

Revelation: How to live through the “end of the world.”

Part 4: How the Church Resists Babylon

Revelation 2-5

**Summary:** Revelation reveals Jesus’ call to the Church to resist Babylon—not through force, but through faithful worship, courageous witness, and unwavering devotion to the Lamb.

**Main Ideas:**

There is a story that seems to be written in our DNA.

Revelation was written to reveal the story of the universe. A story we all have a part in.

Revelation is Jesus’ handbook on how to be his rebels in a world opposed to his kingdom.

The dragon uses Babylon to infiltrate and dominate Jesus’ church.

4 ways Babylon infiltrates church communities.

- Love becomes disordered.
- Teachings become distorted.
- Worship becomes corrupted.
- Loyalty becomes divided.

Worship shows us Babylon through God’s eyes and how to live as rebels inside Babylon

Worship is a life that continually acknowledges, celebrates, and enjoys the goodness and greatness of God

Worship doesn’t just resist Babylon... it lets us participate in destroying it.

**Invitation:**

For the next 7 days, read and meditate on a song of rebellious worship.

- Revelation 4:8-11, 5:9-14, 7:9-17, 11:15-18, 12:10-12, 15:1-4, 19:1-8

Pray: Jesus, use these songs to shape me into your reliant rebel.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What stood out, bothered, confused, inspired, or challenged you in this week’s message?
2. Which of the four ways Babylon infiltrates the church (refer back to notes) do you think is the biggest challenge for the American church today?
3. Read one of the rebellious worship songs in Revelation. What stands out to you?
4. What is something practical you can do this week to be a rebel against Babylon?

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**Transcript:**

**WE:** Across cultures and time, there’s a story that keeps resurfacing and stirring our hearts and imaginations to something greater.

There is a story that seems to be written in our DNA

Think about it...

- The Iliad (Homer) – A coalition of Greek warriors fights against the mighty empire of Troy.

- Exodus in ancient Jewish Scriptures- Israelites against Egypt.
- Les Misérables- A small group of revolutionaries rises against oppression in 19th-century France.
- Lord of the Rings- The forces of evil want to take over the world and are stopped by small hobbits and an alliance between humans and elves.
- Star Wars- A small group of rebels defeat the evil empire
- Harry Potter/Xman- A persecuted group fights against oppression and evil.
- The stories of the American Revolution- small colonies fighting for freedom against the world's most powerful empire.
- WW2
- Gandhi and his people fighting for Indian independence.

All of these stir something deep in us- the desire to resist evil, fight for freedom, and give ourselves to a greater purpose.

We are drawn to these stories b/c they are shadows of the real story of the universe.

- The story REV reveals to us.

REV wasn't written to help us predict the future

REV was written to reveal the story of the universe. A story we all have a part in.

To understand it we need to step into the world in which it was written.

It was written to real people in 7 real cities... people like us... they had families, jobs, hopes, and dreams.

Though they were under the shadow of the Roman Empire...

- They dared to declare that Jesus, not Caesar, was the true king of the world.
- They refused to worship the emperor, the empire, or the idols of Roman gods or participate in the cultic practices of their neighbors.

This brought persecution, scorn, mockery, loss of income, and in some cases, loss of life.

- Some stayed strong. But others began cracking under the pressure.

And REV is Jesus' handbook on how to be his rebels in a world opposed to his kingdom.

**GOD:** Jesus writes a letter to each of the 7 churches...

Probably the most taught section of REV b/c, on the surface, it's easy to take lessons from them and apply them to our lives now, like the rest of the NT.

- And in the rest of the book, things get weird, so we don't usually teach that stuff.

But to hear/understand/and apply these letters fully, we need to zoom out.

These weren't just isolated churches having a tough time... there was a bigger enemy at work... an enemy that is still prowling around.

These letters were written to churches living inside Babylon.

The system built by the dragon and his beasts.

- Dragon- Satan... hell bent on destroying the people of God
- Beasts- Rulers and Empires given power by the Dragon to dominate the world
- Babylon- The system and culture created by the Dragon and the beasts.

Jesus writes to these churches b/c what is happening to them is what has been happening in the centuries since...

The dragon uses Babylon to infiltrate and dominate Jesus' church.

Imagine if this group here were the only JFs in Salem...

- The only ones who refused to play the Left/Right Dem/Rep game.
- Refused to give in to the worship and culture around us?
- And b/c of it, we were mocked, persecuted, and even killed.
- How long before we cracked under the pressure?
- But then we get a letter from one of Jesus' disciples with a message from Jesus himself.
- That's what these letters are.

The letters were written TO individual churches but FOR every church in every time.

And Jesus encourages most of them for their efforts to remain faithful, hold to the truth, and persevere even when they feel weak.

- Ephesus **Rev 2:2-3** *I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.*
- Pergamum **Rev. 2:13** *I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you there in Satan's city.*
- Thyatira **Rev. 2:19** *I know all the things you do. I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things.*

So Jesus commends many of them for clinging to their trust and loyalty.

But he also warns them: Babylon is not just "out there." It's already getting into your church community.

Scot Mcknight, in his book 'REV for the Rest of Us' shows how there are 4 ways Babylon infiltrates church communities

First, their love becomes disordered.

- **Rev. 2:2-4** *"I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You*

*have discovered they are liars. You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!"*

Other translations say, "You have lost your first love."

They were DOING all the right things... but the motivation, the heart of it wasn't love for God or others.

- As the apostle Paul says in 1 Cor 13... Right actions w/o love are pointless.

See, Babylon says, "Sure do good b/c it'll..."

- Make YOU look good (Pride),
- It'll get YOU what you want (Greed/Lust),
- It'll make YOU feel good (Selfishness).
- If you don't, YOU'LL get in trouble (Fear/Guilt)

When our motivation is duty/guilt/etc. We will eventually tire and fall

But when we work out of an ongoing and maturing love for God and others, we resist Babylon.

Question: Why do you do the good you do? What is your true motivation?

And when love is no longer the root... truth gets twisted.

Second, their teachings become distorted.

- **Rev. 2:14-15** *"But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching."*

What these exact teachings were, we aren't sure.

The story of Balaam is from the OT. Convinced the Israelites to worship the gods and sleep with the women of the Moabites.

The Nicolaitans were most likely people who said it was ok to participate in the Roman cults... sacrificing to and eating the food sacrificed to idols and participating in the festivals to the gods that could include erotic/sexual behavior.

It seems some in the church argued, "It's fine... we can follow Jesus and still do what everyone else around us is doing."

"As long as we are being good people, doing Jesus-y things, it doesn't really matter if we participate in this cultural stuff too."

But when we conform to Babylon, it shapes us into its own image.

Jesus says, either you follow me with all of you or you are following Babylon

- Participation in the empire is the same as rejecting the way of the Lamb.
- It's the way of Babylon and the Dragon OR the Way of the Lamb.

But it didn't stop there... the lies they tolerated began to shape their lives.

Third, their **worship becomes corrupted**.

- **Rev. 2:20-21** *"But I have this complaint against you. You are permitting that woman—that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet—to lead my servants astray. She teaches them to commit sexual sin and to eat food offered to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to turn away from her immorality."*

Very similar to the above.

Worship isn't just singing. It's our whole life... who and what are we living for?

Being a rebel of the Lamb means devoting one's whole life to the Lamb.

- And surrendering to/giving our allegiance to anything else is corrupting our worship to the real King.

But the difficulty for these churches is that religion and everyday life weren't compartmentalized.

- To be a good citizen, you participated in the religion of the empire.

So, to reject the empire's nationalistic religion was seen as turning your back on your community, your nation, your social network, and even your family.

It would require daily and often difficult choices to not go along with the rest of the society.

What would they choose to be loyal to?

- Babylon or the way of the Lamb?

Same question for us... what has our loyalty/worship?

- Our culture/country/society
- Or Jesus?

And once you allow Babylon to shape your life... it's not long before you start switching loyalties..

Fourth and finally, **loyalty becomes divided**.

- **Rev. 3:15-18** *"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see."*

Here we see one of the most devious ways Babylon infiltrates the Church.

This was written to the church at Laodicea.

- A very wealthy city

And this church had begun to rely on their wealth instead of Jesus.

They were self-sufficient... and Jesus was just a side hobby.

Their loyalty was to Babylon's comfort... not the Way of the Lamb.

- They were unable to challenge Babylon b/c they had become part of it.

That's the meaning of the lukewarm vomit comment.

- It's not about being on fire for Jesus as your youth pastor might have taught

Laodicea was in an interesting location...

One of their neighbors had hot springs that people believed had healing benefits... and they had aqueducts that would bring that hot water to Laodicea, but by the time it got there, it wasn't hot and healing anymore.. It was just lukewarm.

Another city near them had refreshing cold water from a nearby river. There was also an aqueduct taking that water to Laodicea. But by the time it got there, it had been warmed by the sun and was lukewarm... no longer refreshing.

So Jesus says... b/c you are simply going along with the culture of Babylon, you are neither healing nor refreshing... you're pointless and gross.

- Turn back to me, and I'll make you healing and refreshing effective rebels.

Now all of this can feel like a lot...

We want to play our part in the story of the universe... we want to be loyal rebels who follow the true king...

But it can feel overwhelming.

- Compromise feels inevitable
- It's easy to get tripped up, confused, or deceived.
- Constantly watching for Babylon can be exhausting.
- It could easily turn us into the types of people who shut out everything and refuse to let our kids read Harry Potter and watch the Smurfs b/c of the evil influence it might have.

But then the story takes an amazing turn.

After these letters John is taken into the ultimate reality. Worship in the throne room of God. And everything changes.

**Rev. 4:8b-11 and 5:9-14**

*Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,*

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—*

*the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”*

*Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,*

*“You are worthy, O Lord our God,  
to receive glory and honor and power.  
For you created all things,  
and they exist because you created what you pleased.”*

AND

**5:9-14** *And they sang a new song with these words:*

*“You are worthy to take the scroll  
and break its seals and open it.  
For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.  
And you have caused them to become  
a Kingdom of priests for our God.  
And they will reign on the earth.”*

*Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus:*

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered—  
to receive power and riches  
and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and blessing.”*

*And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang:*

*“Blessing and honor and glory and power  
belong to the one sitting on the throne  
and to the Lamb forever and ever.”*

*And the four living beings said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb.*

As the vision continues, it keeps getting “interrupted” by more singing to God and the Lamb.

So what do we do with these songs of worship?

- We let them shape us.

These aren't just songs from angels or happy pappy songs of comfortable people sitting in luxury...

They are songs for rebels who want to stay loyal to the Lamb while still living in Babylon.

### Worship shows us Babylon through God's eyes and how to live as rebels inside Babylon

It transforms us into people who know God is on the throne and the Lamb is the victor even if we are surrounded by and assaulted by Babylon.

The more this truth seeps into our bones, the more we are capable of living the way of the Lamb

When we worship, we begin to reflect Jesus in our everyday choices/lives.

- It shapes us into people who live like him, love like him, and show the world what he is really like.

It's not just about believing something... it's about becoming something... little Jesus' bringing Jesus revelation to Babylon.

- Doing what Jesus would do if he were living your life.
- Xian = Little Christ.

See the kind of worship we see in REV. isn't just singing some songs once a week at a church service...

### Worship is a life that continually acknowledges, celebrates, and enjoys the goodness and greatness of God

So the question is... are you ready to move beyond just believing information ABOUT Jesus... and start living in allegiance to him?

- Are you ready and willing to become a rebel of Jesus?

REV doesn't call us to be warriors FOR God but witnesses of the goodness, greatness, and love OF God.

- And it is through that witnessing, through lives of worship, that Babylon is resisted and defeated.

And maybe it's time for you to accept his invitation to follow him for the first time.

- Are you ready to join the rebellion?
- Just have to tell him and start following.

**YOU:** Jesus is calling his followers to be a community that isn't shaped by fear, guilt, or pride—but by courageous compassion and clear allegiance to the Lamb.

What if we could be known not for our outrage or retreat—but for our faith-filled resistance to the empire by living and loving like Jesus everyday?

A community who sings the songs of REV—not just with our mouths, but with our choices, loyalty, and lives.

Let's resist Babylon not just through effort but through worship.

Let's live the life of the Lamb—faithful, truthful, courageous, and surrendered.



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Pray: Jesus, use these songs to shape me into your reliant rebel.

This isn't just about individuals resisting.

It's about a church, a community, US...

- Becoming a group of witnesses who live the way of the Lamb... every day.

**WE:** So what would it look like for us—all of us—to take these letters from Jesus seriously?

What if we heard Jesus not just addressing them, but us?

What if we read REV not as a mystery to decode but as a mission to embrace?

What if we woke up each day not asking, "How do I survive Babylon?" but instead said, "How do I follow the Lamb wherever He goes?"

We don't have to be fearful disciples, we don't have to just go along to get along.

We can change the lives around us by allowing Jesus to change us into his rebels who challenge life in Babylon, wherever we encounter it.

Through Jesus, Babylon falls (next week)... not by brute force, but by the faithful worship of his people.

In the end, Worship doesn't just resist Babylon... it lets us participate in destroying it.

**Rev. 3:20-21** *"Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne."*