

**Intro:** On August 24, 410, the Visigoths sacked Rome, leaving the great empire on its knees. The people who once ruled the world were left searching for answers. Philosophers and other leaders tried to make sense of it all. Thankfully, one of the greatest theologians in the history of the church, St. Augustine of Hippo, lived in the city during this time and took opportunity to draft a 1,000 page letter that was titled the *City of God*. In his massive work, Augustine argued that the story of Rome was only one very small story in the history of God's larger story in the world. He taught that there are really two cities, the city of God and the city of man. One has a basic love for God, the other idols. One is destined for eternal life, the other eternal death. Augustine taught that those who belong to the city of God have the privilege and responsibility to display their dual citizenship in a compelling way to those who simply dwell in the city of man.

**"Working as a City within a City"**

**Jeremiah 29:1-7**

**The Point: God calls his people to work for the good of their city as a city within a city.**

**I. Live as the city of God while you dwell in the city of man (29:1-4).**

**[Read 1-4] Location & Identity**

- There is a clear change of residence. Jerusalem to Babylon and the change could not be more drastic!
- Jerusalem. City of David. Mount Zion... But these were volatile times in Israel. The people had plummeted morally and forsaken their God for worthless idols (Jer 2:13??). Jeremiah was given the unenviable task of declaring God's message of repentance and coming judgment. Throughout the early chapters of this book, he declared that Israel would be sent into exile. By the time we get to chapter 29, many of them were already in exile in Babylon. As a result, he was persecuted for it.
- Babylon was the capital of Assyria. They were a dominating empire, and one of the most feared for their wicked and barbaric conquests. Needless to say, the transition from Jerusalem to Babylon must have been unimaginably hard for them.
- Their plan, their hopes, their desires were to be out of exile, so much so that false prophets, like Hananiah (in ch. 28) and Shemaiah who surfaces at the end of this chapter, rose up... I got something to tell you... We'll be out of this situation with the quickness. That's what everyone wanted to hear. Their message was analogous to the health & wealth preachers . . . So they were probably not thrilled to receive Jeremiah's instruction from God.
- But let's not miss the careful wording that opens the letter in the opening salutation: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles *whom I have sent into exile* from Jerusalem to Babylon.
- Were the Babylonians the acting agent in Israel's deportation to Babylon? Yes. Put that "a" in "agent" as 'lower case.' The larger question: Was God the acting agent in Israel's deportation to Babylon? Yes. Put that "a" in "agent" as an upper case. God is ultimately sovereign over the times and places of our dwellings.
- Here's the catch: their change in location did not change their identity as "his people," "God's treasured possession," and "the sheep of his pasture." {Identity in Christ... "you are Christ's" (1 Cor. 3:23)}
- We're going to see that God wanted his people to go on living as his people no matter where God places us or how drastically our circumstances may change. God desires the same for us.
- If you belong to God, then you are citizens of two cities & subjects of two kingdoms.

**The Christian: Citizens of two Cities/Kingdoms**

- **"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints" (Ephesians 2:19)**
- **"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20)**
- **"For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come." (Hebrews 13:14)**
- The classic question that God's people have answered in every age is: How should we, as Christians, live in the culture in which God has placed us? Or to put it another way, "How should the city of God live in the city of man?"
- I want to lay out a simple framework for how Christians typically respond to the culture. Here are three options.

**Christians & Culture**

- **1) Christians Against the Culture.** This response looks to reject most everything in the culture and/or retreat into their own Christian ghetto. A friend of mine calls this "**cultural anorexia**." Let's go to movies. Nope. Read some magazines. From the devil... Go to the beach. You might sin... There are definitely things we should reject, but that should not be our general posture toward the culture. #2. . .
- **2) Christians Of the Culture.** This response basically receives and imbibes the culture showing very little distinction between being in the world, but not of the world. This is accommodating completely to the culture, and we could call this "**cultural obesity**."
- **3) Christians In the Culture.** This response is neither afraid nor naïve, but seeks to transform the culture by redeeming what is redeemable. Christians in the culture provide us a third and better way that we could call "**cultural fitness**." Christians in the

culture sound the call for “engagement.”

- We should engage our culture by working and living in a distinctly Christian manner in any and every endeavor under the sun.
- This is what Abraham Kuyper referred to as “sphere sovereignty.” He said, **“No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” – Abraham Kuyper**
- This is a call to full & complete engagement, and we can do so without quoting chapter and verse. It does not matter if we’re talking Medicine, the Military, Business, Law, Politics, the Sciences, Arts, Technology, Education, you fill in the blank.
- We are doing this series, because we want to release you into your sphere of competence and expertise to do phenomenal work that promotes the good of the city and displays the radical change the gospel brings. Every person in this room has opportunities to make lasting impact in your vocation and on the culture however great or small.
- It means treating customers with real care and concern. It means refusing to exploit people’s ignorance and extending generosity. It means displaying creativity and ingenuity in the arts without sacrificing ethical convictions.
- Now, I am not suggesting that the transformation of culture is the mission of the church. I am suggesting that the culture will be greatly influenced as Christians fulfill their vocational callings in a distinctly Christian way. Cultural engagement and transformation will be the natural byproduct of Christians living as salt and light wherever they are.
- The church’s job is not to start a political party, or a non-profit for every worthy cause, but we, as a church and especially as individual Christians should support promote gospel values wherever we find them.

Trans: So how do we engage and influence the culture in which we live? Verses 5-7 tell us.

## II. Seek the welfare of the city by engaging in prayerful good work (29:5-7).

**Read 5-7:** “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.” (Jeremiah 29:7) Let’s take these two commands in reverse order. . .

### Prayer

- “Pray to the Lord on its behalf...” One of the missional commitments of our church covenant is to pray for Medford & Greater Boston. We should pray for health, safety, security, protection, justice for the poor, unity, good education, economic progress, and that opportunities for work and leisure abound.
- Additionally, we can pray for the city by praying for our work. Ask God enable you to work with skill, excellence, and integrity. We should pray for our coworkers, give thanks for successes, and seek grace for the challenges that come our way.
- And why should we pray? After all, the city is a lost cause; it’s irredeemable. There is no doubt our city is plagued by great sin, not because the sidewalks or streets or parks or buildings are sinful, but because they are filled with sinful people like us. BUT our city is also filled with great potential!

### The Strategic Nature of a City

- The city is a strategic place. Cities are culture making places because they are the centers of education, government, media, and the arts. Sociologist James Hunter makes the insightful point that a nation could be 80% Christian and “have almost no cultural influence if [those Christians] do not live in cultural centers and work in culture-forging fields such as academia, publishing, media, entertainment, and the arts.” Sadly, over the past \_\_\_ years, many Christians have largely flown out of the city and into the suburbs.
- People often ask why we decided to plant a church in Boston. 1) Need: 2.5% population; 2) Nations; 3) Global city with global influence; 4) Red Sox.

People usually take one of two attitudes toward the city. Some people...

- Use the City: This is a parasitic approach to the city. Boston is my ticket to a better life. Boston is my playground to greater pleasure. Boston is a waitress to serve my needs. We can selfishly consume the city, or it can be a platform for sacrificial service.
- That’s the better way. We should pray for our city to experience transformation, better governance, better neighborhoods, better opportunities for everyone in the city.
- But, it’s not enough to pray. We must also seek or pursue the welfare of the city. Look back at verse 7: “But seek the welfare...”
- This is the second and better attitude toward the city, not using the city but seeking to *build the City*.
- Placement: Building the city may mean you choose to live here longer than you expected. Rather than showing up for a few years for undergrad or grad school, or finding the first job that’s a stepping stool to a better job elsewhere, choose to make a longer investment relationally and through your church/this church in order to seek the welfare of the city.

### Pursuing Shalom

- The word “welfare” is translated in many other versions as “peace.” To understand this verse we really need to begin to get a grip

on the **OT concept of shalom**. *Shalom* is not simply the absence of conflict. But God's idea of peace, *shalom*, runs so much deeper. *Shalom* refers not simply to the absence of conflict, but to the flourishing God desires for his people to experience. This is complete wholeness, fullness, harmony, abundance in every sphere of life.

What does it look like to seek the *shalom* of the city? How can we work for the flourishing of our city?  
Let's go back to vv. 5-6...

### 1) Pursue *shalom* by cultivating God's good creation.

**Read 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." (Jeremiah 29:5-6)

- This reminds us of the language of Genesis 1:28, what some theologians refer to as the cultural mandate, where God told Adam & Eve to be "fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over" everything that lives on earth. We take God's creation and then cultivate it for his glory.
- Mark Noll speaks of this in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*: "**Who, after all, made the world of nature, and then made possible the development of sciences through which we find out more about nature? Who formed the universe of human interactions, and so provided the raw materials for politics, economics, sociology, and history? Who is the source of harmony, form, and narrative pattern, and so lies behind all artistic and literary possibilities? Who created the human mind in such a way that it could grasp the endless realities of nature, of human interactions, of beauty, and so make possible, the theories of such matters by philosophers and psychologists? Who moment by moment sustains the natural world, the world of human interactions, and the harmonies of existence? Who maintains moment by moment the connections between what is in our minds and what is in the world beyond our minds? The answer in every case is the same—God did it. And God does it.**"
- Work involves taking the raw materials God has given and developing into something true, beautiful and good.
- If people begin quitting their jobs one by one, our society would progressively turn into a wilderness. The lack of cultivation would drive us into a chaotic wasteland. Conversely, being cocultivators with God means there are countless ways to "reshape the world." (Maybe use Andy Crouch's wife or see his book for more...)

### 2) Pursue *shalom* by practicing justice.

- Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"
- OT scholar Bruce Waltke defines justice in a that might surprise us. He says: "**The righteous (the just) are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community; the wicked (the unjust) are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves.**"
- How can you seek the flourishing of our city by disadvantaging yourself in order to advantage those around you? What sacrifices can you make? What rights can you set aside in order to promote the good of others?
- *Take posture of a SERVANT*: Give of your time. Serve at a community event. Volunteer at a non-profit. Join the PTA. Coach a little league team. Help with our efforts at RHC to love and serve the city and exemplify Christ in all things. [with Soccer Nights, our local partnerships, CG Service projects]
- This is about being a good neighbor. Doing our small part to make our city a safer and better place.

### 3) Pursue *shalom* by doing excellent work.

- This should be inherent in the previous two. Do your job and do it well! Pursue growing competence to do excellent work.
- Pic: Do you remember the "Miracle on the Hudson?" After a bird flew into one of the engines of US Airways Flight 1549, Captain "Sully" Sullenberger and crew, landed the plane in the Hudson River and evacuated all 155 people with no loss of life. They were later awarded the with the rare Master's Medal for their "split decision making" and "text book evacuation" and "heroic achievement." Competence is crucial.
- Strive to make a contribution to your field. Improve your work. Work on your work "People sin in their vocations, and they sin against their vocations."
- I love what Dorothy Sayers says about how the church should encourage those in the workforce: "**The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him to not be a drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to come to church on Sundays. What the church should be telling him is the: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.**"
- We can and should feel good when we put in a good day's work.

*Here's the good news. When we seek the shalom of the city, there will be two awesome results!*

- #1) "For in its welfare you will find your welfare."
- #2) *All of this, all of our work, all of our relationships, all of marriages, all of our parenting, every trip to the grocery, every all of our multiplication, all of our cultivation should point to something much greater.* As we engage in good works, we are giving people a preview of what the coming city of God will look like.
- We cannot read the final chapter yet, but every time we feed the hungry, heal the sick, bind up the brokenhearted who have been tormented by injustice and abuse, then we are giving tiny previews of what the final chapter will look like. No hunger, no pain, no abuse, no injustice, perfect peace and flourishing in the city of God.
- We hear an intense reverberation of *all of this* in the words of Jesus in **Matthew 5:14-16: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."** (Matthew 5:14-16)
- When we live as a city within this city, we give a counter-cultural and compelling picture of work, ambition, greatness, friendships, power, and sex. Make no mistake about it. God desperately wants to see his people prosper and flourish. Listen to the hope of vv 8-14.

**Conclusion:**

- *Gospel Hook:* Here's the deal. You can't truly seek the flourishing of the city of man if have not experienced the shalom Christ brings... Is your life being flooded with the light of Christ? We can't shine what you don't have...
- Do you know the peace of God? Peace does not simply mean that God is no longer against you, but that he is immensely and infinitely (wc) for you! He doesn't simply forgive us for our unrighteousness, but he gives us the righteousness of Christ. He doesn't simply cancel our debt, but he loads us with an incalculable inheritance.
- It is this reality in the gospel that infuses our life with the potential to flourish as the city of God in the city of man.