

2023 Vision Series

A Vision for a City

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 & Revelation 21:1-5

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Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon...It said: This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 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. Increase in number there; do not decrease. 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."

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

You are becoming someone.

“The more we choose something, the more we become that something. We are all in the process of solidifying our identities by the decisions we make. With each decision we make, we pick up momentum in the direction of that decision. Just observing people can, I think, prove this point. I knew an old lady once who was the most ugly, bitter, mean-spirited person I’d ever met. As a young lady, however, I am told that she was beautiful, personable, and fun. But at the age of 19 her fiancé ran off with her sister three days before her wedding date. She was understandably humiliated and hurt. But what is most tragic is that she proceeded to choose to be hateful and unforgiving toward her sister and ex-fiancé the rest of her life. Though her sister was extremely sorry for what she had done and tried numerous times to make amends later on (over the course of 50 years!), this lady would never budge. And with each decision against love and forgiveness, she solidified herself in bitterness. Like all negative emotions which are entertained over a long period of time, her bitterness eventually colored her whole outlook on life. She became her hatred. She became her bitterness. The momentum of her decisions became irreversible. She no longer chose it; she couldn’t now choose otherwise! All

the good God originally intended her to be was consumed by the repeated course of hate she chose. What started as her decision eventually became her nature. So it is, I believe, in every area of our lives. The more we choose something, the harder it is to choose otherwise, until we finally are solidified—eternalized—in our decision. The momentum of our character becomes unstoppable. We create our character with our decisions, and our character, in turn, exercises more and more influence on the decisions we make. It's in the nature of free, created beings, and I don't see how it could be otherwise.”

- Dr. Gregory Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father's Questions about Christianity*

“Love must always start free—but its goal is to become unfree. To be unable not to love is the highest form of freedom in love.”

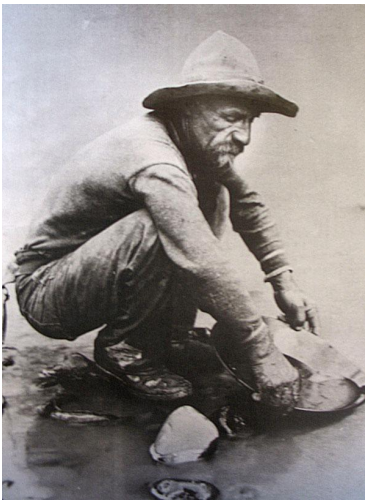
- Dr. Gregory Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father's Questions about Christianity*

The decision of stability versus instability, rootedness versus rootlessness, place versus non-place.

Stability is the spiritual skill for staying put in order to get somewhere – to become someone.

“We vow to remain all our life with our local community. We live together, pray together, work together, relax together. We give up the temptation to move from place to place in search of an ideal situation. Ultimately there is no escape from oneself, and the idea that things would be better someplace else is usually an illusion. And when interpersonal conflicts arise, we have a great incentive to work things out and restore peace. This means learning the practices of love: acknowledging one's own offensive behavior, giving up one's preferences, forgiving.”

- *Vow of Stability* from Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey



Miners:

- Miners don't set down roots where they live, they live in "camps"
- They are there to extract minerals from the land for profit and then move on
- They often leave the land depleted when they leave

Place vs. Non-Place

"Places are concerned with history, relationships, and identity. Therefore spaces which are not concerned with history, relationships, or identity are non-places...one passes through them; they are not places in which to set roots, rather they are built for rootlessness."

- Marc Auge

"The twentieth century will be remembered as an age of wondrous creativity, when Americans voluntarily shattered their lives into distant and dissonant fragments. America's industries learned how to assemble atomic bombs, airplanes, iPads and the genetic codes of life itself in the same era that American society disassembled the ancient overlap of family, food, faith and the field of work. Americans reached for the stars as they withered their roots, inhabited space but lost any sense of place."

- David Janzen

“The failure of an urban promise: That promise concerned human persons who could lead detached, unrooted lives of endless choice and no commitment. It was glamorized around the virtues of mobility and anonymity that seemed so full of promise for freedom and self-actualization. But it has failed...It is now clear that a sense of place is a human hunger that urban promise has not met...It is rootlessness and not meaninglessness that characterizes the current crisis.”

- Walter Brueggemann, *The Land*

A City is both the context of redemption and the crucible of transformation in the Biblical story.

Revelation 21:1-2

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared...

“Had God not given John a particular vision of a city in his revelation, we may have been tempted to overlook the form of the city as the context of our redemption, and we may have missed something important in our cities. Because of this significant place in the history of our salvation, we cannot disregard the specific form of the city as a unique context with redemptive possibilities. John’s vision gives us permission to examine our own cities for such redemptive possibilities, even if they exist only as a shadow form of what is to come.”

- Eric Jacobson, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom*

Jeremiah 29:4-7

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 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. Increase in number there; do not decrease. 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.”

Could there be a connection between the eternal city as the form of our redeemed existence and the temporal city as the crucible in which character is formed for that eternal existence?