

An aerial photograph of a sprawling city, likely New York City, showing a dense concentration of skyscrapers and buildings. The city extends to the water's edge on both sides. A dark, semi-transparent horizontal band is overlaid across the bottom third of the image, serving as a background for the title text.

# Lessons From The Big City

# #1: Embrace The Crowd

- Visiting a cosmopolitan place like NYC is a reminder of how big the world is. The crowded, chaotic, noisy streets can be overwhelming! We usually just enjoy our little corner of the world, and rarely look too far past our own backyard. Don't waste opportunities to gain a wider perspective, especially on spiritual matters.
- There are Christians from all walks of life, just as God intended (Matt. 28:19, Mk. 16:15). The "nations" are frequently mentioned in scripture as a receptive population to God's love and grace (Psalm 96, Is. 2:1-4, Rev. 5:9-10).
- Just remember the warning that we must not be like the "nations." We must not follow the empty and hollow ways, the idolatry, the fleshly impulses (2 Cor. 6:14ff).

# Applications

- I can stay up-to-date on the work being done by preachers we support. Read their letters, send them an email of encouragement, do some research on where they are and what life is like in that land.
- I can intentionally fight stereotypes and assumptions by talking to people who are different. Hear their stories and "put myself in their shoes." Paul meant what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:19ff. His behavior was deliberate.
- I can recognize what is special about others (their talents, potential, unique background) without ignoring their essential spiritual need. While I embrace the "nations" I also need to teach them the gospel. We have all sinned (Rom. 3:23) and the purpose of the gospel is to take people out of their worldly, fleshly, lost state and transform them into something new and glorious (2 Cor. 5:15ff).

# #2: Worship Is Essential, Even In The City That Has EVERYTHING

- There is everything you could ever want in a city like New York. Eating, shopping, playing, sinning, any time of day. Boredom would never be a problem! Given all the stimulation, it's easy for people to put truly important things on the backburner. It's even tempting for Christians, who might dismiss worship as somehow non-essential while on vacation ("Hebrews 10:25 is only about *habitually* missing church, right?" one might say).
- I don't want my own example to come across as arrogance. I am just following a model for how to prioritize God without it coming at the expense of fun.

# Applications

- Do research. Don't let Sunday worship be an afterthought. Plan your vacation around the Lord's Day using readily available tools and technology.
- I need to understand how valuable my presence is for a small congregation hungry for connection to brotherhood. My singing, my friendship, my sharing in their fellowship, my encouragement – these are all things I can directly contribute to another congregation.
- Worshiping in the middle of a vacation helps us stay grounded. Did I remember to pray? Did I get my Bible reading done? Am I remembering God at all while I'm enjoying HIS creation and blessings given by HIM (James 1:17)? Worship takes me back to the spiritual watering hole (Psalm 42) and is a proclamation of my hope and enduring faith in God.

# #3: Peeling Back The Layers

- Most things in life have a façade. Peel away the layers and you'll find the rust and rot underneath. That's just reality in a world corrupted by sin (Gen. 3:17-19, Isa. 24:1-6, Rom. 8:20-22). Buildings, no matter how well-built, are prone to wear out. Streets require frequent maintenance. A beautiful city skyline hides many layers of filth, vermin, human waste, and decay.
- New York is no worse than many other places (in fact, I was pleasantly surprised, for the most part), but even the most beautiful places have their dirty little secrets and dark streets.
- In one city, I saw Sodom, Nineveh, Babel, and Ecclesiastes all rolled into one!

# Applications

- If our own city is like Sodom, I must stand with the conviction of Lot and refuse to be OK with sin (2 Pet. 2:6-8).
- If our own city is like Nineveh, I must not be a hard-hearted bigot like Jonah, who hoped for their destruction even as he preached for their repentance.
- If our own city is like Babel, I must not be caught up in the self-glorification and monument-building that has infatuated so many before me.
- If our own city is like the glitz and glam of Solomon's heyday, then I must re-focus my life on God, realizing that without Him, we can have no satisfaction, no joy, and no lasting purpose.

# #4: A Lasting City

- Finally, and as an extension of the previous point: "here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come" (Heb. 13:14). Similarly, this world is compared to a "tent" in 2 Corinthians 5:4. It lacks permanence, corrupted as it has been by sin.
- So, even in New York (widely regarded as the "greatest city in the world"), we cannot find an eternal, perfect home. For all its allure, charm, and engineering, it will one day fall like every work of man. It is destined, like all "the earth and its works" to be "burned up" and "melted with intense heat" (2 Pet. 3:10-13).
- Let us look to the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, for eternal fulfilment, described so beautifully in Revelation 21-22.