about numbers. Of course, that wouldn't be true in our country, would it? I mean, when you think about it, and that's what Sardis was all about. "I mean, Sardis, you have a name for yourself. You're really, wow!" And God says, "I don't like that." And we begin to understand why. Because the world is actually alluring through this. And you start focusing on numbers, then you stop focusing on God. Once you start doing that, then there's no longer a desire

and a love to lift Him up. And quite frankly, not shortly after that, compromise begins to happen because it's all for the sake of the numbers.

So, you read, for instance, in Revelation 3:17 about Laodicea. And you have this wealthy church, and the church says, "I'm so wealthy, we don't even need God. We can handle it. We have money to do that." And they're not putting their trust in God. Well, you understand where that came from. I mean, the affluence of the harlot has come into the church. But the whole point of all this is, don't let this come in your doors. You have Thyatira, according to Revelation 2:20, who is known to be tolerant of evil. And you've opened your door to these things, and you have Ephesus that is harsh and overbearing, and you have this sense of authority just telling you what to do, and you have Pergamon that's opportunistic and, well, it's all about career mindedness. You know, the church of Pergamon was surrounded by unions, and unions were making decisions, and people were worshipping in union halls because, hey, they needed a paycheck. So, they couldn't not, right? I mean,

that was part of the union way. And so, John is writing to them, he says, "You can't do this. You can't let Jezebel come in and start delegating what you're going to do because of your career." And the world's going to try in so many ways to come in and manipulate the church and to get us off track. And this picture puts a face on it. This is why it's so important that you understand what Revelation is about. What we're seeing is the evil personified. And God is revealing this to us and is saying, "It's not just that you're taking money and putting it in a prominent place in the church. It's that you're now being sucked into the whole game of selling yourself." And you realize, "Okay, we can't let this happen." This is one of the reasons why the church has to take very strong stands on issues such as this, because this is where the world starts coming in and manipulating and taking us away from following Christ.

You come to the wonderful gospel of Jesus Christ, and He comes. Do you think there was a reason why He was born in a manger? Do you think there was a reason why He was born in the little town of Bethlehem? Do you think there

was a reason why the first people that really got to see Him were shepherds and not the kings? Do you think there was a reason why He lived in Nazareth? Do you think there was a reason why the disciples that He got didn't come from the city, but came from the rural areas? Do you think all along Jesus was demonstrating the pattern that it's about faith in God; it's about a relationship? It's not an organization and it's not an institution and we're not trying to build great emphasis unto ourselves. Don't get sucked into that. The church must stay separate. Come out from among them, be separate.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today, and we ask you to change our hearts. Lord, we are inundated with things that the world is saying that's just not true. It's not true. It's not true. Our relationship with You is what it's all about. And You, as we were reading earlier today, take us into green pastures and restore our soul. You take us away from the noise and the hustle and bustle and the

confusion and as Isaiah so aptly puts it, the chaotic city. And You bring us into a place of rest. We begin to hear the gentle, quiet waters of Shiloah. And we realize that You came to give us peace. We realize that we can't think like the world. It's trying to get in the doors. We've got to be separate. And yet, Lord, help us as we go out into the world to proclaim this wonderful message of peace, that as we have come out and seen the truth, and the picture has become clear, let us reveal that to those that are lost. With your heads bowed and your eyes closed, Revelation is speaking to you; it's speaking to me. It's telling us not to get intertwined with the things of the world, but even more than that, it's calling upon us to cry out, "Lord Jesus, come. I want out of this place. This isn't my home." And it creates a longing for that which is real, rather than that which is not only self-indulgent, but just a selling of oneself to things that are destructive. When we come together today, we come that you might be separate. I trust that as we've opened up God's word, the Spirit of God has been calling you.