

(Living as Jesus Lived) 9. the Bride of Christ

by Zac Poonen

The sermon highlights the contrast between the Bride of Christ and the Harlot church, emphasizing the importance of living in true holiness and obedience to God.

Scripture: Exodus 25:8, Jeremiah 51:58, Matthew 7:24-27, 2 Timothy 3:5, Hebrews 12:22, James 4:4, 1 John 2:6, Revelation 17:5, Revelation 18:4, Revelation 21:2

Topics: "The Bride of Christ", "Obedience vs. Disobedience"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the stark contrast between the Bride of Christ and the Harlot church, illustrating how the Holy Spirit's work results in a glorious, holy city, while Satan's counterfeit leads to spiritual adultery and destruction. He highlights that true Christianity is marked by obedience to God's will, as seen in the lives of those who build their faith on the rock of Christ, in contrast to those who rely on human wisdom and ultimately perish. Poonen warns against the false security of those who claim to follow Christ without genuine obedience, urging believers to heed the call to separate from the worldly system of Babylon and embrace the holiness of Jerusalem. The sermon calls for a life that reflects the divine nature and purpose of God, culminating in the eternal glory of His grace.

Transcript

In the closing pages of Scripture, we find the result of the Holy Spirit's work - the Bride of Christ. We also see there the result of Satan's counterfeit work - the Harlot church.

John says,

I saw the HOLY CITY, THE NEW JERUSALEM, beautiful as a BRIDE, descending from God. It was FILLED WITH THE GLORY OF GOD and glowed like a precious gem, crystal clear like jasper (Revelation 21:2, 10, 11 - TLB).

Before seeing this vision of the Bride of Christ, John was given a vision of the Harlot - the spiritual adulteress, who claimed to love God but actually loved this world (James 4:4). This is spurious Christianity, having a form of godliness (correctness of doctrine), but no power (no divine life) (2 Timothy 3:5).

John says, "I saw a woman, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS, and a voice saying "Babylon the great is fallen. See THE SMOKE OF HER BURNING. Her smoke rose up forever and ever"

(Revelation 17:3, 5; 18:2, 9; 19:3).

The contrast is striking. Whereas the Bride comes through the judgment fire, "glowing like a precious gem," the Harlot is reduced to ashes completely, her smoke ascending to the skies, because she was made of perishable stuff.

Jerusalem the Bride, and Babylon the Harlot are two systems - one from God and the other "earthly, soulish and demonic" (James 3:15 - margin).

Let us look at Babylon first.

Babylon originated with the tower of Babel, which was built according to man's plan, in man's strength and for man's glory.

"They said to one another (FROM MAN), 'Let us build for ourselves a city (THROUGH MAN) and make for ourselves a name (TO MAN)" (Genesis 11:3, 4).

Years later, King Nebuchadnezzar, having built the great city of Babylon, capital of his great world empire, looked out one day over the city and spoke in the same vein:

"Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built (FROM MAN)...by the might of my power (THROUGH MAN)...for the glory of my majesty (TO MAN)" (Daniel 4:30).

The tower of Babel ended in judgment. Nebuchadnezzar's boast also brought down on him the immediate judgment of God (Daniel 4:31-33). The final end of all that has been produced by human wisdom and human power for man's glory will also be judgment by God. That which is done through human soul-power will perish, even if it is called 'Christian work'.

"The wide walls of Babylon shall be levelled to the ground and her high gates shall be burned; THE BUILDERS ('Christian' workers?) FROM MANY LANDS HAVE WORKED IN VAIN - THEIR WORK SHALL BE DESTROYED BY FIRE" (Jeremiah 51:58 - TLB).

Jerusalem, on the other hand, is the City of God (Hebrews 12:22). In the Old Testament this was where the Temple of God was. Jerusalem, God's dwelling place, had her origin in the Tabernacle, built by Moses (Exodus 25:8).

The Tabernacle was built exactly according to God's plan:

"...ccording to all that the Lord commanded" (Exodus 40:16) (FROM GOD).

It was built by men endowed with the power of God:

"Bezalel.... have filled him with the Spirit of God.... (Exodus 31:1-5) (THROUGH GOD).

It was built for the glory of God:

"The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:34) (TO GOD).

That which originates in God and is done through Divine power for the glory of God alone will remain forever. It will come through the fire, glowing like a gem, because it is built of gold, silver and jewels.

As we compare the opening pages of Scriptures with its closing pages, we find that the two trees (the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil) have produced two systems, by the end of time - Jerusalem and Babylon.

That which is truly born of the Spirit - from God, through God and to God - remains for ever; whereas that which was born of the flesh - from man, through man and to man - perishes.

Today, we are living between the pages of Genesis and Revelation. And whether we realise it or not, we are being caught up in one of these two systems - one determined to exalt and glorify God, and the other out to glorify and exalt man; one following Christ and the other following Adam; one living in the Spirit and the other living in the flesh and the soul.

Both Jesus and Adam heard the voice of God - the difference was only in the fact that one obeyed and the other disobeyed. So too, Jesus said, it would be with those who hear His voice - one would obey and build on the rock, unshakable for eternity, while another would hear but not obey and thus build on the sand, ultimately to perish (Matthew 7:24-27).

These two houses that Jesus spoke of are Jerusalem and Babylon.

There are those today who are truly justified by faith and enter into the new covenant, sealed by the blood of Jesus, and follow Jesus in a life of obedience to God's will (particularly as described in Matthew 5 to 7), who build on the rock and have a part in Jerusalem. One has only to read Matthew 5 to 7 to discover whether he belongs to this company or not.

Equally there are others (and this is by far the majority), who hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 to 7, but having a false understanding of justification, faith and grace, live in a false security, not caring to obey the words of Jesus, and thus build on sand - Babylon - finally perishing forever.

These are 'Christians' in their own eyes, for Jesus said that the man who built on sand was one who heard His voice, and therefore obviously, not a heathen, but one who read the Bible and went to 'church.' His only problem was that he did not obey and therefore could not partake of eternal salvation promised to all who obey Jesus (Hebrews 5:9). His faith was not genuine, for it did not have works of obedience to perfect it (James 2:22, 26).

Those under the headship of Adam follow their head in disobedience to God's revealed will, but are persuaded by Satan that they "will not die" (Genesis 3:4), because they claim to have 'accepted Christ.' Thus they live in false security in Babylon.

Equally, those under the headship of Christ are identified by the fact that they "walk as Jesus walked" (1 John 2:6) in obedience to God's will. These are the brothers and sisters of Christ (Matthew 12:50), and are a part of Jerusalem.

The interesting thing about the parable that Jesus spoke at the end of Matthew 5 to 7, is that both the wise man's house and the foolish man's house stood for some time, as both Babylon and Jerusalem stand today - until the rains and the flood came. While the foolish man was only concerned about the external appearance of the house (the testimony before men), the wise man was more concerned about the foundation (the hidden life in the heart, before the face of God) primarily.

But when the floods and the rains came (the judgment of God), it was the foundation that was tested first. 1 Peter 4:17, 18 - Berkeley).

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your Name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you (for "no one who sins knows Him" - 1 John 3:6). Depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness (disobey God)' (Matthew 7:21-23).

Notice here that there will be many who are Christians in their minds (calling Jesus "Lord") and in their emotions (calling Jesus "Lord, Lord!"), who yet do not yield their wills to do the will of God in their lives. The Lord rejects them as unknown to Him.

The distinctive feature of Jerusalem is holiness. It is called "the HOLY City" (Revelation 21:2). Babylon however, stands out for its greatness. It is called "the GREAT city" (Revelation 18:10). It is called "great", eleven times in Revelation.

Those who live in true holiness, in obedience to God and have partaken of the nature of Christ by grace through faith, are built together into Jerusalem; whereas those who are looking for greatness here on earth (the testimony and the honour of men) are built into Babylon.

For nineteen hundred years, the call has been coming to God's people,

Come out of her (Babylon) MY PEOPLE; do not take part in her sins, or you will be punished with her (Revelation 18:4 - TLB).

The call is even more urgent today, as we approach the end of the age. It is truly unfortunate that even God's people can be mixed up with Babylon and thus share her punishment - if they do not take heed to this call of God which is so clear. Having held on to an evangelical doctrine, or having made a 'decision for Christ' will not help anyone in that day, if they have not lived a life that corresponds to the true doctrine, or brought forth works of obedience that are the identifying marks of a genuine faith.

How intense was God's desire when He made man in His own image that man should partake of the divine nature and manifest His glory.

And when man fell, how great a price God was willing to pay, "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemning sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3), so that a Way might be made whereby man might be restored and brought back to the place where he could once again fulfil the divine purpose.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all together involved in this work of redeeming man and transforming him. And although, many men and women in their foolishness will not respond to God, yet the divine purpose will be fulfilled in a remnant (the few who find the narrow way to life), who submit to God, like Jesus did, and through whom the glory of God will be manifested, not only here in time, but also in the ages of eternity, when God will show forth through them, the surpassing riches of His grace that they were made partakers of through Christ Jesus.

To Him be all the glory, now and forever.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/living-as-jesus-lived-9-the-bride-of-christ/>

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