

Tauranga: A City of Refuge and a Resting Place for God

This city, Tauranga, New Zealand, is called to be a city of refuge. In fact, the name "Tauranga" actually means "safe anchorage" or "safe harbor." We as a community and a ministry have an integral part to play in contending for this city to enter her destiny. The nation of New Zealand and the city of Tauranga will play a dynamic role in the coming years as God's end-time purposes unfold. It's important we understand what the "Spirit is saying to the church" in this city. And it's essential that we understand what our response is to be.

I. The Lord Desires a Resting Place Among Men

Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; where is the house that you would build for me, and where is the place of my rest? (Isaiah 66:1)

- A. God desires *places* to be set apart and sanctified. This is an overlooked idea in the modern Protestant church. Catholicism has understood this and embraced it. They believe in the significance and value of places of worship and prayer. By and large the Protestant church has failed to understand this. And to our own demise. The result is that prayer and worship as ministries to God are looked upon with contempt or as irrelevant compared to the practical work of ministry. This is partly why the Protestant church in the West is going through such a deep identity crisis.
- B. The Lord desires a place to rest. But not just any place - *among the sons of men*. He said through Isaiah that He views heaven as His throne and earth as His footstool. He goes on to explain how He desires more than this. Heaven and earth aren't satisfying. He desires a place to dwell with men; in agreement, affection and unity.
- C. In the following verse the Lord defines what He means by a resting place:

All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2)
- D. God has created heaven and earth with His hands. But He desires to "look" upon human hearts gathered together who walk in humility and dependance before Him having treasured His word.
- E. It's essential that we understand (1) that God desires to dwell among men and that (2) He has specific requirements that must be met by men for it to happen. We must respond to the word of the Lord and honor His leadership.

II. Three Dimensions of a City of Refuge

A. A Resting Place for God

1. God is constantly striving with humanity. This grieves His heart. Rebellious men in their sin grieve Him.

The LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever...5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth... 6 and He was grieved in His heart. (Gen. 6:3-6)

They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them. (Isa. 63:10)

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44)

2. God desires to walk with men in intimacy and agreement. We see this in the life of Jesus in the city of Bethany. He loved spending time in Bethany before and after spending time in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem He was told who He was supposed to be and how He was supposed to act. In Bethany He was allowed to rest and be Himself. Note the language in Isaiah 66:1 where God asks "Where is the place of MY rest?" God desires rest from striving with man.
3. Our assignment from the Lord is to establish a city within a city that Jesus would relate to as a spiritual Bethany. A place where He can be Himself and not be told who He is. We do this by worshiping Him according to who He has declared Himself to be in His word. And we do this by praying according to His will (praying the Scriptures). This is part of what Isaiah referred to in Isaiah 66:2 speaking of "trembling" at God's "word."
4. King David caught the vision for this for the city of Jerusalem:

Remember, O LORD, in David's favor, all the hardships he endured, how he swore to the LORD and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, "I will not enter my house or get into my bed, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob." ... "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!" Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might....The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my

testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne." For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: "This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. (Psalm 132:1-14)

- a. God made a vow to David and David made a vow to God. Both revolve around a resting place where God and man can dwell together in unity, agreement, affection and intimacy.

B. A Resting Place for Men

1. Isaiah 24 paints a graphic picture of the nations of the earth at the end of the age as God releases His judgments. We're told that "at the ends of the earth" songs will emerge as individuals and communities worship Jesus singing "Glory to the Righteous One!"
2. The judgments of God to be released upon the nations of the earth will be so terrifying that "men's hearts will fail from fear" at the mere thought of "what's to come" (Luke 21). Men will seek death in that day and not find it (Revelation 9). Every social demographic will be driven by fear to hide in mountains hoping to be killed that they might be spared from the "wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6). In that hour men will seek rest.
3. During the releasing of the plagues of Egypt the city of Goshen was a place of refuge where the Jews were safe from the judgments. In Amos 4 we read about how God sends drought to one city and rain to another depending on how the cities respond to God.
4. Joel 2:12-17 is the clearest statement in Scripture about how we're to respond in crisis. If we obey these commands God will release greater measures of "blessings" (2:13-14) as He brings "destruction" (1:15) around us.

C. An Apostolic Sending Center

1. The city of Antioch is the clearest picture in the Bible of this:

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit... (Acts 13:1-4)

2. Prophets and teachers gave leadership to a community centered around worship, prayer and fasting. The fruit of this community was the preparation and sending of Paul as an apostle.

D. In Tauranga it is our assignment to labor to see all three dimensions established.