

**Mars Hill Church 10th Anniversary
Loving the City (Jeremiah 29:4–9)**

October 1, 2006

Pastor Mark Driscoll

I have many people in this city.

– Jesus (Acts 18:10)

Today Mars Hill Church celebrates its 10th anniversary. God has been exceedingly gracious to us in every way. Rather than speaking about our past, though, I want to focus on our present and our future; there are many fruitful years of ministry left for our church and city.

While we believe there must be faithful churches wherever there are people, we also believe that cities (like Seattle) and their surrounding areas (like the Puget Sound) are of strategic importance. This is because culture flows downstream from urban areas where government, education, healthcare, information, entertainment, trade, travel, and industry are concentrated. An urban area is marked by density and diversity, and for the first time in the world's history, roughly half of the world's population is urban. That number is expected to swell to 60 percent by the year 2030.

Regarding cities, the Bible actually opens with a garden and the cultural mandate to build a city. The Bible ends with the unveiling of the heavenly city, an urban paradise for God's people (Revelation 21–22). In fact, Christianity began as an urban movement led by Paul, whose itinerant church planting ministry was almost exclusively urban. He moved from city to city and bypassed the rural areas. By AD 300, roughly 50 percent of the urban population in the Roman Empire was Christian, whereas 90 percent of the countryside was still pagan (the word *pagan* simply means “one who lives in the country”).

As a church that loves the city of Seattle and the surrounding Puget Sound region, it is important for us to learn from the example of Paul, as well as from other parts of Scripture. The same truth—the significance of urban ministry—is expressed in Jeremiah 29:4–9, which is the focus of our study today. In this passage we find that God's people have been defeated by the godless Babylonians and were taken captive into their great city of Babylon (which is in many ways like Seattle). Bewildered, God's people refused to act like missionaries to their city. God responded by speaking to them through the prophet Jeremiah and giving them four commands, calling the Christians to love their city.

1. Be a missionary to the city.

⁴ *This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:*

God places His people in cities they may not like (e.g., Babylon or Seattle) because He wants them to be agents of cultural transformation. Babylon was founded by the godless man, Nimrod (Genesis 10:10). Symbolically, it came to be associated with the counterfeit kingdom of Satan and the haven for all sin (Revelation 18:2,10, 21).

As missionaries to our city, it is important that we know our city. Some interesting insights include:

- Seattle is the fifteenth largest market in America.
- The population of the greater Seattle metro area is roughly 1.7 million.
- King County has grown by 98,245 people since 2000.
- The urban population is expected to grow by 60 percent by 2040.
- Seattle is America's most educated city; over half of adults hold a bachelor's degree.
- Seattle is the fifth "Creative Class" city in America.

2. Become a stakeholder in the city.

⁵ *"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.*

- The average person in the Puget Sound has lived three places in the last ten years.
- Home ownership is lower than most urban areas at only 52 percent.

3. Live as a city within the city.

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden." Jesus taught that the church was supposed to be a small city of God's kingdom within the big city. Speaking to Jeremiah, God says that marriage, children, and grace are to be some of the hallmarks of the Christian city within the city:

Honor marriage

^{6a} *Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters.*

- Seattle has the fifth largest concentration of college-educated singles between twenty-five and thirty-nine.
- 40,000 college-educated singles moved here from 1995 to 2000.
- Seattle's cohabitation rate is 250 percent higher than the national average.

Have children

^{6b} *Increase in number there; do not decrease.*

- In 1973, a citizens' committee published their "Goals for Seattle," which included a strategy for halting population growth, in part by discouraging births.
- Seattle has less children under five than any city but San Francisco.
- Seattle has less children than dogs (75,000 vs. 150,000).
- By having children and raising them as Christians, we are ensuring the city will have the gospel in its future.
- Over time, the number of children from one family can become quite large (e.g., fifth-century Irish warlord Niall has 3 million descendants and 1/12 of all Irish men descend from him; thirteenth-century leader Ghengis Khan has 16 million descendants).

Serve the common good

⁷ *Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

As the following statistics show, Seattle is not yet a widely Christianized city. However, by serving the common good of the whole city in word and deed, as opposed to only our own self-interests, the gospel can be brought to our city in a winsome way. Furthermore, if greater Seattle can be reached for Jesus, the world can be reached for Jesus (as the examples of Amazon, Microsoft, Boeing, and Starbucks show, the direction of this city has global implications).

- The Seattle area is only 8 percent evangelical Christian.
- There are more dogs in Seattle than evangelicals (150,000 vs. 136,000).
- Washington and Oregon are the two least churchied states in America.
- Not one church from the NW is among America's 100 largest churches.
- Only one church in Washington/Oregon is among the 100 fastest-growing churches.
- From 1990 to 2000, 134 churches were planted around Seattle, but 456 were needed to keep up with population growth.

4. Do not fear the city.

⁸ *Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have."* ⁹ *They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the LORD.*

There are many reasons to be fearful of a large urban area that is vocally not Christian. The reasons include:

- Sin is concentrated in the city—but that is where the need for God is most easily seen.
- The city is expensive and *Forbes* named Seattle America's most overpriced city two years in a row, which means we must take care of one another.
- Seattle is among America's least charitable cities (1.9 percent of gross income), which means that every Christian must be a generous giver for the cause of Jesus.

In summary, to be a church meeting in multiple locations and planting multiple churches around Seattle will require nothing short of a miracle. Historically, there have been seasons in which God built a church in a city that helped to transform that city and make it a church planting center from which suburban, rural, and other urban areas were reached for Jesus. One historical example is John Calvin, who pastored in Geneva in the sixteenth century. Not only did his church and its Bible teaching transform their city, but also their influence spread; many pastors who were trained and influenced by Calvin planted churches in other cities. For example, in 1555 there were only five underground Protestant churches in France. By 1562 there were reportedly 2,150 churches planted in France with roughly three million people worshipping Jesus. Among the French churches planted under John Calvin's leadership were some megachurches numbering four to even nine thousand people. Likewise, we believe that God still loves cities, including our own, and has placed us here to continue building a city within our city that honors Jesus as King.

For further reading: *The Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* by Rodney Stark; *The First Urban Christians* by Wayne Meeks; *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* by Richard Fletcher; and *Light for the City: Calvin's Preaching, Source of Life and Liberty* by Lester DeKoster.