

Think Local: Why Changing the World Begins in Your Backyard – Week Three

First Pattern: Involvement in Civic Affairs

Selected Scriptures

Introduction: To change the world, God calls his people to find places of influences within the civic affairs of secular power structures. Sometimes he forces them into these places. Sometimes he leads naturally. Sometimes he instills a desire. When we find ourselves there, we must steward the opportunity well.

1. OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE – God calls his people to faithfully represent him within structures of power.

- A. Joseph is chosen to serve within the power structures of Egypt. Genesis 41:41
 - 1. His elevation to power was totally beyond his control.
 - 2. His cultivation and use of gifts *were* under his control.
 - 3. Joseph’s power would have been extremely controversial among his family.
- B. Daniel is chose to serve three kings in the Neo-Babylonian & Medo-Persian Empires. Daniel 1-6
 - 1. His elevation to power was totally beyond his control.
 - 2. His cultivation and application of gifts were under his control.
 - 3. Daniel’s power would have been extremely controversial among his people.
- C. The exiles in Babylon are commanded to immerse themselves in secular culture. Jeremiah 29:4-7
 - 1. They have been transported to Babylon. Their dreams have been crushed.
 - 2. False prophets have given wrong expectations.
 - 3. God through Jeremiah commands immersion in secular culture and promises good.
- D. Nehemiah is granted authority to represent the king back in Jerusalem. Nehemiah 1-2
 - 1. Nehemiah has been elevated to a position of power.
 - 2. Nehemiah’s heart is for God.
 - 3. Nehemiah becomes used by God because of that power.
- E. How the world works – When people are in structures of power, they can do extraordinary things. The thesis of James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

2. NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE – God typically calls people to remain in those structures of power after they come to Christ.

- A. Gospels – Jesus & John sometimes had people remain in places of power. Lk. 3:12-14; 8:1-3
 - 1. John advocated integrity even if operating in secular power structures. 3:12-14
 - 2. Jesus’ female followers maintained their strategic place even while following. 8:1-3
- B. Epistles – The case of Erastus.
 - 1. Erastus was city treasurer in Corinth and donated money to the city. Rom. 16:23
 - 2. Erastus was part of Paul’s small group and was with him when he wrote Romans. 16:23b
 - 3. Erastus did short term mission trips with Paul. Acts 19:22
 - 4. Erastus remained in his place of power. 2 Timothy 4:20
- C. History – The example of the founding of Roman Church
 - 1. Church founded, not my missionaries, but by business people.
 - 2. Church contained people of great power: Aristobulus and Narcissus.
 - 3. The church is highly strategic to Acts 1:8.

3. A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF POWER – God calls people to minister inside places of secular power.

- A. 1st principle – A position of secular power can be stewarded for good or for ill.
 - 1. The question: “How does my place here fit into God’s mission?”
 - 2. It’s not an evangelism question; it’s a missional question.

- B. 2nd principle – God sometimes brings his people to power through trials.
 - 1. People in places of power need to be humble.
 - 2. People in places of power need to lift others up.

- C. 3rd principle – Christ-followers in power need our support not our criticism.
 - 1. Class envy is the way of the world.
 - 2. It shouldn't be in the body of Christ.