21ST CENTURY CITIES: THE NEW FRONTIER OF GLOBAL MISSIONS

In every earthly city, there are two cities vying for control – the City of Man and the City of God.

WHY CITIES?

The obvious answer to this question is that God loves cities because that is where the people are. But is this really the case? Population experts assert that at present we are undergoing the largest wave of urban growth in history. Over 400 cities around the world have a population of at least one million. Already, for the first time in history, more than half of the world’s population lives in urban centers. By 2030 this number will swell to almost 5 billion. This demographic shift is mostly taking place in Africa and Asia, largely in low-income settlements in developing countries – much of it in the 22 "megacities" whose populations will exceed 10 million and in some cases grow to more than 20 million by 2015. But are there biblical reasons why we should focus our missions efforts in the 21st century on the city?

GOD LOVES CITIES

- The cultural mandate God gave to Adam implied city-building (Gen. 1:28). Cultivating resources, building from what was at his disposal, and managing the affairs of his family and the extended family of mankind would have naturally resulted in cities.

- But the race of Adam fell into sin and estrangement from God. Though corrupted and polluted by the presence of evil, mankind still built cities (cp. Gen. 4:1-6:8). Much that displeased and angered God was done in these cities, but God relented from sending immediate judgment. In this way even today the cities of the world stand as evidence of God’s preserving and preventative grace.

- Throughout the history of redemption, God pursued His rebellious children in the city. We see in the OT and in the NT that His judgment is focused on cities (Isa. 13:19; 21:9; 47; cp. Rev. 16:19; 18). But what of His love? Perhaps the greatest historical example of God’s love for the city is found in the OT– in the story of Jonah (1:2; 3:2; 4:11).

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Gen. 1:28

“And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

Jonah 4:10-11
GOD BUILDS AND PROMISES CITIES

- History began in a garden, but it will end in a city (Rev. 21).
- Abraham was promised much by the Lord (Gen. 12:1ff). But his understanding of God’s promises led him to look for a city — not an earthly one, but a heavenly — a city that God Himself would design and build (Heb. 11:10).
- The Church, as the Bride of Christ, looks forward herself to life in a beautiful, radiant city which shines with the glory of God (Rev. 21:10-11). Having the Tree of Life in its midst informs us that God's final city is the fulfillment of the purposes of the Garden of Eden.

PAUL WENT TO CITIES

- Paul launched out to cities all around the Mediterranean from what was the third largest city in the Roman Empire (Acts. 13:1-3). God used a cosmopolitan church and a cosmopolitan man to reach a cosmopolitan world (cf. Acts 20:23).
- His strategy began with the largest city of the region (cf. Acts 16:9, 12). His missions work was focused on urban centers (e.g., Thessalonica, Philippi, Corinth, etc.).
- Paul believed that the way to permanently influence the Empire was through its cities. And the way to permanently influence the cities was by planting churches. He planted churches in each city (cf. Titus 1:5); thus, we have epistles that are named for churches in first-century cities.
- Upon doing this, he could say that he had preached the gospel in a region and that he had no more work to do there (cf. Rom. 15:19, 23)

Why did Paul and the apostolic community focus some much attention on cities?

1) They were the population centers of the Empire.
2) People in the city were less conservative and more open to new ideas.
3) The Gospel spread faster into the influence centers – law, politics, the arts, etc. and into diverse national groups.

By 300 AD, more than half of the urban populations of the empire were Christian while the countryside was mostly pagan (the word *paganus* means “country-man”).
WHAT IS GOING ON WITH 21ST CENTURY CITIES?

We are entering a post-secular, urbanized, and global world. “The 21st century,” writes Parag Khanna, “will not be dominated by America or China, Brazil or India, but by the city. In an age that appears increasingly unmanageable, cities rather than states are becoming the islands of governance on which the future world will be built. This new world is not – and will not be – one global village, so much as a network of different ones.”

In an article entitled “Beyond City Limits”, Khanna provides some starting facts concerning the emergence of global cities:

- Just 100 cities account for 30% of the world’s economy, and almost all of its innovation
- NYC’s economy alone is larger than 46 of sub-Saharan Africa’s economies combined
- Massive influx of people has spurred the growth of existing cities as well as the creation of new ones on a scale not previously imagined (cities like the ones in China’s Guangdong province or the new cities in the Arabian desert)
- 21st century cities are drivers of diplomacy to a greater degree than the countries they exist in (cp. NY, Washington, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, etc.)
- Megacities are on the rise, especially in Asia – for example, in India more than 275 million people are projected to move into the country’s teeming cities over the next two decades
- Many megalopolises are flourishing, but with stark economic inequalities – stunning modern high-rise buildings next to destitute squatter villages.

In *Urban Ministry in a New Millennium*, David Claerbaut writes: “To understand the city is to understand the future. A world-class city is a microcosm of the world. A city dweller has the opportunity to become truly international and cross-cultural.”

Tim Keller and J. Allen Thompson point out that reaching the people of these cities means reaching three kinds of people who live in the city. Together, they exert tremendous influence on our society, and cannot be reached by living in the suburbs:

1) The *elites* who control the culture and who are becoming increasingly secularized

2) The *masses* of new immigrants who will move out into mainstream society over the next 30 years

3) The *poor*, whose dilemmas are rapidly deepening and affecting the whole country

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1 Parag Khanna, “Beyond City Limits,” Foreign Policy Magazine (Sept/Oct 2010).
1. **We must pray for these cities.** God has a plan and a purpose for these cities. We must pray for these cities to receive the message of the Gospel. We must pray for these cities to be infiltrated by Gospel-movements. We must pray for church planting churches to take root in the heart of these cities.

2. **We must focus on church planting in cities.** Leading missiologist C. Peter Wagner has famously said: “Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven.” Jesus’s call was to plant churches – not simply share our faith! The Great Commission included *disciple-making and baptism*, both of which were done within under the authority and within the context of *the local church* (cp. Acts 2:41-47). As we have seen, this was the practice of the apostles who followed Jesus. Keller points out that new churches are most effective at reaching new generation, new residents, and new people groups. Research also demonstrates that it is new churches that best reach the unchurched\(^4\).

3. **We must strategically focus missions work on reaching cities.** Our local church missions programs should include outreach to cities. Many of the world’s neediest cities are in the 10-40 Window – the most populated yet unreached region on the planet. Imagine the impact of having every local church in America supporting a work in one of each of these cities in the 10-40 Window.

4. **We must send short-term teams into cities.** As the Lord leads, we must look to gain a foothold in one of these cities. Short-term trips can be an affordable way to help churches to gain first-hand information, come up with creative and unique evangelistic ideas, establish on-field relationships, and forge ministry partnerships to reach ministry objectives.

5. **We must raise up a generation of missionaries who understand the value of targeting the city.** In the late 1800’s, the Student Volunteer Movement began with a vision of sending scores of young people to the mission field from the Western world. By 1959, over 20,000 young men and women had answered the call. The harvest fields are even whiter today. As parents and as the church, we must raise up a new generation who will see the need and answer the global call to reach 21\(^{st}\) century cities.

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\(^4\) Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, p. 30

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**THE WORLD’S TOP 20 CITIES BY POPULATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo, Japan</td>
<td>35,200,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jakarta, Indonesia</td>
<td>22,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumbai, India</td>
<td>21,255,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi, India</td>
<td>20,995,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manila, Philippines</td>
<td>20,795,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City, USA</td>
<td>20,610,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>São Paulo, Brazil</td>
<td>20,180,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seoul, South Korea</td>
<td>19,910,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico City, Mexico</td>
<td>18,690,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai, China</td>
<td>18,400,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cairo, Egypt</td>
<td>17,290,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Osaka/Kobe, Japan</td>
<td>17,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcutta, India</td>
<td>15,535,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Los Angeles, USA</td>
<td>14,775,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shenzhen, China</td>
<td>14,470,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beijing, China</td>
<td>13,955,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moscow, Russian Fed.</td>
<td>13,675,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guangzhou, China</td>
<td>13,245,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Istanbul, Turkey</td>
<td>13,135,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karachi, Pakistan</td>
<td>13,085,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Numbers shown include population within the recognized metro area of the city, and they include people living in the immediate surrounding area outside of the established border of the city. Ref: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_by_population](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_by_population)
WHAT CAN YOU DO RIGHT NOW?

1. Pray.
   - Pray for God to burden you (and your family) for a city.
   - Adopt a megacity.
   - Adopt a missionary or missions agency in a city.

2. Stay informed.
   - Follow events in megacities.
   - Read the leading newspaper online from an adopted city.
   - Begin making an information folder on an adopted city.
   - Receive updates from workers or agencies in the city.

3. Get involved.
   - Communicate information about the adopted city to others in the church.
   - Share your burden with the Mission Committee.
   - Find ways to support the work of the Gospel in the city.

4. Be willing to go.
   - Plan an upcoming vacation to the city.
   - Plan a short-term missions trip to the city.

5. Go.

OTHER IDEAS???
BIBLIOGRAPHY


