

Being Confident

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[0 : 0 0] Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. Father, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. Help us, Father, to be more confident, but not confident, Father, in our own powers per se, but help us, Father, to be confident that you are sovereign, that you are good, that you are real, that your grace is powerful, that Jesus really is, Father, the power in his death upon the cross, the power that comes from you for salvation when we receive it by faith.

Father, grant us an ever deeper confidence in you and your ways and your word and your power, and we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

I mean, why do we live in... This sounds like an odd way to begin this sermon, but why do we live in Ottawa? I mean, maybe some of you are wondering that. Why do we live in Ottawa? Why do we live in the city?

My wife and I, before I came to serve in this church, we served in a small little place, probably had about 1,200 people living in it, called Eganville. And I not only looked after Eganville, but I also looked after a tiny little church in a place called Killaloo.

That's where beaver tails are from, by the way, the treat. Killaloo Sunrise. It was started at the Killaloo Folk Festival many, many years ago by ex-hippies.

[1 : 2 5] And Killaloo is a little tiny blip of about 600 people. And I also looked after two other little churches. One had no people living around.

Actually, neither of them had any people living around it. And when we went there, they had a long history. For almost 100 years, over 100 years, ministers who went there only stayed there for about three years, and they got out as soon as they could.

And we stayed there over seven years. In fact, when we left the church in the 140 or 150 years history of that set of churches, I was the second longest serving minister in the church's history.

And I used to feel blessed to live there. I'd say to myself, and I'm a city kid. I was born in Montreal and then lived in Ottawa. But I loved it up there.

I'd think to myself, you know, other people have to take their holidays to come to live in Eganville and to enjoy this. And I get to live here all year round. And I really liked it.

[2 : 2 5] But so why did we leave the countryside? This was probably a bigger sacrifice for my wife than it was for me. But we came to the city basically for our kids to give them opportunities and to be able to get them set up in a way of living their life later on that they wouldn't have if we had stayed in a place like Eganville.

We had a large family, have a large family, and we knew that we couldn't help them go to university or college. And I just knew that the way that we could help them to go, and so did Louise, to go to university and or college was to go to a place where there were universities and a college, and they could live at home with us while they would get further education and training to go on with their lives.

So it was for our kids. It was for their advancement and their opportunity that we left the country, the small town in the country, and came back to Ottawa and why we stayed.

You know, it was really interesting because my wife, it was very heavy for her in many ways leaving Eganville to come to Ottawa. And in a small town like Eganville, everybody knows what's going on.

And she was in the little fresh mart just down the hill from us, maybe just a week or two before we moved to come to Ottawa. And she got talking to the cashier.

[3 : 49] She talked to the cashier regularly, and the cashier said, oh, I hear you're moving to Ottawa. And Louise said, yeah, we don't really want to go. I don't really want to go. And the cashier looked at her with complete surprise and said, who on earth wouldn't want to go to Ottawa and get out of Eganville?

Like, who wouldn't want to be able to leave Eganville? She felt trapped with her job and her kids and her roots there. And the idea of the city, a city like Ottawa, of its opportunity, of everybody not knowing your business, which is what happens in Eganville if the cops pull somebody over on the road, within several hours, if I wanted to, I could find out who was in the car, why they were pulled over, and what happened to them.

Like, that's what happens when you live in a small town. And, you know, but for the cashier, just this, you know, the city is a place of opportunity, of life, of not having people know everything about you, of freedom.

It's just a great place to go. So believe it or not, the Bible has some things to say about cities, and you might not have picked it up, but that text, which Emily read, actually introduces the notion of the city in a very, very interesting way.

So if you could turn in your Bibles, we're going to look at that. It has far more to say than just cities. It really is, you know, it's like a lot of things in the Bible. It's Genesis chapter 4, verse 17. It's like a lot of things in the Bible.

[5 : 13] If you just give it a quick read, it looks a little bit boring. But if you pay a little bit of attention to it, if you especially think that in the book of Genesis, in particular, these first 11 chapters, but all the way through the Bible, but really here as well, every word counts.

Every word matters. It's a very carefully crafted story filled with symbolism and meaning, and every word matters.

So let's just read this. Actually, just before I start reading it, verse 17, if you're not familiar with what's going on here in Genesis, here's been the flow. Genesis 1, at the very beginning, teaches that God creates all things out of nothing.

Then it gives us sort of a story, the so-called first story of creation that teaches us other things about creation and who God is and who we are. Then there's a second story of creation that teaches us more things about who God is and who human beings are.

And one of the main things out of all of this is that God makes everything completely and utterly good. And Genesis 3 describes how evil and sin and death, which we all see around us, come into the world.

[6 : 22] And it comes into the world through the choices made by human beings. And then we see after this choice has been made and Christians call it the fall, we see how God both, God shows mercy to them and promises a mighty deliverer and there's also judgment and there's also prediction.

And immediately after that, when Adam and Eve are out of the garden, the very next story, which is just the one before this, is the story of Cain murdering his brother Abel.

And this is sort of the story where Emily read is continuing. Well, we'll just go up a few verses before verse 17. Let's start at, let's say, verse 13. So God has sort of spoken to Cain words of punishment and Cain's response in verse 13, Cain said to the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

Just last week we talked about how this isn't repentance, this is self-pity. At no point in time in Cain's response is there repentance. It's self-pity.

My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me.

[7 : 42] Then the Lord said to him, Not so. If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod. And if you look at your note, Nod means wandering. So he basically settled in wandering away from God.

It's a bit of a poetic wordplay. What his home was, what he now saw as home, was wandering away from God east of Eden. And now the story continues.

Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

And we'll just sort of pause there. And just if you're wondering who's Cain's wife, what I've decided is, what I'm going to do is next Sunday at the sermon, I'm going to sort of tie together several questions or problems that we have.

[8 : 49] Like what is the flood? Is it universal? Who did Cain marry? Who lived in the city? I'm going to spend a couple of minutes on all of those questions and group them together next Sunday.

So just if you're curious, come in next Sunday or you can listen to it online afterwards. But here's the thing which is very, very interesting is this is the first city. And it started by Cain whose home is wandering away from God.

And Cain is the one who makes the first city. And if you'll notice, it's very interesting. He doesn't name it after God. He names it after his son. In other words, the city is named in honor of Cain and his line.

not in honor of God or in any type of way of referring to God. And the other thing which is very, very interesting about this is the word for city here can also be translated as fortress.

And it can also mean like a wall as part of a fortress. So the very first city is also a place of power. It's a fortress.

[10 : 00] fortress. So what is this? Now, here's the interesting thing. If this was the only place in the Bible, we didn't know anything else in the Bible about cities, probably the way for us to interpret this would be to say that Christians shouldn't live in cities.

I mean, it's the very first city is named in the honor of Cain's line. and Cain is the guy who murders his brother whose wine shows no repentance, is quite happy to have his home and his whole destiny wandering away from God.

And it's very, very interesting that the Bible pictures him as building the very, very first city. And this shows a very, very big human problem.

Like as we just think about this, especially if it's the only piece in the Bible, which it isn't, which we'll get to in a moment. Now, if you're a guest here and you're not from a Christian background, you might not know this, but some Christians don't believe that Christians should celebrate Christmas because it's pagan, because it was started by, it was a replacement for a pagan festival in a pagan country.

And they, there's Christians who don't celebrate Christmas. In fact, they have similar types of things around Easter. Because of the origin of the holiday.

[11 : 23] Now, for some of you, you might be saying, well, that's just really odd that there are Christians like this. But, you know, it's actually a very, very, very common human problem. Imagine that there started to be a cultural trend or a cultural movement that people are really getting into.

And then it came out that the person who launched that trend had been a key financial supporter of Donald Trump. What would happen?

Well, the Twitterverse would explode. People would stop it. Why? Because it's poisoned at its origin. And this isn't just a more left-wing problem in quotation marks.

What would happen if it turned out that there was a, some type of a cultural trend and it went back to Naomi Klein or Michael Moore or a big supporter of Hillary Clinton.

Both of those two were, of course. Well, there'd be a whole part of America would say, how on earth could Christians or more conservative people get on board with such a movement or such a celebration given the terrible roots that it has?

[12 : 31] In fact, it's a very, very human problem that if we know something about the roots of something and we don't agree with it or we think it's wrong, that we don't want to be involved with it.

So it's a human problem. So what's the Bible doing here? Is the Bible trying to communicate that cities are bad? In fact, you know, as we know, there's terrible things about cities as well.

They don't have not only opportunity and universities and education and government and prosperity, they also can be very, very terrible, brutal places, places with murder rates.

I guess I have a bit of a, anyway. So, so what's the Bible doing here? Is it, um, and, and, and for some of you, I don't know, maybe for some of you, there's been a time in Christian history not that long ago where Christians were very suspicious of the city.

Where real Christians move out to the suburbs or move out to the country because the city has too much vice and evil in it. So is this what this Bible text is doing?

[13 : 36] Why is it that, I mean, apart from the fact that it probably was Cain who builds the first city, why is it that the Bible brings this out to us? I want to suggest that what's going to be going on in this text, and it starts here with the city, is that the Bible text wants to teach us something really important about God and that this text wants to humble us.

And I know that's not a very popular thing. People don't like going to places where they're humbled. They like to go to places where they're pumped up. But this text is going to humble us and it's going to begin by humbling Christians in some very, very, very powerful ways.

But here, if you could put up the very first point, what we're going to see here is this, that even though human beings are fallen, God's common grace is still at work in the world.

Even though human beings are fallen, God's common grace is still at work in the world. This is really, really, really, really, really important for us to get our minds around and to understand.

Every single person that we meet, it doesn't matter if the person is an angry atheist, it doesn't matter if they're a settled secularist, it doesn't matter if they're a devout Muslim, a devout Hindu, a devout Buddhist, even if they're a devout witch, it doesn't matter.

[15 : 01] In every single human, I mean, on one level those things matter, but another level, it doesn't matter because every single human being is fallen and in every single case, the fall doesn't have the final word about human life and human experience, but God's common grace is always present.

God's common grace is always present. And what the text here is doing is in story form, it's introducing us to this idea that won't be developed until later on in the scriptures.

And remember, if those of you were here last week, you might remember that I said that what's happening with, you know, Cain murders his brother, he, you know, he's a smartass with God, lies to God, God speaks to him with grace, you know, Cain talks back, Cain shows no repentance at all for having murdered his brother, he only whines and shows self-pity, and then in the response to Cain's self-pity, God says, no, no, I'm not going to let people kill you.

And you might remember that I said, what you're seeing here in picture form is God's common grace, the fact that there still is beauty in the world, the land continues to grow, that there's beauty in human beings and human lives, and so what happens with God, with Cain, is that Cain still has provision and protection from God, that's common grace, provision and protection from God, common grace doesn't save us, it doesn't make us right with God, it doesn't make Cain right with God, but God acts in such a way that Cain is provided for, he's protected, and this story here is going to continue to show other aspects of common grace in a way which is going to very powerfully humble us and not just humble Christians but the text is going to go to humble all hearts to reveal our hearts pride and their boasting.

You know, that's why, and so, why do I say some of this about the city? Because here's one of the things about the city, here's one of the things that we know if we know other things about the rest of the Bible, Jerusalem is important.

[17 : 28] Jerusalem, the city Jerusalem, is a powerful symbol of God's presence and his purposes and his people. And for Christians, we look for the new Jerusalem, we continue to have a concern for the earthly Jerusalem, you know, the Bible tells us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and we are to do that.

Doesn't mean we agree with everything Israel does, but the Bible tells us we don't have to agree with everything they do. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem and we look forward to the heavenly city and to the new Jerusalem.

And in the book of Revelation, part of how redeemed humanity is portrayed is like a city. So we know here that the city is not just something which is portrayed as evil, but it's telling us something that it's not going to be the case that we're going to see that all of the good things just come from that line that is in obedience to God.

It's very, very, very important to see that good things are going to come out of Cain's line and it's showing us in picture language an important principle of God's common, sovereign grace in human affairs.

You know, it's why there's lots of non-Christian marriages that are better than Christian marriages. It's why there's lots of non-Christians that you and I all meet who are nicer, kinder, smarter, more self-giving.

[19 : 02] It's God's common grace. And this is being introduced in story form, in symbolic form, not in, like in propositions as I put it up there, but God uses stories and images to lodge things in our mind so that when we hear the idea, there's both an idea and a type of image even if we're not aware of it.

So, you know, what else is going on here in this particular text? You know, there's another problem which is being addressed in this text which is a very, very common problem.

It's a common problem for Christians and just for all human beings. My parents are immigrants. I was born a year after my parents immigrated from Europe. In fact, they immigrated from Northern Ireland.

And some of you might have heard that Northern Ireland has had problems in its past between Protestants and Catholics. And one of the things about my parents is that when I did something really well, like if I made my bed really properly and cleaned my room well or cleaned the kitchen well, my mom would say to me, that's very Protestant.

She'd say, that was very Protestant. Now, isn't that really interesting? Catholics don't know how to make their beds in clean kitchens, but Protestants do.

[20 : 29] And just for the record, you know, as part of God's sense of humor for both families, I marry Louise and Louise is Polish and Ukrainian.

And in Poland, even the atheists are Catholics, right? Even Buddhists are Catholics. Like, Poland is Catholic with every letter capitalized. and one of the things the family said about Louise marrying me, which was a bit of a not really very good, was they said, sorry, at least he's not a Baptist.

So, that was very faint praise. At least I'm not a Baptist because I would have been really bad if their daughter had married a Baptist. Anyway, so, you know, there's a bit of a problem, right? That the best things come from Christians or the best things come from Protestants.

And by the way, this isn't just a common, this isn't just a Christian problem. What's one of the things that many, many, many secular people believe? Evangelicals are stupid and unread.

I mean, sometimes they actually literally say it. They literally believe if you were better educated and better read, you wouldn't believe the Bible. If you knew more science, if you knew more art, if you knew more philosophy, if you knew more culture, you wouldn't be a Christian.

[21 : 48] What is it that Muslims believe? Muslims believe there has never been a better written book than the Koran. There is, in fact, one of the proofs they would use, so-called, for the superiority of the Koran and why it's God's word is that it is the finest example of human writing in existence.

I mean, in the gay culture, there's often a conceit within the gay culture of its superiority over straight culture. there's a common human problem of believing that your group is somehow smarter, more creative, kinder, better.

It's a human problem. So, what is the Bible, is the Bible going to help or hurt this? Well, this is where the story gets very interesting. So, go back to reading the story, verse 17. We've already got this idea of common grace which is being illustrated here because the city isn't an evil place.

It's a bit of a mixed place on a human level but it's not saying cities are evil. 17. Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

Then we have this genealogy. To Enoch was born Irad and Irad fathered Mahujael and Mahujael fathered Methusheel and Methusheel fathered Lamech.

[23 : 09] So, the point here is this is all of the line of Cain, right? The guy who murdered his brother and is living quite happily in wandering away from God and this is his line.

These are the people who are following in his footsteps, so to speak, not only biologically but in other senses as well. And then it comes down to Lamech and then in verse 19, and Lamech took two wives.

It's very interesting. The Bible shows that polygamy, which is going to show is basically always wrong. This is a bit of a distinction. You have to read the rest of the Bible to see it, but polygamy comes from this line and polygamy is a clear sin.

Living in a city is not a sin. Polygamy is a sin. And it comes here from that line, but we'll continue on. And Lamech took two wives. The name of one was Ada and the name of the other was Zillah.

Ada bore Jabal and he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. Just pause. What this is saying is a bit, I mean, you can sort of get it in the translation, but in the original language it's even clearer.

[24 : 20] Civilization rests on the fact that farmers are able to breed and produce and figure out how to grow lots of grain and feed animals and there's surplus.

So in a sense, it's connecting the beginning of prosperity and the beginning of what's needed for civilization that that comes out of Cain's line.

And then look what happens next. His brother's name was Jubal or Jubal. He was the father of all those who played the lyre and the pipe. And what this is using and just a very, you know, it's like one of those really good artists who can just, with a couple of very lines, just three or four or five lines can capture a picture.

And so the significance here, it's saying that music and not only music but poetry and not only music and poetry but therefore of literature and basically of all the arts that this comes out of Cain's line as well.

In a sense, it's out of Cain's line that they're the patron saint of that. And then look what happens next in 22. Zillah also bore Tubal Cain.

[25 : 39] He was the forger. That doesn't mean you make counterfeit money. It means he's able to build things, make things in a forge of all instruments of bronze and iron.

And the sister of Tubal Cain was Nama. And the significance of the instruments is that in a sense it's the beginning of technology. It's the beginning of tools.

It's not just stone tools but tools of bronze and iron. It's the beginning of mining, of metallurgy. It's the beginning of technology and of science. So isn't this very interesting?

Cities come from Cain's line. Polygamy, which is clearly taught throughout all of the Bible as being wrong, comes out of this line.

But the Bible isn't going to say that science and technology are wrong. You know, later on in the Old Testament when the ark is being built and when the first temple is being built, God gives special abilities to both a Jewish person and a non-Jewish person to build all of the furnishings and to bring all the beauty into the temple.

[26 : 49] And the text is saying that prosperity, which is a good thing, by the way. The Bible never says that prosperity is a bad thing. And that's coming out of this line.

And the Bible is not going to say that art and culture is bad because, I mean, who is the greatest king in Israel? Who is like the archetype and it's from his descendants the Messiah will come and it's David.

But David wrote songs and played the lyre. So the Bible here isn't saying that music is bad. Far from it. But it's saying that music, that culture, that science, that technology, it all comes out of Cain's line.

In other words, it would be as if I said to my mother, you know, the person who invented a well-made bed was a Catholic. Not a Protestant. Protestants never dreamed it up.

It's a Catholic idea. It's very, very interesting what the text does here, isn't it? And so here's the second point.

[27 : 55] This is where we have to start to get humbled, right? So I remember I began by saying that there's a human problem, right? You can see it in secular culture. You can see it in, you know, people who are in the Trump side and that whole political equation in the States.

You know, they're the ones who are going to make America great. You know, you can see it on the Clinton side. You know, the Trumpers are deplorables. It's a human problem. But what we see, if you could put up the next point, that would be great.

Here's what this text is starting to see. The Bible is trying to undermine this powerful human problem. It says, I've added Jesus in here because we're reading it as Christians. Belonging to Jesus does not make me better than other people.

Belonging to Jesus does not make me better than other people. Belonging to Jesus doesn't mean I make my bed better than other people. Actually, Louise will tell you I don't make the bed at all ever. That's confession for later on.

I have to confess that. And for those of you who are young, there used to be a time when you didn't have these comforters that you just threw over beds and it covered up all sorts of lack of, you used to have to actually make everything tight.

[29 : 06] Anyway, there you go. That's a separate thing. But this is what the text is teaching us indirectly here, right? It's saying that it's definitely not the case that just because you're a Christian you're going to be better at science.

Just because you're a Christian you're going to be better at music. Just because you're a Christian you're going to be better at poetry. Just because you're a Christian you're going to be better at carpentry or better mechanic. The Bible's telling us that in a series of images here it's humbling us.

It's telling us to reject that very powerful human drive and desire to see our tribe as better than all other tribes.

It's doing this very ancient story. It's undermining this powerful human problem and drive that causes so much problem, so much prejudice and everything like that in the world.

But some of you might say, okay, but George, like shouldn't grace make us better? Like if you've given your life to Jesus, if God has reconciled you to himself through the person of his son, if the Bible is God's word written, if God gives us the Holy Spirit, shouldn't grace make us better?

[30 : 27] Shouldn't grace just make us better? Well, in some ways it does, by the way, right? I mean, it's a very, very common thing that many people, what helps them in dealing with their addictions or their alcoholism is in fact the grace of Christ.

What can sometimes be a check on marriage being broken up is just the call of the Bible and the call of Jesus to come to him and to take his yoke upon you.

And obviously in sanctification, there is to be changes in our lives. But remember this thing about common grace. Let me tell you this. All of my prayers, I could fast and pray.

I could memorize the book of Psalms. And I will not run as fast as Usain Bolt. Talent matters. I don't have his ability to have oxygen come into his lungs and go to his muscles.

I don't have the percentage of fast twitch muscle fibers that he was just born with. I don't have the perfect proportion of different parts of his bones to each other that just allows him to go so gloriously fast.

[31 : 44] And I can hardly draw a stick figure. And I can just tell you, I could pray till the cows come home.

And maybe God, for some reason, would do a miracle and allow me to be able to paint well. But you know what? Why necessarily would he do that? See, here's the thing about this.

Which is, you see, it's actually a grace of God that the way our human desire that, okay, Christians are just going to be better. We're going to be the better musicians.

We're going to have the best families. We're going to have the best businesses. We're going to have the best made beds. You know, we're going to have the best science and the best technology. You know, it's actually part of God's grace that that doesn't happen to us.

To put up the next point, because this is what would go on in our hearts. If godliness leads to my success, if godliness leads to my success, I will choose godliness to be successful, not to be godly.

[32 : 48] Now, maybe I'm way more wicked than you, but that's what would start to happen. If it really was the case, as the health and wealth gospel people fraudulently claim, fraudulently claim, that if I could just give 10% of the money that I make into the church and I'll become rich, if that really got out, Kevin O'Leary would be giving 10% of his money to the church.

Would he be doing that to become godly? No way. He'd be doing it to become rich. If it really was the fact that praying would make me as fast as Usain Bolt, they'd be doing prayers at the Olympic training camp.

Why? Because they want to know God? No, because they want to go faster and win a gold medal. Right? If a hockey team understood that memorizing the Ten Commandments would make them win, they'd all memorize the Ten Commandments.

Why? Not because they want to know God, not because they want to be known by God, not because they want to be right with God, but because they can triumph themselves.

And so it is that it's a kindness of God to us. It's a kindness of God to us. We're going to see why even more in a moment with this next surprising twist in the story, that it is not the case that when you give your life to Jesus that everything in your life will now be better than others.

[34 : 24] It won't be. You know the wonderful thing about the gospel? Everything that happens in your life, you don't do it alone. You do it with Jesus. You do it with your Heavenly Father. And you do it with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's a great, great, great, great, great thing. I'm going to be going to Angola in July. You know, we'll talk to you about that in a little bit to speak to some missionaries in Angola and to do some teaching to local churches.

And I'll be honest, in my flesh, I'm chicken when it comes to stuff like that. And I feel nervous about navigating myself around different airports in Ethiopia and Namibia and rural airports in Namibia.

And I, you know what, especially one of the things that just worries me, it feels far more comfortable. I've just had one human being with me. Because being with others matters, you know. But we have Jesus, so we can talk about it all too.

But the text goes on, and not only does it then, the text deals with another human problem that also affects churches and Christians and non-Christians.

[35 : 33] You have to watch the time. One of the things that, you know, around the city right now, I'm going to take a risk of offending people, maybe not people who are here, but maybe some people who are here.

There's a lot of churches which are closing in the city. And one of the things which is really interesting is that these churches that are closing, some of these churches that are closing, and some of them choose not to just sell their buildings for the highest bidder.

Some of them sell them for lower than their highest bidder. But they sell them to arts groups. They don't say, you know, there's a powerful move amongst God for new Canadians coming from Africa.

And there's this really wonderful pastor who's come from Africa to minister to new Canadians from Africa. Why don't we give the building to them? Or there's this powerful move of God amongst people who've come from China to become Canadians.

And they come here to become Canadians, but then they become Christians. There's a powerful move of God. Why don't we give our building to them? No. They want to give the building to an arts group.

[36 : 53] They're revealing their idol. And the fact of the matter is that many, many, many, many people in our culture believe that science will solve our problems, that technology will solve our problems, that art will solve our problems, that prosperity will solve our problems, that better cities will solve our problems, that better government will solve our problems.

And it's a very, very, very, very, very common idea, but the Bible is far wiser. The Bible is far wiser. Look again at what the Bible does next. It's very, very, very, very interesting.

Very interesting. So we've just, if you go to verse 24, 23, so the city has been invented. Prosperity is going back to Cain's line.

Art, science, and technology. And then the father of this, in verse 23, Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zillah, hear my voice.

You wives of Lamech, listen to what I say. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man, literally a lad, for striking me.

[38 : 05] A lad strikes him, he kills him. A lad strikes Lamech, and Lamech in anger and rage kills the lad. Now here's the thing. If Cain's revenge, in other words, God says, I'm going to protect Cain by sevenfold protection, then Lamech's, Lamech's is 77-fold.

Next point. I get this thing from a novel that I read. Even after science and art and prosperity and civilization, the lizard part of our brain still thrives unchanged.

It comes from the Jack Reacher novels. He comes to a point, and he'll mention how the lizard part of his brain kicks in, which means he's going to kick butt in a serious way.

And it's a very, very powerful image, isn't it? And you know what? University faculties that fight, women's centers that fight, mosques that fight, churches that fight, nations that fight, families that fight, streets that fight, neighborhoods that fight.

Even after science and art and prosperity and civilization, the lizard part of our brain still thrives unchanged. See, it's easy for us to see, we now have, we have the beginnings of prosperity, we have the beginnings of science, we have the beginnings of technology, we have the beginnings of art and culture of civilization, and it all looks very good, and it's not come out of the line that's going to worship the Lord, it's come out of the line that is seeing God, they're quite happy wandering away from God, and it can look as if, well, what we need is we need more of this, this is going to solve our problems, this is fantastic.

[39 : 54] And then the text very subtly has this boast of Lamech to remind us, the lizard part of our brain is unchanged.

Is it going to put up the next point, please? Cities, prosperity, science, and art are great goods. That's what the Bible is going to teach, they're great goods.

It's not a virtue to be poor. It's not a sin to be poor. People who are poor aren't sinners, people who are rich aren't virtuous. It's not saying that.

But cities, prosperity, science, and art are great goods, but as idols, they always fail. As idols, when we put our hope and trust in them, they always fail.

And you know, the other thing which is so interesting about this is the way that the story very subtly plants in our mind this idea of their failure. So what's going to happen? Lamech makes this big boast.

[40 : 56] Chest-thumping boast. I'm way more powerful than God. You fear God, you should fear me way more. I'm way stronger.

I'm meaner. I'm harder. I'm faster. I'm quicker. And what's the very... How does the Bible... What's God going to do? What's God going to do? Show him he's bigger and tougher.

Send down a lightning bolt. Kill him. You know what he does? It's very simple. What happens next? A baby's born. We all know babies can sure beat big strong guys, right?

A baby's born. That's the response of God in the text. A baby's born. And you know the other response? Lamech's line disappears. We go to see the ruins of the Roman Empire.

We don't go to visit the Roman Empire. We go to see the ruins of the Mayan Empire. We don't go to visit the Mayan Empire.

[41 : 57] Look at verse 25. And Adam knew his wife again. And she bore a son and called his name Seth. For she said, God has appointed for me another seed instead of Abel. For Cain killed him.

To Seth also a son was born. And he called his name Enosh. At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord. Now, my time is up. I just, here's the thing.

You could put up the next point, please. Actually, could you all say this with me? It's a great text. But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

So the text says we have art, we have civilization, we have science, we have prosperity, we have all of these great goods. We have cities. They're great goods. But God is going to continue.

His common grace is present, but his special grace will come. The line out of which the one who will slay the serpent and slay sin and death, God's promise continues in the face of all these goods, in the face of all this sin, in the face of all this human arrogance, and all this human pride, God's purpose remains.

[43 : 12] He continues to be true to his word. And he teaches that rather than boasting, wisdom says that we call on the name of the Lord. Now, that would have been hard to know what people understood of it when they first hear this story.

They have to come to Exodus 3 to understand a little bit more about the Lord. They have to wait until they hear about David to hear more about what the Lord is. They need to wait until Isaiah and Daniel and Ezekiel to know a little bit more about who this, the Lord is.

And ultimately, they need to wait until Jesus has come, who is the promised seed, who does slay the serpent and does slay death and sin and defeats demons and will bring in the new heaven and the new earth by his death upon the cross.

The Bible says that when Jesus is dying upon the cross, it is we see before us God's power for salvation for those who receive it by faith and trust in Jesus and what he has done.

And what this text is very interestingly do is the normal human tendency is, and most of our boasting is quiet. But what boasting reveals to us is, where do we get our identity?

[44 : 26] Where do we get our meaning? What makes us think that we will triumph and survive? What gives us direction? Well, it's because I'm cultured.

It's because I'm good looking. It's because I'm able to control things. And you know, if you think about it, it's because I'm able to control things. Well, that's part of my identity.

That's what's going to give me success. It's what I put my hope in. It's what I trust in, that I can control things, or that I'm good looking, or that I'm rich, or I have this degree, or I'm a scientist, or I'm a secularist, or I'm a Baptist, or I'm an Anglican, or something other than God.

And what this text is saying is that as the gospel grips us, as we give our lives to Jesus and the gospel grips us, one of the purposes of the gospel gripping us is that we start to no longer believe that these are the things that will give us direction and success and meaning and identity, but that we are to understand that what our identity comes from is God's power given to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus to make us right with him, that nothing will change that, nothing will shake that from us.

That's to be my ultimate hope. It's not whether I can have lots of children, or I can get the job that I want, or the husband that I want, or get political power. Not that these things are bad.

[45 : 57] It's not that we should seek them, but if they become our boast, if they become the thing that makes us believe that if that's the sign of success and the means of success, if that's the basis of our identity, it's going to be like Lamech, and it will fail.

But as the gospel grips us, and we realize that God is not only giving common grace, but saving grace, that his strong arm has reached down and reached our tiny failing arm to put our hope and trust in him because our idols have failed, and our idols are consuming us, and our idols are only making us anxious or making us arrogant, and that we can start to understand that our identity, our hope, our trust, our ground, our shape comes from being gripped by the gospel, by Jesus' death upon the cross, by who he is and what he's done.

As that becomes our boast, it doesn't mean that we leave the world, but we live in the world in a different way. that the idols that make us either arrogant or anxious start to lose their control over us, and they start to lose their allure to us as we're gripped by the gospel.

Please stand. Please stand. Just before we pray, could you put that scripture passage up again, that last point?

Could you just all say this with me one more time? It's a great text to memorize, by the way. I encourage you to memorize the Bible, meditate upon it, ask God to make it true in your life and in your heart that the gospel would grip you so that your boast, my boast, our church's boast will be in the gospel and in Jesus and that that will shape how we live in the world and how we do science and how we do marriage and how we do family and how we do relationships.

[48 : 14] Can you say this with me one more time? But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

Father, we thank you that, we thank you, Father, that you know that we have, we struggle with idols. Father, you know that we don't even struggle with idols. Father, you know that many of us have powerful functioning idols in our lives that we don't even struggle against.

We just think that's just the way to be. And we thank you, Father, that you don't wait for us to be perfect, but you see us and you love us and you saved us through Jesus and his death upon the cross that all who call upon him to be the Lord, to call upon the name of the Lord, to be their Savior, that you will turn none away.

You will turn none away who calls upon you today, right now in this place, that you turn none away, that you take them for yourself. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you do not weigh our merits, but you look at Jesus and look at us and take us in Jesus and give us Jesus and put us in Jesus and put Jesus in us.

Father, make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, who are learning to boast in the gospel, in Jesus and what he has done for us in the cross.

[49 : 33] May that be, Father, more and more the source of our identity, the source of our hope, the lens by which we see the world, the lens by which we understand ourselves, so that we live, not, Father, for our glory or the glory of our city or for art or for science, but for your glory as we live in a city and do art and do science.

And, Father, we ask all of this in the name of Jesus and all God's people said, Amen.