

Session 2: “Reading the New Map”

The Issachar Principle: 1 Chron. 12:32

“... men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do. . . .”

Point of the passage: David had men who were not only strong warriors but wise leaders. They discern what was happening and knew the right things to do.

Application: As people called of God, we have no choice but to seek, develop, and exercise discernment and wisdom so we can interpret what is going on and know what to do.

Definition of terms:

- *Culture.* Culture is simply who we are.

So, is culture good or bad?

- *Worldview.* A worldview is the lenses through which we see, understand, and interpret the world.

A Few American Changes Affecting Culture and Worldview:

1) Growing diversity:

1. *We are a nation of immigrants.* We all came from somewhere else. Our national soul is an immigrant one.
2. *We are an American culture consisting of multiple cultures.* That is, we are a mosaic of cultures that are all part of the American culture.

3. *Multicultural America can and should be celebrated.*

Do these realities matter missiologically?

1. Missiologically, we must learn to “see” America as diverse. This missiological challenge relates to the controversial homogeneous principle.
 - a. On the one hand . . .
 - b. At the same time . . .
2. Missiologically, our diverse nation means that we must be ready to share the Biblical narrative in the right way.
3. Missiologically, the nations have come to us, so that should help us to fulfill the commandment to take the gospel to all the nations.
4. Missiologically, we need to rejoice at the Christian influence from many immigrants.

2) Urbanization:

Suffice it to say that:

1. The American trend toward urbanization will continue.
2. Urban areas will continue to grow particularly in the South and the West, and especially due to immigration and internal population shifts. \
3. An obvious effect of increased immigration and population shifts is a change in the racial and ethnic makeup of metro areas.

Consider the following:

- a. The majority of the population lives in the urban areas, and, consequently, the greatest percentage of lostness is in those cities.
- b. The majority of immigrants arrive in and stay in the cities and suburbs.
- c. The centers of power of business, education, entertainment, and both high and popular culture are in the cities.
- d. The cores of the cities are being revitalized.
- e. Because of growing secularism and postmodernism, the cities are more “tolerant” to alternative lifestyles, in particular homosexuality and gay marriage.

3) Dying of Builders, Aging of Boomers

This “graying of America” has political, economic, and vast cultural implications. For instance:

1. Baby Boomers will redefine what it means to age.
2. At the same time, however, because such a large group will be aging America may be facing an “economic time bomb.”
3. Because the “nature of aging is changing,” how aging in general is viewed by American society is liable to change, also.

So, aging Boomers are both a mission field and a potential mission force.

4) American Idolatry

The reasons they are missiologically important are:

One, they are currently dominating our society in both activity and discussion.

Two, the Postmodern fallout means that there are fewer and fewer grounds, from the point of view of intentional and aware practitioners, by which to critique these idols.

Three, they are right in there in your churches!

1. The Right to Have Rights: Radical individualism

But what happens when individual rights – “my rights” – become the criteria by which we judge all concepts of freedom and happiness? Individual rights then become radical individualism. The societal and moral consequences are many. A few include:

- i. A society where every real or perceived slight is grounds for a lawsuit.
- ii. A society where no-fault divorce is the norm.
- iii. A society where the “right to choose” and “women’s reproductive rights” automatically overrule the right to life.
- iv. A society that is willing to redefine traditional understandings of sexuality, gender identity, and marriage based on the “right” to exercise one’s sexuality.

Bottom line:

2. Materialism

Working hard to make life better and easier for future generations is good. Working to improve one’s material status becomes an idol, however, when:

- *It erodes marriage, family, and other relationships.*
- *It leads to unethical practices.*
- *It becomes an end rather than a means.*
- *It deteriorates into consumerism.*

3. Science and technology

One, we still believe to some degree that science will get us out the mess we have created.

Two, we look to technology to fill the meaninglessness and hopelessness in our lives.

4. Entertainment

- More sports leagues than ever, and when that is not enough, we create fantasy leagues.
- More amusement parks, which “generate \$12 billion in revenues each year.”
- Cable television (“estimated revenues of \$74.7 billion in 2007”).
- MP3 players alone “generated \$5.4 billion in revenue in 2007”
- Movies (“more than \$10 billion in 2009”)
- Americans spent \$13.5 billion on home video and computer games in 2006.
- Won’t even mention our gambling obsession.

5. Our obsession with sex

The bottom line is that America has made an idol out of sex.

American society is moving through three general attitudes toward sex:

One, from an era when sex was a taboo subject that was practiced in private, and when even sinful acts were kept private.

Two, through an era of “open and free love” in which sex has been “freed from its shackles” and idolized.

Three, toward a rapidly developing era in which sex has become so open, commonplace, routine, and marketable that it carries no more meaning to people than having lunch together, an attitude already common in most of pop culture.

Missiological Implications

- 1) *We must unmask the idols by naming them.*
- 2) *We must be willing to give up our individual rights.*
- 3) *We must articulate and practice a Biblical theology of life.*
- 4) *We must practice simpler lifestyles and demonstrate generosity.*

- 5) *We must keep science and technology in perspective.*
 - 6) *We must learn and practice what the Bible means by Sabbath rest.*
 - 7) *We must practice sexual purity.*
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- 5) Worldview Shifts.

Here is the primary missiological challenge:

Questions for further reflection

- 1) How do I define culture? What can I do to develop a theology of culture (a biblical understanding of culture)?
- 2) What is my worldview? What are the lenses through which I see and interpret the world? Are there aspects of my worldview which need to be judged by Scripture?
- 3) Do I understand the culture(s) and worldview(s) of my congregation and the community I am trying to reach? What do I need to do to learn more about these? What do I need to read? What conversations do I need to have? Who do I need to listen to?
- 4) Have I done recent demographic research on my community? Have I been out in the community studying it? Have I grown complacent and assumed I already knew what I needed to know about the people I am trying to reach?
- 5) Based on the demographics of my mission field, the changing cultures, and the worldview of people, what needs to change in my strategy? My outreach? My preaching and teaching? What issues do I need to address?

Suggested Resources

Carson, D. A. *Christ and Culture Revisited*.

Netland, Harold. *Christianity and Religious Diversity*.

Payne, J. D. *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration and Mission*.

Rah, Soong-Chan. *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the church from Western cultural captivity*.

Raley, Matthew. *The Diversity Culture*.

Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*

Sire, James W. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*

Swanson, Eric and Sam Williams. *Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City*.

Terry, John Mark and J.D. Payne. *Developing a Strategy for Missions*.