

The Mother of False Religions, part 2

Revelation 17:1-7

(preached Pine Grove 7/16/17; Sunday AM)

Introduction

Calvin Coolidge was the 30th president of the United States, serving from 1923-1929...

He was a man of few words but loved to play practical jokes...

On one occasion, Coolidge decided to play a joke on folks who were visiting the White House for a highly formal dinner...

Coolidge knew that it common courtesy for visitors to simply imitate his actions in this highly formal setting...

People would only place their napkin in their lap once he had done so...

They would only select a fork by following what he did..

They would only eat when he began to eat...

So on this occasion, he decided to have a little fun with them but also teach them a lesson...

After dinner was served, the meal turned to coffee followed by dessert...

So Coolidge grabbed his coffee cup and saucer and placed his cup in an upright position but did not place it on the saucer...

Everyone at the table did just the same...

Once the servers poured coffee in everyone's cup, Coolidge took his cup and poured a little bit in his saucer, where he proceeded to pour sugar and creamer in the saucer and mix it together...

To Coolidge's amusement, everyone at the table did the same thing...

Once it was mixed, Coolidge took the saucer, called his cat over and placed the saucer in the floor for the cat to have a little coffee...

Everyone at the table grinned in embarrassment while Coolidge had the last laugh, and a lesson about blind imitation was taught...

The saying is that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

And that may be true in many cases, but when it comes to world religions, imitation is the worst form of evil...

With respect to salvation and the gospel, imitation of the true faith of biblical Christianity will not only lead you astray today, it will send you to hell for eternity...

The gospel is not a game of horseshoes or grenades where getting close is good enough...

You may get into a ballgame with a fake ticket but you will not make it to heaven in a false religion...

And there are many false religions that look like the real thing...

And that number is growing every day...

You see false religions imitate true faith in Christ...

False religions offer a way to heaven, but unfortunately they are copies and counterfeits of the only way to heaven..

And we must know what false religions look like in order to avoid being taken captive by them and also to be able to snatch others from their grip...

Last week, we began to examine Revelation 17:1-7, which is a set of verse that describe the fall of the final form of false religion at the end of time...

And though they describe a future final false religious system, they can teach us much about false religions today, which are shadows of the dark religion that will be formed at the end of time...

You see, world history is headed to an end...

The world will not go on forever and ever as it is now...

The Bible, which clearly teaches the God created and began the world also teaches that God will bring the world to a close...

And the description of how the world ends is found in the final book of the Bible, the book of Revelation...

Now, we have been looking at this book for almost 10 months now...

And we have learned that the end of the world will begin with the rapture of the church...

The church which is composed of the true believers in Jesus Christ will be removed from the earth to be with their Lord in heaven...

And then sometime shortly after, the world will begin to pick up speed to the destructive end...

After the rapture of the church, a man who is known as the Antichrist will rise to power on the world scene...

He will gain popularity because he will be the greatest peacemaker the world has ever seen...

He will bring peace to the Jews and Muslims in the Middle East by signing a peace treaty with Israel..

And while the ink is drying on the peace treaty, the clock on the final 7 years of world history will begin to tick...

For the first 3 1/2 years of the 7 years, the world will enjoy relative peace...

Christians will be gone and the world will begin to believe that all the troubles of the world were a result of Christian influence...

All other religions of the world will thrive in these 3 1/2 years...

They will even begin to merge and coexist with one another in harmony that you won't be able to see much difference in them....

Muslims will embrace Buddhists and Jehovah Witnesses..

Hindus will join hands with Mormons and Christian Scientists...

And the Antichrist will be the agent for all this great harmony among the world religions...

It will be the golden age of false religions and all will be happy and religious wars will cease and the world will finally have what they always wanted and that is world peace...

And we began to look at this picture of harmony last week in the opening verses of Revelation 17, which take us back in time to the beginning of the 7 year tribulation period to see this great unity of false religions begin to form...

Let me read Revelation 17:1-7 to us again...

17 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, 2 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." 3 And he carried me away [a]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. 4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and [b]adorned with gold and

precious [c]stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, 5 and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” 6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the [d]saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered [e]greatly. 7 And the angel said to me, “Why [f]do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

Last week, we talked about how these verse give us a picture of what the world will look like in terms of false religion in the final years before the second coming of Christ...

We took a little journey to the beginning of time where we saw the birth and spread of all false religions at the tower of Babel in Gen 11...

Where men disobeyed God by not filling the earth and instead congregated in one area and tried to build a tower to God and pridefully make a name for themselves...

And we talked about that pride and disobedience to God are the foundations of all false religions of the world...

Then we saw how the harlot or prostitute of Revelation 17 is a picture of this final false religious system of the end time and that her name is Babylon which comes from Babel, where false religion began to grow and spread...

And then we began to look at the characteristics of false religion by looking at how this harlot is described in verses 1 to 7....

First of all, we noticed that the first characteristic of false religion is widespread, seen in the fact the the harlot sits on many waters in verse 1...

In other words, false religions reach to all corners of the earth...

That is true today, but it will also be true in the end times as people all over the world seek out false religions as shelter from the judgments of God in the end times....

Then we looked at the second characteristic of false religions and that is the relationship between governments and false religions...

Which is seen in verse 2 as the harlot of false religions commits immorality with the kings of the earth....

And we said that the idea is not the actual act of immorality but the picture of how false religions have

been, are used and will be used by kings and political leaders to accomplish their lust for power..

And we talked about false religions are simply a means to an end for politicians who are hungry for power...

Now, we must deal with the final 4 verses of this opening section of Revelation 17, where will find 3 additional characteristics of false religion in the end of time...

And the 3rd characteristic of false religion is found in the first part of verse 4....

III. False Religions are Attractive (4a)

Let's read the verse 4 again....

***4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and
[b]adorned with gold and precious [c]stones and pearls,
having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and
of the unclean things of her immorality,***

The clear picture here is of a woman who is attractive to the world...

In the ancient world, purple and scarlet were the colors of wealth...

Since the dyes needed to create purple and scarlet clothing were expensive and not found in all parts of the world, acquiring these colors suggested wealth..

Not only is the harlot wearing the colors of wealth, she is wearing the jewelry of the wealthy...

Gold, precious stones, pearls are all a part of her attire..

She has the look of a wealthy prostitute....

A famous harlot who knows how to dress well..

And she is also holding a golden cup...

This is a woman of wealth...

She is dressed well..

She owns and wears expensive jewelry...

She is holding a cup of gold and she is hanging out with the rich and powerful kings of the earth...

This is woman who is attractive to the world...

Now remember, the woman is a representation of false religion...

And the clear teaching is that false religion is attractive to the world...

I spoke about some of this last week, but people are drawn to false religion by the traditions of it...

By the elegance of it...

By the order and allure of practicing something that the rich and famous practice...

Scientology is a false religion that started in the 1950s around the writings of a man named L Ron Hubbard...

It wasn't that popular until Tom Cruise and other famous celebrities began attending churches of scientology in

around southern California that the religion suddenly exploded in popularity...

That is an example of the power of attraction in false religions...

There is also the draw of the Roman Catholic church that we see even today...

The fancy robes...

The big hats...

The golden scepters and altars...

The impressive architecture and the strict order of services are an attraction to the world...

Not to mention the fact that many celebrities and people of power are Catholic...

Then you have the attraction of Mormonism in Utah..

Incredible buildings...

Impressive worship...

Great sounding choirs...

And then on top of that, you have the church filled with solid families...

Clean cut, middle to upper class people...

And many people run to Mormonism to be a part of the upper crust of society...

This is the draw of false religion....

It is fancy...

It is ordered...

It looks important and legitimate...

And millions run to it today and will run to it as the world comes to a close....

The harlot of false religion is well dressed, well organized, well connected but.....hell bound.....

And millions will follow her and her ceremonies to destruction...

Now let me make an important note here...

There is nothing wrong with the church being attractive to the world...

We want the world to come to hear and know the gospel...

That is our mission...

So order within the church is fine...

In fact, chaotic churches repel people from the gospel...

So I am not saying that the church shouldn't have order..

In fact, the Bible says that all things in the church should be done in an orderly way...

But we must never come to love our traditions more than Christ...

You see false religion has no object of worship so they sell their people on appearance, traditions, and order...

They substitute the worship of the true God with the worship of man made ceremonies and dress...

And sadly, people fall for that shallow attractiveness hook, line, and sinker...

But not only are false religions attractive, they are also very immoral...

IV. False Religions are Immoral (4b-5)

Lets look again at the end of verse 4 and all of verse 5...

***“...having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations
and of the unclean things of her immorality, 5 and on
her forehead a name was written, a mystery,
“BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF
HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE
EARTH.”***

In a sad twist, the gold cup that the harlot carries
enhances her attractiveness, but inside the cup is nothing
but the filthiness of immorality...

False religions of the world are filled with immorality...

Now, most hide it very well...

But underneath the outward attractiveness of false
religion are the people full of sin and immorality...

Take for example, the growing list of abuse charges in
the Roman Catholic Church..

Lines of boys and girls who have been abused by
priests...

Lawsuit after lawsuit against churches and leaders in the
Catholic church...

Then consider the religion of Islam...

An outer appearance of peace and goodwill, but it only hides a deep hatred of those who aren't Muslims...

The Mormon church is not without scandal as marriages within Mormonism are often polygamous...

Men and women who break the command of God to have one husband and one wife...

And then all the cults have coverups and payoffs to keep people quiet about all the immorality within them..

Look, the proof is in the pudding...

And false religion is seen by the immorality that happens behind the scenes in it and sometimes makes it to the light of day...

The danger of false religion is that it draws you in with its flashing lights but you end up in a world of darkness...

The harlot will be dressed in purple and scarlet but inwardly will wear the blackness of sin...

Now, I also need to be careful here because there have been way too many acts of immorality within the true Christian church as well...

Greed, adultery, theft, homosexuality are all sins that have appeared in the true church as well...

But the difference is that those sins are not a way of life in those churches...

If they are, that is a false Christian church and it must be avoided just like the other false religions...

Look the world is fallen and people are fallen...

Sin occurs in every organization in the world, but what sets the true church apart is that sin doesn't stay in it...

It is repented of and dealt with before it takes root...

False religion let sin take root and grow forests within them....

The false religion of the end time will be attractive to the world but filled with sin behind the scenes...

WE then find a 5th and final characteristic of false religion in verse 6...

V. False Religions are Hostile (6-7)

Let's read verse 6...

6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the [d]saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.

A final thing that John notices are the actions of this harlot...

She is drunk with the blood of the saints and the witnesses of Christ...

In other words, she kills Christians in the world during the time of the tribulation...

Now, we know the Antichrist will murder believers in these final years of world history, but false religions will also spill the blood of believers as well..

Now the interesting thing here is that the first 3 1/2 years of the tribulation will be a time of peace..

But this verse also seems to suggest that peace will not extend to Christians...

As the false religions of the world continue to persecute Christians as the tribulation begins...

IT may be that the disappearance of Christians in the rapture and the peace that results will convince the world that all their former troubles were the result of Christian influence...

And that idea may be so taught and accepted that it is open season on believers even during a supposed worldwide peace....

Who knows how it happens...

We simply know that the harlot of false religion will spill the blood of Christians to the point that she is intoxicated by it...

In other words, false religions will get a rush from killing believers in the end of time....

But make no mistake, all false religions even today have a dislike of true Christianity...

And the foundation of that hatred is the hatred of Satan for the true people of God..

Look, other religions make speak kindly of Christian while in the public eye, but behind close doors, they work to undermine the true Christian faith...

And this should come as no surprise to the true believer....

Jesus even said in Matthew 12:30....

30 He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

Conservative estimates tell us that the Roman Catholic Church has killed over 50 million protestants since the Middle Ages...

In fact, Muslims have killed far fewer Christians over the centuries when compared to the Pope...

But this is the pattern of false religion...

To silence true faith, they murder and destroy...

It started with Cain's murder of Abel in the garden...

Cain tried the false religion of disobeying God, and when his false religion was rejected, he murdered Abel because his true worship was accepted by God...

Ever since then, followers of false religion have been thirst for those of true faith and devotion to God...

And it will be that way until the very end of time..

Now, there is a final verse in this section that I want to read to get you ready for next week...

Look at the end of verse 6 and verse 7...

When I saw her, I wondered [e]greatly. 7 And the angel said to me, “Why [f]do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

As soon as John sees the harlot on top of the beast and takes note of her appearance, he is filled with wonder..

Now, what was he wondering about?

I am not sure, but I would suggest that he was wondering about she rises to prominence and possibly about the identification of the beast...

Who is the Antichrist and where does he come from to give her a lift?

Well, as soon as John begins to wonder, the angel says...

Don't be filled with wonder, I will give you more details about her and about that beast...

And that is what we will look at next week beginning in verse 8....

Conclusion

Let me end with a few closing thoughts on this harlot of false religion that we have looked at for 2 weeks now...

#1 - Be wary of any religion or church that stresses outward appearance over inward change.

The gospel of salvation is not a promise to clean up your outside but change you from the inside...

However, false religions are more concerned with how they look to the world than how you look before the Lord..

Again, ceremony and order are not bad in themselves, but they are often a substitute that makes you think you are taking part in something pleasing to God when in fact, you are part of something that is repulsive to God.

I think it is no accident that false religious leaders often have elaborate dress...

They are trying to attract you with it but they are also trying to hide their sin behind it...

#2 - Be ready to leave any religion or church that doesn't take sin seriously.

When you see sin out of control in the members of a religion, leave that church...

Not true church will allow sin to go on unchecked without consequences...

If that see that in a church or religion, leave it and encourage others to leave it as well..

#3 - Be thankful that your ears have heard the truth and pray for those who need to hear the truth.

I cannot say this enough...

Pray for those trapped in false religions...

Warn those trapped in false religions...

The book of Jude even say to snatch some out of the flames of false religion...

It is easy to be filled with hatred to those of false religions, especially when they are hateful of believers...

But please resist that urge to return hate for hate...

The Bible is crystal clear...

We pray for those who persecute us...

We dont return evil for evil....

But we return good for evil...

And the reason we aren't filled with hate is that we realize that could be us trapped in these demonic false religions...

Nothing you have ever done caused you to deserve to hear the truth, yet you have...

And that should keep us all humble and praying and warning those of false religions to turn from these demonic religion, repent of their sins and trust alone in Christ...

The truth is this....

Nothing in this world can make you right before God except repentance and faith in Jesus Christ...

Any form of religion that adds to that or takes away from that is a false religion that must be avoided...

Remember imitation may be the sincerest source of flattery in every aspect of life...

But the imitation of true Christianity will leave you sincerely sorry for eternity... Let us pray...