

Noah & Baby Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] hear your word. We acknowledge before you that unless your Holy Spirit moves in our minds and hearts and wills, we cannot truly properly understand your word or receive it. So Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would do such a work in our minds and hearts and wills in the depths of our souls, so that we might hear and understand your word, and not just, Father, to hear your word, but to be doers of your word as well, that we might bear fruit for your glory. And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. I was going to stand up there for my sermon, but we're a small little intimate group, and it would feel funny me standing up there for an intimate gathering. I love looking at bumper stickers in cars. It's one of those things that I like looking at bumper stickers, but I don't like having a car with a bumper sticker myself.

Anyway, probably I would put bumper stickers on my car if I got around to it, but I'd end up probably regretting it after I put them on. I think they were funny or cute or absurd or something, and then I'd be a bit embarrassed by it. But the other day, last Sunday, in fact, just this past Sunday, when I was leaving the church to start to drive home, I saw a car with this bumper sticker on.

Hopefully, Andrew has it. There you go. You must have seen this bumper sticker coexist on different cars. Sort of an interesting bumper sticker. There you sort of have, you know, peace, and underneath, I think, if you were to blow it up, you'd see the different Christian, different faiths, Jewish, Muslim, Taoism, a variety of different faiths, sort of all represented by it. I don't, maybe afterwards, I'll find out that one of you has this bumper sticker on your car, and you can tell me why you have it on your car. I never feel threatened by it or anything like that. I just sort of, I think often it probably means some type of syncretist. That's a big \$100 word that just means that a lot of people in Canada believe it doesn't matter what path you follow or what religion you follow, we all end up in the same place. And if we're all going to end up in the same place, we might as well coexist and get along with each other. But the interesting thing about this past Sunday, when I saw this bumper sticker on the car, the same car had another bumper sticker right beside it.

Andrew? Fiction. So they obviously weren't syncretists, who just thought that all the different faiths are going to get, you know, should just get along because we're all going to end up in the same place.

This particular car, actually it had a couple in it. So either it was that the man thought one thing and the woman thought the other thing, and they'd have interesting conversations when they drove. Or it meant that that was sort of their view, that, you know, once again, you see the different faiths represented up there in the words that spells out the word fiction. So I guess for this, the people in this particular car, they have the view that since all of the different religious faiths and spiritualities are fictions, they might as well get along with each other. I mean, it would be the same thing as like, why should people who like reading Jane Austen get into big fights with people who like watching The Walking Dead? Like they're both just fictions. You might as well just get along with each other. It'd be silly to get into any type of a fight over something which is just, just a fiction. And, but, but here's the thing about this, and it sort of fits in with Christmas and stuff, is that, Andrew, if you could put up the first point, Christians should often seem like atheists or agnostics. That's going to be my first sort of comment. I think that in Canada, it should often be that Christians seem like atheists or agnostics. Now that sort of maybe is a bit of a puzzling idea to some of you, that we should seem like atheists or agnostics. But I think that, I think,

[4 : 04] I think what we're going to look at in the, in the Tower of Babel in a few moments and in John's Gospel, I think I can show you that that's in fact, that why we often must seem, why we should seem like this. Andrew, if you could put up the next slide. Christians, the reason that we should often seem like atheists or agnostics is I think that we should agree with atheists and agnostics that men and women cannot know God by the working of their minds or hearts or wills. I think that's something that we should agree with. That, that, in fact, so there might only be a very small number of hardcore atheists who deny that you could, that there's a God that exists or hardcore agnostics that would believe that even if there is a God that does exist, you couldn't possibly know it. And, and I think that on a fundamental level, Christians should agree with this. They should say, I think you're completely and utterly correct. I think there's good reasons to accept what you say, that it's very, very hard to know whether or not there is a God that exists or whether we should practice any of these particular faiths at least, because it's, I think it's probably correct that it's hard to know whether God does exist just by the exercising of our minds or hearts or wills. The idea that

Christians should support just general spirituality is, well, in fact, I don't think that's a biblical idea at all. And we can sort of see a little bit that it's not a biblical idea if we look at the story of the Tower of Babel. But before we do this, I'm going to show a movie clip, which, well, I mean, the people who wrote the Coexist bumper sticker and the people who wrote the fiction bumper sticker wouldn't agree with this. But I'm going to show you this interesting little video, or Andrew will, and it sort of shows why it is that we would begin looking at Christmas by talking about the Tower of Babel, which is way back early on in the Bible. So with this very Christian idea that, in fact, there's one ultimate author of scripture and that the whole, all of the Bible has one primary theme and points to one primary person and what that one primary person does, if you have your Bibles, let's look again at Genesis chapter 11, which is the story of the Tower of Babel. Tower of Babel,

I don't know how you pronounce it, actually. I'll just say Babel. And Genesis right at the beginning of the Bible. And listen to this story again. It's a very, very curious story. The book of Genesis, chapters 1 to 11, are the basic introduction. They set the theme and many of the problems and the issues that the rest of the Bible is going to address. Genesis chapter 1 and 2 talk about the creation of the earth and how everything is created good. Genesis 3 talks about how evil enters into the world through Adam and Eve. And they who represent all of humanity and from whom humanity flows, bent, bend, and make our human nature bent, and therefore mean that we can't everything is touched by a rebellion against God. And Genesis 3 through 11 talks about this bentness working itself out in a variety of important human relationships and shows how it grows.

And Genesis 11 is sort of the end of that. It's going to open up to Abraham in the beginning in a sense of salvation history, I suppose you could call it. But Genesis 11 is a very, very curious story of the tower of Babel. It goes like this, just to refresh your memory. Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, now here's what they say to each other, it's giving us their impression, their understanding of what it is that they're about to do.

Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens.

[8 : 21] And let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth. Now I sort of shared this on Sunday. The word for city, the thing that characterizes a city in the Old Testament is one of two things. Either a wall of fortification around a place where people live, or a strong tower or a fortress that people can gather when they're attacked. So it's sort of a very, very curious thing that these people want to do two things. They want to create a place that will protect them from war and in a sense allow them to wage war. They're not interested in just having tents or houses unprotected by fences or fortifications. They want to build fortifications.

And they want to do something which will allow them to build a famous name for themselves, for their own glory. And they want to build something that will be able to reach heaven. And they want to do all three of those things. They want to be able to be, in a sense, protected from war and also probably be able to engage in war themselves. They want to be able to reach heaven and they want to do it all for their own glory.

And you see, one of the things that the Bible does is that there will be places in the Bible where ideas will be communicated just very, very straightforwardly in a sentence form.

But in other places, ideas are communicated through story. Some people like things like creeds. They like creeds.

They can remember creeds. Other people, abstract ideas like a creed doesn't do anything for them at all. They need to hear a story. And I think most human beings need a little bit of both.

[10 : 13] They need the story to sort of settle into our imagination and into our mind. And so at the heart of it here, we see a very, very common human idea. In fact, it's the idea behind fiction in Coexist.

It's the idea that in Coexist, they would say that we believe that everybody can strive to know God in their own way. And so Brian over there, he has his own way where he's going to try to reach for heaven.

And Lisa has her own way that she's going to try to reach for heaven. And George has his own way that he's going to try to reach for heaven. And since we're all just trying to reach for heaven ourselves, we might as well try to get along while we're on the journey.

And we see here in this story that these people are trying to reach heaven. They might not be doing it through philosophical ideas or religious ritual.

They might be trying to do it more physically. But their physical quest is very, very common with any human quest by their own effort to reach heaven. And if you think about it, people who talk about these ideas are engaged in these quests.

[11 : 30] I'm not saying that they're all proud people or more proud than you or I. Sometimes our character can be better than our ideas. Just as sometimes our character can be worse than our ideas.

But if you think about it for a second, it's actually an unbelievably proud thought to think that you've figured out how to reach heaven. Just think about it for a second. I've managed to learn the timetables.

I'm old enough that they still made you learn timetables in school. And I've figured out, you know, seven times seven. And I just know the answer to that, you know.

Andrew there could probably actually work with imaginary numbers, like the square root of negative one. It's an imaginary number. I've never been able to get my mind around the square root of an imaginary number.

So he's sort of smarter than me. I can figure out seven times seven. He can figure out the square root of negative one. And somebody else can figure out all the way to get to heaven?

[12 : 32] That's pretty smart. You have to be pretty proud to think that you're smart enough to figure out all the way to get to heaven all by yourself. Like, the person who says that I've figured out the spirituality that will allow me to get in touch with God, they might have a character which is very, very humble.

But the idea is actually very, very proud. It's a very proud idea that some human being, by their own mind, their own effort, or their club, or their group, has managed to figure out how to reach God.

And in fact, you can see the worry of some people that if you're proud enough to think that you've figured out how to reach God, then you probably want to do war because you're smarter than other people.

It doesn't always happen that way because often people's characters are better than their ideas. And so we see here in this story form this fundamental human desire of somehow being able to build, by my effort, a stairway to heaven.

I don't know, my earlier point, which Andrew put on, was that Christians agree with atheists and agnostics. Men and women cannot know God by the working of their minds or hearts or wills.

[13 : 46] And that's sort of shown here in this story, in story form. What happens after their desire? Well, actually, it's a very ironic statement. So here they are, all very busily thinking that they're smart enough to try to reach to heaven.

And God's answer comes in verse 5. And the Lord came down to see the city. And the Lord came down to see the city. They didn't even begin to get close enough to actually reach God or reach heaven.

The Lord had to come down to see the city. You see, that's actually, it's not that God, that's the, you know, sometimes we get so caught up, we've been so, we see Genesis 1 to 11 through the frames of evolution and all of that type of thing and trying to figure out a scientific thing.

We miss the irony in the story that the heart of this particular story is, boy, we're going to be smart enough to think our way out and work our way out of heaven. And God looks down and has to come down.

They haven't even begun to get close. And, and then, and then the story goes on about how, in fact, God is going to take efforts in terms of confusing their language to make sure that nothing like that ever happens.

[14 : 58] And you see, that's why on one fundamental level, both in terms of God actually, you know, sovereignly acting to make sure that that can happen, but also that the whole point of the story shows that he doesn't even have to really do anything sovereignly to make it not happen because he, he has to come down to see them.

It's sort of another topic of the thing, you know, another one of the things about this story, one of the ironies is that all the way through the book of Genesis from the very beginning, God keeps saying to them, I want you to be fruitful and I want you to multiply, so I want you to go and be fruitful and I want you to be fruitful and multiply.

And what is it they do? Because they're ultimately seeking their own glory, they don't want to be fruitful and multiply, they want to have everybody come together and be with them so they can reach for heaven.

And so God actually, by scattering them, continues in what his original purpose is to go and have them to be fruitful and to multiply, that ultimately, sort of a side topic, we can relate to God in one of two ways.

God's will will always be done. We can do his will as his children or we can do his will as his tools. But God's sovereign will cannot be overcome. But that's sort of a bit of a sideline from this fundamental thing.

[16 : 12] Now, some of you might say, well, George, this is very, very interesting, but don't at the same time, don't you sort of, doesn't the Bible also teach that there are ways that we can actually sort of know God?

And, well, I'm going to answer that question, but before I do, let's see this other, this other movie, which starts to point into a, the completely different direction that Christians want to go when it comes to things like coexist and fiction.

I don't know if you can, when it is, if you can put up the next point.

Christians sort of, the reason they, they sort of, in a sense, agree with that thing, fiction, although not with the cross in it, is that atheists and agnostics haven't considered a particular idea.

It is, in fact, proud and vain, if you could put the next slide up, it is, in fact, proud and vain to think that human beings by their own minds can reach up to heaven. But what if God spoke to us?

[17 : 24] What if it has nothing to do with human cleverness, human pride, human vain glory, human ability, collective ability, technology, technique, poetry, spirituality, religion, or ritual?

What if it has nothing to do with any of those things? What if God actually spoke? What if God actually stooped down? Then, in fact, it's humility rather than pride to receive it.

See, Christians, Christmas is the retelling of the story of God stooping to speak to ordinary people and to save them. Christmas is the retelling of the story of God stooping to speak to ordinary people and to save them.

Christians are actually sort of caught with two types of ideas. In the Bible, they're very, very clear, in the Book of Romans and other places, it's very clear that when a person appears before God that there will be no excuse.

It's very clear in the Bible that the Bible teaches that God has left all sorts of clues and riddles so that people can know that there must be something, someone, like a God.

[18 : 35] God. And, in fact, I could give you a range of different clues and riddles in human existence that would point to the fact that there must be something like a God.

Yet the fact of the matter is that it would still be the story of Babel would still speak against that and how could we possibly really know there is a God if all we have are clues and riddles and if our minds and our efforts and our hearts can't reach to God.

And, in fact, the riddles are to create within us a type of humility to say, God, there are riddles and pointers to your existence but we don't know if you exist or what you're like. We need you to speak.

We need you to do something because our power is limited. In fact, all of the clues and all of the riddles are to bring us to the point of humility and openness and yearning and asking for God to do something.

And at the heart of the Christian faith is that God stoops and God speaks and God speaks in such a way that we can be reconciled to him. He doesn't merely impart information.

[19 : 36] He brings himself to reconcile ourselves to him. In the Gospel of John, we get this told to us in sort of very, very abstract but very, very powerful language.

If we're mindful of the story of the Tower of Babel and our inability to reach up to God, mindful of that, listen to how John describes what's happening at Christmas.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. See, it's from that perspective that you can understand that there will be riddles and clues.

Why is it that we prefer light to darkness? Why is it that we have a sense of right or wrong? Why is it that there seems to be design written everywhere in the universe? Why is it that we have some sense that there must be something more?

[20 : 43] Why is it that reason in our minds seem to work with this world? Why is it you can multiply all these whys and whys and whys and whys and there's this picture of God having created all things?

And then in verse 6 it's very interesting it begins there was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light. And contrary to Babel then it says in verse 9 the true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world.

into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him.

But to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood or of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God.

[21 : 51] and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth.

Before I talk any more about that let's look at this next video clip which uses artwork to tell the three key moments in the coming of Jesus. It might be a little bit hard for you to have to look a bit closely.

It's an artist working on a light table with sand. We were able to follow that. It was she drew the annunciation and then she drew the birth and then she drew the visit of the wise men and I can't draw stick figures I always find it amazing that people could do something like that with their hands and so the Christians believe that there is natural revelation but natural revelation's purpose is to make us humble and to make us yearn and we are to be made humble and we are to yearn for God to speak and to recognize when God speaks and God acts because unless he does it we are helpless and so Christians believe that if you could put the next one up Andrew Jesus is God come down to earth to make himself known and to redeem all who turn to him in repentance and faith

Jesus is God come down to earth to make himself known and to redeem all who turn to him in repentance and faith and that's what we celebrate at Christmas the good invasion the return of the true king come to deliver us and return those who put their faith and trust in him to himself the good invasion we're going to now look at another movie which talks about war but makes a really important distinction between celebrations and festivals and the person let's watch it sort of just wrapping up Christians agree with atheists and agnostics men and women cannot know God by the working of their minds or hearts or wills but at

Christmas we remember God doing something which is a surprise to atheists and agnostics and is a completely and utterly different claim than any other religious figure Muhammad said he could point to the way Buddha could point to the way every spiritual teacher and religious advisor can point to the way Confucius can point to the way Jesus says he is the way all other spiritualities can point towards God Jesus claims well the Bible claims that Christmas is the retelling of the story of God stooping to speak to ordinary people and to save them Jesus is God come down to earth to make himself known and to redeem all who turn to him in repentance and faith last night I shared with the congregation who was here a story I was in a

[25 : 28] Starbucks in the corner of Laurier and O'Connor yesterday morning trying to finish my talk for last night and my talk for today and I was into it for about an hour and a half and to a table there was an empty table and a table beside me there was a younger woman probably in her early twenties and a woman closer to my age not old yet and they came and sat down in that table and they're just talking and I overhear bits and pieces of the conversation and then I see the young woman open up a Bible and I realized that the young woman is trying to lead the older woman to give her life to Jesus and I realized that part of the reason I was there that morning was not just to prepare a talk for last night and tonight but to pray for the two of them as the woman just shared about Jesus and what a better time to give your life to Jesus than at Christmas because Christmas is all about God stooping to save us and you know so this very last movie which we're about to show makes the very clear connection between the

Christmas gospel the Christmas story and the gospel and there is no better time than Christmas to either give our lives to Jesus in repentance and faith or to recommit our lives to Jesus in repentance and faith let's watch it let's stand father we give you thanks and praise that your son would in obedience to you and in love for us would set aside his glory and divine prerogatives his appearance as God that he would set aside everything father of God except the fact that he never set aside his nature as God and we thank you that he set all that aside and stooping took into himself our human nature and walked among us we thank you father that he came to die that he father was the only baby born to die as his express purpose and we thank and praise you father that he died for us on the cross taking our doom upon him and offering us his destiny we give you thanks and praise father that you did not merely give us information but that you spoke true words to us words that point to

Jesus that will also redeem us and if we heed them and accept them reconcile us to you and make us your children by adoption and grace father everything that we can possibly receive all comes from you it's only you your son the holy spirit who leads us to your son the sealing of your redemption in our lives it's all a gift that comes from you we ask father that this Christmas that we might be gripped by the gospel more and more so that it becomes the means by which we live and the means by which we see and understand ourselves in the world and this we ask in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen please take a posture of prayer and we'll have a brief time of intercession the responses to the different parts of the intercession will be on the screen father we all have loved ones who are traveling at this time maybe not today but over the days before and the days to come we commend into your hands all who travel

Jesus precious savior have mercy upon us father we give you thanks and praise for those in our armed forces who serve overseas heavenly father we commend into your hands those in our canadian armed forces serving overseas and we also commend into your hands their loved ones who wait for them at home Jesus precious savior have mercy upon us father we remember before you the church in north korea we remember before you the church in china we remember before you the church in syria and egypt we remember before you father the church in pakistan and in northern nigeria heavenly father we commend into your hands the persecuted church Jesus precious savior have mercy upon us father we thank you for the missionaries that we have the privilege to be in fellowship and communion with we ask your blessing today father for those missionaries in particular from our own congregation for brian as he prepares to return to china for phil and janine in kassagstan for steve and his wife stella in new delhi india for richard in his work in ottawa with love ottawa and across canada with together canada we ask father for the other missionaries that we support we think father of diana with pioneer missions of great as