What's gone wrong with the World?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 August 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] Now, can we turn again in our Bibles, this time to the book of Genesis, page 12, if you're using a church Bible.

We're going to read a couple of sections from Genesis 11. Over the next four Sundays, we're going to be looking at different scenes from the life of Abraham to help us answer some important questions.
Now, this time our question is, what's gone wrong with the world? And to help us to answer that, we're going to be in Genesis 11, beginning at verse 1.
Now, the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.
They said to each other, come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly. They used brick instead of stone and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves.
[1:06] Otherwise, we'll be scattered over the face of the whole earth. But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, if as one people speaking the same language, they've begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city.
That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there, the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth. And then from verse 10 to 26, we get a family tree of Shem.
But we're going to pick up in verse 27, where we're introduced to the account of Tira's family line. Tira became the father of Abraham, Nahor and Haran.
And Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Tira was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans in the land of his birth. Abraham and Nahor both married. The name of Abraham's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah.
[2:17] She was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was childless, because she was not able to conceive. Tira took his son Abraham, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abraham.

And together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Tira lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.
Amen. This is God's word. So as I said, we're thinking about this question, what's gone wrong with the world? In 2025, so just last week, there was a global concerns report.
It was a survey done, 30 different countries across all continents, asking people to reflect on what concerns them most about the world.
And the top four answers were these. Inflation, immigration, corruption, and conflict. Now as you think about what's gone wrong with the world, I wonder if you would agree with those, or what else would you add?
[3:27] There is probably a lengthy list that we would each have. When we come to the message of Genesis 11, and indeed the message of the whole Bible, we see that there are visible problems in society.

We are aware of them. Crime, abuse, injustice, war. But all of those problems, they stem from a deeper source. The Bible helps us to see what's gone wrong, that when people act as if they are God, or when we live rejecting God, what the Bible calls sin, that is what the Bible says is what's gone wrong with the world.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

To think about the classic G.K. Chesterton anecdote you may have heard, when the Times newspaper back in the late 1910s, invited people to write in and respond to this question, what's gone wrong with the world, he simply wrote, Dear Sirs, I am yours sincerely, G.K. Chesterton. That people are the source of the world's problems, was Chesterton's observation, and I think it's the observation we see in Genesis 11. So we're going to explore today the problem of a failed human project.
To recognize it as a monument to self, this Tower of Babel, and then we need to see God's responses to it. So over the next four weeks, as I said, we're going to be meeting Abraham.
[4:48] Abraham described in the Bible as the father of faith, and we know he's a key figure within Christianity, also within Judaism and Islam, a huge figure to consider.

Today he's kind of in the background, we will meet him. I guess it's an invitation to come back and find out some more next week. He lived an amazing life. If you want to do any homework, read Genesis 12 to 22 over this week or the coming weeks.
And you see a man where God is working in his life in remarkable ways, getting involved in his story. We are going to hear some really rich and wonderful promises that God gives Abraham, which are good news for everybody.
We also see real challenges, which are a challenge and enable his faith to grow. And the story of Abraham is also going to help us to answer some key questions.
It's going to help us to answer questions like, who is God? How can I know God? What does faith in God look like? And today, what's gone wrong with the world?
[5:49] And what Genesis 11 does for us is, while it reveals that the world has walked away from God, it also offers hope that God will send Jesus to bring us back to himself.

So we're going to look, first of all, at the human problem, and then we're going to look at God's answer. And the human problem can be summarized here as pride and personal glory.
In the early 1900s, cruise liners, those big old ships, they were the way to travel. And in the early 1900s, there was a great race on to see who could build the fastest ship to cross the ocean.
Or other companies were interested, who could build the most luxurious ship to cross the ocean.
And the White Star Company, they went down the luxury line, leading them to build and then launch the Titanic.
Incredible design and incredible luxury came together. But the Titanic also came with a boast.
There was the claim that this boat was unsinkable.
[7:03] And so when the first voyage began, there was the expectation that Titanic was on the route to bringing the boat and the company great fame and great glory. But we know what happens, don't we?

In 1912, it sank. And tragically, over 1,500 lives were lost. It wanted a name. It wanted glory. But that name is associated with tragic failure.
The story of the Tower of Babel is its own Titanic building project. And this is about making much more than just a grand city and a high tower.
It's a people wanting to make a name for themselves. That Babel was a building project aimed at personal security and personal glory and people becoming godlike in their ambition.
And the outcome of that building project, a name associated with shame and confusion, a monument to human folly.
[8:06] So the author of Genesis 11 wants to tell us that story and he uses language and he picks up themes to support his point. So look with me at our text. And it begins in the first couple of verses with the people of the world on the move.

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved east, they found a plane and they settled there. So notice that at this time in history, humanity is united.
They share a language. They share a culture. Think about how different that is from our experience today. We just have to look around this building and we recognize different languages and cultures.
And we go outside into the festival and we recognize that there's an incredible diversity.
And that's a great thing. And we celebrate that. But at this point in history, unity, the first danger sign for this united people is here in the idea that they are moving east and they are settling.
And we might think, well, what's the problem with moving east? Well, if we go back earlier in Genesis, we discover whenever people are moving east, they're moving away from God. So after Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden eat the forbidden fruit and God sends them out, they are sent

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

east.
[9:22] After Cain commits the first murder and kills his brother Abel, he is sent to wander east. So when we discover that all the people are moving east, this is a sign that the world is walking away from God.

And the fact they're settling reminds us they are comfortable in this position. So the people of the world, they're on the move and they're also a people on a mission.
That's there in verses three and four, isn't it? They're working together on this epic construction project. And remember, they have no machinery. They have very basic tools, but they're taking the best of modern tech that they had.
They've got brick and bitumen and they use it for this great building project. Now we are familiar, aren't we, with the competition to build big. I guess last century, all the big buildings were probably situated in America, but now it's moved towards the Middle East, hasn't it?
And those great towers, those skyscrapers are a sign of ambition and power, a way of placing one's stamp on the world. So the biggest at the moment is the Burj Khalifa, but there's competition from Jeddah and Riah wanting to build bigger, that they are known as the place with the highest skyscraper.
[10:40] Well, on this original building site of Babel, you can hear the personal pride, the sense of ambition, the drive for glory.

It's there in the language, verse three and four. How many times do we find them saying, let us build ourselves so that we may make a name, otherwise we'll be scattered. Here are a people, and the Bible tells us, they have been made in God's image, because everybody is, including us, but they are not interested in getting God's opinion, getting God's input, or seeking God's glory.
Look at the reason why they're building the tower. They want to build the tower to avoid being scattered. And we may instinctively think, well, that's okay, security's a good thing. But not when we go back in the Bible and we discover God has said to people, fill the earth, spread out, so that the glory of God would fill the earth.
God says, scatter, and they say, gather. God says, spread my glory, and they say, no, we want our own glory, thanks very much.
Because the text tells us they want to make a name for themselves. We are made to worship God, but personal glory is clearly their number one priority in this new city.
[12:00] They are not honoring God, wanting to make his name great, and they're not trusting that God will make a name for them. They want to make a name for themselves. And notice too, they want to make a tower that reaches to the heavens.

And that's not simply saying we want to build up and build high. And that's saying we want to reach God's level. We want to become like God. So here is a people, and they're using the technology that's available to them, and they're all working together effectively to get rid of the need of God.
And so we're given, just in a few short verses, here is a snapshot of a people who are walking away from God, working to get rid of the need of him. And so Babel functions as a giant monument to the cell.
If anybody has been on holiday in any of the ancient Roman sites, or maybe you've been to a place like Vietnam, you are going to have seen monuments and images all over the place.
And those were used to claim personal glory and authority for the person who is depicted. Babel is like that. And we can also say that Babel is the first truly secular society.
[13:19] You know, the idea of secular, removing God from the picture. That's exactly what they're doing. It's the foundation of Babel, the sense of what progress looks like in Babel. It's all built on self with no word of God at all.

The dream of these Babel builders is we can provide the security and the status and the good life that we are looking for, and we don't need to concern ourselves with God. Back to our question, if we ask Genesis 11, what's gone wrong with the world?
The answer is that we as people have walked away from God and his ways. The problem is human pride. The problem is when we seek personal glory at the expense of God and his design for our lives.
I wonder if we thought about life in those terms. I wonder if we've asked ourselves the question, or can we see why Genesis gives that answer? A brief look through history might help us.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Think about the world empires, you know, the desire for expansion. What are they built on so often? Look at your history books, you'll find greed, injustice, slavery, exploitation, racism, and the desire for personal glory.
[14:33] Think about the world wars. At 20th century, people were celebrating, oh, look how technologically advanced we are. Look at all our scientific progress. How is the progress used to create weapons of destruction and mass destruction?

Or look around at contemporary society. What are some of the things that worry us? What makes the headlines or what gives us sleepless nights? Think about migrants and the realities of human trafficking.
Think about the hate and the violence that we're confronted with in our news headlines day after day. Maybe it's the race of the companies to build powerful AI and we have that fear.
Well, what if it becomes untethered and on the loose? What if people are asking, not should we, but simply can we? Maybe our anxiety is to do with social media, social media platforms or social media influencers and maybe the impact that it has on a younger generation.
Go to the roots of all of those things and we're going to see elements of human pride, human ambition, human self-interest, seeking personal glory and not seeking God. And the Bible says that's a recipe for chaos and suffering in so many ways.
[15:47] And then instead of just looking out, if we look in, if we're brave enough to turn the spotlight on ourselves, what do we find? Isn't it true that our own personal pride and our desire for glory that that can produce harm in our relationships?

Isn't it our seeking status and glory that leads us to perhaps tear others down so that we can build ourselves up? Because if I want to be number one and if I want my name to be great and then you also want your name to be great, well, what happens?
Well, now we've got clash and conflict and something has to give and there's going to be winners and there's going to be losers and there's conflict. But maybe we also find this. Maybe we also can identify with Babel in this way.
When we remove ourselves from God's story, when a society or a person removes oneself from God's plan for how life is supposed to be, we're still trying to build a life for ourselves and we're still trying to make progress, but maybe we're not sure exactly what that's supposed to look like.
What is progress supposed to be? What does the good life really look like? And for many people, it leads to a feeling of being anxious and frantic and hopeless because we can't figure it out by ourselves.
[17:13] There is something within us that as people, we often dream that we have the answers, but we're not so good at seeing that often we're part of the problem. I came across the beginning of the UN Charter in 1948 this week.

So after the Second World War, that determination that the nations would work together for peace. And even to just read the preamble, you discover what big claims, I mean, great ambitions, but big claims that we can make for ourselves.
Listen to how the Charter begins. We, the peoples of the United Nations, will succeed in getting rid of the scourge of war.
We will promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. You know, that sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But what's the reality?
There is still the horrors of war. There is still the reality of oppression. Millions of people are still being bought and sold by people traffickers. The heart of the Babel problem is the problem of the human heart.
[18:24] So we left to ourselves are not going to fix it. When we reject and remove God and His design, when we replace God with self at the center, when a life or a society is driven by pride and a desire for personal glory, Genesis 11 reminds us it creates so many problems.

Some of you might remember the episode of the sitcom Friends where Rachel wants to make an English recipe. So she decides she's going to make an English trifle.
But the problem is that her cookbook has got two pages stuck together. So she's trying to make trifle, she turns the page and she's reading the instructions for making a shepherd's pie.
You try and make a trifle with the ingredients for a shepherd's pie and the result is obviously going to be a disaster. Now far more seriously Genesis 11 is telling us as people we have taken God's good idea of progress but we're following entirely the wrong direction because we're rejecting God

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

in favor of self and it leads to chaos and confusion.
And so what we need to see next is God's responses to see as their hope. So if that was the problem pride and seeking personal glory let's see God's responses because there's two responses the first response that we need to recognize is the response of judgment.
[19:51] So look at verse 5 and notice the irony. So here's these people that are trying to make a tower that reaches to the heavens but the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that people were building.

And I think the author of Genesis is inviting us to imagine God as it were stooping down and squinting maybe he's getting his magnifying glass out if you've seen Honey I Shrunk the Kids trying to see this tiny speck of a tower that the people thought was so grand and glorious.
God is so much greater. And so it's full of irony but verse 6 reminds us this is no joke. The Lord said if as one people speaking the same language they've begun to do this then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.
Notice God knows the human heart and he recognizes that the Tower of Babel is really only phase one. This is a people who are entirely set on I'm going to build a life without God.
And so what happens is that the creator of the universe the designer who tells us how life should go he intervenes. He has been insulted and rejected and rebelled against and so God gets involved.
[21:07] Some of us will likely have been or will go to the cinema to watch The Odyssey Homer's kind of epic poem on screen 7th century or so Greek poem.

It has loads of weird stuff in it but one thing that I think Homer gets right is it is a bad thing to insult the God.
the story is full of even more so it is a serious thing to insult and to ignore the one true and living God.
And so God comes and he confuses language and he scatters people and we can just imagine the chaos you imagine any project where nobody can communicate because there's culture barrier and there's language barrier and what happens here is that God will not allow the people of the world to continue on their own merry way in rebellion against him.
And so this is judgment on sin that rejects God on hearts that are turned inwards in human pride. They wanted a life and a world and progress without God but in the Lord's judgment it all comes crashing down and it will come crashing down.
[22:23] And so there is that warning of a God who judges rebellion. But that's only one of God's responses. The second response is the promise of rescue and reconciliation.

So, so far I think we've been dealing with the bad news of what's gone wrong and hopefully we're seeing that it's honest but it's not yet hopeful.
To find hope we need to turn to that second passage that we looked at. We need to turn to that family tree and you might be thinking well what on earth has a family tree got to do with hope and I guess the next few weeks will unveil that so bear with me in that sense.
But one way to think about it is this. So over the summer our family we did a little bit of a Spider-Man movie catch-up because there's a new one coming out and if you know anything about the superhero genre think about what you have.
You have often a very unexpected hero who is chosen in a surprising way in the end to save a city or save a world.
[23:28] That's a superhero trope but it's also in a sense a biblical principle. God chooses one for the sake of the many. And what we're going to see in the coming weeks is that God chooses Abraham a very old man who had previously been worshipping idols and he's going to speak to him and he's going to save him and as we saw he sets him on a journey and what God's going to do for Abraham is he's going to make a name for Abraham and he's going to give Abraham wonderful promises and one of the things that he says to Abraham is that Abraham from your family will come a source of God's blessing to all nations.

It's there at the beginning of chapter 12. So through Abraham's family comes a hope of rescue and reconciliation. God's going to extend salvation. to the whole world.
And so Genesis 11 prepares us for the truth that there is hope coming. That yes, the Bible is very honest, the world is in a mess. And yes, God does judge sinful rebellion, but wonderfully, yes, also God has a plan to redeem and rescue and restore.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And the whole Bible tells us that he does that wonderfully through his son, the Lord Jesus, who comes from Abraham's family. So let's just look for a few minutes at how Jesus is God's answer to the human problem.
That while we as people have walked away from God, God comes to bring people back to himself. So first of all, who is Jesus?
[25:00] Well, we know that Jesus is the eternal son of God, glory of heaven, worshipped by hundreds of thousands of angels, but he is the God who came down to us to become one of us.

Fast forward to the New Testament. First book of the New Testament is the book of Matthew. Matthew begins his story of the life of Jesus in a way that I think we find as modern people surprising. It starts with a family tree.
Why start an exciting story with a family tree? Because Matthew wants us to know Jesus is the one from Abraham's family who is the promised one. He is God's redeemer. He is the way God will reconcile people to himself.
So God the Father sends God the Son into a world that needs rescue. And Jesus, the Son of God, he comes and he lives a perfect life.
So different from the people of Babel, so different often from us. Full of humility. Serving others, taking upon himself the title of a servant, washing his disciples' feet.
[26:02] He lives always and only for his Father's glory, not trying to make a name for himself. And he comes with an amazing message. I am the way back to God. He has come from the Father so we could know God as Father.

And then as we come towards Jesus' death, we discover that he dies, this perfect one. He dies on a cross. And the Bible tells us why. In 1 Peter 3 verse 18, we are told Christ died, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God.
Do you know that's the goal of Jesus coming into the world? That's the greatest good that Jesus brings so that you and I, by trusting in Jesus, we can know life with God.
God gives us himself to restore what sin has ruined. And then after his resurrection, so Jesus dies three days later, he's risen, he returns to heaven, because Jesus belongs there, and from heaven he sends his spirit.
And we read about it in Acts chapter 2. And did you notice what happened in the book of Acts? There are nations, people from different languages and places, and together they hear the good news of Jesus.
[27:23] So here's a new people united, different languages, different cultures, worshipping, celebrating the good news of Jesus. Jesus. And we can go to the very end of the Bible, Revelation chapter 7, you get this vision of what's life going to be like in the new creation.

And we find people from all nations and tribes and peoples and languages, and they're worshipping, and right at the centre, the source of their word is Jesus. So do we see what God has in store to do through his son Jesus?
He is uniting people together again. Not in pride, because pride separates, in worship. A group of people no longer thinking about our own glory, but now captured by God's glory.
And what the Bible tells us is that history is progressing in a great building project, but it's not ours, it's God's. And Jesus is the master builder, and he's also the foundation.
And what Jesus is doing right now is Jesus is calling people from different places and different backgrounds. And he's giving people the faith to believe.
[28:38] So people are being united to Jesus, and they've been brought together into the church of Jesus. And that takes us to the mission of the church. Why are we here as a local church?

We have a mission. We are workers together on Jesus' building projects. So what do we do? We tell people about Jesus, we put the love and the grace of God on display so that others can be restored to life with God too.
We are to help people to both see and to feel that Jesus is God's great answer to our human problems in the way that we practice unity and peace and love, in the welcome that we extend, in the kindness that we offer across difference.
So we have here in Genesis 11 both the indication of what's gone wrong with the world, our walking away, our sinful pride, but it also offers hope that the God of grace and love is not done with people and that rather he will come in Jesus to bring us back into relationship with God.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And so Jesus today invites us to come to him. for rescue and reconciliation. Let me pray for us. Our God and Father, we thank you that the Bible tells one great story of redemption, that while it is very honest about the reality of the sin in our hearts and lives, our own pride and our seeking glory for ourselves, it also shows us your grace and your salvation, that you sent Jesus to our people who are walking far away from you to bring us back home so that we could call you our father, so that we could live for the glory of Jesus and not for our own glory.
[30:28] And so we pray that you would help us to wrestle with these realities, to bow our knee to Jesus and to be so glad to live to make him known and to enjoy his glory.

And we pray in his name. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host