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God of this City; Lord of this Nation

Part One

Human history, as we see in the Bible, starts in a garden and ends in a city. I read recently that 174 million people live in the world's twelve largest cities. 94% of North Americans, 74% of South Americans and 73% of Europeans now live in cities. For the first time in history, the world is more urban than rural. Over half of the people in the world presently live in cities. By 2050 there will be 6.4 billion people living in cities. The urban population in Africa will double between 2000 and 2030 and will grow to 742 million.

The Apostle Paul, in his evangelistic outreach and strategy, selected cities along major trade routes. This was likely done to expedite the spread of the Gospel. Not only does the population, education, finances usually abound in cities, sin and wickedness also flourish.

If asked to describe your city in one to three words, what would quickly come to mind? Swarming streets, tedious traffic, soiled slums, soaring skyscrapers, boulevard beggars and constant commotion begin the list. Surely, a list of good and bad, negative and positive would speedily be generated. There is: lost, unreached, dark, hopeless, desperate, unpromising, worldly, and wicked to add. Did I mention sinful? Doesn't it cause your heart to sink, feel sick and sad? But, there is hope.

Bluetree, a music group, comes from Belfast, Ireland. One year they were invited to sing at a praise event in Pattaya, Thailand. This beautiful city is tarnished by sexual slavery and prostitution. Girls are bought from their parents for a price; sold into the sex industry at ages as young as five years old. Is it possible for God to show His light in such a dark place?

The group sang for over two hours and started feeling God's heart for this city. They began spontaneously singing, unrehearsed, the lyrics to the song "God of this City." The words were not just for Pattaya. They are for every city. They are for your city and mine.

God seemingly gives a prophetic voice over nearly any city in any nation: "You're the God of this City...You're the Lord of this nation....For greater things have yet to come and greater things are still to be done in this city."

Paul labored with little success and great opposition in this city known for its idolatry, sensuality, and being a center of commerce. Some rejected the truth. Some stirred up trouble. Should Paul leave or stay? Looking at this city, it would have been easy to give up hope. But, God saw much people there. God's plan was to save many. He promised Paul success in his labor.

"One night the Master spoke to Paul in a dream: 'Keep it up, and don't let anyone intimidate or silence you. No matter what happens, I'm with you and no one is going to be able to hurt you. You have no idea how many people I have on my side in this city.' That was all he needed to stick it out. He

stayed another year and a half, faithfully teaching the Word of God to the Corinthians” (Acts 18:9-11, MSG).

The essence of these words is similar to the promise of Isaiah 41:10. “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (NKJV).

“To walk by faith means to see opportunities even in the midst of opposition. A pessimist sees only the problems; an optimist sees only the potential; but a realist sees the potential in the problems. Paul did not close his eyes to the many dangers and difficulties in the situation at Corinth, but he did look at them from the divine point of view. Faith simply means obeying God’s will in spite of feelings, circumstances, or consequences. There never was an easy place to serve God; and if there is an easy place, it is possible that something is wrong. Paul reminded Timothy, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12, NKJV). “Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament” wrote Francis Bacon; “adversity is the blessing of the New.” Paul did not allow adversity to keep him from serving God” (*The Bible Exposition Commentary*).

- God gives Paul the same promise that endorsed and authorized the Great Commission, “I am with you always” (Mathew 28:20, ESV).
- God still gives men a vision for a city, nation, or even multiple nations. We cannot and will not be disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). “I’m sending you off to open the eyes of the outsiders so they can see the difference between dark and light, and choose light, see the difference between Satan and God, and choose God. I’m sending you off to present my offer of sins forgiven, and a place in the family, inviting them into the company of those who begin real living by believing in me” (Acts 26:17-18, MSG).

- We must speak out against the sins of the city (Jonah 1:2; Acts 15:7; Ephesians 6:19), yet also proclaim God’s compassion and love (Ephesians 4:15). Truth must be preached in the streets of our cities (John 17:17; 3 John 4).

- God is with us as we proclaim His Word. Isaiah 59:19 popularly reads, “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.” Some scholars suggest that the comma has been misplaced here and should read, “When the enemy shall come in, like a flood the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.” See the difference? This change is consistent with other translations of the verse that tell us that the Lord comes like a fast-flowing, raging flood. Even if one keeps the comma as placed in the King James Version that is not a problem. In that case, not only does the Lord raise a standard against the enemy, He sits on the flood and remains King forever (Psalms 29:10). Either way, we win; Satan loses!

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isaiah 43:1-3, NKJV).

He knows the end result of our faithful labors in His harvest field (John 4:35). The harvest is great. God has never had a problem finding a harvest, only in finding willing workers to bring in the crop (Matthew 9:37). We do not walk by sight. We are not moved by circumstances. We walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Things thought impossible are more than possible to God (Luke 1:37; 18:27). Faith is still the substance of what we are hoping for and the evidence of things not yet seen (Hebrews 11:1). It hasn’t entered into our hearts the things that God has prepared (1 Corinthians 2:9).