

**“Serving the City”
New City Church of LA
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- We all come to the city with a purpose.
 - Agrarian culture changes by the Industrial Revolution and the cities boom
 - Urbanization is still occurring
 - According to the UN-HABITAT 2008 Annual Report, sometime in the middle of 2007, the majority of people worldwide were living in towns or cities, for the first time in history;
 - By 2050 over 6 billion people, two thirds of humanity, will be living in towns and cities.
 - Information Age now causes us to be in the city but even more fragmented from one another as offices and lives have become highly mobile
- Most of the time we’re here because we’re getting something *from* the city.
 - Economic gain, job opportunities, more accessibility to resources
- We end up using the city to build our resume or to enjoy our lives the way we want to enjoy

- This passage gives us a radical new perspective on how to engage with the city and culture.
 - Jerusalem has just been sieged
 - Nebuchadnezzar deports a large group of Jews to Babylon.
 - Jeremiah is prophesying this whole time about how the people of God are to correct their ways
 - Once in exile, he writes this letter as a prescription on how to interact with Babylon—a large and hostile city.
 - Remember: the role of a prophet isn’t to tell the future, but to speak God’s will to His people
 - Jeremiah is giving instructions on how to interact with a hostile, foreign city
- Los Angeles is a hostile and foreign city
 - Quoting a great philosopher of our time, Axl Rose (**SLIDE 1-AXL ROSE**), “Welcome to the Jungle” was written about LA
 - Welcome to the jungle
 - It gets worse here everyday
 - Ya learn ta live like an animal
 - In the jungle where we play
 - If you got a hunger for what you see
 - You'll take it eventually
 - You can have anything you want
 - But you better not take it from me

- According to NPR, LA is the most gang-saturated city in the country
 - This is a rough place
- For many Christians, the city—and LA—can seem to represent some sort of “bastion of sin”
 - They would point to the crime, the vanity, the utter accessibility to sin
- Why is it important to engage with the city/culture?
 - Cities are the birthplace of culture (music, art, movements) (SLIDE 2-CITY)
 - Cities most often show what our culture values the most (our tallest buildings)
 - As much as we understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, Christians will be motivated to engage culture and redeem the city therefore transforming the world
- This is difficult to do---two views on the city
 - The city is immoral and we should withdraw (false prophet Hananiah’s argument against Babylon)
 - Exclusion and Embrace: A man who left Sarajevo before the war in 1992 and joined the Serbian army that was shelling the city said in a phone conversation with his best friend who had remained and whose home was destroyed by a shell: “There is no choice. Either us or them” He meant “Either we will inhabit this place or they will; either we will destroy them or they will destroy us; no other option is available.
 - False dichotomy
 - The city and culture is great and we should take advantage of it while we can (but move away when we need to)
 - Both views assume the city and culture is a resource to be used for our own good!
 - But this passage prompts us to have an entirely new relationship with the city we live in and the culture around us
- How are we to love the city/culture around us?
 - Give our resources (v. 5)
 - Most people take resources from the city (example: night life, jobs)
 - But this tells us to give resources. The people of Israel were called to plant and eat.
 - Give of our families (v. 6)
 - They are commanded to “increase” and not “decrease”
 - Commentators disagree on whether this meant inter-faith relationships
 - At the very least, this would mean the Israelites must learn to co-habitate with the Babylonians—a hostile culture
 - Give of our peace (v. 7)

- The Israelites were being asked to pray for a culture not their own and hostile to them
 - They were asked to pray for its SHALOM
 - What is SHALOM? It's an all-encompassing Hebrew word—not like saying “Peace, dude”...it means something much deeper
 - God establishes a mutual relationship between His children and the city
 - This means we too are to seek the shalom of the city and culture even if it means risking our peace and prosperity
- Give of our resources, give of our families, give of our peace
- What empowers us to do this?
 - There are a few ways NOT to try and approach this engagement with the city
 - Attitude of: we need to save this place before the fires of God come down to destroy it
 - Leads to moralism and self-righteousness (SLIDE 3-REPENT)
 - This is best seen in guys walking around with the placards about how the world is ending tonight
 - Attitude of: this is our home and we need to take it back
 - Leads to a sort of social activism that esteems the city and confuses the means for the end
 - Both views revert back to the assumption of the city/culture as something to be manipulated, used or owned!!
 - Instead, we need to be motivated by the redeeming act of Jesus
 - See, most people read this passage and place us, the Church, as the exiles living in a foreign, hostile city
 - But, the book of John tells us something different
 - 10He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13children born not of natural descent,[c] nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.
 - The “Him” is Jesus! He's the exile
 - We are not the exiles, we're Babylon
 - God first became an exile towards us
 - He came into human form
 - He suffered and died
 - He gave up his shalom—his total perfect wellness to suffer
 - Why?
 - To save US—the TRUE Babylon

- This reverses our paradigm and allows us to care for the city without feeling self-righteous about it AND without feeling put off by its immorality
 - Because Jesus was not self-righteous about us
 - AND he wasn't put off by our immorality

- This experience with Christ should empower us
 - Give of our resources
 - Jesus gave of himself for us (philippians 2:8—even to death on a cross). He didn't take but instead gave. He gave up A LOT from himself.
 - I mean, imagine Jesus' interview for a job after having left heaven for earth:
 - Yeah, I took a lower paying job
 - It was a pretty long commute
 - I had a pretty bad apartment—the bed felt like a rock
 - My co-workers weren't too nice to me
 - In the end I got axed for something someone else did!!!
 - This can motivate us to want to give to those around us of our resources (time, energy, mental capital).
 - Example: Brooklyn families coming together to provide low income housing.
 - One thing I never noticed about this passage before: it was the elite, the artists, the builders, and the King who were carried into exile. They had so much to offer the city in terms of providing for its material, cultural and social growth
 - This is why it's so important to support local artists (like e3rd does) and local points of cultural renewal
 - Ask yourself—how can you give of a gifting you have? What skills can you reinvest into Los Angeles?
 - Give of our family
 - John 3:16—God gave away his only child to death on a cross. God crossed the ultimate racial/cultural divider (heaven/earth). He didn't draw boundaries on what a bad neighborhood was. God let his kid, Jesus, play with all the other kids even though the other kids weren't all that good of an influence!
 - This motivates us to live radically in regards to how we interact with our “neighbors.”
 - Example: Redeemer church in south central LA.
 - Give of our peace
 - In the Garden of Gethsamane he cried out and wept tears of blood because he knew he was soon going to give up his peace, his shalom for us
 - This motivates us to risk our shalom for the sake of others. We can give up our peace and prosperity because Jesus first did it for us.

- Example: The Christians during the Black Death, going into the city to help those with the plague. Known as “Plague Saints”
- Volf describes the way in which we are to relate to “others” as covenant and not contract
 - A contract with your neighbors and the culture of the city is performance based, temporal and contingent—God didn’t establish a contract with us!
 - A covenant is not performance based—it’s a promise to make space for others to inhabit your life
 - “God renews the covenant by *making space* for humanity in God’s self. The open arms of Christ on the cross are a sign that God does not want to be a God without the other—humanity—and suffers humanity’s violence in order to embrace it....the social side of that new covenant is *our way of embracing* one another under the conditions of enmity.”
 - Explain this quote
- Pray