

The Urbanity of the Bible, Sean Benesh

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In *The Urbanity of the Bible* Sean Benesh offers evidence to support the idea that Christianity should be viewed as an urban religion. He offers early biblical evidence that God had an expectation for city life and that Jesus in his own life very much ministered in an urban setting. Benesh goes on to support the belief that as a result of globalization the notion of Christianity as a religion for the city must be embraced for proper evangelization. Benesh's desired impact is that we as Christians embrace both the Lord's Great Commandment and Great Commission to be effective in properly sharing Christianity.

More frequently we see the urbanization of vast areas of the world. As a result of large groups of individuals moving to slum cities for a chance of upward mobility or even as a result of migration over fifty percent of the world's population lives in cities. In some areas we have mega cities where the population is significantly greater than the area per square footage. In these areas of high populous city living there usually exists a great need for tangible physical support of its members. As early as in Genesis chapter 4 we see that Cain moved into a City named after his son. Benesh postulates that perhaps Cain needed the support and safety of a City environment following his punishment. Benesh offers other Biblical examples of the need for City living and the Lord's desire or *Missio Dei* requires us to consider the importance of focusing our ministry efforts on city dwellers. An analysis of City living in the Bible as a blessing is that it serves as a place refuge, an incubator for commerce, a catalyst for innovation and creativity, a place for equity and care for the marginalized and as a place that serves as a conduit for *Missio Dei*. (Benesh 2015 p.68). In his analysis Benesh sees the Old Testament that demonstrated city life as the center for the world to see the Lord's mission happening within it. However, in the New Testament Benesh sees the Lord's mission as an expression that launches

its efforts outside of the City outwards. Therefore, the manner of the mission in the City of the New Testament was more gospel oriented lending itself to evangelization

Benesh feels that as a result of the urban nature of the Bible we as Christians have to do more than share the Gospel. There exists a need and command to help the poor, to seek justice and love mercy and to walk humbly. He feels that our mission is to become part of the city and questions why some church planters plant churches where they do. Why is there sometimes a high concentration of church planting on a particular strip or a particular area? “Our lifestyle and posture in the city shows to urban dwellers that the outflow of our faith in God through Christ compels us to love the city, and sacrifice on behalf of the city.” (Benesh 2015, 171,2). This means that we may have to move in deeper, not plant on the outskirts but dive in to the tough areas where there is a greater need of grace. Our living and operating tangibly in these areas lends to a greater demonstration of God’s grace and by virtue thereof a greater reflection of the gospel message. According to Benesh, Jesus operated in the city. Much of the Lord’s ministry we are told of in the Gospels occurs as Jesus travels from city to city. Also, Jesus’ introduction as a newborn is one of an international migrant as he traveled to and from Egypt to escape Herod’s plan for mass killings.

The study and application of urban ministry models requires the constant reanalysis to reflect the changing landscape of the city. For example as a result of gentrification many of those most in need are forced out. Additionally, as a result of migration there can often times be a great change in the cultural make up of a city populous. Benesh states that we must immerse ourselves in the city to properly reflect and relate to the needs of it. How can we truly know the needs of the city if we watch from afar without becoming part of it? It is true that the great commandment requires us to be the incarnate Jesus to our neighbor. We are charged to help the

poor, as they will always be with us. We cannot be everything to everyone all the time, thus we must take time to reflect and analyze the needs of our city to be relevant and transformational.

Benesh offers biblical evidence to support his point that we must have a bifurcated approach to our ministry. His exposition of biblical stories that evidence his point can certainly advance his agenda. However too often in his writing it seems as his agenda to argue the point that Christianity is solely an urban ministry. What are we to do with the rural tribes hidden in forests and jungles that must hear the Word too? Are we to wait for them to seek upward mobility in the nearest city? Also, Benesh spends way too much time discussing bike paths. Clearly, he is an advocate of having bike paths as he talks about it in excess in his writing. I am loathe to argue in excess of one view or another when discussing the Bible. There are far too many scholarly people that have a particular bent for some social justice issue that can pick out points in scripture to argue for their desired social project. There must be a holistic approach to scripture that includes the urban and the rural, that is the incarnate Jesus to the poor and to the poor in spirit. The aforesaid notwithstanding proper theological reflection should impact the implantation of a dualistic approach to urban ministry. There is a need for an approach that considers our command to share the gospel as well of the reality to become part of the city to be relevant and more importantly to be the incarnate Jesus to a people in need.

WORKS CITED

Benesh, Sean. 2015. *The Urbanity of the Bible: Rediscovering the Urban Nature of the Bible*, Eugene, OR: Urban Loft Publishers.