

Introduction

"When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.' Jesus replied: 'A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready." But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me." Another said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me." Still another said, "I just got married, so I can't come." The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame." "Sir," the servant said, "what you ordered has been done, but there is still room." Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet." " (Luke 14:15-23)

For nearly a thousand years religious men in Israel tried to put Jehovah in a box. Solomon built an elaborate temple and invited God to make it his "usual place of abode". The nation of Israel believed that, to experience God, it was necessary to go to a location. King David said, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD' " (Psalm 122:1). A central location served to limit syncretism, but for many people the building and its ceremonies became the centres of attention. The word for "house" of God doubles up in Hebrew for "receptacle" or "shelter". Imagine building a "shelter" for the Creator (the same Hebrew word is used for shelters for animals). The Prophet Isaiah looked to the day when worshippers would be able to go to Mt Zion to worship God (Isaiah 2:3). Some disagreed and suggested alternative residences (John 4:19).

Then Jesus came and set new parameters (John 4:21-23). He positioned Himself in the "marketplace" and people discovered God was not limited to one address. Stephen proclaimed, "The Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?" (Acts 7:48-50)

Most of Jesus' ministry, and those who followed him in planting the First Century Church, was conducted outside of synagogues and other religious buildings. Had it been otherwise Christianity would have remained a sect of Judaism. The key to world evangelism was that it "was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26).

Christianity in the marketplace enabled the Great Commission to move beyond the particularistic confines of ecclesiastical tradition and reach people of all cultural backgrounds, in their homes, offices, factories, schools, supermarkets, guest houses, farms and malls.

Unfortunately, we still build our practical theology on the language of religious exegesis and the premise that it is necessary to go “to the house of the Lord” to meet Him.

Don’t get me wrong. I am a strong advocate of Christians getting together in Jesus’ name, anywhere, at any time, including during sessions of worship and in home groups. The gifts of Jesus to His Church include men and women with special gifts to teach, preach, lead and exercise a huge range of other ministries (Ephesians 4:7-16). The Bible encourages us to meet as often as we can for fellowship, breaking of bread and corporate prayer and praise (Acts 2:42-47, cf Hebrews 10:25). If we remove ourselves, the fire is bound to die out. I have seen that happen too many times.

That said, the House of God is His People, the Church (in Greek, the “*ekklesia*”, the “called out ones”; called out of a life of sin, but not to exclusivity). Most Christian ministry (service) occurs in the world of work away from the sanctuary.

People in Jesus’ day usually met him in the street, at dinner parties, or at home (indeed, many of them were prohibited, sometimes on pain of death, from entering religious establishments because they were not Jewish by ethnicity or faith). Jesus spoke the language of the street; in fact his enemies complained that he behaved too much like those he met in the street. He was there, with them, in the highs and lows of their daily existence.

Now He is with you, in you (see John 14:17), as you circulate around the marketplaces of your city. He is in the street, on the bus, at the shopping centre and your university tutorial. He is in your place of work, child’s playgroup, or aged care facility.

*“Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism.”
(Lausanne Covenant)*

You are a full-time child of God and minister of Christ. You are better equipped and positioned than anyone else to influence people in your sphere of influence for Christ.

As you read the following pages, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you can experience and represent the Kingdom of God in the marketplace.

I pray that you will engage people who live in your world in a new way and see results that have eternal significance. Heaven knows, they need it.