

The Tower Builders and the Name Game

by Roger Ellsworth

The sermon explores the story of the tower of Babel, highlighting the importance of considering the context of the story and the main purpose of God's plan of redemption, which is to bring glory to God's name.

Duration: 34:57

Scripture: Genesis 11, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Babel"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of connecting Old Testament stories with the Lord Jesus Christ. The sermon is divided into three parts: the context of the story, the character of the tower, and the curse of Babel. The preacher discusses God's plan of redemption and how it relates to the story of Babel. He also highlights the pride and opposition to God displayed by mankind in building the tower. The sermon concludes by emphasizing that God's curse still rests upon those who refuse to give glory to His name and submit to His word.

Transcript

Well, thank you, Joni. Please find Genesis chapter 11. Genesis chapter 11, and it's hard for me to believe, but this is my third summer here at Parkview Church.

And I have spent our summer evenings, the previous two summers, dealing with some of the great stories of the Old Testament. You know by now that I love the Old Testament stories. My, they are so interesting, so fascinating, so helpful.

And in 2009 we had the theme, Old Gems in New Settings. And last summer we spent our summer Sunday evenings looking at snapshots from the Christian Family album. And this summer I propose to put before you some good lessons from bad people, good lessons from bad people.

Now I don't want to be accused of being overly negative. Sometimes you can't believe this, can you? Sometimes people accuse me of that. They say, ah, you're too negative in your preaching.

And you know me by now. You know how sweet and warm and cuddly I am. And you certainly wouldn't go along with that, would you? That I'm too negative.

Well, I don't want to be too negative. But we are going to be looking at some bad people this summer. And I want to say that these bad people yield positive lessons.

So if you are inclined to think that I might be a little on the negative side, just keep in mind that we're talking about positive lessons, good lessons from these bad people. And we begin tonight by looking at the first nine verses of Genesis chapter 11. And we're dealing tonight with the tower builders, the tower builders.

And of course, we're talking about the Tower of Babel. And I want to read these verses to you and then ask you to think with me about the great truths that we have here. And you have found Genesis chapter 11, and I'm still looking for it.

Now I have it, okay? Genesis chapter 11, beginning with verse 1 and reading through verse 9. Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass as they journeyed from the east that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.

They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens. Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, indeed, the people are one and they all have one language. And this is what they begin to do.

Now, nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let us go down. And there confused their language that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore, its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there, the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

And so there you have, from those verses, this well-known story that we probably know by the title, The Tower of Babel. I'm talking tonight about the builders of this tower and talking about some lessons that we need to draw from them. Now, let me simply remind you that these stories here in the Old Testament are not merely here to entertain us.

Now, some people explain these stories in that way. They go along these lines. They say, well, now you know.

Centuries ago, people did not have computers, and they did not have televisions, and they didn't have all these little gadgets that you carry around in the palm of your hand, and they were very bored people, and they had to find ways to amuse themselves. They had to find ways to entertain themselves. And so this is how they did so.

They came up with these stories, and they would spend their time telling each other these stories. And these stories are very interesting, but after all, they're just merely stories, and we should not put too much stock in them. We shouldn't give too much weight to them.

Well, you know better than that, don't you? You know that these stories in the Old Testament are here, not because this is the product of men who had overly active imagination. You know that these stories are here because the Spirit of God had them put here. The Spirit of God prompted men to write, and that's how we have what we call the Bible.

And so we are looking here tonight at something that was put here before us by the Holy Spirit of God, causing it to be included in Holy Scripture. But there are many who believe that what I've just said, that these stories are here because the Holy Spirit wanted them to be here, but they still don't handle these stories as well as they should. I dare say that you could go to many, many Bible-believing churches, and the approach that you would hear regarding the Old Testament stories would be something like this.

Well, these stories are here to give us examples of how we should cope with various difficulties and challenges that arise in our lives. Well, I certainly don't want to dismiss that. I do admit that there are principles in these Old Testament stories that will help us with the living of our lives and the facing of our challenges, but I do think that that falls short of the real purpose of these stories.

And we must always keep in mind the story behind the stories. And what I'm saying to you is that this Bible is a book with a definite theme, and the theme of the Bible is God's redemptive plan, God's plan of salvation. We were talking about it this morning.

God's plan to rescue sinners from his own wrath. This is the great theme of the Bible. Another way of saying it is that the Lord Jesus is the theme of the Bible.

And don't take it from me. Go over there to Luke chapter 24, and you find there that Jesus was traveling on the day of his resurrection with a couple of his disciples. And they were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and these men were very troubled as they walked along the way there.

And they were troubled because they had seen Jesus crucified, and now they heard all these stories about the resurrection, and they didn't quite know what to make out of things. And Jesus began to open to them the scriptures. And the thing that we find as we read Luke chapter 24 is that Jesus not only opened the scriptures, but he showed to them the things concerning himself.

And I just say to you on the basis of what we find there in Luke chapter 24, and I could say it to you on the basis of other passages as well, that all of the Bible is about the Lord Jesus Christ. And we don't handle the Bible accurately if we fail in our handling to look for the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus is the great subject of the Bible.

He is the great hero of the Bible. And while we can find principles for living in these Old Testament stories, we have not done adequately with them until we have connected them in some way with the Lord Jesus Christ. So now, having said that, I want to just divide the sermon for you tonight into three parts.

I want to talk with you about the context of this story, the context of this story. And I've already given that to you. I've talked to you already about God's plan of redemption and the Lord Jesus.

But I want to go further with that in just a few moments. And then I want you to think with me, secondly, about the character of this tower, the character of this tower. And then, thirdly and finally, we'll think for a while about the curse, the curse of Babel, or the curse that God put on this tower.

And so there are the three divisions of the message tonight, the context of this story, the character of this tower, and the curse of Babel. Now, think with me some more about this matter of the context of this story. Here, I think, is one of the mistakes that we make in reading various passages from the Bible.

We come here to the Old Testament story of these tower builders, and we tend to read that story in isolation from everything that has come prior to it. And so we read the story, and we're just thinking about

these nine verses. We're not thinking about the first eight chapters of the book of Genesis, or the first ten chapters, I should say, of the book of Genesis.

We're just thinking here about the first nine verses of chapter 11. And we ask ourselves the question, well, what can I find here that will help me? What can I find here to put it in a way that so many put it these days? What can I find here to help me get through Monday? I don't know what's wrong with us in America that Monday has become such a challenge, but it seems to be this monstrous challenge that we dread every week. And here we are now.

We've got chapter 11 of Genesis and the first nine verses before us, and we're isolating those nine verses from the previous chapters of the book of Genesis, and we're focusing entirely on them, and we're not dealing with the context in which these verses were placed by the Holy Spirit of God. And so I want to ask you to think with me now about these first ten chapters of the book of Genesis. And some of you are getting scared now because you're saying, it takes this man a long time to preach just a verse or two, and now he's going to talk about ten chapters.

How long will we be here tonight? Well, I promise I will speed along here. You remember the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. You remember how that God created Adam and Eve, and yes, I still believe in the creation account of the book of Genesis, but that's another sermon for another day.

And you remember how God put Adam and Eve there in the Garden of Eden, and how he gave them this single command that they should not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And you know further how Satan came into that situation, that peaceful setting, and Satan tempted, and Adam and Eve partook of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And they immediately realized the enormity of what they had done.

They realized that they had sinned against the God who made them, and the God who had so wonderfully blessed them. And they felt guilt, and they felt shame. They knew that they were now guilty sinners, and that they were dealing or were going to have to deal with a holy God.

I want to tell you that Adam and Eve were better theologians than most of the people who live in Jackson, Tennessee tonight. Most of the people who live in Jackson tonight are not conscious of their guilt before God, and they're not conscious of having an appointment that will require them to stand before a holy God. And so Adam and Eve made these fig leaf aprons for themselves, and you remember how God came to them there in the garden.

Aren't you glad that God is the great seeker? God took the initiative. God did not wait for Adam and Eve to come to him. He came to them.

I think we sing a song about that, about how he came to me. When I could not help myself, when I could not come to him, he came to me. And that's what God did.

And he found Adam and Eve there in the guilt of their sins, and clothed in their fig leaf aprons, and he made it clear to them that their fig leaf aprons would not be sufficient for them to stand in his holy presence. But God provided something for them. God, the Bible tells us, killed animals, and he made coats of skin from those animals, and he clothed them in those coats of skin.

I don't have time to go into this tonight, but you notice that the coats of skin that God provided involved the shedding of blood, involved the shedding of blood. And God not only clothed Adam and Eve in the coats of

skin that involved, of course, the shedding of blood, but he also gave them the promise of the Messiah. And so God put in place there, in the Garden of Eden, his plan of redemption.

And I want to simply tell you a couple of things about this plan of redemption. Some of you say, what does all this have to do with the Tower of Babel? Well, you see, I want to keep you listening, okay? I want to tell you a couple of things about God's plan of redemption. First of all, now hang on to something, God's plan of redemption is designed by God to bring glory to his name.

God's plan of redemption is designed by God to bring glory to his name. You may say, well, I thought God's plan of redemption was to save sinners. Well, it is, but God is going to be glorified in the salvation of sinners.

And I don't have time to go into that. You'll just have to take my word for it, that God is set on glorifying himself in the salvation of sinners, in providing this plan of redemption. Now, there's something else you need to know about the plan of redemption, and that is that in order to receive him, we have to be humble.

We have to be as little children. And I'm so glad to be able to tell you tonight that when God took away those fig leaf aprons that Adam and Eve made for themselves, and when God provided them with those coats of skin, Adam and Eve received from God what God provided. They received what God provided with childlike humility.

Now, I can go on. I can tell you that Adam and Eve had a couple of sons, Cain and Abel, and I can tell you that Abel received God's plan of salvation in childlike humility. But Cain, on the other hand, refused to receive God's plan of salvation.

Cain essentially tried to revive the fig leaf aprons of his parents. Cain essentially said, I'm going to do things my way. I don't care what God requires.

I'm going to do things my way. I have often said that Cain was the first practitioner of Burger King religion. Burger King, you know, is always saying, have it your way.

And Cain said, I'm going to have it my way. And he made a whopper of a mistake, a whopper of a mistake. And oh my, suddenly this book of Genesis now leaps over the centuries of time, and it is just as relevant as it can possibly be for us right here in this building.

It's relevant for the thousands of people here in Jackson because the way of Cain has not died. Cain died, but the way of Cain is alive and well, and there are all kinds of people today all across this country and all around this world who are saying, I'm not going to come God's way. I'm going to do things my own way.

I've had people bluster to me. Well, now I've got my own ideas about religion. And I knew whenever I heard that, that I was looking at Cain.

Cain said, I've got my own ideas about religion. Well, the way of Cain became so widespread that God sent a judgment upon the whole earth, the flood, and only Noah and his family were saved. And now we have come down here to the 11th chapter of Genesis once again, and we have talked about this.

This is the context in which this story belongs. God announced a plan of salvation, and God's design in this plan of salvation was to bring glory to his name. And God made it clear that in order to receive his plan of salvation, people would have to be childlike.

They would have to be humble. They would have to receive this plan of salvation, submit to it in all humility. Now, that's the context for this story.

And some of you are saying, I sure hope he doesn't preach on Revelation chapter 22 because he's going to cover the whole Bible before he talks about Revelation chapter 22. You need to have the context in mind. And now you're in a position, and I'm in a position, to understand the character of this tower.

And when I say the character of this tower, I'm just talking about what was really going on here. And there you have it in verse four. This is after the flood now, and Noah and his family were saved, and Noah and his family came off the ark, and the earth began to be repopulated.

So we're many years removed here from Noah and the ark. And in verse four, they said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens. And here's the key phrase in this whole passage.

Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth. Now, my friends, I've already told you, I had a purpose in pointing out about the plan of redemption, that it was intended to glorify God. The plan of salvation, my friends, was constructed by God in such a way that His name, His name, His name would be built.

That's the whole essence of the plan of salvation. God is building His name. He's bringing glory to His name.

And now here you see these men, as it were, thumbing their noses in the face of God, and they're saying, we're not interested in building God's name. We're interested in building our own name. I tell you, this is the error of Cain all over again.

This is raw, undiluted rebellion against God. We're not going to glorify God's name. We're going to glorify our own name.

And we're going to glorify our name by building this city, and by building this tower, and generations hereafter will praise us. They'll praise us for being such wise people, and they'll praise us for being such powerful people. And our names will be secure in the future if we build this tower and this city.

And so here you see these people. This is the character of this tower. It is rebellion.

It is rank rebellion against God. I think Matthew Henry, the great old commentator on scripture, put it like this. He said, this is bold opposition to God.

This is bold opposition to God. And they not only determined that they're going to build their name. By the way, before I leave that point, I just want to say this is the option before all of us.

Our option is either to sing what we sing at Christmas time, glory to God in the highest, or our option is to sing glory to man in the highest. And essentially what you have here is these tower builders saying, glory, glory to man in the highest. Not glory to God in the highest, but glory to man in the highest.

You know, don't you, that we were made by God to live for his glory. And here's the very essence of sin. It's the very essence of rebellion.

Paul put it like this in Romans 3.23. All have sinned and what? Come short of the glory of God. What is sin? It's refusing to live for the purpose for which you were made. It's refusing to live for God's glory.

It's determining that you're going to live for your own glory. Now, here's something else about these tower builders. They not only here refuse to give glory to God.

God has a plan of redemption. I have said it again and again, that plan of redemption was designed by God to bring glory to his name. And here these tower builders are saying, we're going to glorify our own name.

Is any of this going on in America today? Are people thumbing their noses in the face of God and saying, we're not going to live for God's glory. We're going to despise God. We're going to despise those who try to live for God.

And we're going to build a name for ourselves. The tower of Babel is still with us today. But here's another thing they said, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.

I said a while ago that another part of God's plan of redemption is it requires submitting, submitting to God's word. You know, God had delivered a word about what these people were to do. You can find it in chapter nine and verse seven, where God said, I want you to fill the whole earth.

I want you to spread out. I want you to fill the whole earth. Now we could spend a lot of time talking tonight about why God wanted people to fill the earth.

I will just simply say, it doesn't matter if God wanted it. That's all that was, that's all we need to know. And so here you have these people saying, we don't care what God has commanded.

We're going to maintain unity. We're not going to spread out over the face of the earth as God has commanded. We're not going to build his name.

We're going to build our name. And we are not going to scatter out, but we're going to stay together. And this tower was intended to provide a physical unity for these people, because it was going to be such a high tower that people could go for miles and they could have a point of reverence.

They could always find their way back because they could see that tower. They're out here on a plane, we're told in this passage. And so it provided a physical unity, but this is a religious thing that's going on here.

This is a religious tower and it was also intended to provide a spiritual unity for these people. I want to simply tell you that you should not get the wrong impression about how God feels about unity from reading this passage of scripture. God's not opposed to unity if people are united around him.

But God is opposed to unity when people are united against him. And this is what we have here in this passage of scripture. These people are uniting, they're uniting in their opposition to God.

And so what we have essentially is these people rejecting those two key elements that God put in the plan of redemption way back there in the Garden of Eden. God set the plan of redemption up to bring glory to his name. And these people said, we're not going to glorify God's name.

God set the plan of redemption up in such a way that people had to humbly submit to what God said. And they had to say, we're going to obey what God says in his word. And here God had spoken to these people about scattering out.

They said, we're not going to obey the word of God. Is this thing being replayed in our own day? People saying, we're not going to live for God's glory. They might not come out openly and say it, but the way they live makes it clear.

They're not going to live for God's glory. We're not going to bow in submission to the word of God. We're going to do things our way.

It's Cain all over again. Well, here's man then in his greatness. Here's man summoning all of his wisdom.

Here's man feeling so very proud of himself. Here's man standing in opposition to God. And what does God do about it all? Well, we come now to the third and final part of the sermon, and that is the curse of Babel.

And all my friends, nothing has changed. God's curse still rests upon people who refuse to give glory to his name. And God's curse still rests upon people who refuse to bow in submission to the word of God.

And God put a curse on Babel that day. And isn't it interesting how the story here conveys this? Look there at verse five. The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

Oh, I don't think anything is in the Bible by mistake. And those four words, the Lord came down. Now, you must not misunderstand what we're being told here in that passage.

You're not to think that the Lord is somehow limited, that the Lord is somehow localized. You must not get the impression that God here was just kind of passing through the area one day, and he looked down there, and he saw that tower, and he said, what is that? I better go down for a closer look. Now, this is how I talk.

This is how Sylvia talks. She says, you know, I've got to have these lights on. I can't see very well.

I'm talking about early in the morning, whenever we get up. She can't see in the dark, and I can't see in the dark. And I find myself sometimes holding things up like this because I say, I can't see that very well.

You must not think that God was limited, that God was just passing by, and he said, what is that down there? I need to get a better know. God knew about the thing from the very beginning. Here's the point.

Here's man at his greatest. Here's man at his highest. Here's man at his wisest.

Here's man at the very peak of his power, and he has built his tower, and God says, I've got to go down to see it. What are we being told? That man with all of his power can do something that is so small, that the most that he can do is so very small that God has to come down even to see it. You see, man at his greatest is never anywhere near equal to God.

And so God comes down that day, and yes, by the way, I agree with those who say in verse 7, when God said, come, let us go down, that that is a Trinitarian reference, that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are involved here. And here God comes down, and he confuses their speech, and his will is achieved because they're scattered, as he intended all along. Oh, I think tonight, my friends, there's

consolation here.

Evil is abounding today. It's almost as if these vast cities of rebellion are being erected against God, and these great towers of rebellion are popping up all over our society, and sometimes it appears as if evil is so strong that God is going to be defeated. Don't you believe it for a moment.

God here comes down and puts his curse upon Babel, and his will is achieved, and God will not be defeated. He is achieving his will, and he's bringing everything down to the end that he has appointed. May I simply close by just reminding you of something that we read in Hebrews chapter 11.

There we're told about the great saint of God, Abraham, who was seeking for a city. A city. Why, these men here in Genesis 11, they built a city, and God has a city, and Abraham, we're told, was seeking for that city.

Listen, whose builder and maker is God, the heavenly city, and God's not only in the business of erecting a heavenly city. He's already constructed a tower that will take you all the way from this sinful earth to that glorious city. That tower is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and here's the essence of it all.

We can either go to God's city by means of God's tower, or we can experience God's curse, the curse of eternal destruction, just as those people experienced God's curse back there so long ago, and my friends, it all comes down to this. In order to take God's tower, Jesus, to God's city, we've got to quit glorifying ourselves. We've got to renounce our wisdom.

People today are so sure of themselves when it comes to the things of God. They're so quick to pronounce. If you want to take God's tower to God's city, there's a sense in which you've got to lay your hand over your mouth.

You've got to hush up. You've got to quit spouting your ideas, your viewpoint, your opinion, the latest poll. You've got to lay your hand over your mouth.

You've got to glorify God, and you've got to bow in childlike submission to the Word of God, and then you can take God's tower, Jesus, all the way to God's city, the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, and God's people said, let's bow together for prayer. Father, thank you for this time around your Word tonight. And Father, how very encouraging it is to read this ancient, ancient episode, and yet find that it's not just an ancient episode, it's a modern episode because it speaks very pointedly and powerfully about things that exist today.

And as we read this account, we look around, and yes, we see those who are living in bold opposition to God. They will not glorify God. They won't bow in submission to his holy Word.

And Father, we realize this is a modern story after all. Father, help us to carry away from this passage the determination that we will live for your glory. We will live in submission to your Word.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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