



# THE STORY OF *Everything* LUKE 24:27

“Don’t judge!” “They’re really judgmental!” There is almost no greater criticism today than to judge. To judge someone is to cause a person to think or feel that their actions are unacceptable. Today, the most important action one can take is to affirm; the worst thing you can do is to judge someone. To be opening and affirming and celebrating is seen as the key to health and wholeness; to judge is seen as to set someone back, to be destructive, and to cause harm.

No one likes to feel judged. To be judged is to feel a sense of condemnation of your actions, attitudes, or even your being. For these reasons, when it comes to God, many people have a hard time understanding how a loving God could ever judge. If our culture’s greatest value is to celebrate and affirm, God must be like that, right?

Yet all around us there are clues that we know that God must judge. Ask anyone who has suffered at the hands of some form of injustice if they want God to judge, and they will say yes. No one wants to see the abuser, the murderer, the thief get away with harming others. Even in our use of cursing, one of the phrases that people use is a pronouncement of divine judgment, telling people that they should be damned by God or go to hell.

In Revelation, as the Bible story comes to a conclusion, the apostle John has a series of visions. At the beginning of the book, in Revelation 4, John weeps when no one is able to open the scroll. He sees the evil being done, he sees the harm being caused by the evil one, and no one seems like they are able to stop it. So he weeps. Is there no one who can open the scroll? Is there no one who can deal with evil? Who will condemn it? And then the Lion of Judah, the Lamb who was slain, comes forward and is able to open the scroll and carry out judgment on evil, to bring it to an end. And this action brings about great rejoicing in heaven. From those who have been killed for their faith, their question in Rev. 6:9-10 about how long evil will go on is answered: not long. So how should we respond to God’s judgment?

### **Hear the final judgment on evil (vv. 1-3)**

As John looks and sees that all of the judgments on evil have been rolled out by the Lamb who was slain, Revelation 18 opens with an angel coming from heaven with authority and glory declaring that evil has been struck a final and decisive blow. “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!” This echoes Isaiah’s pronouncement that one day Babylon would fall (see Isa. 21:9).

The name “Babylon” is not a single note, but is a chord, as Peter Leithart claims (quoted from B. Tabb, p. 167, “All Things New” quoting P. Leithart 2018a: 9). Babylon is the city that has opposed the ways of God from the very beginning. In Genesis 11, the first city that was built was Babel, the place where people came together to make a name for themselves and sought to reach the heavens with their own pride. Nimrod, the founder of Babel (Gen. 11:2-4), was a rebel against God, and this is the meaning of his name. God had come down and confused (bālal) the languages of the people and scattered them.

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Throughout the OT, Babylon was the great enemy of God's people. It was Babylon that sent God's people into exile; it was Babylon that oppressed the saints like Daniel; it was Babylon that became the type of city that opposed God. John's use of Babylon here does not mean the literal Babylon, but it represents the city of humanity that sets itself up against God. Babylon is Vanity Fair. It is the city where no one ever has to say no to their desires. It is the city of indulgence that will destroy itself.

The reason there will be a final judgment on the city of humanity is because the power that Babylon uses is a seductive power. It causes the rulers of nations to get drunk with power. It causes the leaders of the world to use power immorally. John uses the language of sexual immorality to describe Babylon's sin – the sin of having other lovers rather than having the one true love. The OT used the picture of sexual immorality to describe idolatry – that having and worshipping the one true God and being loyal and faithful to him is a picture of what marriage is to be like – being loyal and faithful to your spouse. Sexual immorality, the pursuit of other lovers shows that there is something wrong with worship in the heart.

Babylon is the city where all evil happens. Every unclean spirit, bird, and detestable beast participate, celebrate, and spread evil. But John hears these words: Evil has fallen. Evil will not win. Believe it. Live like evil won't win.

## **Be in, but not of the world (18:4-8)**

John hears the voice that calls God's people to come out of her. This command – to be in the world, but not of the world, is something that the OT prophets had said over and over because of the coming judgment (Isa. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8; 51:6, 45). God's people would not always live in exile, under the power of the city of man. And John hears that just like Israel was brought out of Egypt when the plagues came, so God's people will be delivered if they do not participate in the city of man and experience her plagues.

While we live in this world, we do not participate in the system of her power – getting drunk on power, abusing power, and loving power. We serve. We do not act like Babylon does – promoting and celebrating the things that God has condemned. Abusing power by promoting and celebrating what God has condemned results in heaping up sins and building a city into the heavens that is like Babel – promoting self-glory, not God's.

Instead of creating a separate city, John is told to pay back Babylon for her sins. What does this mean? Is this repaying evil for evil? It doesn't seem like this is what the angel means. It seems that Babylon will receive what she deserves for using power to promote herself. As v. 7 says, she used her power for self-glory, as though she herself thought of herself as God. And her judgment will be destruction by fire, a judgment for her evil. Like Egypt suffered the plagues, so will Babylon.

While we don't have time to flesh out all of the details of the book of Revelation, God's command for God's people to come out of Babylon does not mean that we avoid being in the world. Jesus had told his

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followers to be like him – in the world, but not of the world, meaning not to participate in the system of evil of this world (Jn 17:16). This means that God’s people are to live as God’s bride. Revelation contrasts these two ways of life with two cities, the cities of Jerusalem and the city of Babylon. Jerusalem is the city that is from above, the city of God, and Babylon is the city of this world, the city that opposes God and rebels against him just like Nimrod the rebel did:

## Jerusalem – chaste bride (21:2, 9)

- Splendor – God’s glory (21:11-21)
- Nations walk by light (21:24)
- Kings bring glory – worship (21:24)
- Glory & honour of nations come (21:26)
- Uncleaness excluded (21:27)
- Water & tree of life – healing (21:6; 22:1-2)
- Life & Healing (22:1-2)
- God’s people – enter (22:14)

## Babylon – harlot (17:2)

- splendor – exploiting empire (17:4; 18:12-13, 16)
- corruption, deception of nations (17:2; 18:3, 23, 19:2)
- rules over kings (17:18)
- luxury, wealth extorted from world (18:12-17)
- abominations, impurities, deception (17:4, 5; 18:23)
- Wine causes drunkenness (14:8; 17:2; 18:3)
- blood of slaughter (17:6; 18:24)
- God’s people – called out (18:4)

The way that God’s people repay evil is not by doing evil in return, but by living as the righteous, holy people of God. We worship God. We exalt God. We live for God. We live using power for the benefit of others, to serve others, to show that God’s ways are the ways of life in a world of death. This is what it means to come out, to live in the world but not of the world. It means to live as faithful exiles who are awaiting the new Jerusalem, the city of the great king while we live in the city of man.

## Rejoice, Don’t Weep (18:9-24)

There are two responses to the fall of evil. First, for those who have loved evil and participated in it, they weep. John sees how the kings weep (vv. 9-10) because the power and luxury that they enjoyed from the great city has been shown to be useless. The merchants weep (vv. 11-17a) because no one buys their cargo anymore (v. 11) – which is all of the wealth of this world to the slavery that they participated in. And in a moment, their wealth is gone (v. 17a). Finally, those who have worked in the system and enjoyed the benefits of the evil system weep (vv. 17b-19). These verses sound a lot like the weeping that Ezekiel recorded in response to those who worked the seas when they heard of Tyre’s fall (Ezek. 27:30b-34).

Paul said that there are two reasons people weep: either because they have worldly sorrow or godly sorrow. Here, we see what worldly sorrow looks like: people weep because they’ve lost the things of this world – the wealth, power, ease, and position they had. They weep because their idols have been destroyed (2 Cor. 7:10). The pornography, the music that celebrates evil, the movies that depict violence – all the pleasures that tempt us now in the city of man will be laid to waste (vv. 21-24).

But those who have humbled themselves will be exalted. Those who saw that the raw use of power and luxury for one’s own benefit is no beauty at all, just a prostitute who used others. And so the response that evil has been judged is rejoicing (v. 20). We do not rejoice that people fall. We do not rejoice that

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people suffer. We rejoice that evil has been dealt a mortal blow, that its system and destructive pattern has been brought to an end. Heaven, apostles, prophets rejoice because her destructive patterns and spilt blood has come to an end.

We do not rejoice that people suffer. We rejoice because God's holy anger has come and dealt the final blow to evil. We rejoice not because God has gotten angry and flown off the handle at evil – finally! We rejoice because God's settled disposition against evil is not an emotional explosion; his action against evil is an intentional condemnation of sin and evil based off of his holy and righteous character.

Even now, God is in the process of judging evil. Evil turns on itself. Evil destroys itself. But evil will not completely wipe out evil. Only God can do that.

And it is through the blood of the Lamb that was slain that evil is brought to an end. At the cross of Calvary, God himself sent his one and only begotten Son to be slain for the sins of the world. At the cross of Calvary God took the mortal blow of evil himself, tasting the sting of sin and death so that he might put death to death and bring life through resurrection life.

Babylon and her system will be shown to be evil and destructive. As Christians, we live by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony, declaring that we love God beyond life itself. It is not death to die at the hands of Babylon. Evil may look like it is winning; governments may abuse power; corporations may look like they are advancing by exploitation; but in the end, Christ wins by his own blood.

We wait for the day of evil's judgment not as those who delight in it, but as those who work awaiting for the coming King – the one who has already conquered sin and death by his own death and resurrection. And we work for that day this day, by doing good, living in the light, loving and walking as holy, righteous citizens of the kingdom of heaven.