

Friends, good morning and welcome to City Bible Church. My name is Marwan and I serve as one of the pastors here. We're continuing our sermon series on who we are and who we aim to be as a church. And so this series serves as both an introduction and a charge.

We ultimately want to be a church that Glorifies God.

Last week, we considered what it is to Glorify God *in Community*. And today we'll consider what it means to be a church that's *For the City*.

As I thought about that, I considered how every group or organization is known by something. Whether it's intentional or not, they're known by what they do, or what they offer or stand for. McDonalds is known for burgers and fries. Starbucks is known for over-priced coffee. Political parties are known by one or two main things. If I say anything more about political parties in Lebanon, it could get me in trouble. So, we'll just leave it there.

So, I wonder: What is the church known for?

I'm not talking about CBC. I'm thinking generally about the Christian church in the eyes of those outside the church. I'd like to think that some people think well of the church. Some might think that the church is for Jesus; for love; for good deeds. But there some things that the church has been known for, and it's not good. It's become a common assumption that the church is full of hypocrites and is after your money. And sadly, not without reason.

But as I've thought about it more deeply, I think in our day the church has become known for what it's against, rather than what it's for.

A couple of quick examples that come to mind are homosexuality and abortion. The church is known to be against those things. Now, whether these are biblically accurate or not is for another conversation, but the question I want us to ask is if this is right. Should God's people be known for what they're against? Or what they're for?

My prayer for our church, for City Bible Church in Beirut, Lebanon, is that we would be known by what we are for. I pray that we would be known for our love for one another. That we'd be a church for the gospel. And that we would be a church for the city.

To give a brief foundation on what I mean by being for the city, we can think about the different categories that churches often fit into in relation to their city.

I've been greatly helped and formed by Tim Keller's work in this area. He argued that most churches fit into one of four categories. First is a church that is "*in* the city." That means that their only interaction with the city is that they happen to be located there. Usually these are old churches that had the city

grow around them. I can picture some of these around Beirut. High walls with bars. They minister to people within the four walls of the church but have little to no effect on the city around them.

The second type of church is the one that's "**against** the city." Sadly, there're a lot of churches that fall into this category. It's an "us versus them" mentality. The church is good. The city is bad. "*Let's keep our people away from the city and all the things that have to do with the city.*" That because there's a fear of being stained or influenced by the city.

I remember the different concerns people shared when we decided to plant the church in Gemmayze. We were told that's where all the bars and clubs are. There aren't Christians there. It's not a good area. And I just smiled and said, it sounds like a great place for a church to be.

The third is a church that's "**of** the city." What Tim means by that is that this type of church has tried so hard to be like the city and like the culture that there's nothing distinctively Christian about them anymore. It might've been from a desire to make non-Christians welcome into the church, that they stripped away anything that might be offend. This kind of church is no longer the salt and light of the world. It's just another group of people who find value in spirituality.

Lastly, is a church that's "**for** the city." This church seeks the welfare and peace of the city. They want to see it flourish so that God is glorified.

So, how will CBC be a church that glorifies God by being for the city? What does it mean for CBC to be a church for the city?

Here's the main point for us this morning: **A church for the city has God's heart for the city.**

To develop this point further, we'll work through the sermon in three parts; or three movements:
Gospel. City. City to Come.

Gospel

To have God's heart for the city, we need to **know** and **love** the gospel.

Our primary text this morning is in Jonah. Since we're not in the Book of Jonah, let me give you some context. Jonah was a prophet in the 8th century BC. This was a time when the Israelites were victorious against neighboring powers.

It was a time of peace, but the Israelites boasted in their victories and looked forward to what they understood would be the day that God would crush all of their enemies. One of their enemies were the people of Nineveh. And in the opening of this book, we see that God called Jonah to go and preach to the people of Nineveh. Listen to Jonah 1:1-2.

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because their evil has come up before me.”

Jonah refused and tried to run from God. He jumped on a boat that was heading the opposite direction of Nineveh. He doesn't seem to be the smartest of prophets to think he can escape from God. But, we all do that in some ways. Right? We all think we can hide from God, but we can't.

That's something that some of you needs to hear this morning. If you're trying to run away from God, *or hide from Him* — Stop. First of all, you can't hide. Secondly, God loves you, so run **to** Him.

Back to Jonah. He got on a ship. God sent a huge storm. Then it's discovered by the crew of the ship that Jonah is the cause of the storm. He told them to throw him overboard. They did. The storm stopped. And Jonah was swallowed by a great fish. Jonah was in the fish for three days and three nights. Then Jonah is freed from the fish. That quickly covers chapters 1-2. Let's pick up the story and read Jonah 3.

Jonah 3:1–10 (CSB):

3 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2 “Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you.” 3 Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the Lord's command.

Now Nineveh was an extremely great city, a three-day walk. 4 Jonah set out on the first day of his walk in the city and proclaimed, “In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!” 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth—from the greatest of them to the least. 6 When word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 Then he issued a decree in Nineveh:

By order of the king and his nobles: No person or animal, herd or flock, is to taste anything at all. They must not eat or drink water. 8 Furthermore, both people and animals must be covered with sackcloth, and everyone must call out earnestly to God. Each must turn from his evil ways and from his wrongdoing. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent; he may turn from his burning anger so that we will not perish.

10 God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it.

Jonah preached a message of the judgment of God against sin, and the people repented. What wonderful news!

You might be thinking that it's a bit redundant to say we need to know **and** love the gospel. They automatically go together, but in chapter 4 we see that's not always the case.

Jonah 4:1–3 (CSB):

4 Jonah was greatly displeased and became furious. 2 He prayed to the Lord, “Please, Lord, isn't this what I said while I was still in my own country? That's why I fled toward Tarshish in the first place. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one

who relents from sending disaster. 3 And now, Lord, take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

This is such a crazy text. It's clear here that Jonah understands the gospel. Really well.

Jonah understands the nature and character of God. He's gracious and compassionate. Slow to anger. Abounding in faithful love. He believed that God was able to save, and in this case, it was likely that He'd save the people of Nineveh. **But He didn't want them to be saved.**

Jonah's gospel was selfish. It wasn't for the whole world. He wanted good things for himself and his people, but judgment for everyone else.

So, the question for us as a church is, how are we going to love the gospel fully? How will we be a people that not only know the gospel, but love it?

Much can be said, but I'll say two quick things. Remember God and recognize our need.

To grow in our love for the gospel, we need to remember Who God is. We remember His greatness and self-sufficiency. We remember His holiness and grace. We remember the lengths He went to show us His love for us, and to redeem us from death.

And we recognize our need for the gospel. Not only do we recognize that there's nothing we could've ever done to earn God's love. We need to understand that the gospel isn't just the path to salvation.

The gospel isn't only the entrance to the Christian life, **it's all of Christian life.** We need the power and promises of the gospel to make it through each and every day. We need the gospel to grow and mature in Christ. To love one another. We need to recognize that we have no power or hope without the gospel.

Rehearsing this and repeating this to ourselves daily will help us not only know the gospel more deeply, **but to love it more deeply.**

Let's continue and think about **City**. To have God's heart for the city, we need to know and love the city.

We moved to Beirut in 2016. And in different ways we've grown more into the ways of Beirut. For example, not only do I ride a Vespa around. I've now started taking Noah and Shaya along with me. The next level would be to take all of you on the scooter with me.

The boys are very familiar with the roads and traffic, and because they're Beirut kids, anytime there's traffic they tell me to honk. Sometimes honking is necessary. Anytime I honk my horn, I always explain to them that I'm helping people learn how to be better drivers.

I wonder if it's every happened to you where you honk with a little more passion than usual. There's

someone driving really slowly. They're taking up the middle so you can't get around them. It's causing congestion and they made you miss the green light. You give a nice long honk to express your frustration. You finally get past them, and of course you're going to look look to see who the horrible driver is. And it's the sweetest looking old woman. Or old man. They look startled. They look tired.

I don't know about you, but I instantly regret my thoughts and actions towards them. I wish I would've considered the person more. I worry that I've upset them or embarrassed them. If only I would've known their condition, *if I would've thought about them instead of myself*, I probably wouldn't have gotten upset.

I think this is how the church looks at the outside world. This is how they often look at cities – a place filled with worldly things. Christians can get so frustrated by the actions of non-believers. They feel their sin is obnoxious. It often infringes on our comforts and rights.

What's happening is that we're looking at the outside. We're thinking about how we're affected instead of considering who they are. These people who bother us are lost and helpless. They're sinning because that's what sinners do.

Churches can too easily have a hardened heart towards the world. **But that's not the heart of God for the city.** Yes, there are lots of concerning things that happen in cities. They're places of darkness and brokenness. But they're also places of opportunities and new beginnings.

Cities are where higher education happens. University students grow and discover who they are. Cities are where arts and music are created. People begin new careers in cities. Because of the unique challenges in cities, people are often more open to discussing God.

You see, to have love for a city doesn't mean you like everything that happens in the city. It's not a special love for traffic and trash and brokenness. **We're called to love the city because it's filled with people.** Because we've been given new eyes to see Jesus, that means we have a new way of seeing everything. And when we can look passed the way people affect our way of life and have a deeper recognition that they're lost children created in the image of God, **our hearts and actions will change.**

I think it can be argued biblically that God loves cities more than any other place. Because as Tim Keller says, **"Cities have more of the image of God per square inch than any other place on earth."**

We catch a glimpse of this in Jonah 4. Jonah continues to complain, v10 — **"And the Lord said, "You cared about the plant, which you did not labor over and did not grow. It appeared in a night and perished in a night. 11 So may I not care about the great city of Nineveh, which has more than a hundred twenty thousand people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left, as well as many animals?"**

It's not so hard to see the brokenness in our city. A six-year-old kid should be asleep in a comfortable

bed at 1am, not selling flowers on the street. People who work seven days a week shouldn't struggle to put food on the table.

What did God do to address the sin and brokenness in Nineveh? He sent Jonah to preach against it. That might sound harsh to our ears, but it's not. It's loving. You see, people need to understand sin and the consequences of sin. They must see their need for someone to save them. And they need to hear that God is merciful and compassionate.

You see, to be *for the city* is to want **more** and **better** for it. It's lovingly shining light into the darkness. It's speaking truth to all the lies it believed.

The sins of Nineveh came up to God, and He sent Jonah to preach a message of judgment and salvation. But he ran away. Our sins have come up to God, and He sent His Son Jesus to preach judgment and salvation. And He didn't run. Jesus was faithful in both life and death. And not just any death, but death on the cross.

We can love the lost and want the best for the lost because we were lost. We were enemies of God, and yet He graciously saved us. He died the death that we deserved. And now we live a new life. That's the message of the gospel. It doesn't matter what sins you've committed, because God knows them all. And in His knowing he's declared that anyone who believes in Him will have life.

We struggle with God's wrath and judgment, but it's necessary. We're sinful and broken people, and yet we're angry when we see injustice. How much more a holy God? Sin must be judged, but in His love, he's made a way for Jesus, the perfect substitute, the Lamb of God, to take God's judgment.

If you've not heard, I pray you hear today. God's judgment is coming. We can either try to stand on our own efforts – and we will fail. Or we can rest in Christ, who took God's wrath and judgment, died, and was raised. Oh, that you would believe in Jesus today.

As Christians who love the gospel and love the city, the practical outflow is to invest in the city. To labor for its good. Right belief will result in right living and practice.

Let's think on our third section: **City to Come**.

We can have an entire sermon series on the new heaven and new earth, and the city to come. But what I want to highlight is that creation started in a garden, but it will end in a city. A garden city.

The scripture that was read right before the sermon gave a glimpse of this city. No tears. No death. No need for the light of the sun because the glory of God will illuminate everything. No hunger and no thirst. **That is our home and reality.**

We're currently living in between two worlds, but that is where we belong and will one day be. And so

the reality of our heavenly citizenship, *that we are residents of a city to come*, should drastically affect how we live today.

There's a beautiful description of what it means to invest in the city in Jeremiah 29. This is during the Babylonian captivity. God reminded them that He's sovereign and that He led them into captivity. But He's working. They're His people and He's preparing a homeland for them. The time for them to go to their own city wasn't now, and so while they were in Babylon, He told them to invest in it.

Listen to Jeremiah 29:4–7 (CSB): 4 *This is what the Lord of Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the exiles I deported from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 "Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Find wives for yourselves, and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons and give your daughters to men in marriage so that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there; do not decrease. 7 Pursue the well-being of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the Lord on its behalf, for when it thrives, you will thrive."*

Build houses. Plant gardens. Get married and have babies. And he said when Babylon thrives, they will thrive. Think about that. Their own prosperity, just like ours, will be tied to the prosperity of the city.

And so, what does it look like for us to invest in Beirut as God's people and as a church? **We take the glory that's reflected amongst God's people and shine it in the city.** Remember what we considered last week. There's something unique and special about that way Christians love one another and welcome one another. When we do it as Christ did, we are reflecting his glory.

Jesus told us that the world will know we belong to Him by the kind of love we have for one another. But, does that mean that the world will come into the church? Maybe. Hopefully some do. This is a call to take the glory seen amongst God's people into the city.

Listen to Matthew 5:13–16 (CSB) *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

The church is called to reflect the glory of the Son of God, not to hide it. And we reflect it by the way we live our lives. By the things we do in the name of Jesus. Because the world is dark and broken, the church has retreated in many ways. There's a concern that the church needs to protect herself from the world. But if we had a deeper biblical foundation and understood the gospel and God's heart for the city, **the church wouldn't be hiding.** It wouldn't be retreating. Instead, we'd be a light in the city that couldn't be hidden. A light that the city sees as good and necessary. Not just bright and obnoxious.

The reality that we belong to Christ and have a place in **the city to come** gives us the joy and confidence to go out. Remember, the church is made up of people who see God as glorious. So, let's reflect his glory in all that we do. At work, do your best and be thankful for your employment. People will notice. When you're a good friend, or you're kind to people you interact with, God will use that.

The church has lost its voice in the city, but it doesn't have to be that way for us. Let's know our neighbors. Let's build relationships. Let's be a church for the city. Not just for what we can get out of it, but let's think of ways we can benefit our city. Let's be for the rich and the poor. The saints and the sinners. For the helpless and the hopeless.

May we believe that the greatest hope for Beirut are lives who have been renewed by the gospel. And through personal renewal, we'd see renewal in the city. Let's believe that God will accomplish his work in the city, and may we as a church desire to be a part of it.

Amen. Let's pray.