



GOD AND THE CITY

by Mark D. Roberts

October 28, 2016

Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

Psalm 48:12-14

I love to walk around in a city. Walking in Boston, New York, or San Francisco is, indeed, one of my favorite things to do. There is so much to see, to smell, to hear, and to experience.

There are so many fascinating people to look at, but not too obviously.

Given my joy in walking around in a city, you can see why Psalm 48:12 caught my attention.

The Sons of Korah, writers of Psalm 48 under divine inspiration, said to the Israelites, *“Walk around in Zion, go around her, count her towers, etc.”*

But they had something special in store for those who make this walk. It wasn't just about enjoyment or even about the city. **It was about God.**

In Psalm 48, Jerusalem is so closely associated with God that it **reflects God's own character. God's greatness is seen in the height and magnificence of Jerusalem** (48:2).

God reveals himself as a defender in the towers of this city (48:3).

The “ramparts” and “citadels” of Jerusalem tell present and future generations that God is strong, protective, and permanent (48:12-13).

Does it make any sense in today's world to think of a city as somehow reflecting the character of God? Many of us, I expect, think of cities as places of commerce, commotion, and crowds.

We hear of great cities with declining populations, crumbling school systems, and excessive violence. Surely, therefore, if we want to experience God, we must flee from the city to the country, where we can find rest and beauty.

Indeed, times of retreat from the city can quiet our hearts and renew our relationship with God.

I do believe that, like Jesus, there are times when we need to steal away from the busyness of the city in order to be renewed in body, mind, and spirit.

But retreats are not the purpose of life. Nor should they be the chief context for our relationship with God. Rather, we understand that retreating for a season replenishes us so that we might go back into the world, which often means into literal cities, as God's ambassadors.

I am encouraged to see more and more Christians embracing cities as places in which God is present and active. *We are reclaiming our earliest roots, in which the cities of the Roman Empire were the focus of Christian mission.*

We are taking seriously for our own day the Lord's command through the prophet Jeremiah:

“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” (Jeremiah 29:7).

Churches throughout the world, following the example of churches like Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, are seeing their cities, not as hostile territory to be attacked or avoided, but rather as *fertile ground for the seed of the kingdom of God.*

The compelling vision of Redeemer Pres reads: “To build a great city for all people through a gospel movement that brings personal conversion, community formation, social justice, and cultural renewal to New York City and, through it, to the world.”

Whether you live in a giant metropolis, a quiet suburb, or a small town, you have the opportunity to live out your faith in such a way that God is present in the place you live.



Through acts of kindness and demonstrations of love, through speaking and living the truth, through enriching your environment with artwork or flowers, and through doing justice according to God's Word, you can help your city or town be a place that reflects the very character of God.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

How have you experienced God in the "city" of your ordinary life?

How might you live so that God's presence is revealed through you in your daily life?

How do you experience God in the city?

PRAYER:

Gracious God, even as you once made your presence known in Jerusalem we ask you to reveal yourself in the cities of our world.

Show your justice and mercy, your grace and truth
your beauty and kindness to the multiple millions of people who live in cities.

Thank you, O God,
for those who have embraced their city
as a place of mission.

Thank you for lawyers and teachers,
for construction workers and city council members,
for mothers and pastors,
for police officers and bankers,
and for all of your people
who manifest your kingdom
in the places where they work and live.

Thank you also for times of retreat,
times that renew us so we can engage this world
with deeper faith and broader love.

All praise be to you, God of the universe,
God of the city.
Amen.