

A Tale of Two Cities

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,
it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness,
it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair,
we had everything before us, we had nothing before us,
we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way
--in short, the period was . . . like the present period*

Rev. 17: 1-6, 18; 18:21; 21:1-14, 22-27; Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16

What's it all about?

The Bible – God's activity in the human race down the centuries – the Church?

God's eternal purpose – a Bride for His Son – the New Jerusalem

And satan's counterfeit – the Great Whore, Babylon

Babylon

Babylon appears first in the Bible Gen 11 (Jebusites mentioned Gen 15, some hundreds of years later – didn't become Israel's until David's time – 1000 years later and another 40 years before it became God's dwelling on the earth)

(satan was not the originator of the idea – Enoch, before the flood, saw the coming of the Lord, which is still future to us. Hebrews tells us that the patriarchs looked forward to a city whose builder and architect is God)

Babylon represents everything that is contrary to the will and purpose of God – go forth and multiply – lest we be scattered

Most, if not all, false religions can be traced back to ideas inherent in Babylonian worship – the gods of the Egyptians, Greek pantheon, the Roman pantheon, the Middle Eastern religions, the Nordic gods, the Druids, even the structure and titles used in Roman Catholicism, Allah of the Muslims.

The world system of finance and government

Opposition to God's people, be it the Israelites or the disciples of Jesus

And it's all going to end in an hour! Unthinkable a generation ago, but in our times . . . ?

The great Hallelujahs of Rev 19 celebrating Babylon's downfall. The challenge is – are we investing in Babylon? Our money, our time, our affections, our intellect? The stock's on the way down – it will make all the stock market crashes of all time seem like small change (and all the catastrophes of all time seem like a tea party).

The New Jerusalem

The end of the story – God wins!

When does the story begin? Before time! The redeemer is promised as soon as man fell – not a knee-jerk reaction, but the Lamb chosen before the creation of the world 1 Pet 1:19-20. In whom, we were chosen before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:5)

according to the plan of Him who works everything in conformity with the purpose of His will (Eph. 1:11). What an assurance!! All the knocks and blows of life, all the reverses, sicknesses, even death itself, all the failed hopes and ambitions, all the fulfilled hopes and ambitions, all the successes and good things – all worked together for good by God to fulfil his plans and purposes (Rom. 8:28)

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and strengthen the weak knees (Heb. 12:12). This is not 'Just look up, and cheer up, keep smiling, we'll be caught up to glory some day', not escapism. This is strong confidence in the God who is faithful, who is omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent – Isa. 45:11-12; 22-24

The Bride, the wife of the Lamb

This is what God is, and has been, doing for all time, and it will last into eternity – this stock is on the up. "Never catch a falling knife" doesn't apply to this one. This is the best investment advice you will ever receive – 'Lay up treasure in heaven', given by the best investment advisor ever – Jesus!

What is God doing?

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

Who is going to enjoy this?

To **him who is thirsty** I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.

7 **He who overcomes** will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Will any not enjoy this?

8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death."

Some details – the glory

9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Foundations and Gates - continuity

12 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The materials

18 The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.

21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

Gold, precious stones, pearls

- Gold – mined, refined, beaten out
- Precious stones – mined, cut and polished
- Pearls – hidden pain transformed into something beautiful

Its worship, illumination and glory

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

26 The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it.

How can I be a part of it?

27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Is this all pie in the sky? Can I put it off?

22:6 The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

What a Hope!

As Coastlands goes through a time of review and change, and we look forward to a time of fruitfulness and the outworking of what God has worked into us, and promised us, over the last few years, it's time to stir up our faith and our hope. He has chosen to accomplish His purpose through us – He will do it in spite of us if necessary – He'll use someone else, somewhere else and we will miss out on our reward of being part of His purpose – just thirsty or an overcomer? Just a citizen or an inheritor?

Tale of Two Cities – Part two

The “Two Cities” is not just an interesting way to view the Bible, nor just a framework for understanding its teaching, but essential to our eternal destiny – to share Jesus’ throne as His Bride/wife, and to participate in God’s great project – the restoration of all things through and in Christ. (We are one with Christ – indivisibly united and therefore share His destiny!)

The “Big Picture” describes who we are and defines why we do what we do, in contrast to:

- the Enlightenment did away with God as the source and the great story teller;
- post-modernism an age of disbelief in anything, especially meta-narratives, no continuity;
- our lives become disjointed episodes, no commitment, individualistic;
- hence the popularity of soaps and series like Dallas. We see people living out a story, esp. as a family, and it has context and continuity, in contrast to our own lives where we struggle from one crisis to the next, not knowing where we are going or what is the point of it all

Understanding the ‘Big Picture’ gives context and purpose to our lives. For example, why do we insist on marriage? Not just because it is a picture of our destiny, but because it enshrines the great mystery and, as a sacrament that we live in, we live out the greater story of our God who is committed to His people. Why work? Because we have a God who works (Creation – sustains) and who has created us with a share of His creativity, not because He has to, but because that’s the kind of God He is. Why forgive? Not just because we have been forgiven (like some sort of incentive or pressure), but because we have been caught up in the forgiveness story and we live it out. We know that we are part of the Big Story and we know what we are here for. What a message of hope to a hopeless and disoriented world!

The Big Story also tells us that salvation is not the end, getting to heaven is not the end – it’s the start of our eternal work, ruling and reigning over the New Creation – whatever that may involve. That’s a mystery, but what is not a mystery is that this life is a preparation for our destiny. The process of discipleship, learning to be led by the Spirit in everything, dealing with our own iniquity, standing against the schemes of the enemy, discernment and spiritual maturity, are all part of our training, part of our destiny to be conformed to the image of God’s Son, part of our calling, and not just an optional extra for the more dedicated.

The Big Picture tells us that we are in training for reigning over the new creation. Current creation beautiful and complex, a united whole declaring the Glory of God – yet subject to vanity and frustration Rom. 8. What will the New Creation be like – eye has not seen, etc. but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit (cf. OT quote).

As part of that training, God has revealed to us the principles on which the two cities, or systems, operate. The burden on my heart this morning is to show how we can use these principles to recognise the deception that is around us in these end-times. Much of what is around will appear to be Biblical (otherwise it wouldn’t be deceptive!) e.g. the Word of Faith movement or the Prosperity Teaching.

I don’t want to set out a set of principles so we can go round judging other churches or ministries, but we do need to be discerning – **as we ourselves are confronted** either in the church or in the world, e.g. Climate Change.

Babylon is not 'on the front page' throughout Scripture but it appears early on and is always there behind the scenes, propagating its anti-God message and representing the world system. It is finally revealed for what it is (Rev 17) and judged. Jerusalem appears much later but becomes increasingly prominent – tells us which way history is heading, and therefore which 'horse to back'!

Origins Gen. 10:8-12; 11:1-9,
Character Dan. 4:30; 5:1-4; Rev: 17:1-6;
Destiny Rev. 18:1-3, 21 (2 Pet.3:11-13 commentary)

At its foundation, the memory of the Flood would be very fresh and probably mankind saw Babel and its Tower as a kind of ark to save them from God's judgement – if so, it was rank unbelief as God has said He would not flood the World again. This is how men still think today – anything to get their own salvation apart from believing God's Word! Nimrod – a might hunter in the face of the Lord.

In contrast Jerusalem first comes to our attention in Gen:14:18-20
- law of first mention. Babylon is rebellion, Jerusalem worship of the true God
It went away from God and came under judgement but is a picture of what God wants to do
True Jerusalem's Character described in Heb. 12:22-24
Destiny Rev. 21:1-4; 9-11

Babylon

Human effort, especially to achieve unity without God Gen.11:4, 6
Anti-God, rebellion Gen. 11:4
Impressive – status – prestige Gen. 11:4; Dan 4:30
Religious Activity Dan. 5:1-4
Mammon – appealing to the flesh Rev. 17:2; 1 John 2:15-17; temptation of Jesus
As it developed (read the prophets and secular history) it became:
Confusing, complicated, intellectualism – illustrated in banking crisis, Madoff
Darkness, secretive, only the initiated
Control, keeping everyone in their place, man's order Dan 3 – Golden image
Seductive, deception Rev 17:2; The Lie 2 Thes.2:11-12 – a person

Jerusalem

Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit 'My kingdom is not of this world
Dwelling place of God, obedience Heb.12:22-24
Despised – unimpressive – it's your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom,
Luke 12:32, not fight for it, it doesn't appeal to the flesh – Beatitudes – contrast!
Rest, relationship John 17:3 this is eternal life
Spiritual things, spiritually discerned 1 Cor.2:9-10 **by faith**
Simplicity 2 Cor. 1:12; 10:1; 11:3
In the light John 3. 19-21; Rev. 21 and 22
Servant leadership, Luke 22:24-27. Led by the Spirit
The Truth – a Person

Come out of her my people (Rev.18 4), but we can't come out if we don't know we are in her – her way of thinking has so coloured our society (intro re Enlightenment), that we can be affected without knowing it. How is my thinking affected?
Shepherd leads flock to pasture – Continue in the Word – renewed in the thinking of your mind – **Stand!**

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| Babylon | | Jerusalem |
| Human effort | | Not by might |
| Anti-God, Rebellion | | Dwelling place of God, obedience |
| Impressive – status – prestige | | Despised – unimpressive |
| Religious Activity | | Rest, relationship |
| Mammon, appealing to the flesh | | Spiritual things, spiritually discerned |
| Confusing, complicated, intellectualism | | Simplicity |
| Darkness, secretive | | In the light |
| Control, keeping everyone in their place, man's order | | Servant leadership Sons of God Led by the Spirit |
| Seductive, deception The Lie | | The Truth |

Principles of the New Jerusalem

Tale of Two Cities – Babylon and Jerusalem. But, as we read the Bible, we discover that there are two Babylons and Two Jerusalems – the physical Babylon and the spiritual Babylon – the physical Jerusalem and the spiritual Jerusalem.

Despite Saddam Hussein's best efforts, the physical Babylon is a ruin, and has been for thousands of years, just like God said it would. But the system initiated by Nimrod at Babel is going strong. We see its culmination in Rev 17 – "Mystery; Babylon the great; the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth."

Earthly Jerusalem – New Jerusalem

This is the city of which we are citizens (Phil. 3:20-21) and therefore by whose laws and principles we ought to be living. Like Philippi, we are a colony of heaven upon the earth. New Jerusalem is a picture of the church, the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven – the goal of God's plan for the earth – a bride for His Son, to display His glory and exercise His rule over the whole creation

Roger: "How do you see yourself in the kingdom of God? As a key part of God's plan . . . or more like a film extra, simply making up the numbers in God's epic production, entitled 'The Church'?"

Films made in fragments. For example, often all the scenes at each location are filmed and only later spliced into the correct sequence. The actors must know the whole story and how the plot develops to give the correct performance of the parts being filmed. They also have to get "in character" – start thinking and behaving like the character they are playing

So with us, we have the Big Picture, so we can know where our part fits in and where the Story is going. Or to come back to the colony idea, we can know the principles on which God is working and live them out, just like the citizens of Philippi behaved just like they were living in Rome.

Unlike actors, we are getting 'in character' and we won't have to get out of character – what we develop now will go with us into eternity. We are 'in training for reigning' and we need to be learning and living now by the principles that we will live by then. This is one aspect of our adoption – learning the Father's business.

So the question is: "do we really understand these principles or are we just swept along by whatever 'the church' is doing or running after?" We all have a theology – a way of thinking about God, our world, the Bible, our mission, and that will guide our understanding, actions and habits – and they are character forming! The Bible is our Citizenship Manual (amongst other things!)

A W Tozer commented over 50 years ago that the Christians of his day tended to be like 'children skipping through the corridors of the Kingdom, not pausing to take note of the significance of anything'. How about us?

Do we sing the latest songs and imbibe our theology from them without thinking? Take the line from "Your Kingdom come" – "We call the nations now to welcome you in". A nice thought, and one day, the nations will. But how is that to come about – by us 'calling' them or by a dramatic upheaval in the world system resulting in Jesus taking His authority, and ruling and reigning?

Is the church's mission to call the nations to welcome in a King who they nailed to a cross, or to call sinners to repentance? To seek and to save those who are lost, or trying to effect social and political change by imposing His rule on society or political institutions?

Jesus didn't. He went to the root of the problem – sin and iniquity, and the need for personal change. He didn't address the many social ills in society at that time – e.g. babies and old people left by the roadside to die. He addressed mammon, greed, pride, lust – in the individual.

One day, the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15), but we believe that that will be by His direct, personal intervention, after the cataclysmic events of the 'last days'. That will be followed by a 1000-year reign of Christ and His Bride, during which there will be unprecedented peace, harmony, fruitfulness and equality – conditions similar to the Garden of Eden, while satan is bound in the bottomless pit.

At the end of the 1000 years, satan is released and goes out into the world to find if anyone wants to join in his rebellion against God. And he does!! He assembles a massive army to try and storm the New Jerusalem; fire descends from heaven to destroy God's enemies and satan is cast into the Lake of Fire, where he will stay eternally. The Last Judgement then follows (The Great White Throne), where our eternal destiny is assigned. God then creates a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness will be at home, and where God will live with His people for ever. (Rev. 20-22; 2 Pet. 3)

This is what I believe, based on a plain reading of Scripture; this is what the leadership of our church believes; and it has been the view of Bible-believing Christians down the ages. But there are other views around, and making their way into popular Christian thinking (because we don't know the book of Revelation – the end of the story – the Big Picture?).

The most frequent alternative is the idea that there is no Millennium, no literal 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth; called a-Millennialism (we are pre-Millennialists, if you want a name). This view basically says that the Gospel will go into all the world, get every one converted, or at least the majority, and then, when our work is done, we welcome Jesus back to reign over the Christianised world. I'm not sure what they think happens after that – we all live happily ever-after?

A derivative of this is Dominion Theology, or Kingdom Now. And many movements in the present-day church are motivated by this agenda. "We must get the Gospel out to every nation, like Jesus said. So they will get converted and He can come back." The Latter-day Rain movement and emphasis on a great world-wide end-time revival have this sort of viewpoint. (NB Latin America and Far East)

There are at least two problems with this view. The Bible clearly states in several places that the last days will be exceedingly troubled, with great apostasy, and little faith on the earth – not worldwide faith. The other problem is Islam which is advancing much faster than Christianity. That has a similar agenda – get all the world under the influence of Islam and the prophet, or the 12th Imam, can come back, interestingly with Isa (or Jesus) as his right-hand man.

Related to that, though not identical, is Replacement Theology which states that the Church has replaced Israel as the agent of God's purposes for the earth; that God

finished with Israel when the Temple was destroyed and the nation scattered across the earth; that the Church has inherited all the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament, to the exclusion of Israel (but left the curses for Israel for crucifying their Messiah).

There are at least 2 problems with this view: (i) Romans 11 where Paul states categorically that God has not finished with Israel and (ii) the existence of Israel as a state living in the historical land of Israel.

I came across a new one (to me) recently, and this is where I get back to my theme – Liberation Theology. Popularised in South America a few decades ago, it was a reaction to the exploitation of the poor by the rich and identified Jesus as a Marxist revolutionary! Its aim is to bring about social change to 'Christian' standards by whatever means necessary, including violence, overthrowing Governments and replacing them with itself.

One writer, writing in support of it, said that the Bible was written when Christianity was a minority religion, persecuted by the State, and so has nothing to say about how Christians should behave when in Government.

Perhaps the Bible has nothing to say directly about this, is because Jesus specifically stated that "My Kingdom is not of this world". For examples of what happens when Christianity becomes the ruling power, we can look at the persecution of minorities in the years after Constantine, the Crusades, the Inquisition. For more modern examples, we can go to Geneva after Calvin, or the 'New World', where the extreme position on separation of religion and state is a reaction to the enforced church attendance and merging of church and local government that applied for many years.

Coming back to our reading, was the Crucifixion just an unfortunate accident? Was it only the means of our redemption? Or was our King saying something about His Kingdom and the principles on which it operates? I've already referred to Jesus statement that His kingdom is not of this world, otherwise His servants would fight.

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had said that the Kingdom does not come by observation, but the Kingdom is within you.

Slide 1

As the story of His trial proceeds, we see:

Submission not resistance in the face of oppression } 1 Peter 2:21-23
Silence against reviling }

Boldness and spiritual insight in the face of false accusation John 18:34; 19:11

True witness in the face of lies 18:37

Finally, He goes forth carrying His cross, while at the same time having all the power of Godhead to deliver Himself – true meekness – controlled power 19:17

This is nothing new, of course. In the so-called Kingdom Manifesto (the Sermon on the Mount), it is the poor in spirit, not the proud, who inherit the Kingdom; those who mourn, not the triumphant, who receive strength; the meek, not the successful, who inherit the earth (Getty – but not its mineral rights!); the pure in heart, not the pushy, who see God; the persecuted, not the mighty, who inherit the Kingdom; those who are reviled, not those who are respected, who have a great reward in heaven.

These are the principles on which God has always worked – look at Abraham, Sarah, Rebekah, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Peter, Paul. Where there was success or human effort, God had to break it, or break the person, so that it was clear that it was God who was at work, and it was His power that accomplished His purposes.

Are these the principles on which we are building our lives? Which we apply when confronted with some new thing? It's easy to be impressed by size, numbers, big buildings, lots of resources, TV coverage – these are principles of Babylon.

That's not to say that God doesn't do things on a large scale – take the day of Pentecost! So I don't want to get into criticism of other churches or ministries, but we must be thoroughly grounded in God's Word to have discernment when discernment is called for; to know for ourselves how God works; so we don't get caught up in the end-times deception which, I believe, is all around us.

Paul sums it up in 1 Cor. 1:18-29

Slide 2

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet to the nations, with authority by the Word of the Lord over nations and kingdoms. But he's not known as the weeping prophet for nothing! He saw revival under Josiah and lived through several kings reigns to see his prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled to the letter.

Misunderstood and oppressed from his own townspeople to the religious and political leaders of the nation. But against all odds, he stood. And what does he say to us: Jer 9: 23-24

Will we let these principles guide us? Challenges ahead – in our local congregation, and on the wider scene. In the face of persecution we can give up, hide away, resist by human effort, or **STAND** (Eph 6)

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| Principles of New Jerusalem | | In the face of |
| Submission | | Oppression |
| Silence | | Reviling |
| Boldness and Spiritual insight | | False accusation |
| True Witness | | Lies |
| Carrying the Cross | | Violence |
| | | NOT |
| Poor in spirit | | Proud |
| Mourn | | Triumphant |
| Meek | | Successful |
| Pure in heart | | Pushy |
| Persecuted | | Mighty |
| Reviled | | Respected |

John 18:28 – 19:22
Matt. 5:3-12

New Jerusalem principles

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|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| God's Foolishness | Wiser than | Worldy wisdom |
| God's Weakness | Stronger than | Man's strength |
| Foolish things | Shame | The worldly wise |
| Weak things | Shame | The strong |
| Lowly and despised; and things that are not | Bring to nothing | Things that are |

1 Cor. 1:18-29