

A Gospel Movement

RCC Vision Dinner – April 10, 2019

“Reaching an entire city takes more than having some effective churches in it, or even having a burst of revival energy and new converts. Changing the city with the gospel takes a movement.”

– Tim Keller

“A gospel movement is the integration of local churches and cultural leaders exercising their faith and influence in every sector of society for the transformation of the city.”

- Luis Palau

First, **WHY a gospel movement?** Two answers to that question – a **personal** and a **Biblical** answer. The personal answer is my calling and gifts. In many ways the church has been on a parallel tract with my calling. This is both a positive and a negative. This is changing.

Also, Biblically, the church is the instrument and not the goal of the gospel. The goal is always something bigger – i.e. the kingdom of God.

“The problem is that, in North America, the church has become largely a vendor of religious services...Families ‘shop’ for churches the way they shop for groceries, each family looking for a congregation that will match its style and needs most closely...We North Americans tend to think of meeting our needs as not just one good thing among many other aspects to life. We tend to think of meeting our needs as the central purpose of our lives. We regard it as a kind of moral mandate that precedes all other duties and responsibilities we might have. It’s what gives our lives their meaning at the deepest level...We think this way because we tend to identify our humanity at its core with a set of needs that must be met...We are trained to see ourselves first and foremost as consumers with needs to be met...Glaringly absent is any understanding of a purpose for human life that extends beyond ourselves and the gratification of our own needs and desires. The problem is not that meetings needs is wrong; it’s that when meeting needs move to the center of our lives, the result is self-absorption and narcissism...”

What the gospel offers, by contrast, is the opportunity to be drawn into something larger than ourselves – into God’s overflowing love that moves out in ever-widening circles, embracing the whole of creation. The gospel sees our humanity not in terms of needs to be met, but in terms of capacities and gifts to be offered in God’s gracious service. We are created not to consume, but to know God, not merely to meet our own needs, but to participate in God’s life and mission.” – Jim Brownson

If you begin with the idea that we are basically people with needs and it is the church’s job to meet those needs, then you have (religious) consumerism. Consumerism is the enemy of the gospel. If, however, you begin with the idea that it is better to give than to receive, and that believing the gospel leads to becoming the gospel, then what people need most, is to be given the opportunity to participation in mission. As they say, it isn’t the church that has a mission, it is God’s mission that has a church. There is no other way to live as a Christian than on mission.

Second, **WHAT is a gospel movement?** Big picture, a gospel movement is **revival**. We continue to pray for revival. **“Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (Jn 3:6)**. You can grow a church in the flesh or through revival. Signs of revival are: 1) Spirit power; 2) Gospel assurance; 3) bold witness and 4) radical conversions.

More specifically, a gospel movement is a genuine work of the Spirit that avoids the dangers of **institutionalism** and **anti-institutionalism**. Both quench the Spirit.

Every movement has to institutionalize. If it doesn’t, it will die. But if it over-institutionalizes, then it will also die. A movement is driven by the balance between authority and tradition and freedom and creativity. An example of harmful institutionalism would be denominationalism. Inside the church, it would be top-down leadership structures. Both create bottle-necks that quench the Spirit. ... Pastors are called by God to train people for ministry outside of the church, not approve or “green light” ministry in the church. That creates a bottle-neck. It is a violation of the “ever member ministry” principle in the Scriptures.

Third, **HOW does a gospel movement happen?** Here, the answer is that there is no answer. There is no formula. We can't say for sure what causes a gospel movement to happen. But we do know some of the things that can prevent it from happening. Let me mention a few.

- 1) Trying to move "beyond" the gospel
- 2) Self-reliance and boasting – ex. *"How the Mighty Fall"* by Jim Collins
- 3) Discouraging diversity
- 4) Becoming inflexible and resistant to change
- 5) Beginning to think in either/or categories rather than both/and
- 6) Becoming inwardly-focused – prioritizing ministry to those already in the church

State of the Union:

We had 28 professions of faith at Redeemer in 2018. 20 adults and 8 kids. That really is an amazing statistic. However, the majority of those adult conversions were at RSW not RCC. Now, in one sense, we need to embrace that we are becoming more of a resourcing "big steeple" church. But not at the expense of evangelism and reaching new people. You're going to feel that tension.

We have 306 communing members and 95 non-communing members. So, 401 total. (25% of our church are children. 40% is under 18 year old.) This is a huge blessing and a huge responsibility.

We're praying for 20% growth in 2019. So, that would be an addition of 80 adults and children to our rolls.