

Tim Keller

Tim Keller – senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian in Manhattan. Keller started a church planting center in 2001 and remains committed to reaching the cities with the gospel. Redeemer’s vision is to spread the gospel, first through themselves and then through the city by words, deed, and community; to bring about personal changes, social healing, and cultural renewal through a movement of churches and ministries that change New York City. Keller has authored two books.

Being the Church in our Culture – Session 1

As a city goes, so goes the culture.

Paul was almost completely focused on planting in cities. (Acts) Christians won the cities. In Europe, the same thing was true. Europe won the cities first.

What really changes the culture is not the elite, elites but the grassroots majority. MTV has had a major impact on changing our culture and worldwide. The people at MTV aren’t the richest or the most powerful. The poor are extremely strategic. When they embrace faith, they have a moral leg up. People listen. Both of these groups have disproportional cultural power.

America is the most anti-urban country in the world. Cities have always been looked on as bad places. As a result, cities are under-served by Christians. Until evangelicals are willing to live in cities, they should not complain about the state of the cities. Christians should be living in the cities because they want to not because they have to or feel guilty about it.

The Christian church has to get a better grasp on the gospel.

Religion operates on the principle that “I obey therefore God accepts me.” The gospel operates on the principle that “God accepts me, therefore I obey.”

Motivation is different in both cases. In the gospel, motivation is positive – no more condemnation. In religion, I base my justification on my sanctification and when things go bad, I’m either mad at God or I’m mad at myself because I’m not living up to the highest standards. If you really believe the gospel, I might struggle but I still maintain my faith in Christ and maintain my self-esteem. The human default is to maintain control of our lives. We would rather believe that if we obey, then God accepts me and I can maintain some control of my life.

If you ask people to accept Jesus, they think you are just asking them to be good. If you can’t show the difference between religion and the gospel, they won’t understand what you’re inviting them into.

Living in the city as a Christian is counter-cultural.

You have to create mini-cities. Christians are supposed to be an alternate city within a city – racial diversity, artistically savvy but different. Non-Christians need to see

Christians who will so inhabit their environments that they want to become Christians too. The churches need to reflect the culture of the cities but be different – really different – a lot more thoughtful, less selfish and a lot happier. The Christian community needs to be a dynamic counter-culture.

For instance, chastity only makes sense to non-Christians if you can live within a culture that really, really loves and watches out for each other – like an extended family. Americans are the product of who they hang out with most. The only way to really change is to hang out with a different kind of community. Put the community over our careers.

Integrating faith and work

Faith and work are typically separate worlds for most people. Christians need to understand the theological meaning of ordinary work. For instance, a gardener takes the raw materials and re-arranges it in the ground to grow flowers and things to eat – you change the potential outcomes. All cultural production is basic gardening. No work is too menial. In the new world, it's a material world. But everything will be perfect in the new world.

Pastors aren't the only ones converting people for Christ. We should be asking people to integrate their faith through their work – not sealing off the two things from each other.

How do we help Christians work distinctively?

How do we help Christians work excellently?

How do we help Christians work and remain accountable?

We know how to pull people out of the secular work place and bring them into the church but we don't know how to equip people to live and work as Christians in the secular work place.

Christians need to live in the cities and pour themselves out for the good of the city.

Christians are not supposed to try to take power but live very different kinds of lives. They live for the good of the city and not just for themselves. Christians should live to make the cities better places even if they leave the city and no longer live there. Paradigm based on Babylon in the scriptures - Seek the peace for the city and you will flourish and prosper. You maintain your identity yet enter the city and pour yourselves out for the good of the city. Gain influence and favor.

Contextualization of the gospel

This is inevitable and desirable. 1 Corinthians – Jews saw one thing and Greeks saw another in the cross.

This is not simply giving people what they want. It's giving them God's answers to the questions that people ask and probably not what they want. Whatever you say will move toward some people and away from others. You can't be all things to all people all the time.

How to do it? A few guidelines –

You can't remove any of the offensive essentials of the gospel. On the other hand, you must remove the non-essentials of gospel that offend. And know the difference between the essentials and non-essentials. Don't over or under-adapt to the culture you're in.

Religion either leads to pride or inferiority. The gospel leads to love and acceptance and humility. Only the gospel gives you this unique identity.