

Come Out of Her, My People (The Unhappy Hooker)

Revelation 18-19:8

November 4, 2001

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This sermon is really a continuation of last week's sermon (and actually all those that have come before). The Revelation is one incredible picture. Last week we preached from Genesis through Revelation about God's dream of creation: creators in His image. And we preached of the Bride and the Harlot.

Harlotry is the pinnacle of consumption—an “economy of consumption,” and harlotry is a great lie—a deception. It is the belief that one can purchase something which only comes by grace.

God created sexuality as a sacramental communion of grace. The groom goes into his bride to commune with her in love, and in the process he implants his seed in her womb—*his life*. She bears life—creation—in the image of God. Sexuality is to be “life given” and “life created.” And God designed it to be *pure ecstasy*.

Harlotry is a lie. It promises communion, life, and ecstasy, but . . .

Instead of surrender, it is control;
Instead of giving, it is taking;
Instead of creation, it is consumption;
Instead of ecstasy, it ends in depravity and tragedy;
Instead of communion, it ends in isolation and death.

Harlotry uses *people* to obtain *things*;
Love uses *things* to serve *people*.

Harlotry is consumption;
Love is creation.

Harlotry ends in dead hearts
alone in their own private hell.

So there really are *no happy hookers*.

In Revelation 17 we meet the Great Harlot. She's not happy but drunk with blood. She rides the Beast; she is dependent on the Beast and his kings, and they are dependent on her. They are using each other, so they *hate* each other. In the end the Beast burns her and makes her fall.

She is world economy
dependent on a unified political authority.
She is world trade
dependent on United Nations.

She is a goddess
who preaches liberty but practices licentiousness.

She is a goddess
who preaches freedom that is really bondage to evil.

Who is the Harlot? Well, she's **Babylon** . . . Babel in Genesis, where they built a tower to conquer Heaven. Babel is a tower that falls.

She's also **Rome**. Peter even refers to Rome as Babylon in I Peter 5. World trade flourished under Roman Empirical power. The Mediteranean Sea became a free trade zone. (This then is quite a picture: John the Apostle, old and exiled to Patmos by the Empire of Rome, sings a funeral dirge over Roman culture in the height of its glory.)

The Harlot also appears to be **Old Jerusalem**. Jerusalem fell suddenly, *crushed* by the Roman Beast in 70 A.D. She was called a harlot by God, because the people of God had sold out to other gods—*idolatry*.

When the voice cries in chapter 18, "Come out of her, my people," it sounds like Jesus. Remember that Jesus warned His disciples in Jerusalem to flee the city at the sign of its destruction. History shows that, in fact, they *did*.

In Revelation 17 John describes the Great Harlot, how she's destroyed by the Beast. In Revelation 18 he sings a funeral dirge over her destruction. Who is she?

Chapter 18:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird; for all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion . . .

"Porneias" in Greek means fornication, impure passion, harlotries. "Pornos" is "harlot" or "whore." All these words are from the same root — porn.

The United States of American is the world's number one producer of porn . . . something like a \$10 billion a year industry. Especially now with the Internet, all the nations of the world are drunk with our porn.

Do you use porn? "If you look on a woman with lust, you commit adultery in your heart," Jesus said. Sex for money or sex simply for pleasure (sex for consumption, sex outside the covenant of marriage) is "porneias."

. . . and the kings of the earth have committed fornication ["porneias"] with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness."

Our economy runs on “wantonness.” We call it “consumer confidence.” This was a recent perfume ad in the window at Macy’s:

You want it. You want it bad. Sometimes so much it hurts. You can taste it. You feel like you would do anything to get it. Go further than they’d suspect. Twist your soul and crush what’s in your way. Then you get it. And something happens. You become the object of your desire. And it feels incredible.

Does it? Throwing licentious parties for herself alone in the dark — The Great Whore.

“The merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness.” I bet more people around the world have tasted Coca-Cola than communion wine. But that only stands to reason, for “Coke is the real thing.”

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven . . .

. . . heaped like bricks in the Tower of Babel, heaped in order to seize eternity with human energy . . .

. . . and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her as she herself has rendered, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and played the wanton [that is, “gave herself luxuries”] . . .

I read that if we could shrink the earth’s population to a village of 100 people, one-half of the village would suffer from malnutrition, one-half of the village’s wealth would be in the hands of only six citizens, and all six would be American. I don’t know how accurate that is, but I do know that minimum wage in the Dominican Republic is \$28.00 a week. That’s really good considering that over 1 billion people subsist on the equivalent of less than \$1.00 a day . . . like in Mozambique.

In Mozambique infant mortality is almost one-fifth of the live births, 172 of 1,000. In the U.S. it’s 1 of 100.

“But man shall not live on bread alone but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. His Word is life.”

In the early 90’s it was reported that Americans spent 140 times as much on legalized gambling as overseas Protestant ministries. And we spent 17 times as much on diets and diet-related products. That is, while billions of unsaved people starved, we paid already wealthy people to help us not eat . . . at a rate of 17 to 1 . . . diets over the Word. We’re still some of the fattest people on earth. And a little preaching might have gone a long way in Afghanistan about ten years ago. . . .

. . . so give her a like measure of torment and mourning. Since in her heart she says, 'A queen I sit, I am no widow, mourning I shall never see' . . .

The Harlot has become *so arrogant* in her wealth she thinks she will never see suffering. "Health and wealth" theology is really strong in America: Our riches mean God's approval. This whole "Pre-tribulation Rapture" thing is really a recent American phenomenon. The idea is, God *surely* wouldn't let His chosen people suffer great tribulation.

So I guess that means those martyrs in the Sudan weren't chosen . . . And *of course* we're supposed to "pick up our cross and follow." In fact, you can get a nice gold-plated one on a chain at Macy's for \$49.95 . . .

. . . so shall her plagues come in a single day, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she shall be burned with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who judges her." And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and were wanton with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! alas! thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon! In one hour has thy judgment come."

And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo any more, cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

In my country white people are still far richer than black people. Don't be fooled. There is a reason for that . . . slavery.

And if I understand Scripture correctly, my country has systematically and hygienically aborted something like 38 million human souls since 1973.

Loneliness is longing for human souls.

"The fruit for which thy soul longed has gone from thee, and all thy dainties and thy splendor are lost to thee, never to be found again!"

The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?"

And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! In one hour she has been laid waste. Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!"

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea . . .

Jesus said, “It would be better to have a millstone tied around your neck and cast into the sea than to lead one of these little ones astray.” In my children’s school it is illegal to talk about God. Life is explained through consumption, “survival of the fittest.” Any biologist has to admit that doesn’t explain life, it explains death. Have you ever tried to teach World History without referring to Jesus? Of necessity it forces you to lie and lead children astray . . .

. . . a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and shall be found no more; and the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters, shall be heard in thee no more; and a craftsman of any craft shall be found in thee no more; and the sound of the millstone shall be heard in thee no more; and the light of a lamp shall shine in thee no more; and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall be heard in thee no more; for thy merchants were the great men of the earth, and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery [magic spell].

By graduation the average American teenager has seen 350,000 TV commercials, amounting to one and one-half years of eight-hour work days. Not just Americans, but all nations are sucked into our economy through commercials. It’s how we rule the world . . . our magic spell. And how do they work?

Remember this one? “Is that me holding you or you holding me? I cannot tell where you begin and I end. *Eternity.*”

What are they selling? — Perfume.
What can you say about perfume? — It smells good.
What do they promise? — Eternal communion.

Now in Eternity commercials they show children running down a beach . . . eternal communion that bears life. And all it really is is *smelly water*. That’s a lying promise, a magic spell, harlotry . . . and it works, for we buy the stuff.

And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

Prophets and saints bled for a vision of a country, blessed like old Israel . . . “Blessed in order to be a blessing.” That’s the Protestant work ethic: Work with God to create for others, instead of working alone to consume in the dark.

It may look the same on the outside,
but it’s dream is creation not consumption . . .
It runs on *Creator* confidence,
not *consumer* confidence . . .
It runs on *fullness* not *emptiness*,
giving instead of *getting* . . .

Israel was *blessed* in order to be a blessing, but they turned their blessings into idols.

I was listening to a secular rock song and heard these lyrics:

Only in America
We're slaves to be free
Only in America we kill the unborn
To make ends meet
Only in America
Sexuality is democracy
Only in America we stamp our god
"In God We Trust"

And it's illegal in the public education system to mention just who we think God might be. That means many children first read of "God" on a dollar bill.

What have you been mourning since September 11? I hope it is towers filled with priceless human souls for whom Christ died. But perhaps it is towers that represent an idol, our consumer lifestyle. . . towers of Babel.

You see, my heart is awfully invested in Babylon. God may be trying to remind me of something. So this is not an easy sermon to preach, but I'm scared not to preach it.

For while we were preaching through The Revelation, right after we spoke of the Beast as the nation of Islam, planes flew into the Twin Towers (the World Trade Center) right down the street from the United Nations, in the Great City. We watched them fall in one hour behind a statue on the waters, the goddess of liberty, whose liberty has become license. And the next week's text that I was to preach on in Revelation announces the fall of "Babel-on," for the Beast will attack and burn her with fire.

God might actually be sending us a message, even at the hands of the godless Beast. And the message is, "Repent." When-ever Israel encountered disaster, their immediate temptation was arrogance. "We're God's people!" But God's message was always the same: "Repent!"

Well, the U.S. is *not Israel*, but the Church is Israel. We may be living in the most dangerous place on earth, but not because of terrorists. Jesus calls, "Come out of her, my people," and we call back, "Well, we actually kind of *like* it here."

We're like dieters who work in a doughnut shop; like alcoholics who work in a liquor store. Is anything wrong with doughnuts and alcohol—the goods of this world? *No!* In fact, donuts can be used to save a starving man, and alcohol can be communion. But if you're a fat, alcoholic idolater, hanging around doughnut shops and liquor stores can be dangerous!

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."
In America? Yeah, right.

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."
In America? That's tough.

And to the extent America is a hooker, she's an unhappy hooker. For prostitution leaves you violated, alone, and mortally depressed. Some sociologists claim America is the most violent country on earth. Mother Teresa said several times, "The greatest poverty is in the west." She was talking about loneliness.

The suicide rate for youth in our country has tripled since the 1950's. Yet we are all worked up over Anthrax, because four or five people have died. Since September 11, if statistical rates stay constant, about 6,000 Americans have killed themselves. That's more people than the terrorists killed on September 11! Have you mourned their deaths? They were worse by far. They died feeling like lonely harlots.

So what is God saying? The voice cries, "Come out of her, my people." What does it mean when a man comes out of a harlot? Jesus is saying, "Stop fornicating the whore. She'll suck you dry and leave you desolate. Stop giving your treasure, your heart, your dreams, the deepest longs of your soul, to an economy of consumption. Your heart is only satisfied in me. And I am in the last and least of these, my brethren."

When you're depressed do you go shopping? Jesus calls to you in that moment saying, "Come out of her. She will not give you life."

Well, a man was made to go into a woman and give life. If he is to come out of a whore, into whom is he to give life and make life?

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

Once more they cried, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

And from the throne came a voice crying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great."

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" --for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

In Revelation 21:24 we read, "The kings of the earth bring their glory"—their life, their stuff—into the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ.

In Revelation 3:21 we read, "The New Jerusalem is [present participle] coming down." That means the New Jerusalem has been coming down for 200 years and is currently among us . . .

like Jesus said the Kingdom is among us (Luke 17:20). The New Jerusalem is the people of God—the Bride.

Come out of the Whore and go into the Bride . . . with your seed (“sperma” in Greek) if she’s your wife . . . with your treasure, heart, time, and money, if she’s your church. In other words, use *things* to love *people* and bear much fruit . . .

Fruit that will not be consumed in the fire
but purified for eternity.

If America is the Harlot, America is also the Bride. No country has ever *consumed* as much, and no country has ever *created* as much. We’ve built hospitals around the world; we’ve evangelized nations; we’ve even rescued the world from Hitler in World War II.

America is seduced by the Great Harlot, but she’s also salted with the Bride.

At the last Living Stone Service Philip Yancey shared about his recent visit to New York and Ground Zero. He could not stop talking about how *proud* he was of America. For at Ground Zero he saw . . . the Bride:

Firemen,
Policemen,
Construction workers . . .

. . . sacrificing themselves and pouring their lives into others. He spoke of spontaneous and planned prayer meetings all over the place. People’s lives had been changed. There were three booths set up right across from the site:

POLICEMEN FOR CHRIST
FIREMEN FOR CHRIST
SANITATION WORKERS FOR CHRIST

One of Philip’s pastor friends, Gordon McDonald, volunteered with the Salvation Army. In his journal McDonald wrote of the first night serving at Ground Zero. “In all my years of Christian ministry, [McDonald has ministered to presidents . . . he has written books] I never felt more alive than I felt last night.”

Alive — at the foot of a cross? Imagine that! Jesus is there impregnating His surrendered Bride with life, creating His Bride from the rubble of World Trade. The Bride is *in New York City*: the people of God. Some were in the Tower when it fell; some are now searching through the rubble. But the Bride is rising in the Harlot’s remains.

God consumes the great spirit of harlotry by turning harlots into brides. His love *is* a consuming fire. God’s people were all harlots without Him—idolaters. He creates His Bride from harlots by bleeding for them on His cross, then sending His word to conquer their hearts and impregnate them with life.

In chapter 19 the Word riding a white horse conquers the world. Then the Bride is revealed in all her glory.

We are created to create in His image. It means sacrifice, it means Word—seed—spoken into broken hearts. It hurts, but done in love it's a taste of ecstasy—life. It produces life—the party—the Kingdom—the New Jerusalem—even here. Come out of the Whore and go into the Bride.

Tony Campolo tells about a certain night when he found himself wide awake at 3:30 AM due to jet lag. He was in some U. S. city where he was to speak. But now he was alone—a tempting time for men and for preachers. He walked down to the street and into a dingy, little diner. The fat guy behind the counter shoved him a doughnut and some coffee.

About that time eight or nine good-looking prostitutes walked in. They sat near Tony. Their talk was loud and very crude. He was just ready to leave when he overheard: “Tomorrow’s my birthday. I’ll be 39.” A second voice said, “So what? What do you want from me? A birthday cake and a Coke? You want me to sing ‘Happy Birthday?’” The first one said, “Come on, why do you have to be so mean? I was just *telling* you, that’s all. I don’t want anything from you. I mean, why should *you* give me a birthday cake? I’ve never had one my whole life.”

Campolo waited until the women left, and he asked the fat guy behind the counter, “Do they come in every night?”

“Yea.”

“How about the one right next to me?”

“Yea, that’s Agnes. Why to you want to know?”

“It’s her birthday tomorrow. What do you say we throw a party?”

The fat guy thought a minute, smiled, and said, “That’s great. I like Agnes.” His name was Harry. He said, “I’ll bring the cake and spread the word.”

At 2:30 AM the next night Campolo came back with decorations he had purchased with his time and with his money. He had a big sign that said, “Happy Birthday, Agnes!” At 3:15 it was wall to wall hookers, Harry, and Tony. At 3:30 Agnes arrived. They all screamed, “*Happy Birthday, Agnes!*” And they sang to Agnes.

When Agnes saw the cake, she broke down weeping. Harry said, “Agnes, cut the cake. We want cake!” Finally, Agnes composed herself and said softly as she looked at the cake, “Look, Harry, is it okay if I just look at it a little while?” Harry said, “Sure. Take it home, if you want.” She said, “Oh, can I?” She looked at Tony and said, “I live right down the street. I just want to take it home.” She picked it up like it was the holy grail—the communion cup—and walked out.

At that, no one knew quite what to do. So they all looked at Tony. Being a pastor, Tony said, “Let’s pray.”

So he led them all in prayer to God through Jesus His Son—the Word. He prayed for Agnes, that God would bless her, change her life, and save her. When he was done, Harry leaned over with some hostility and said, “Hey! You never told me you were a *preacher!* What kind of church do you belong to?” Campolo said, “A church that throws parties for hookers at 3:30 in the morning.” Harry said, “No you don’t. There’s no church like that. If there was a church like that, I’d *join* it . . . I’d *join* a church like that.”

There is a church like that: Jesus’ church. He always got in trouble for partying with tax collectors and sinners . . . prostitutes like Mary Magdalene. But He turns prostitutes into brides.

“There’s no church like that!” I hope *we* are a church like that. Campolo said his story was partly fictitious, but ours is not . . .

When we go to the Dominican Republic, we usually stay in a place called Rosie’s. There are red lights above the doors, and it functions at times like a brothel. Last time Andrew was there, Tom set up a meeting between Andrew and Rosie, and he led her to Christ.

Your giving goes to places like the Dominican Republic and places like Alternatives Pregnancy Center. We help young mothers keep their babies. Who knows all the stories behind those pregnancies?

With your giving you love people in Mozambique and the Dominican Republic . . . harlots in the mountain, city, and world, people like us—people of harlotry, some very literal in their harlotry, some metaphorical in their harlotry, but all harlots apart from Christ, now redeemed by blood and impregnated with life.

We’re about to move into our new building. It represents our hearts, money, and treasure, and it may be harlotry if we see ourselves as religious consumers with the building there to service us alone. It may be harlotry that ends in stagnation, loneliness, and death.

But it will be life and the New Jerusalem if we think of it as Harry’s Diner—The Harlot’s Café. In it we throw parties for harlots and sinners. We not only serve Cokes and cakes to people driving by, but in worship we offer the body and blood of Jesus, who died for His whoring Bride and now impregnates her with life as we surrender to His love.

There was never a more creative moment than when Jesus (betrayed, forsaken by His Bride) took the bread and broke it and said, “This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper He took the cup and said, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me.”

He paints His Bride with His own body and blood, and impregnates His Bride with life when she comes to Him in surrender.

Clearly you *are* the Bride of Christ. And He *will not* let you go. But there is an Evil One, a Dragon, and I suspect he’ll send emissaries who, after a sermon like this, will whisper in your ear

something like this: “You’re a whore, aren’t you? You’re just bad. Why don’t you go watch some porn? Maybe you ought to go buy something.”

Even more than that, maybe he will say something like this: “Maybe you had better give a lot more. In fact, maybe you had better give 20%.” And then you say, “Jesus, would you be pleased with me if I gave 20%? 10%? How about if I gave you my raise this year. Would you be pleased with me then?”

Jesus says, “I *am* pleased with you! You came to my table! I washed you with my blood. You’re my Bride. You can’t buy my love.”

So when you hear those voices, rebuke the Evil One and remind yourself who you are. You’re the Bride of Christ.

Further Reading

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. . . ."

-Revelation 18:4-5

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." . . . Therefore its name was called Ba'bel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

-Genesis 11:1-4, 9

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. . . ."

-Luke 12:32-34

"And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations. . . ."

-Luke 16:9

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.

-I John 2:15-17

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

-I John 3:16-17

A survey of expenditures in the late 1980s and early 1990s demonstrated that Americans spent annually twice as much on cut flowers as on overseas Protestant ministries, twice as much on women's sheer hosiery, one and a half times as much on video games, one and a half times as much on pinball machines, slightly more on the lawn industry, about five times as much on pets, one and a half times as much on skin care, almost one and a half times as much on chewing gum, almost three times as much on swimming pools and accessories, approximately seven times as much on sweets, seventeen times as much on diets and diet-related products, twenty times as much on sports activities, approximately twenty-six times as much on soft drinks, and a staggering 140 times as much on legalized gambling activities (Ronsvalle & Ronsvalle 1992: 53-54). And in 1995 worldwide expenditures for advertising, designed largely to convince us that all of these and similar items are necessities, amounted to \$385 billion (R. Sider 1997: 21). As for church construction, between 1984 and 1989 American Christians spent \$15.7 billion (R. Sider 1997: 89). Suter (1989: 649) puts it pointedly: "In its most dramatic and obscene form, the question is whether the labour and resources of the Third World nations should contribute more to the opulence of America's cats and dogs than to the elementary good health of Third World humans."

Meanwhile, the amount of American giving to charitable organizations of all kinds remains relatively constant at somewhere between 1.6 and 2.16% of a family's income (Stafford 1997: 21-22). American *Christians* do only slightly better, averaging somewhere around 2.4% of the national per capita income (R. Sider 1997: 205). And consistently, Americans with lower incomes give more of their earnings to religious organizations than those with higher incomes (Ronsvalle & Ronsvalle 1990: 154). . . . As for our governments, the US ranks last among the eighteen major Western donors of foreign aid in terms of percentage of GNP, while the UK comes in twelfth (R. Sider 1997: 31).

-Craig Blomberg, Denver Seminary

Only in America
We're slaves to be free
Only in America we kill the unborn
To make ends meet
Only in America
Sexuality is democracy
Only in America we stamp our god
"In God We Trust"
What is right or wrong
I don't know who to believe in
My soul sings a different song
In America
Church bells ringing
Pass the plate around
The choir is singing
As their leader falls to the ground
Please mister prophet man
Tell me which way to go
I gave my last dollar
Can I still come to your show
What is right or wrong
I don't know who to believe in
My soul sings a different song
In America
I am right and you are wrong
I am right and you are wrong
I am right and you are wrong
No one's right and no one's wrong
In America

-“Creed”

On Earth this desire is often called “love.” In Hell I feign that they recognise it as hunger. But there the hunger is more ravenous, and a fuller satisfaction is possible. There, I suggest, the stronger spirit—there are perhaps no bodies to impede the operation—can really and irrevocably suck the weaker into itself and permanently gorge its own being on the weaker’s outraged individuality. It is (I feign) for this that devils desire human souls and the souls of one another. It is for this that Satan desires all his own followers and all the sons of Eve and all the host of Heaven. His dream is of the day when all shall be inside him and all that says “I” can say it only through him. This, I surmise, is the bloated-spider parody, the only imitation he can understand, of that unfathomed bounty whereby God turns tools into servants and servants into sons, so that they may be at last reunited to Him in perfect freedom of a love offered from the height of the utter individualities which he has liberated them to be.

-C. S. Lewis

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

-John 3:16

Throughout the entire Old Testament dispensation the wedding was announced. Next, the Son of God assumed our flesh and blood: the betrothal took place. The price—the dowry—was paid on Calvary. And now, after an interval which in the eyes of God is but a little while, the Bridegroom returns and “It has come, the wedding of the Lamb.”

-William Hendrikson

“And more than once I asked myself – as everyone asks – is God here? And I decided that He is closer to this place than any other place I’ve ever visited. The strange irony is that, amidst this absolute catastrophe of unspeakable proportions, there is a beauty in the way human beings are acting that defines the imagination. Everyone – underscore, everyone – is everyone else’s brother or sister. There are no strangers among the thousands at the work site. Everyone talks; everyone cooperates; everyone does the next thing that has to be done. No job is

too small, too humble, or, on the other hand, too large. Tears ran freely, affection was exchanged openly, exhaustion was defied. We all stopped caring about ourselves. The words 'it's not about me' were never more true.

"No church service; no church sanctuary; no religiously inspiring service has spoken so deeply into my soul and witnessed to the presence of God as those hours last night at the crash site.

"In all my years of Christian ministry, I never felt more alive than I felt last night. The only other time I can remember a similar feeling was the week that Gail and I worked on a Habitat for Humanity project in Hungary. As much as I love preaching the Bible and all the other things that I have been privileged to do over the years, being on that street, giving cold water to workmen, praying and weeping with them, listening to their stories was the closest I have ever felt to God. Even though it sounds melo-dramatic, I kept finding myself saying, 'This is the place where Jesus most wants to be.'"

-Gordon McDonald's journal entry (via Philip Yancey) after volunteering at Ground Zero

And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it

-Revelation 21:10, 24

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