NUMBER 5 – A TALE OF TWO CITIES – BABYLON

Babylon was notorious in the history of the people of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar had carted off the people of Judah around 600 years before Jesus. It was ‘by the rivers of Babylon, the people wept when they remembered Zion’ (Jerusalem) (Psalm 137). We know that the fall of Babylon cannot be literal – it was mostly in ruins around BC300, only 300 years after the height of its fame and the time of Judah’s exile.

So certain is its fall that it is written in the past tense (‘has become’) although it is yet to happen. (18:2). The city is described as ‘the home of demons and evil spirits’. The way the city is described suggests it is the symbol of all that is evil and has led nations and rulers (v3) away from the true worship of God. Anyone who has practiced idolatry (worship of false gods) will be judged.

1. Verse 3 suggests that greed comes under condemnation from God. What kinds of evil that exist in our 21st century world come under condemnation?

How do you think a Christian reading chapter 18 at the end of the first century would have reacted?

How does the fact that, ultimately, all evil will come under God’s condemnation, help us deal with the wickedness we see in our world today?

It might be appropriate to go back at this point to a quote from Jeremiah which synchronises so well with the fall of Babylon

 ***‘You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before you.***

 ***Yet I would speak with you about your justice.***

 ***Why does the way of the wicked prosper?***

 ***Why do all the faithless live at ease?’ Jeremiah 12:1***

1. This has always worried Christian people down the ages? Why do the wicked get away with it?

Why does God allow Putin to butcher Ukrainians?

Why do the people traffickers of Calais earn such huge sums of money exploiting desperate people?

Why did Mr. X get away with cheating or abusing me?

Discuss !!!!

Does the fall of Babylon concept help you with this?

There will be a final judgement which no one will escape. So, God’s people are told to leave the place of wickedness (Babylon) – it is the place where God’s justice will be final and complete(v4). This echoes the words to the seven churches in chapters 2 & 3. Believers need to persevere and overcome – Christ is with us to help us – God’s Holy Spirit lives in us to direct, help and strengthen us. We must turn our backs on wickedness.

1. Is it sometimes difficult to turn away from something we know to be wrong?

What are the issues that get in the way of us persevering in our faith?

The scale of the judgement on Babylon is huge – read chapter 18 verses 5 to 8. This is piling on pressure even double what she has given out (v6)

1. Is judgement a concept we find difficult?

Shouldn’t we show love and forgive those who do evil things?

There is no hint of repentance in Babylon’s behaviour so don’t they get what they deserve?

Whatever we think, the scale and speed of God’s judgement is terrifying. (v10) Read verses 9 to 16 to get the full force of God’s actions.

1. Do we sometimes underplay wickedness?

Do we believe in the wrath (anger) of God against all that is wicked in our world?

Is the church too slow in condemning the actions of wicked people?

Has political correctness blunted our prophetic voice?

All this talk about God’s fearsome judgement should remind us that the believer is safe from the awful picture of chapter 18. If, with God’s help, we have tried to ‘persevere’ and ‘overcome’ we will be spared the righteous anger of God because we are covered by the finished, forgiving work of Jesus on the cross (remember the slain lamb of chapter 5 verse 6).

1. Are we aware enough of what Christ’s death on the cross has accomplished?

Is heaven seen as a massive privilege that we have in no way earned?

In your prayer time you could thank God for his amazing love and grace in giving you a future hope in heaven for ever.

A POSSIBLE EXERCISE

During the coming week read this chapter in Revelation (chapters 18).

Perhaps think about this.

 Would you rather have a God who looked at evil and wickedness and basically did nothing about it?

 OR

 Would you rather have a God who finally and fairly dealt with justice in His way?

Think about one particular wicked event that you are aware of. Could you pray for the people involved? Could you give some money to a society that is trying to deal with injustice?

WE’RE NEARLY THERE !!!!!!!!!!

NEXT WEEK we see THE NEW JERUSALEM