

Miracle in the Marketplace

Christian businesspeople are winning their co-workers to the Lord at a record rate. God wants to work in your workplace!

At Riverview Community Bank in Elk River, Minnesota, employees pray regularly for customers. Since the bank opened its doors 18 months ago, 54 miracles have occurred and 60 people have received the Lord during business hours. A hotel chain in the Philippines offers intercession to customers as part of its regular services, reaping thousands of salvations. A European corporation has designated a chair in the boardroom as "Jesus' chair." When faced with perplexing corporate matters, the leaders go to the Lord for guidance. One such inquiry resulted in a \$1 billion contract!

These examples illustrate a growing phenomenon: ministry in the marketplace, where the power and presence of God are employed to change not only lives but also the marketplace itself. It's church in the marketplace!

The marketplace is made up of the three arteries through which the life of society flows—business, education and government. It constitutes the heart of a city. To transform the city, its heart—the marketplace—must experience transformation.

To some this may seem like an extra-biblical concept. Does God expect the church to bring transformation to cities and nations?

The answer is a resounding yes. But for us to fulfill this mandate, we must first experience a major paradigm shift.

Many Christians have no trouble believing that the devil—a

created being with limited power—contaminated all of creation with just one sin. But they find it difficult to accept that Jesus Christ—who is God—through a perfect sacrifice has made provision to recover all of “that which was lost.”

Jesus testified of Himself, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost”(Luke 19:10, NKJV). By this He meant that He came to save not just the lost but also that which was lost.

So what was lost when sin entered the Garden of Eden? At least three things: our relationship with God, our relationship with one another and something else that often goes unmentioned—the marketplace.

The curse on the ground (see Gen. 3:17) affected its business dimension. The resulting rebellion had an impact on its government aspect. And because God was no longer enjoying unhindered fellowship with His creatures, the educational dimension was lost. Therefore, when Jesus stated that He had come to save that which was lost, He meant the marketplace as well as individuals.

This truth becomes more apparent when we consider that the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 19:10 were meant to explain why Zacchaeus—a marketplace leader—was crucial to the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. A few hours earlier when a blind beggar had been blessed, everyone praised God, but when the “Donald Trump of Jericho” had a similar experience, everyone got upset.

Yet Zacchaeus’ salvation clearly illustrates that Jesus came to recover everything that was lost.

The tax collector's link to God was established when God's kingdom came to his house. His relationship with his neighbors was restored when he gave half his wealth to the needy and used the other half to make restitution to those he had cheated. And through the parable Jesus told after Zacchaeus' conversion, He showed how He would use people such as Zacchaeus to recover the marketplace.

The parable of the minas is the story of a nobleman who gave investment capital to his servants to do business, obviously in the marketplace. While he was away, his enemies took over the kingdom, but his servants continued to do business as instructed. When he returned, the nobleman granted them authority over cities in direct proportion to their success in the marketplace.

Jesus told this story to show that Christians must gain authority over cities by applying kingdom principles the way Zacchaeus did in Jericho. It also teaches that the scope of His redemption goes beyond the salvation of souls. In fact, it is tridimensional: It applies to the individual, to interpersonal relationships and to the marketplace.

When Christians understand that Jesus came to save everything that was lost, they are able to see the marketplace as an opportunity instead of a threat. Rather than viewing it as an unconquerable evil, they tackle its challenges with the same spiritual arsenal with which pastors come to the pulpit on Sunday mornings.

In the hotel chain mentioned previously, each one of the 1,600 rooms was used an average of five times a day by prostitutes working in cahoots with the hotel's 2,000 employees. Humanly speaking, this was an irreversible situation. However, when

the owner (a new Christian) realized that he had spiritual jurisdiction over the hotel, he hired 40 ministers to do prayer evangelism on site, and after two years most of his employees had become Christians and joined the spiritual turnaround that transformed the hotel chain into a spiritual powerhouse.

Chuck Ripka, senior vice president at the Riverview Community Bank, also learned to take advantage of opportunities to see business as church. "The attitude of management is that if a customer is struggling with his payments, we will not send the collectors, but instead will inquire how we can pray for them," he says. "This may sound like church, but keep in mind that this is a bank where God is at work!"

The notion that Jesus came to save more than just souls is not an extra-biblical concept. John 3:16 does not state that God loved only the people in the world, but the world itself, precisely what was lost in the Garden. To interpret it otherwise leaves us with faith for personal salvation but without hope for our cities and nations, even though the Great Commission is about effectively discipling all nations, and the book of Revelation provides evidence that nations—saved nations—will bring glory to God (Rev. 21:24-27).

The idea that nations themselves can be redeemed runs like a thread throughout the Bible. The revivals described always influenced the marketplace. Of 69 divine interventions in the book of Acts, 68 happened in the marketplace.

Furthermore, the centrality of the marketplace in the transformation of cities and nations is evident in Paul's missionary endeavors.

For more than 10 years (see Acts 13-17), Paul ministered once a week to God-fearing people in religious settings. He was so effective at this that he became the model for church planters. However, according to Acts 19, it wasn't until "all who lived in Asia" heard the gospel—which included those in the marketplace—that Paul saw the region transformed.

Before this, Paul was influencing individuals but not society. Asia, the first regional transformation Paul initiated, came about because he moved his base of operations to the marketplace.

The genesis for this breakthrough was Paul's going into the marketplace as a tent maker after meeting Aquila and Priscilla (see Acts 18). They set up in a house next to the synagogue that wasn't just a home but also part of the marketplace. It's safe to assume that Paul and his associates ministered out of that house every day to ungodly people in a nonreligious setting, combining tent making with apostolic ministry.

So many Corinthians believed and were baptized in the marketplace that Paul, perplexed and overwhelmed, became frightened and was tempted to quit. God instructed him in a nightly vision to go on "'because I have many people in the city,'" making clear that his focus should remain in the marketplace.

Paul spent the next 18 months teaching the Word of God in the marketplace and having an impact on Corinth (see Acts 18:8-11). Subsequently he and his associates moved to Ephesus, where they combined business and ministry so effectively that in two years everybody in Asia heard the Word of God (see Acts 18:18-19:10).

When Paul shifted his focus to the marketplace to minister to unreligious people in a business setting, multitudes were saved, and cities and regions experienced transformation. This shift toward the marketplace is what is needed today for the Great Commission to be fulfilled in our generation.

Having church 24/7 in the marketplace may be easier than we think. The early church met primarily around meals (see Acts 2-6). If we were to turn every lunch break into an occasion to establish God's presence and power in the marketplace, we could easily (and inexpensively) emulate Paul. If we took it one step further and began to do kingdom business in the marketplace, we would gain authority over cities.

This is precisely what is happening in Argentina. After a canopy of prayer was lifted over the nation in 2002, the out-of-control social upheaval miraculously subsided and the economy rebounded. Since then a number of governors and mayors have dedicated entire cities and provinces to Jesus with verifiable blessings. Pastors are also equipping members to shepherd corporations, schools and government agencies.

In Mar del Plata pastors are shepherding the entire city instead of just their congregations. Prayer centers operate in neighborhoods, police stations, hospitals and City Hall, making it hard for sinners to go to hell because the kingdom of God is evident all over town.

It's about time we begin to seek and find what was paid in full by Jesus' blood. Why not take the first step and invite Jesus to come into your workplace, and then systematically pray for everyone you do business with? Intercede fervently for those people and situations that require a miracle.

Doing this will allow you to experience the marketplace as a location for ministry where the power and presence of God change not only human lives, but also the marketplace itself. It will be church in the marketplace!

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