

The City Church of the 21st Century

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Introduction

If I am correct in my understanding of God's prophetic plan then we can expect a great tribulation of His judgment over the earth that will result in economic collapse as well as the collapse of functioning nation states. If I am further correct that the Lord's plan is not to take us out of the earth but that we are here to destroy the works of Satan, then there is only one conclusion to draw: Revelation 20 and Micah 4 are lying ahead of us. The church will fulfill its calling of "healing the nations" (Rev.20: because the nations will come to us and say "teach us your ways" (Micah 4: The church will indeed fulfill the Great Commission of discipling the nations.

But for this great purpose of God to be fulfilled, our vision of the church will have to change as well as how we organize our church life.. The coming great collapse means that church as Sunday morning meeting of several hundred relative strangers in a quiet suburban setting is coming to an end. And the future of the church is not larger mega-churches of 5,000 meeting on a Sunday morning (just more strangers!).

The future of the Church is communities of believers using modern technology to create a virtual community of believers that can create their own civilization in any great city of the world; a community that creates their own economic, educational, governmental, social, entertainment structures based on covenant commitments to the Kingdom agenda. Communities that the Lord will use to heal the nations and disciple them into the Kingdom of God.

In this article I am going to present you with three critical concepts to understand the vision of the "City Church of the 21st Century":

1. I am going to present to you 8 problems with the way we are conducting church at present and why we have come to the end of the current church model.
2. Then I want to present you with the New Testament idea of the "ekklesia" and how that differs from "church".
3. That will allow me to introduce you to the idea of the City Church as a virtual Covenant Community, the next great move of God needed to heal the nations.

I am going to present to you a radical idea that is in actual fact the logical result of the Radical Gospel of the Kingdom. It is this. If we have any expectation of accomplishing the great things that the Lord wants to do in the earth in these days ahead then how we organize ourselves as the church needs to be radically changed. By

that I mean we have reached the limits of what you can do with church as a Sunday morning meeting. We need to re-organize the structure of the church in such a way as to create and release more power and resources for the work of the Kingdom.

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Kingdom Agenda or Church Agenda?

When I say we have a problem with the present church model then it implies that I am measuring what the church mission is by a vision or idea of what that mission is which must be different to what most church leaders are teaching as the church mission. And that is so. I call it the Kingdom Agenda as opposed to the church agenda. The Kingdom agenda is simple:

- Disciple the nations
- Destroy Satan and his works
- Bring the Bride of Christ into the full stature of His image, spotless and pure.

At first glance most evangelical preachers will agree with me and say but that is what we also believe and we are doing that as best as possible. The reality however is somewhat different. What they actually believe is that none of these goals can realistically be met before the Rapture. The church is not going to actually disciple the nations; that will be left to 144,000 Jews in the Great Tribulation (or the Millennium). Satan will not actually be defeated and destroyed by the church because the Antichrist will take over the world and the church will be taken out of the world to protect us from the Antichrist. As for a spotless bride, they actually believe millions of lukewarm wordly evangelicals in love with the world and the things that are in the world are going to make the Rapture because they have been “born again”.

The Present Model Church

Let me first give a warning. I don't like moaners and complainers who like to criticize those in the ministry who have sacrificed their lives in fulltime service for the gospel and seem to find fault with every small problem in the church. None of us are perfect and the wonderful grace of the Lord allows Him to use imperfect vessels with sometimes imperfect motives to accomplish His work. What follows is not a criticism of the church because I believe where the church is now is exactly how the Lord has led His church up to now. Who am I to fault Him who is head of the church? I praise those

brave missionaries who have gone to the farthest ends of the earth to plant new churches. I honor those who Sunday by Sunday preach with love and compassion the wonderful gospel message. We have all been blessed countless times by an encouraging word from the pulpit.

What I am suggesting is that we stand on the brink of a new outpouring of power from the Lord that will require a radical new vision of what is possible and what the radical implications of the Kingdom Agenda will require of us in the years ahead. This “new wine” outpouring will require “new wineskins” to contain the power and blessings to be released. This vision could not have been seen before as the church and world circumstances were not ready.

So let me outline eight problems we face...

1) The Problem of Community

We are supposed to be a body, a family, a community of believers. The reality is we end up fellowshiping with the back of someone's head on Sunday morning. We are in actual fact a gathering of strangers and the larger the church the bigger the problem.

The Barna Research group after doing a study of the mega-churches in America found out that the church audience basically changes every three years. So preachers after three years start their old sermons over again because it is a new group of people.

We try to remedy this with cell groups and people enjoy cell groups for the simple reason that when we do fellowship with one another we really like each other...I mean we really do! We can meet a complete stranger from another country but the moment we know they are fellow Spirit filled believers barriers drop and we hug and share. I want to be around fellow Christians as much as possible, I like their company. What can we do to increase our fellowship contact?

2) The Problem of Needs

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Our churches are full of people with needs. That is because we are normal humans and because we throw open our doors and say to everyone who will listen, “You have a problem? Jesus is the answer...come to Him all you who are heavy laden”. So now we have churches full of people with needs but I can promise you from decades of experience...their needs are not being fully met. Part of the problem is that we actually don't know what their problems are and when we do know the local church does not generate enough resources and “problem solvers” to deal personally and effectively with people's needs. So we fall back on the sermon as the solution. Some problems can be solved by an individual hearing the Word...like the problem of sin and salvation. But most problems cannot. They can only be solved through the mediation and ministry of others. But that is exactly how the Lord designed life and its challenges. You cannot succeed on your own, you need to be part of a community. But we have no real community so many needs are unmet in the church. Paul recognized this same problem in the Corinthian church because they did not “discern the Lord's body (i.e. that we are all part of His body and need each other's ministry)...for this cause many are sickly and weak among you...” (1 Cor. 11:30).

3) The Problem of Giftings and Ministries

For every problem that people have there is a solution. Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor.11:29-30) and says many of them are weak and sick because they do not discern the Lord's Body. I believe that within the church, the Lord's Body there are the ministries that are needed to minister to the needs of every person. There are solutions to all the problems we face. It does not come from one man in the pulpit, it comes from a multitude of people each having a unique gifting that others need to complete their lives and fulfill their callings.

But our problem here is two-fold. Firstly once again we do not know who among us has what giftings and abilities and secondly we do not know what the needs of the people are. For the most part everyone sitting in church are using their abilities to build up corporations,

government, social institutions and world systems. They have enormous contributions to make within the church to the needs of people but there is no room for them, there is nowhere for them to give expression within the vision of the local church to their gifts and abilities. So how do we get the broad community of believers involved in the mission and ministry of the church?

4.) The Organizational Leadership Problem

If you are part of a church where the same man is preaching every Sunday then both you and your church have a major problem. You are part of an organization, not an organism. Organizations are led by one man visionary leadership. That is how I run my business, that is how nations are run, that is how corporations are run. It is the best way to run an organization; one man visionary leadership that can give direction, make quick executive decisions and oversee the smooth running of the operation. But that is not how the church operates. We are a Body whose head is Jesus Christ. He makes His will known through a plurality of people. He ministers through a plurality of people and many times will select the weak and unimpressive among us. The whole New Testament vision of the church is that leadership is plural. Elders rule the church and even Apostles went out in groups. That is how an organism works. You need a multitude of ministries impacting into your life for you to grow into a balanced disciple. You need personal mentoring. You need personal accountability for you to make progress in your spiritual walk. You need a spiritual coach!

Our problem is that we have continued the one man hierarchy of the Roman Catholic system except we now have a Pope in every pulpit. Pastors are not necessarily teachers, or evangelists or prophets or apostles. But they try to be far too often. That a man is a good orator does not qualify him to be the speaker every Sunday. The result is a weak and sickly church body. Pastors should be personally mentoring their flock, instead they are trying to do all the other jobs. The result is Christians who are never personally disciplined and mentored by their pastor but are preached at every Sunday with no

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accountability as to whether the Word is being implemented in their lives. Proper diverse teaching ministries are not developed and so people go to church for years and cannot from scripture defend the basics of the faith. Prophets are not developed or allowed to minister and so sins remain hidden and not ministered to, people are not hearing from God for personal directions. Apostles are not encouraged and supported and so the miracles are missing and new churches not established. Evangelists are not supported and so revivals are missing and new converts lacking.

How do we move the church beyond one man leadership and develop a true Biblical Five-Fold gift leadership in our churches? As long as the church is structured as an organization, then one man leadership is inevitable. The issue then becomes how to move from church as organization to church as living organism?

The Leaven of the Pharisees Problem

Problems 5,6 and 7 have to do with the age old problem of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Let me explain to you what the problem of the Pharisees and Sadducees was and why it is inherent in the way they organized themselves and why we are facing the same problem today (which is why Jesus warned us against the problem).

The Sadducees originally back in about 167 BC were a holiness movement that fought alongside the Maccabee brothers to kick out the Syrians and to restore the Temple and the Priesthood. They were the descendants of Zadok the priestly order. Their rallying cry was holiness unto the Lord and a purified Temple and purified priesthood. After regaining control of the Temple and its sacrifices the money started rolling in. By the time Jesus appeared on the scene they had become so worldly that they no longer believed the authority of scripture, they did not believe in Angels or the resurrection etc. But they clung tenaciously onto their Temple rituals because that was big money. I think here of many modern day churches like the Methodists who started under John Wesley as a Holiness movement and today how many

Methodist ministers see no problem with homosexuality or deny the Virgin Birth or divine inspiration and authority of scripture?

The Pharisees however started as a “Word” movement. Back to scripture. Preach the Word! Reject worldliness in the form of Hellenizing Greek philosophy and stick to the plain Word of God as your standard of truth and authority. But the Zadokites kept them out of the Temple and its lucrative income stream so the Pharisees came up with an alternative. The scripture said Israel was to gather three times a year in Jerusalem at the Temple to hear the Word read by the priests. This excluded them, so they started local community synagogues with weekly meetings to hear the Word read. But not just hear the Word read but hear the Word explained and expounded on by them so that you can understand how to keep the 613 laws of Moses. A very inspired innovation not found in scripture but started with the best of intentions.

And they taught and explained. And then they started Bible Schools where famous and learned teachers taught (Paul studied under Gamaliel) and if you completed a training program with one of these famous teachers you graduated as a “Rabbi” qualified to start your own synagogue (which meant your own income was secured).. But as the years went by the entire religious establishment of Pharisees and Sadducees lost the whole plot. The appearance of Jesus and the announcement that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand was a dangerous theology that threatened their cosy relationship with the Roman overlords. But it also threatened the synagogue building program of the Pharisees and it threatened the Temple revenue stream of the Sadducees. In addition the upstart carpenter from Nazareth teaching with authority was a challenge to the authority of their professional qualifications.

Our church of today is facing the same problem of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The professional religionists have captured the church and turned it into an organization providing cash flow and public admiration for its leaders. The preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom does not fit the needs of these

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organizations. They need stable worldly political and economic systems to function well.

5) The Information Overload Problem

The Pharisees were endless talkers and writers. Books upon books, commentaries, sermons upon sermons. Endlessly. But to gather more people to your synagogue you needed to be famous. To be famous you needed to find new and unusual applications of obscure texts and have this included in the Mishna and Gemarah a huge and lengthy commentary on the Laws of Moses that made up the Talmud. So you have weekly sermons you had to come up with for Sabbath that became more and more obscure as competing Rabbis came up with ever more books and writings on ever more obscure interpretation of every last “jot and tittle” of the Law.

Today in our evangelical churches we face this same “leaven” of information overload as if lack of information was our problem. Meetings, conferences, sermons, books, tapes, DVD’s, endless talking and meeting. But we are so proud that we are not “under law” but under grace. And yet we are yearly facing thousands of new “laws” as thousands of new books seminars and sermons come out purporting to reveal to us the “laws of success”, “the laws of prosperity”, “the laws of hearing the voice of God”, “laws of divine healing” and on and on. Ten steps to this, seven laws of that and the more books come out the more confusion among the people. The more the “laws of tithing” are applied the poorer the people become. The more books on “hearing the voice of God” the more confusion...

6) The Authority and Influence Problem

How to get people to follow you or join your synagogue or believe you? That is the authority and influence problem. Your authority problem you solve by getting recognized academic credentials and your influence problem you solve by making a reputation.

In Jesus’ day if you studied to become qualified as a Rabbi and therefore had the title “Rabbi” you were listened to because you were

academically qualified to be listened to. You had authority on the basis of your knowledge. We send young people to Bible School and upon graduation with a degree they now qualify to be “Pastor” of a church. So you graduate in your 20’s and now you are qualified to be a “Pastor”. The Biblical qualification was that you were to be an “elder”, which at a minimum means an older person experienced in life. Twenty-somethings are not Biblically qualified church leaders but they are organizationally qualified leaders because they have the organizational qualification: an educational degree, they know things. And today increasingly “Dr” in front of your name helps of course to sound “authoritative”. Have you noticed how many of our evangelical preachers are now “Doctor”. By the way do yourself a little Pharisee\hypocrisy test. If your local leader advertises himself as “Dr” then ask him for his doctoral thesis as you want to read it. If he (or she) can’t produce it, as in fact most of the ministry “Doctors” in the pulpit cannot, you know you have a Pharisee/hypocrisy problem in your leader that needs to be ministered to i.e. someone who wants to give the appearance of academic “authority” without actually having done the rigorous academic work.

The other way to establish your leadership credentials in the church and gather followers is by reputation. The church is rife with this problem as were the synagogues and Pharisees of Jesus day. Building a reputation requires constant self-promotion. There are many different kinds of crowd pulling reputations these days. A reputation as a miracle worker, a reputations as a great orator or a funny man in the pulpit able to entertain the masses. Or a reputation as a prophet that always gives happy success prophecies. Or the reputation of a great organizer that gets things done and deserves your financial support. All these require great PR skills. You need to keep the great one constantly in the media to get the attention of the church. You need to constantly extol his great works. You need to constantly have his picture and name prominently advertised. Forget Jesus as a model of leadership who “made Himself of no reputation but became a servant”. Forget Paul’s injunction “now we know no man after

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the flesh”. The end justifies the means does it not? As long as people are getting saved and blessed its ok?

7. The Synagogue Building Problem

Synagogue is a Greek word meaning to gather together and was the model for Jewish people to meet on a Friday night Sabbath, sing, hear a scripture reading and an exhortation from the Rabbi. Not long after the Apostles passed from the scene the church adopted the synagogue model of organization except the meetings were held on a Sunday. Paul went to synagogues all over the Roman world to reach out to Jews in every city and when he converted them he pulled them out of the synagogue and into the local church. He did not start rival “Messianic Synagogues”. The New Testament church was based on city wide communities of believers meeting in homes, not buildings for a Friday night synagogue meeting.

At first glance the synagogue model does not look too bad. Jesus attended synagogue. You gather together, you sing, you hear scripture and you get a sermon. We have all been blessed by meetings like this. I like attending this type of church model. If the praise and worship is flowing and the sermon is inspired exhortation you walk out blessed and ready to tackle the week. But the problem that always develops is what Jesus warned against, “the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matth.16:6). You eventually end up with a “let’s build more synagogues” agenda rather than let’s build the Kingdom of God. That is what organizations always end up doing, they duplicate themselves. They must grow in their own image. That growth imperative is relentless. The leaven of the Pharisees required a constantly expanding synagogue building program just like our organizational “church growth” agenda needs constant new church construction. And that requires dynamic leaders that can draw crowds and finances. And that requires reputations and public relations and self promotion but the end justifies the means does it not?

But here is the problem...up to now the church building program has worked well to establish

footholds in communities and countries as a local witness for Christ. But what happens when major revivals break out under a powerful new anointing of the Spirit and millions come streaming into the Kingdom? The local church model will not be able to contain the overflowing mass of people and their needs. We need new wineskins to contain the new anointing....

8) The Problem of a Collapsing World System

If you see the Kingdom Vision then you realize it is time to exit out of a failing Babylon world system. And since we do not believe the Lord intends to exit us off the earth but intends for us to disciple the nations the question then becomes...exit how and where to? When the Lord tells us in Revelation 18 to get out of Babylon so we are not partakers of her judgment then what practically are we talking about? And the Kingdom message is this: it is Rev. 18 time, not rapture time!

The current suburban church with Sunday morning meeting is dependent on a functioning world system, a growing economy and a stable government. But that is not our future. The great 2010-2030 transition means disappearing oil supplies, banking and financial collapse, bankruptcies, famines, earth changes, resource depletion, plagues and exploding populations. The western business model of endless growth based on abundant cheap energy and growing consumer credit is over.

The idea that we can just continue with church on Sunday morning and that the government, the corporations, the banks, insurance companies, medical aids and retirement funds will meet the other material needs of our congregations for the future until Jesus comes is a dangerous illusion!

The Zimbabwe Lesson

In 1990 a number of international ministries came together with a vision for massive church planting in Zimbabwe. The goal was to double

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the churches from 10,000 to 20,000 by the year 2000. It worked! They actually achieved it. And then came the farm seizures and the collapse of the Zimbabwe economy and the 20,000 churches were plunged into poverty and a third of the population fled across the border looking for food and jobs. If they had planted living communities that were self sufficient in food and energy it would have been an entirely different result. What happened to Zimbabwe is where the world economic system is heading...collapse. We cannot continue with Sunday morning meetings led by one man ministries and think we are doing "church growth", not if you want to have the testimony of the church in the book of Acts, "Neither was there any among them that lacked.."

Is Sunday Morning Church Working?

On the surface it would seem that there is an ever expanding growth in churches. The growth of mega-churches has been an amazing phenomenon all over the world. But we need to be honest with ourselves: masses of people coming to meetings does not always mean real church growth. In a survey done in America it was found that the typical congregation of a mega-church turns over in three years time. It means the people you see there now are not the people who are there in three or five year's time. In fact we don't really know who is sitting in the pews and we do not know what their problems are. They come anonymously to a meeting, have a wonderful time raising their hands in praise and worship, hear an inspiring exhortation from a gifted speaker and go home feeling a lot better. This is not community or fellowship, we are not one as Jesus prayed in John 17. This is a religious meeting.

Now look deeper into the lives of our fellow believers: How many marriages are in trouble? How many are in financial trouble? To what extent are the fruits of the Spirit evident in our lives? After years of "teaching" how many Christians can actually defend the foundation truths from scripture?

How does this compare with the church in Jerusalem of which the book of Acts says,

"Neither was there any among them that lacked..." (Acts 4:34). How does this compare with the vision of Micah 4. Is the world coming to us saying "teach us your ways"? In fact in what ways are our lifestyles any different to our neighbors around us?

Are Our Church Ministries Working?

By that I mean that the Lord has given us Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers, Evangelists for the building up of the saints...**unto the work of the ministry.** (Eph.4:11)

But where are they? Across our many churches I see only Pastors in control of one man ministries. Where are the other ministries that are supposed to be supported by the local assembly? There is no such thing in the New Testament Church as one man leadership. Why? Because the church is a functioning community an organism, that needs a multitude of talents to function. Instead we have today organizations that for all practical purposes are functioning as religious entertainment led by a particularly gifted speaker. But one man does not have all the revelation needed to function in all the ministries needed by an assembly of God's people no matter how gifted a speaker he is or how anointed he is. If you are in a church where one man is speaking every Sunday morning then you are in ...a church, not an ekklesia. Your spiritual life and growth will eventually suffer, no matter how gifted that man is.

If the full restoration of the Five-Fold ministry leadership is to be restored to the church then we will have to move from church to ekklesia. If the restoration of the many other ministries that the Lord is raising up within the Body of Christ are ever to flourish then we need to move from church to ekklesia. That is why Loren Cunningham had to start YWAM outside the church, or why David Wilkerson had to start Teen Challenge outside the church, or why orphanages and old age homes are done outside the local church or why Prophets and Apostles have to hold special conventions to get their message across to the church, or why so many ministries are starved of funds and support. Why? Because we do not have functioning

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ekklesias; communities, where all these various ministries can flourish together in a living organism, each one with a gift to bless every other believer.

The New Testament Ekklesia

What is the difference between Church and Ekklesia?

It will help our understanding if we look at the original Greek words used in the New Testament as well as some good dictionaries. In the Oxford Universal English Dictionary we have the following meaning for Church:

Old English, circe; Middle English, chirche; whence: church. From the Greek, kuriakon; Scottish form Kirk. The Greek word “kuriakon” means belonging to a lord. This word is used twice in the New Testament: In 1 Corinthians 11:20 it is used in “the Lord’s supper” and in Rev.1:10 it is used in “the Lord’s day”. So a “kuriakon” or a Kirk or a Church is “something belonging to a lord.”

The Greek word used 115 times in the New Testament for “church” is ekklesia coming from two Greek words, “ek” meaning out and “kaleo” meaning call, giving a meaning of those who have been “called out”. The other three times where this word was translated properly is found in Acts 19:32,39,41 where it is correctly translated “assembly” to describe the town council and civil body of Ephesus. The Expository Dictionary of Bible Words by Lawrence Richards (Zondervan Publishing House) gives us a good description of what an “ekklesia” was understood to be at the time that Paul used the word:

*“In Greek culture an ekklesia was a political assembly. By the fifth century BC ekklesia had come to mean an official gathering of the full citizens of a Greek city-state (Polis) who were called together to make political and judicial decisions. **The Greeks never used ekklesias to refer to religious gatherings.**”*

In fact if Paul wanted to use a word for a religious gathering he could have used

“Synagogue” which is not a Hebrew word but a Greek word meaning a gathering of people. Synagogue’s were everywhere. Paul preached in them all over the Roman world. They were well known religious meeting places and are the equivalent of what we today would call “church”. But the Synagogue system of religious meetings was not what Paul had in mind when he thought of what the church was meant to be; he purposely used a political word well used and understood in his day. **Athens was an ekklesia. An assembly of people gathered together in a city-state. The church is an ekklesia, a body of people in community who are called out of the world and called to live as a community under God’s laws as a witness to the world.**

by 1640 more than 4,000 Puritans from England had joined them to further the vision of the Kingdom of God on earth, the New Jerusalem. Their community was to be a “commonwealth” of believers who by their example of living the Word of God before all men, they would be a light unto the nations.

It was this vision of what the church was meant to be in the world that inspired the vision of the Geneva Protestant Republic, the English Commonwealth and the Massachusetts Commonwealth. They wanted to live in communities of believers that did not just say we are Christians but would demonstrate to the world by practical example: This is how Christians live!

It is this dynamic witness to the world that Micah the prophet speaks of when he said:

“But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains and it shall be exalted above the hills and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob and he shall teach us his ways and we will walk in his paths...” (Micah 4:1-2)

It is this vision of the “City on a Hill” that would draw the nations into the Kingdom of God by its example, that inspired the Reformation Puritans. Sadly this vision has been lost in the years following the Reformation. But I declare this

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truth:

When the Church of the 21st Century discovers the difference between “church” and “ekklesia” it will be ready to disciple the nations and the Lord will be ready to pour out the anointing of power needed to bring in the harvest of hundreds of millions into the Kingdom!

Is It Practical Today?

But the question remains, can we actually still believe it is possible in today’s 21st Century to hold on to the idea of the church as a community of believers who can order their community structures and build their lives and relationships according to Biblical laws? Furthermore is it even possible to make such a break from the world system? What about our jobs and schools for the kids and retirement and medical aid and the many thousands of interrelationships we have with our modern society that makes modern civilized life possible?

But even more importantly, surely we are supposed to “go into all the world and be a witness” and not withdraw ourselves into some weird socialist, hippy commune, or Israeli style Kibbutz or Catholic style Monastery, where all is love and flowers.

The City Church as Covenant Communities: The Next Great Move of God

Here are the radical ideas behind the radical concept of The City Church as a Covenant Community:

What the Lord is doing in the world in our day and what the Lord wants to do in His church and through His church will require three radical changes in the church.

- 1. A deeper level of covenant commitment to each other moving beyond casual church friendships at meetings or cell groups.**
- 2. A reorganization of church as community and not just a meeting.**
- 3. A reorganization of how we relate to each**

other, moving from casual friendships to covenanted and committed bands of warriors working together to accomplish tasks for the Kingdom of God.

When we do these things, the answer to Jesus prayer in John 17 will be fulfilled, **“that they be one...that the world may believe that you have sent me”**. One result of these coming changes in the church will be the rise of “warrior bands” doing exploits in business, the arts and science etc; another will be the move from “mega-church meetings” to “mega-communities” that are debt free, fully employed, self sufficient in food and energy and fulfilling the mission of “healing the nations”.

My presentation to you of the gospel of the Kingdom is founded on a number of key biblical concepts which if true will require a whole new approach to how we define and conduct church. I state categorically and scripturally that we are now in the Kingdom Age and that Jesus is now Lord and that means He is now ruling over all the powers of heaven and earth to accomplish His will on earth.

It is easy to nod assent to the above statement without realizing the enormous implications for the church. It means that the Lord is working out His will through time, through history, but primarily through the church. The church is His body on this earth. (read the entirety of 1 Corinthians 12!) It houses His presence and His power, it reveals His character to the world and it does His will on earth. And yes, He does all this through fallible human beings who are sinners saved by His grace.

The Church and Babylon Falling

Now let me make a prophetic prediction. If I am correct in my presentation to you of where I believe we are on God’s Kingdom timeline then I predict the following:

God is intervening now in our time in human history to collapse the world system as we know it. By that I mean the institutional systems that

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keep the world system running like the nation state, national economies, banking systems, world trade, cheap energy, law and civilized behavior...these all are visibly crumbling. Sunday morning meetings as our primary expression of church are dependent on these world systems functioning. Change is coming to the world and therefore also to the church.

City Church Communities Defined

The Importance of Covenant Commitment

A covenant community is where two or more people are bound in a relationship whereby certain “covenants” or promises are made to one another.

We are familiar with many such arrangements. A man and a woman covenant with each other when they make vows at the altar that are to last “until death us do part”. Citizens write a constitution or a covenant to organize a nation. An employee and an employer make a covenant with each other over work responsibilities.

Each of these many kinds of “covenant communities” whatever their size of participants has common characteristics. I promise to do certain things in return for certain benefits to the relationship. I pay taxes to my government and the government performs certain functions for me. I give my time and work to my employer and I get a paycheck at the end of the month. All of us are involved in various covenant commitments. The issue I present to you is not would you like to participate in a covenant community? You are already participating in a number of them as an employee, as a citizen of a country, as member of a pension or insurance fund etc. The issue is this...is it not time for you to be moving into new and different covenant relationships with the Godly community of believers based on Kingdom principles?

With Whom do we Covenant?

Here is a warning from the Lord that needs prayerful consideration: *“Take heed to thyself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of*

the land whither you go, lest it be a snare in the midst of you” (Ex.34:12)

A snare is a trap. How many of God’s people are caught up in traps that compromise their Biblical values because their covenant relationships with the world require actions that on the face are legal but in actual fact are unethical?

I believe the Lord is wanting to bring His people into closer covenant relationships **one with another** in order to bring about a manifestation of His Kingdom on this earth. That means new covenant relationships within the church to create businesses, communities, education, arts, entertainment etc. And that means moving out of destructive and unprofitable covenant relationships with worldly organizations and their pagan ways.

The Third Covenant Concept

I am going to introduce you to the idea of the Third Covenant and then apply it to several situations as a spiritual strategy for you to try.

You will make two important Godly covenants in your life that will utterly change your life for the good and after which you will never be the same. Your first covenant is with the Lord Jesus Christ when you surrendered your life to Him. We call it the “born again” experience. At that point you came into a covenant relationship with Him. Jesus called it the New Covenant. He gives you His eternal life, you give him your broken life. You enter into God’s family in a new covenant relationship of Father and son.

Your second life changing covenant you enter into is the day you stood at the altar and pledged your life to your wife or husband to be. For richer or poorer until death do you part you committed your life to that person. You have never been the same since and from that came the greatest earthly blessings you can imagine, your children, your home and joy of family.

As a Christian you know that talking about Jesus or going to church or believing in God is not enough to save you. You need to enter into a covenant relationship with Him...you need to be

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“born again”. As a married person you know that living together with another person is not marriage and family. You need to put a ring on her finger and make that lifetime covenant commitment before God and people.

The Third Covenant idea is this:

In the same way we made a commitment of our lives to the Lord and to our spouse, so it is time that we realize that we the church are the Body of Christ and we need to act accordingly and start making serious covenant commitments to each other. We really do need each other and we need to come into serious covenant commitment relationships with each other to fulfill God’s calling in our lives.

We talk church, we go to church, and two hours later we walk out nicely blessed but we have no real commitment to the fellow believers in that fellowship. In fact we don’t really know anybody and we really just carry on with our lives Monday to Saturday entirely unaffected by other Christians in our lives. We are like two young people who decide to live together because it is fun and when it is no longer fun and they find someone else it is on to the next relationship. The church is full of those kinds of churchgoers. The result is a spectator and entertainment religion with most Christians moving to another “church” if the entertainment is more suitable.

If we are going to fulfill the Great Commission of discipling the nations then it is going to take more than casual meetings and entertainment. If we are going to possess the high places of international finance and business, of top quality education and entertainment, of health and prosperity and in any meaningful manner take these “mountains” for the Lord and His Kingdom then it is going to take committed covenant relationships among Christians.

The Rise of New Apostolic Warrior Bands

I believe the Lord wants to raise up what I want to term “warrior bands” to take territory for His Kingdom. Let me qualify that statement with this simple definition:

The Kingdom of God has come wherever Jesus rules as King!

When I make Jesus ruler over my life then the Kingdom of God has come in my life. My wife and I made Jesus ruler over our home and marriage. The Kingdom of God has now grown to include my home. I have made Jesus ruler over my business. I run my company according to His principles and so the Kingdom of God has now expanded into the business world.

Can you see the progression here? But I want to do more things to bring about the Lordship of Jesus, but to do that I need to get into covenant relationships with other believers to do the greater things. There are certain things I could accomplish by myself. But when I entered into a covenant relationships with my wife my effectiveness for the Lord increased enormously. There are certain things my wife and I can do in our home and business for God’s Kingdom, but our effectiveness can increase far more when we enter into covenant relationships with others.

The Lord wants to raise up Apostolic “warrior bands” of believers who are in committed covenant relationships with other believers for the purpose of tackling a project and seeing it to completion. Wherever two or three are gathered together in His Name, there He is in the midst. And if He is there then that grouping of believers are in a covenant relationship with the Lord and with each other to accomplish His will for that group.

Let me give you some ideas:

In college I formed a covenant relationship with two class mates to meet three times a week at lunch time and fast that lunch and spend that time in prayer and confessing our faults one to another. The purpose of the covenant was that for one semester we would commit ourselves to overcoming sin in our lives through total honesty and prayer for each other. It worked wonders for our spiritual growth.

Transform your usual cell group meeting into a purposeful covenant community. Make a

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covenant with one another to achieve some spiritual goal for a certain period of time. Don't just sit around randomly talking and aimlessly having meetings for the sake of meetings. Ask the Lord for tasks to do. If you are there to study the Bible then do it purposefully. Take a book of the Bible (i.e. Romans) or a topic in the Bible (i.e. prophecy) and as a group study it until you master it! Have a goal set by the Lord and then commit yourself and your fellow believers to achieving it.

Form an action group to do some specific task. In my teen years some of our teens in the church formed a hospital visitation group. We decided to use our Sunday afternoons to visit Johannesburg General Hospital and visit and pray with the sick people. Form or be part of an action group that commits itself to do actual work for the Kingdom agenda. It can be small like visiting the sick but it forms the habit of committed disciplined work.

But the idea extends to all sorts of areas as well. Remember that the rulership of Jesus must be extended to all areas of life and all things must be brought under His authority. That means business, the arts, sciences, entertainment, education etc. If God has called you to the business world then form a covenant community with other believers to bring together skills, capital, creativity and bring products and services to the market that our Lord Jesus would be proud of. And yes give first preference to hiring fellow believers. We need other warrior bands to start Christian schools so our kids can be educated with Godly wisdom.

Company or Community?

As we get used to success in smaller tasks the Lord will call forth larger covenant communities to do greater tasks. The world has formed its own covenant communities to do large tasks. That is the origin of the "company". It comes from two Latin words "cum" and "panis" meaning "together" and "bread". You get the idea...breaking bread together in fellowship to get a specific job done. The "companies" of the world have taken the place of the "communities" of God's people who are supposed to get

together to get work done.

The idea of the company was started with the Dutch East India Company and the British East India Company. These were large undertakings that were too big for an individual but not suitable for government. Large amounts of men, skills and capital had to be brought together to accomplish large tasks. This was extended in the 1800's with the rise of the great railway corporations and industrial factories that needed a lot of people, skills and capital to be brought together to accomplish a large task. This is something we Christians are going to have to learn from the world system...there are certain major tasks ahead of us that will require large groups of Christians to come together with their skills, manpower and capital to accomplish great things. And that does not mean bigger meetings and bigger offerings! The time for talking is over...there is work to be done and big work that needs to be done.

The Coming Christian Communities

I believe the next great move of God is not more and bigger mega-churches meeting on a Sunday morning. I believe the next major move of God is going to be the formation around the world of actual Christian communities. How?

Modern Technology and Virtual Communities

The early Puritans needed to leave Europe and come to a new continent to create the kind of communities where they could conduct their lives and work according to God's laws.

We don't need to find new lands or separate communities in the desert or far away places.

We can use modern social networking tools to create virtual closed communities with restricted access to those only who have made a covenant commitment to the community of believers and will further the agenda of God's Kingdom and live by His laws.

Think of the incredible possibilities of a such a virtual Ekklesia community in any city like Atlanta or London or Cape Town. Everyone

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connected and online:

- Instead of Facebook our own social/spiritual network of believers.
- Instead of Amazon, our own network of online shopping supporting Kingdom manufacturers first to enhance collaborative design, production and consumption.
- Our own Uber and Airbnb.
- Our own entertainment network of wholesome family entertainment.
- Our own Youtube uploads space.
- Our own online financial banking network centered on e-currency and blockchain distributed public ledger also capable of hosting asset registers and smart contracts.
- Our own legal system and conflict resolution.
- Our own group insurance with the lowest premiums because we live right.
- Our own education system of online education
- Our own businesses and factories and our own service providers..

The Lord has given us all the wonderful gifts of technology to further His Kingdom agenda. We need to get off the world system platform and create our own governmental, educational and economic platform where we can govern ourselves according to God's way of doing things and at the same time seek first His Kingdom agenda in all that we do as a community of believers.

Let me just give you a list of why you need to seriously start seeing this vision:

- The world system consisting of the nation state is falling apart. Governments everywhere are no longer able to provide the services they promise the voters.
- The world economic system is falling apart. There is no sustainable pension systems for those now growing old, there are no jobs for the unemployed youth. There is no economic security anymore for anyone.
- That means that the old model of church in a quiet suburb on a Sunday morning is not

sustainable. It is predicated on a stable government and a stable economic system.

- The church of the 21st century will have to face the reality that it will need to create its own government and its own jobs as the world system crumbles.
- Even before the nation state system crumbles it is becoming increasingly evident that the services it is supposed to supply like health, education, safety it can no longer provide. Families already need to start supplementing those services but there is only so much a family can do, the church will need to step up into that gap.
- The world financial system is not only imploding but the very life blood of all economies, the nation's money is being actively destroyed by the actions of politicians and bankers. No fiat money system has ever survived long term. Think of how the Zimbabwe government made millionaires and billionaires out of their people by printing up huge notes and don't think it won't happen elsewhere in the world.
- The world globalization project will collapse and the future will revert back to local economies and local production. That means local communities providing for their needs and that can include local community currencies which are already happening everywhere.

Living among and with sinners is an expensive business. The cost of living shoots up when you have to pay for an army of bureaucrats, accountants, lawyers, police, prisons, endless regulations etc. All these things are needed when you live among sinners because they will do whatever they can to steal, rob, cheat and con your productive work from out of you. To try to protect yourself you need these armies of "service industries".

Live in a virtual City Church community as a member with community of Spirit filled evangelical Christians and see how many police, lawyers, prisons, accountants and bureaucrats you need to keep yourself safe and prosperous.

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Once living in such a functioning Christian community now think of all the ways such a community can save overhead costs using voluntary workers who will care for the sick and the aged, will help you with your car or house repair. Think of Amish communities in America who live debt free, provide for themselves without government subsidies and help newly wed couples to build their houses debt free as a community project.

Now think of all the new world technologies available to us like fiber-optic cables making massive bandwidth available for internet connectivity among communities around the country. And with the new global internet satellite networks of thousands of satellites that SpaceX and Blue Origin are going to launch beyond the reach of any nation's attempts to stop the gospel, we can be connected to our fellow Christian communities all over the world.

How about each community being self sufficient in basic food production and trading specialized foods among each other. With modern greenhouse hydroponics massive amounts of food can be grown in small spaces. With new biotechnologies now available biomasses like grass can be converted into fuels and chemicals that previously came from petroleum. If we combine this with Permaculture farming techniques we can also heal the earth and provide nutritious organic foods for ourselves.

Best New Urbanism design practices mean we can design ultramodern communities that eliminate the car from the community center and instead we design our communities in such a way that we work, shop and live in walking distance or with community transport systems.

Church, we can establish a new mode of living as an example to the world that this is the world of tomorrow, this is how we eradicate poverty and hunger, this is how we educate our children, this is how we create a stable community money system, this is how we live debt free.

All the world's systems are failing or about to collapse. We not only need to get out of these failing systems but we need to create the

alternative systems based on the Word of God and based on our covenant relationship with our Lord and with each other to show the world...**This is who we are...and this is how we live. Don't you want to be part of our covenant family?**

The Wilderness Church or the Promised Land Church?

The Lord had to take Israel through the wilderness in order for them to learn the lessons needed to possess their promised land. I see this principle at work in the last 500 years of church history.

We have built the Tabernacle in the wilderness and divided into our many tribes of denominations around the Tabernacle. We have had our dynamic Moses leaders who have taken us step by step further to the promised land. We have had miracle healings, we have had divine provision of manna in so many wonderful ways. We have had divine guidance from the fire by night and the cloud by day.

But we cannot keep wondering around in the wilderness as a church always needing miracles of healing or miracles of provision or miracles of divine guidance or dynamic one man leaders. We need to stop wandering in circles, always more meetings, conferences, talking...it's time to possess the Promised Land! It is time to for the church to enter into its ministry of discipling the nations!

To this we need a new vision of what the Church of the future is going to look like. The old principle of design is that form follows function.

We need a new vision of what is the Kingdom agenda of the Lord in the earth and then design how we do Church accordingly. If we do that then my answer is that the future of the Church is a move away from one man ministry on a Sunday morning to a Community of believers living the Kingdom reality for the world to see!