

CoaH 20/20 – A City Church

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Jeremiah 29:4-7

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INTRODUCTION

- When I became a Christian in college, I got connected with church... I thought church was something you just do on Sundays...I didn't realize I how the view and experience with church was the result of a major shift that had happened early in the 20th century involving Liberalism, Fundamentalism, and Neo-evangelicalism. I didn't understand any of them but these movements were affecting every church I went to.
- In the first part of the 20th century, German liberalism began to infiltrate liberal churches in America. By the time American culture began to shift its moral thinking in the 50-60's, many of the mainline denominational churches began to compromise on doctrines like the exclusivity of Jesus as the way of salvation and the bible's teaching on gender and sex. These denominations were motivated by not wanting the church to be irrelevant to culture. **LIBERALISM'S** motivation could be seen as a desire to **"LOVE THE WORLD."** But in the midst of their desire to stay relevant with the outside world they began compromising the Word of God and lost the gospel.
- The initial response was fundamentalism – which was an emphasis on the fundamentals of Scripture – the deity of Jesus, the inspiration of God's Word, the death of Christ for the sins of the world, his bodily resurrection, etc. The early fundamentalist movement helped preserve historic biblical Christianity.
- It wasn't long before the fundamentalist movement began to fracture into two parts. The first group is what is largely called **fundamentalism** today. They saw culture moving away from the values of God's Word so they moved away from culture. The idea was the church needed to be a separate and distinct people who aren't like the world. This desire to maintain a biblical sense of holiness and purity caused them to withdraw from culture at large and led them to create their own culture with its own music, its own books, its own movie, and its own way of doing church. These fundamentalists focused on the bible but sometimes would take on a legalistic aspect like hard core positions on alcohol, dancing, playing cards, dressing certain ways, and other stuff. Fundamentalists mantra was **"BE NOT OF THE WORLD"**
- The other part of the fundamental movement developed into what could be called neo-evangelicalism. Neo-evangelicals held to the authority of Scripture and historic doctrine but saw the churches call to love and serve those in the non-Christian culture America was becoming. They wanted to see people who were not Christians meet Jesus and they knew you couldn't reach the world while hiding out from it or robbing rocks at it. The fundamentalists saying was "In the world but not of the world." The **neo-evangelicals' were motivated to "REACH THE WORLD."** This group was not as clearly defined but when I was in college was still connected with aspects of the fundamentalist movement, mainly for the bible teaching.
- So, I cut my theological teeth on Bible studies by fundamentalist guys like John MacArthur and I'm grateful for that but I always felt the call to reach the world by engaging with it like Jesus and the early church did. I felt the deep biblical call toward holiness like the fundamentalists, I felt the call to love those outside the church like liberals, and I longed to reach the world like the neo-evangelicals.
- From my seminary days until I was around 30 I wrestled with this tension but couldn't seem to find an expression of the Christian church that really connected with me. I was leading a 125 year old church that had too much history and too much culture for me to lead where I felt God calling

me.

- It was around that time that God began to call me to Boston to plant City on a Hill. What I didn't realize when it began was that this was going to be the opportunity to start a local church to live out the biblical picture of the church in a way I had not been a part of. I really wanted to see a church that seeks to live out the best of liberalism by truly loving those outside the faith, the best of fundamentalism by maintaining Christ-like character, and the best of neo-evangelicalism by seeking to make Jesus known.
 - Liberalism – love the world
 - Fundamentalism – be not of the world
 - Neo-evangelicalism – reach the world
- Today as we look at Jeremiah 29 and CoaH's vision, we will see how all 3 of these are important to fill out God's vision for his people living in a culture that is not Christian.
- The Israelites found themselves in a similar situation to the church today in Boston. The city is not Christian and people worship everything from money to sex to success. The Israelites were in the city of Babylon. It was run by a pagan king who fancied himself a god and was ruthless in exterminating those who opposed him. There was no option of rallying for Christian laws. There was no chance of getting people to vote in a Christian king. There was no hope that the majority culture would cease to be antagonistic to the claims of the Christians in Babylon.
- In this context we see God calling his people to live as an alternate city within the city in 3 ways.

1. Be not of the city. (v.4)

- This is the fundamentalist approach but we'll see in a minute it is balanced with the others.
- v.4 *Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.*
 - "Exile" – The Israelites had sinned against God so he judged them and sent them out of Jerusalem. They were sent out of their homeland in 587BC to go live in a pagan land. They were exiles - I like the word "sojourn" – exile sounds like we have been cast out of God's presence but the Christian enjoys God's presence. Sojourn has the idea of journeying through the city toward another destination. Sense of NOT ever fully belonging.
- Peter calls Christians *sojourners and exiles* in 1 Peter 2:11. This is a basic part of who we are as Christians. We are sojourners in a land that is not our home.
- ILL – Last week we talked about how Jesus has called us to be missionaries. In 2 Cor 5 we saw the apostle Paul refer to missionaries as ambassadors. Ambassadors are NOT home by definition. They are sojourning in a foreign land, representing their King.
- Daniel and his friends were part of this exile. They were in the capital city as chosen high capacity youth. They were taught Babylonian culture and had to work in the king's court. Yet, Daniel and his friends NEVER LOST their call to be holy and set apart for God. They knew this city was NOT their ultimate home and they can't just pretend it is.
- So we CAN'T settle down and do life in Boston in a way that it looks just like someone who does not know Christ and is making their permanent home here. We can never be fully comfortable here. The closest sense of being home a Christian should have is when they are with their church family.
- A Christian who is always looking forward to the city of God will never get comfortable in the city of man.

2. Love the City (vv.5-6)

- Christians aren't to "hunker" down and hide out. Integrate into the life of the city...READ vv.5-6 *Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear*

sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.

- God didn't want them to decrease; He wanted them to increase. God rejected the idea of being a church that just imitates the city and assimilates into its culture. He shot down the idea of bending into the culture so far that we lose our own identity.
- Historically, we know Babylon had a very specific and strategy for taking over another country. They would go in and fight and beat them down. Then they would bring them into their own city and make them feel right at home. They gave them all the good jobs, let them live in good neighborhoods, and even gave them governmental positions. They would assimilate them into their culture and they would get so at home that two generations later there were no more people waving their hands claiming to be Israelites. They liked being Babylonians and would take on all their systems and values.
- God told the Israelites He didn't want them to do this. He didn't want them to decrease, but to increase. He wanted them to move into the city, but continue to be His people. He wanted them to move into the city, get into the middle of it, build houses, raise children, but not lose their identity when they did it. Be a part of the city, but be His in the middle of it. He destroyed the idea of being a church of the city. Then He also destroyed the idea of being a church against the city.
- So God's vision is a church that is not OF the city but does love the city and is part of the city. These two put the church in a position to reach the city.

3. Reach the City (v.7)

- Up to this point, everything Jeremiah describes is just tied to doing life in the city. Work, family, and food are just part of doing life in the city and loving the city. But now, God calls his people to do something that comes from being the distinct people of God living in a city and loving a city.
- v.7 *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*
- So the church doesn't use the city! People often move into Brookline/Boston, whether it be from a suburb or across the country, to make a name for themselves, to earn a degree, to get ahead... to use the city.
 - But God says *seek the 'welfare' of the city* = shalom = The Hebrew word shalom means total flourishing in every dimension: socially, economically, physically, and spiritually. This is something only God can bring and he does it through the power of the gospel. As people are reconciled to their creator and to each other and press out to serve others in his name, shalom grows and multiplies around the city.
- What happens when there is a strong movement toward flourishing in a city –social, economical, physical, and spiritual flourishing? Life is good in the city! Rather than being a place where some people thrive and some are left behind, it becomes a place where the rising tide lifts all boats.
- This means when Christians live out as sojourners in the city but FOR the city they can make a tangible impact on life in the city for good through the gospel.
- How did the Christians seek the shalom of the cities of the Roman Empire in the first century? Not from power, not from position, but from the bottom up. In a culture where there was little to no welfare, Took care of orphans, served the down trodden, outcasts, served each other when they were sick. When plagues came through, they faithfully sacrificed their own health and lives to serve others while they were dying.
- Historically, Christians have served the good of the greater city and the gospel has gone forth in a powerful way. I am absolutely convinced that this is the way the God intended the gospel to go forth in a city. Christians doing life, serving others, and sharing the gospel along the way.
- These ideas are of a city within the larger city. A city that is not OF the bigger city but loves the bigger

city and reaches the bigger city with the gospel. This is what the church is SUPPOSED TO BE and this shapes our vision of City on a Hill for the next 5 years and beyond.

COAH VISION

- As most of you know I'm going on sabbatical next month and will return in late August. I wanted to introduce our vision before I take off but after I get back we are going to dedicate a message to more fully fill out this vision. So, today is more along the lines of doing a Duck Boat tour, you'll hear some cool things and get a feel for the city, but you will likely forget some of it and need to spend some more time to get a real grasp of what you saw.
- For the first five years of City on a Hill we grew from a few dozen people meeting on Sunday nights in the basement of a synagogue in Brookline to a few hundred people gathering in two worship gatherings and eighteen community groups around the city. The changes haven't just been in numbers though. We have gotten a little older (believe it or not!), have more married people and families attending each week, and have become more multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. Lots of great things have happened but there is so much more to be done to see our city impacted with the gospel.
- As we think about where God wants to take us in the next five years, and beyond, we have to re-imagine our vision as a church. We are not a new church trying to survive but a healthy medium-sized church seeking to be faithful and fruitful for Christ in this next season. It is not so much that our original vision is completely changing but more that it is moving from version 1.0 to 2.0 or from Yosemite to El Capitan. We will continue a lot of the things we are doing but are now imaging what they might look like in five years or more down the road.
- Our original mission to be a gospel-centered community on mission doesn't change but what we see that looking like in the next five years is exciting to imagine. The vision for CoaH for the next five years is becoming

A CITY CHURCH

- Imagine what this church might look like... as we seek to not be of the city but to love the city and reach the city.

1. IMAGINE.... A church with radical DIVERSITY yet uncommon unity.

- We live in a country where racial tensions and systemic racism threatens to further divide us and our city is not immune. Boston has strong economic and racial lines that divide the city. A gospel-centered church displays the power of the gospel to unify people from diverse ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. God has uniquely positioned City on a Hill as church growing more racially and culturally diverse. Our community groups are at the core of how this happens and must continue to press out.

2. IMAGINE... A church with a passion for gospel-JUSTICE in the city.

The Bible calls God's people to minister in both word *and* deed. Christ came to inaugurate a kingdom where all injustice will be undone so his church should be demonstrating that truth through their actions.

- What if there were a community in Brookline/Boston that wasn't here to take from the city but to serve the city?
- What if individuals in this community had a reputation of not running from brokenness but stepping into it? This is a community of servants who take on the cost of undoing the brokenness of others.
- What if Jesus' family was on the forefront of restoring the broken, practicing loving hospitality with those in need, and humbly serving those marginalized in our city?

3. IMAGINE... A church known for GENEROSITY of time, money, talents, and relationships.

We know from 2 Corinthians 8-9 radical generosity marked the church in Macedonia... they could not

help but share what they had out of joy to those in need. They were so generous their reputation spread throughout all the churches. What if there were that type of generosity in the church in Boston? What if the church was...

- Generous in practicing hospitality with our neighbors.
- Generous in opening up our homes and choosing to rent/buy with others for the sake of a neighborhood.
- Generous in supporting global missions and church planting around the city through finances, coaching, and resourcing.
- Generous to organizations in the city that serve the cause of Christ (like campus ministries and crisis-pregnancy centers)
- Generous in mobilizing volunteers to use their gifts and skills to meet needs in the community.
- Generous in stepping in with resources and help where there are individuals in need.

4. IMAGINE... A church which is a catalyst for the MULTIPLICATION of disciples who make disciples.

- Jesus called the church to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20) who make disciples and the opportunity for disciple-making is unique in Boston. Boston has the largest concentration of 20-34 year olds of any city in the U.S. What would the impact be of making disciples of 5% of that group? What would it take to give every man, woman, and child in our area the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel?
- There are 685,000 people in Boston and Brookline. Approximately 3% of them attend gospel-believing churches. What would it take to see that number move to 4% by the end of 2020? That's 6,850 new Christians? What would the impact of that be?

5. IMAGINE... A church that is strategically on MISSION to the nations, locally and globally

- Boston is ranked 21st in Global Cities Index (2014), meaning everyday the nations are impacted by Boston. Factors taken into consideration for the index are business activity, human capital, information exchange, cultural experience, and political engagement.
- In addition, Boston is 3rd in the world in the Global Cities Outlook, measuring, future potential global influence. All of this influence, yet Boston is by far one of the smallest cities on the entire index, at only 625,000 people. This means, Boston may be, pound-for-pound, the most strategic city in the world for impacting the nations with the gospel. Its per capita influence is greater than New York, the #1 city on the Global Cities index. As a matter of fact, the per person global influence is 6 times higher in Boston than New York because we are so much smaller and yet have a global influence.
- Imagine a church that saw this as a God-given opportunity to reach the nations with the gospel?

6. IMAGINE... A church growing as a NETWORK of congregations building a movement across the city.

Waiting for a generation for all the new churches, and the ones planted in the near future, to mature and reach critical mass is one option but the urgency of the need and the strategic opportunity in Boston calls us to consider, is there another way to see a movement happen in the city? If we want to see every man, woman, and child have the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel and have a local, healthy congregation to connect with, we need to see a city church made up of a network of neighborhood churches.

From multiplication to a movement.

Diversity | Justice | Generosity | Multiplication | Mission | Network

We need to go from being neighborhood church to a city church

FOR THE FAME OF JESUS IN BROOKLINE, BOSTON, AND BEYOND.

Not a cool plan because the elders got together and dreamed it up. Jesus died to make us this church in Boston. Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

- I want us to pray now...

- If CoaH is your home church, how does God want you to be involved?

 - Some of you are already here, and this is home. I pray you take on this vision and get involved and believe by faith Jesus can do it!

 - For some it will be plugging in serving and being on mission for a year while you live here.

 - Others of you, I'm praying that God will call to put down roots in Boston long-term.

COMMUNION – a symbol of the kingdom. Jesus said he wouldn't eat of it again until he comes again.

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