

Book Review

“Reaching the New Jerusalem: A Biblical and Theological Framework for the City”

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In the book, "Reaching the New Jerusalem: A Biblical and Theological Framework for the City", a compilation of essays and articles are used to assist faith practitioners in working together, to holistically provide shalom to hurting people, places, and systems within the urban setting, working with God on toward a New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem, as depicted in biblical text, is a holy and royal city. Like the Old Jerusalem, its ruler and King, is the Lord, Jesus Christ. The major difference between the Old Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem is the eradication of all forms of sin in the city in the latter. This book establishes the biblical case for reformation of a city, indicating the love and goodness that the Father desires to be manifest among city residents. With reflections on immigration, educational inadequacies, racism, housing shortages, consumerism, income inequities, and a plethora of the city's sins, the editors have given foundational instruction to birth a new city of God on earth, while awaiting His triumphal 2<sup>nd</sup> advent, ushering a heavenly city, the New Jerusalem.

Most interesting was the theory of "Ecclesiapolis", which reveals the symbiotic relationship between church and city as one of, mutual transformation. The author, David A. Currie, shows that over the course of history in the past two thousand years, with increased industrialization came increased urbanization. This created increase city populations and an array of social problems along with it. The church, being able to relevantly minister, became a source and resource for urban culture shifts. "Pentecostalism began as an urban movement ... Pentecostalism continues to manifest itself primarily as an urban phenomenon even in majority world contexts such as Kenya." (Park, A. Spencer, W. Spencer, 54) The social conditions of urban centers; overcrowding, food shortages, high crime rates, juvenile delinquency, mass incarceration, mental health issues, and more,

give rise for the church to ultimately respond. In fact, this is exactly what Jesus did as He ministered in the cities of Gallilee, Capernaum, Jerusalem, Bethesda and others. Jesus also indicated that the church should do likewise. "Then they too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not give you whatever you needed?' Then he will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.'." (Matthew 25:44-45, NET)

The church is well equipped, by the Spirit of God, to make a difference in the cities of the world. Within urban settings, there are acts of God's redemptive work from Genesis to Revelations that create guidelines for the contemporary church to emulate. Throughout the text, "Reaching for the New Jerusalem", various faith practitioners use their God-given gifts, earned skills and abilities to bring shalom into their urban areas. If there is a need for adult education, the church can contact local community colleges, and public high schools for assistance with educational programs, even for English Language Learners (ELL). Direction of emergency services (ie. food and shelter), if not implemented by the church, the church can be a conduit for meeting those needs in the community by building relationships with city agencies that provide emergency care services. Overall, the idea of seeing a need, then meeting that need, should be the ministerial goal for the church. Ecclesiological reforms go beyond the preaching of the Gospel to the implementation of the Gospel. As much as the city needs the church to bring about healing and transformation, the church needs the city to provide opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ. Christianity is not merely a religious ideology but a spiritual practice. "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is

poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:14-17, NET) Urban centers provide an array of depraved situations, systems, and motifs that require faith in action. One does not have to look far beyond the church doors for areas of which to serve in the city, displaying the love of Christ just by doing so. Obstacles toward healing, growth and transformation are inherent within the city, but also within the church, the body of Christ. The church is not immune to facing some of the very same urban problems that we need to solve. However, this creates an empathetic opportunity and urgency to formulate solutions, inspired by the Spirit of God, to address the city's social ills. This is both what God has called the church to do, and become. The church is a refuge, a source and resource for healing all sin, sins of the body, and sins of the soul, sins of the mind and of the heart.

Similar to the political function of collective bargaining, the church has historically been a driving force toward social reforms when working together. When we overcome our racial, classist and ethnic prejudices it esteems the diversity of the urban world, proving that we can all work together. With renewed minds concerning success and human achievement, the church holistically reverses the effects of a materialistic culture, bent on selfish consumerism of goods and services. The church can return back to the greatest commandment of loving God and loving our neighbors, which requires the compassion in sharing and caring that Jesus implemented as He walked in ancient, urban areas. The church needs to implement strategic and targeted approaches with the aim "at changing the conditions in the environment for people in need. [They] empower the church

and the community to eradicate pervasive conditions in the community that limit freedom and access to social and economic opportunities for those in the margins.” (Park, A. Spencer, W. Spencer, 61)

It is clear that the church’s prophetic role in contemporary urban society is fueled by the eschatological vision of the New Jerusalem. The church is in fact working toward a New Jerusalem here on earth, where the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ is evident among every aspect of society. The desolation and sin in our urban centers that leaves people marginalized, hungry, isolated, fearful, poorly educated, and continually lacking in means, is replaced by the hope of a new and holy city, the New Jerusalem. There is no reason for poverty and injustice to continue, when the people of God are active in modern society. The church, as the organic body of Christ, has the opportunity to be God’s vessels in affecting change and renewal in our cities so that “[His] will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10, ESV)

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Park, Seong Hyun. *Reaching the New Jerusalem: A Biblical and Theological Framework for the City*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013.