

Lord of the Nations

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: 15 December 2024

Preacher: John French

[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Have you ever actually tried to build a tall tower with Lego or blocks or Jenga or something like that?

Yeah. Well, since 2009, the Burj Khalifa is the pride of Dubai. It's got the world record for the tallest building, 828 metres.

And then there's a bit of an antenna on top of that that makes it even a bit taller. Well, this morning we come to the end of our series in the book of Genesis, and we come to the third of the last of three universal judgments that punctuate early biblical history in Genesis 1 to 11.

Remember, the first was the fall, Genesis 3. The second was the flood, Genesis 6. And today we have the Tower of Babel. The significant thing about three universal judgments is that to some degree to another, pride could be considered one of the root causes for all of them.

Pride comes in two versions. There's the appropriate pride that comes with a sense of satisfaction in achieving a job well done. There's a pride that takes another form with inordinate self-congratulations and self-focus that really only belongs to God.

[1:22] Up until the time of the Enlightenment, most of the West would have agreed that pride was the worst of the seven deadly sins. In the 6th century, Pope Gregory I referred to it as vain glory and unjustified boasting.

Pride was considered the sin that caused all the wars. It's pride that stops us from apologising, admitting our mistakes and saying sorry.

But there's been a bit of a shift in society. Pride is making a comeback and it's not good. It's not seen as a bad thing. Sadly, we don't seem to be alarmed by self-centredness.

In fact, increasingly being proud, self-focused, self-reliant is praised and promoted as healthy evidence of a good self-esteem and is seen as key to being really successful in this world.

You might have heard that saying, you do you. The story of the Tower of Babel stands as a lasting monument, not only to the sinfulness of pride, but to the foolishness and destructiveness of pride.

[2:40] Genesis 11 is a passage that is needed to correct our path and teach us how to live in this day and age. So three things from this story. The framework of pride, the foolishness of pride, and the fix for the problem of pride.

So let's take a look at the framework of pride. Our text tells us that after the flood, the whole population of the earth had one language. They spoke with one common tongue.

And they moved together eastward. And interestingly, as they moved eastward, they moved further away from the Garden of Eden and they're moving physically further away with their backs to the garden and spiritually with their backs to God as they move away from the garden.

They go to a plain in Shinnah, ancient Babylon, and they settled there. And then they said to one another, come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens.

The word heavens here can also be translated sky. Let us build a tower that reaches to the sky. At first glance, there doesn't seem anything wrong with this.

[3:50] There's nothing wrong with building a skyscraper. Just like there's nothing wrong with seeking to accomplish a great achievement or being prominent in our career path. There's nothing wrong with building a great business.

There's actually nothing wrong with accumulating money or leading a great church. There's nothing wrong with these things in and of themselves. The key question is, though, why?

What is the motivation of your heart? Why do we seek to achieve great things? Why do we sometimes avoid to achieve great things?

The sin of pride can cut both ways. It can cause us to seek to achieve great things. It can also cause us, out of fear of failure, to play it safe.

It can tear both ways, back and forth, between playing it safe or trying to achieve. Here in Genesis 11, they tell us their motivation for building a tower that reached to the sky.

[4:49] Come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. There's the purpose, to make a name for ourselves, a great name.

It's in verse 4. It should be on the screen, but obviously you haven't added that bit in. Make it to the heavens so that we can make a name for ourselves. God created us not to make a great name for us.

He created us to make a great name for him and for his glory. The essence of pride here is to take that which is God's privilege alone and take it upon ourselves to seek to make a name for ourselves.

Do you hear a lot these days about people saying, I wonder what my legacy will be or I've got to leave a legacy? That sort of legacy talk? Well, maybe you think it sounds like God must have a bit of an ego that it's all about making his name great.

He's desperate for attention, needs to make a name for himself. Almost seems a bit of an unworthy attribute for God. Maybe you'll believe it's proper for God to seek a name for himself, but by the same token, it's okay to make a great name for yourself.

[6:02] Underneath both of these responses is a common problem of failing to recognise the radical difference between God and us. God is perfectly and infinitely good and wise and we are none of the above.

So when we seek to make a name for ourselves, all the problems, all the pain and all the suffering in our world flow out as a result. But when God seeks to make a name for himself, all that which is good and beautiful is the result.

For you or me to say, I'm out to make a name for myself is the most arrogant, egocentric thing we can do. But for God to say, I'm seeking my glory, I'm seeking to make myself a great reputation, that's actually the most kind, benevolent, wonderful and gracious thing that God can do for his creation.

Remember when Jesus taught his followers to pray, the very first prayer point, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. May your name be revered.

May your name be revered. May your name be exalted. Not debased, ridiculed, slandered or cursed. The amount of people that talk about God is astronomical.

[7:18] I hear people talking about God all the time, but it's as a curse. Oh my, and then they say God or Jesus' name. God's name is to be made holy, made glorious. And when we're salt and light in the world, God gains for himself a great reputation.

That's what we're on about here at St. Paul's. As we treasure Jesus together for the joy of all people, it's all for God's glory. So what's your purpose?

Why do you seek to achieve? Or in fear, why do you play it safe? What are you trying to accomplish? To make a name for yourself? Or to make a great name for God?

What underlies our desire to make a name for ourselves is found in Genesis 11.4. Then they said, Come and let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we can make a name for ourselves.

Otherwise, we'll be scattered over the face of the whole earth. According to this, they were motivated by the fear of being scattered. They thought, If we make this tower, we can stick together.

[8:27] We won't be scattered all over the earth. There's a sense of insecurity here. A sense of being insignificant in a vast world. They were afraid that if they got scattered, they would be harmed and die.

And that's what drives us to make a name for ourselves. The sense of insecurity. The sense of insignificance. The sense of wanting to be known. To make a difference. That somehow we can live on and be remembered.

I kind of think of Walt Disney here. Disneyland's are everywhere. Is he really cryogenically frozen? I should have fact checked that one. But he wants to live on.

Ultimately, this desire to leave a legacy is because we're going to die. We fear death. We may try to ignore it and don't like to talk about it. So we busy ourselves with goal setting, achieving, accomplishing and planning our next big thing.

Or just existing. But in the end, death awaits us all. We've sanitised death in the Western world with celebrations of life at funerals and small plaques in nice lawn cemeteries.

[9 : 35] The graveyard used to be next to churches. I kind of like that. It's back when people recognised dealing with death somehow meant, I'm going to be dealing with God. You ever get the chance?

St John's Wilberforce, St Paul's Emu Plains, over at Forklift. Anyway, there's some really cool... St Stephen's Newtown. Those cemeteries, they're amazing. Anyway, the truth is, sometimes, and I've been talking to a few friends, middle-aged friends, about this recently.

In the quietness of night, we lay there, gripped with the reality that we come at time when we die. And then what? We fear the unknown.

People fear what happens after death. Whether consciously or unconsciously, what the builders in Genesis 11 were doing, they were trying to make a name for themselves that would leave a legacy. As if to say, if we build a tower that reaches to the heavens, we'll be immortal. In their pride and fear of death, there's something deeper going on here.

[10 : 37] There's no mention of God in their planning process. They were planning and scheming as if God and God's word did not exist. And really, that is where their fear of death springs from.

When they say, we do not want to be scattered, they're forgetting that God had promised to send a deliverer who would deliver them from death in Genesis 3 verse 15.

And they're forgetting that God even commanded them kind of to be scattered. He says, go out into the world to subdue it for my glory. Genesis 1 verse 28.

They totally left God's promises and God's commands out of their decision making. We can run the danger of doing the same thing. When we leave God out, we start to feel insignificant or insecure.

And so we've got to somehow deal with that. So our motivation to achieve, be secure, be significant, make a name, leave a legacy, is grasping at the mists of immortality.

[11 : 41] Some of you today, or at some point soon in the future, will have to make a big decision. Whether career-related, or relationships, or finance, or moving, or schooling, whatever decision making is coming up, I'd like to ask, when you make those decisions, do you have joy and freedom in your decision making?

Or are you finding yourself bound by anxiety and fear? Could it be you've left God out of your decision making? That you've forgotten his promises and his commands?

Could it be that your purpose in life and decision making is focused on making a name for yourself, or to protect the name you think you might have? If that's the case, the motivation of your heart will be all wrong.

And having your heart in the wrong place, doing everything in your own strength, is the framework of pride. Now the foolishness of pride. Genesis 11, 5.

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. This isn't diminishing God's omniscience. He's not going down and going, oh, whoa, they're building a tower.

[12 : 56] That really surprises me. What's happening here is a dramatic expression of the futility of our best achievements. Humanity attempts to make a tower that reaches to the heavens and God says, oh, let me look at that.

What's that tiny little thing? Oh, I guess I'll come down and have a look. So God comes down to look at this great achievement that we've accomplished. It's as if God is saying to you and me, are you serious?

All our achievements pale in significance to God's omnipotence. As I have 40, verse 22 makes it clear. God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers.

In the overall scheme of things, our grand achievements are so insignificant alongside God's omnipotence, just as if we're grasshoppers in the grass, which we know are hard to spot unless they jump because they're below eye level and they're in the grass.

Characteristic to all our achievements is all their obsolescence. All our plans will one day meet their demise. Can you tell me who got a silver medal that lasts, like, we just don't even remember.

[14 : 12] I asked some kids in my class, who's Kieran Perkins? No idea. No idea. He was a legend. Comes to obsolescence.

He's still alive too. Anyway, Genesis 11, 7. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that they will not understand each other. It's incredible what's happening here in this divine judgment.

Let us confuse are the same Hebrew consonants that are used in the words when the builders say, let us build. The author's point is that even before God came down, even in the planning stage, the

project was doomed to fail.

Right at the beginning, the seeds of failure and folly point to the demise of their feeble attempts at self-glory. We live in a fallen world. Nothing lasts. Everything is breaking down.

Think of what your greatest achievement might be, greatest dream might be for an achievement, and where will what you accomplished be 100 years from now? It'll decay.

[15 : 21] It'll be gone. 1,000 years. No one will know or care. No one remembers. Making a name for yourself comes to nothing. Another quick anecdote.

My great-grandfather on my dad's side, I don't even know his name, I could look that up, but apparently he was a cobbler and he was a chain smoker and he would light his next cigarette with the previous cigarette and he'd just cobble away and his little cobbler place was just wallpapered with cigarette labels that he cut out and, but he means nothing to me, he's not like my grandfather, I missed him, you know, when he died, but my great-grandfather, I'd never had anything to do with him and all I know is he was a chain smoker who wallpapered his cobbler studio with cigarette labels.

Intrinsic to all our greatest plans and achievements are the seeds of their own demise. Here we see the thing that motivates us to make a name for ourselves and what we fear most catches up to all of us in the end.

In verse 8, so the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city. The very thing that drove them to undertake the project so they won't be scattered scatters them.

The same thing is true of us. When we are consciously or unconsciously driven by fear, the thing we fear the most will ultimately catch up with us and death awaits us all.

[16 : 48] That's the greatest folly here. The writer of Ecclesiastes came to this conclusion. He tried to make a name for himself and he actually succeeded. He accumulated wisdom, riches, enjoyment of pleasures and he stepped back and realised that the wise man and the fool, those who enjoy life and those who suffer, the rich and the poor, they all die.

Death does not discriminate. If you do succeed in making a name for yourself, you won't like it.

Genesis 11 verse 9. That is why it's 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. The way this passage is set up is all about giving us the meaning of the word Babel, babbling, confusion.

Those who built this tower said that Babel meant a gate, the gate of God, that it was the way of entering into God's presence through humanity's own miraculous achievement.

God here gives another interpretation. Remember the same consonants for Hebrew word confusion are the same consonants and sound very much like the word Babel, which also sounds very much like the Hebrew word navel, which is the word for fool.

[18 : 04] So much for their efforts being a gateway to God, the name that is placed on humanity's great achievement is fool. When we try to make a name for ourselves, our epitaph is you fool.

Psalms 14 reminds us, the fool says in their heart there is no God. It also makes me think of Luke 12, the parable of the farmer who had an amazing crop and he thought, I'm going to tear down my barns and build bigger ones and I'm going to store all up and take life easy.

I'm going to eat, drink and be merry. And God said, you fool. Tonight, you'll lose your life. The foolishness of pride is that our greatest achievements will never reach heaven and attain immortality.

Intrinsic to our plans and our achievements are their own demise. The thing we most fear, death itself, ultimately catches up with us all. The name that you make for yourself when you seek to make a name for yourself is fool.

What's God doing to fix our problem of pride? There is hope in this passage. There is a fix. verse 5 is the turning point. It's the hinge in human history.

[19 : 28] In order for something to be done about the sinfulness of pride, the Babel in our hearts, it requires the Lord of the nations to come down. Nothing less can change the situation.

The Lord must come down in judgment and in mercy. And there is mercy. Genesis 11, verse 6. The Lord said, if as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they do, nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

What's being said here is that if as one they continue in their pride to make a name for themselves and they're not held accountable in any way, there will be no limits to their sin.

And so God in his mercy come and judges the people by confusing their language and separating the people into different language and ethnic groups and it's for their own good. Before the fall we're meant to be as one and that's the way it'll eventually be when Jesus returns in the new creation. Until that day to keep us humbled and turning back to God it's better that we be diverse, that there be different people groups, different language groups because there is the potential for a greater impact of sinful pride if we're all together as one.

[20:51] God in his mercy comes and confuses the language and he separates us to create a better opportunity for us to then turn back to God in faith.

How does God deal with our pride in a practical way today? Have you ever had a dream for a career or a strong relationship or financial security and it fell apart?

At life at the moment you're feeling a bit confused. What's going on God? What did I do wrong?

Why did God allow this to happen? I'm going to be careful here, don't hear me wrong.

God is not looking to smite you and bad things happen in life because we're in a broken, sinful world and there's not a direct correlation with God judging you at this point but we also know that God disciplines his children and God knows where you're at right now and he knows what's best for you and his mercy if you're in a broken, suffering state hopefully in that confusion it's a means to a gracious end and in that humbling we might turn to him and trust him.

So how does God ultimately fix the problem of our sinful pride? You know what I'm going to say right? It's verse 5 God comes down God comes down in the person of Jesus God comes down in judgment and mercy While we seek to make a name for ourselves there's only one who lived in perfect humility yet his name is the greatest there is one who came down who left heaven's glory and who never left God out of his decision making process he never sought to make a name for himself in fact when he knew the time was drawing near for his crucifixion this is what he said my heart is troubled but what should I say?

[22:51] Father save me from this hour no it was for this very reason I came to this hour why?

Father glorify your name may God's name and reputation be great through what is about to transpire and then Jesus went to the cross and there things got more confusing than had ever happened in all of eternity there the creator was crucified by sinful creatures there the eternal perfect son experienced the judgment wrath of his father he was torn down so that we can be built up he was scattered he was separated right there at the cross there the God of life died and the reason for the confusion was at that moment he died for our sinful pride because we seek to make a name for ourselves and leave God out of the process as a result through his death we have forgiveness of sin we have freedom from the fear of death and we have access to the father through the true gate of God

Jesus the Lord of the nations and at the resurrection three days later we know what happens next we no longer have to live with fear of death hanging over us pride says I don't need God or I can get to God on my own terms pride hardens hearts pride stops us from owning our mistakes pride holds us back from repenting and seeking reconciliation God came down to fix the problem of our sinful pride and we need to admit we can't do it but look to the one who has we'll never get to God in our own efforts so he came to us and James 4 verse 10 at Pentecost God came down again the Holy Spirit was given and the curse of Babel began to be reversed because people from all different countries and languages and ethnic groups began to hear the one message of the gospel in their own language the spirit of Jesus

Christ has now come into his people and we're no longer scattered rather we're united as one in Christ Jesus is your life confused right now have you left God out of the decision making process is your life characterised by joy and freedom or is it characterised by insecurity anxiety and confusion come to Jesus trust him call on the name of the Lord Jesus to be saved trust him in all areas of your life in areas that you may not have trusted him before trust Jesus for your security and your significance for all those in the name of the Lord Jesus are guaranteed eternal life there's immortality live with lasting purpose with a legacy to make God's name great giving all glory and honour to Jesus John the

Baptist said he must decrease I must decrease and he must increase in other words less of me and more of him amen teachings to amen to globe toots letter correct oh to other gracious and other Mandarin hasta■■■■ESS ferry Product