

**For Good: For the City**  
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Matthew 5:14-16

This series is about Christians being “For” something not just being against things.

Today’s message is: “For Good – For the City.” We read the Bible in a straightforward way. We think of numbers as chronological units. Thus “forty” = the number between 39-41. But when the Bible lists “forty” it has an additional meaning: preparation. When Noah built the Ark it rained for 40 days/nights (the Flood) = watch out! Moses’ life was three 40-year segments (Pharaoh’s court, a shepherd, leading the Israelites) and he was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days/nights (then got the Law). The spies looked at the Promised Land for 40 days before returning with a negative report, so the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years. Solomon reigned for 40 years – upon his death there was a BIG change. Elijah traveled for 40 days/nights and he heard from God immediately afterwards. Jesus’ was in the wilderness for 40 days/nights and was tempted. Then his public ministry began. When you see “40” in the Bible something big is about to happen. The number has a greater meaning than chronology. Other numbers are the same, such as 3, 7 and 12 which means “God’s number, perfection and completeness” over against 6 which is man’s number (one short of God) and when tripled stands for evil (666). In the same way, there is an additional, symbolic meaning to the word “City,” particularly in the Old Testament and particularly in Genesis.

1.) **Old Testament Perspective of “The City”** The first builder of a City in the Bible was Cain. After he murdered his brother, Abel, God’s punishment upon him was to make him a fugitive and a wanderer.

**Genesis 4:10-18** *The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." But the Lord said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. Cain became a restless wanderer – a real “nowhere man.” God put a mark on Cain to protect him, but he was unsatisfied with God’s protection of him. He did 2 things. First, he fathered a child. He would pass on his lineage. Second, he builds a city. After being kicked out of Eden, and rejecting his relationship with God, Cain sought to find security in building a city. We read the text and think nothing of it, but the “City” became a word associated with secular independence from God. It had a spiritual connotation. Nimrod is the next builder of a City. He is linked to Babylon. “Babel” means confusion. It is a term which stands in opposition to the things of God for the rest of the Bible. Whenever “Babel” is in the Bible it stands for opposing God. God is disconnected. Confusion reigns. People no longer get along. That’s exactly what happened at Babel.*

**Genesis 11:4-9** *Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language*

*so they will not understand each other." So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel — because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.*

When “the city” shows up in Genesis, the result is often displeasing to God. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah seduced Lot. Salem is where Dinah’s violation took place. The city of Pharaoh was trouble for Joseph. When Joshua conquered Jericho he pronounces a curse upon the city. The City of David (which is built on only 11 acres) Jerusalem, makes a switch, as it is also referred to as “The City of God.” This is the beginning of the redemption of the City. Remember David’s origin - he was always a peasant king. His son, King Solomon, built the City – and he built the city on the backs of slaves. And of course, we know that when he died things fell apart. The City is a geographical place but it becomes much more of a spiritual metaphor. It is a place where people choose to live independently and in rebellion toward God. They could do it God’s way, but instead, choose to gather in their own communities and exclude God. It ends in Revelation with the 2 Cities: The Fallen Babylon and The New Jerusalem. These images are similar to what Jesus said with the two roads: the Broad and the Narrow, and what Paul said about the “flesh” and the Spirit.” Don’t live “in the City of Babylon,” but be a resident of the New Jerusalem. Don’t live in the “Kingdom of Self,” but live in the “Kingdom of God.”

2.) The Bible is the story of **God’s redemption** of lost people. **Jesus** exemplifies this. He went throughout the cities and sent His disciples in efforts to redeem the lost, including those who lived in the City. We also see His lament over the lost City of Jerusalem as He anticipated the horrors of what was to happen in 70 A.D. as the Romans destroy Jerusalem. We could paraphrase: “For God so loved the City that He gave His only son...” And the great news we share is that Jesus is going to take us to a new city - the “New Jerusalem” (Rev 3:12, 21:2) which will be the center of worship in God’s kingdom on Earth.

3.) Not only does Jesus redeem us, but the **New Testament church** was commissioned to cooperate with God's redeeming and transforming work. We are to help others follow Jesus. **Matthew 5:14-16** *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* The gospel was spread primarily through cities.

**Application:**

A.) We must decide **which city** we will live in. Will I do my own thing (there are certainly benefits to living apart from God, but I think they are short-term in nature). There's truly "no future" in not walking with God. Living in relationship with the One who redeems us is THE way to live. The invitation is for you – to recognize God's love for us and His gift of Jesus Christ for our salvation. We ask Him to come into our lives and to forgive us of our sins.

B.) Believers (individually and as a congregation) learn to cooperate with Jesus in living redemptively "For the City." Second Saturday, Day of Service, EduRec, Youth at Heart, Walt Whitman & Union/Grove partnerships, Global Gardens, Celebrate Recovery, and of course, today, Restore Hope.

Our City right now is in the midst of a crisis with the trial of a Tulsa police officer. This is very, very difficult. There is historic and systemic racism in American culture – not only with African Americans, but also with Native Americans.

We are in a City where a LOT of people feel lost. Many feel angry. Many feel despondent. As such, the City presents huge challenges, but it also means that it provides more chances to do good. Being in close proximity to others gives us that opportunity. We want to I believe the church has the answer in Jesus Christ, and we are on mission to share that with the world. We want to join in God's work of redeeming the

city bc the city is full of human souls – friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and numerous others we interact with daily. That’s one reason we support Restore Hope. They are trying to help people experience restoration and redemption. It’s also a reason why we partner with other organizations and support other congregations. This Wednesday night at 7:00 p.m., we have been invited to go to World Won For Christ Church (2121 N. Harvard) for another prayer meeting. It should last about 75 minutes. We will pray together for our City. It’s an expression of our hope in Christ.

Whether you can make that or not, I pray for 2 things: That you have been redeemed. And that you will join with your church in sharing that redemptive story in a lot of different ways.

This is a wonderful note I received this week from a mom/grandmother regarding the impact Asbury has had upon her daughter and granddaughter. (I’ve removed the names, but I spoke with the daughter who gave me permission to use it)

#### THE PIZZA CHURCH

As Mother's Day approaches, I want to thank you & UR congregation for UR ministry to my daughter/granddaughter + indirectly to me, a mother. As a single parent mom, my daughter was looking for a singles group. UR church offered several groups from which to choose. It was important to her that she attend where the children's ministry was stable & where her child would be welcome. UR church, at different seasons of her life, has met both of those needs. My granddaughter recently turned 4, is known by her teachers who call her by name. She has a friend with whom she holds hands when they sit next to each other in church. But the funny attraction which she loves about Asbury is a toy in the classroom which is a magnetic pizza. There is a crust base with which she can assemble a pizza with magnetic tomatoes, mushrooms, peppers, etc. She enjoys playing with this toy so much that she refers to Asbury as "The Pizza Church." When my daughter gets her dressed she asks, "Are we going to The Pizza Church?" As we drive around town, when Asbury's steeple is spotted, she points & exclaims,

"That's The Pizza Church!" We have 5 granddaughters aged 5 & under who ALL now refer to Asbury as "The Pizza Church." In the Hebraic culture, a method of teaching is to put a good taste in someone's mouth. The taste was so good for her, that she recently asked my daughter if she could invite Jesus into her heart. My daughter led her in the prayer of salvation and my granddaughter has joined the family of God. As a mother who has experienced incredible heartache at her child's & grandchild's circumstances as a fatherless family, I want to thank all those who were a part of the good taste we have received & thank you + the Lord for "The Pizza Church."

Here's the bottom line, as Jesus put it: ***that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*** We pray that God would be praised from our lives.