

This is Still My Father's World

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- [0 : 0 0] Now, I'm not very good at general knowledge. Please don't invite me to be on your team for any kind of quiz.
- But here's a pretty easy one. I don't know if anyone knows the tallest building in the world. Not sure. Maybe I shouldn't ask you to be on my team either.
- The tallest building in the world, I had to look it up, it was the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. It was built in 2010. And I'm told it has 163 floors.
- And it's 829.8 meters tall, or about half a mile high in the air. Quite why you need to build up that high when you've got miles of empty desert on every side, I'm really not sure.
- But I suspect that it's a similar reason to the reason that this tower in our passage was built. What do these folks say to each other? In verse 4.
- [0 : 5 9] They say, Come, let us build for ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves. In other words, tower building is a vanity project, isn't it?
- Much like the space race before it, or global empire building. There's that pride in being able to boast in having the first, or the biggest, or the tallest thing.
- There's something almost universal in humanity that pushes us to want our names to be known, to go down in history, or even better, perhaps, to go viral on social media.
- There's something in us that longs to transcend our own time and place, and do something that earns us global fame and divine glory, a place in history.
- And as we come to the end of our series in the first part of Genesis, perhaps that doesn't come as such a surprise to us. We've seen, haven't we, over our time, that ever since our first parents believed the lie that they could become like God by turning away from God, that we have had an instinct in us that tells us that we should really be king on the throne, not God.
- [2 : 1 8] And Genesis has shown us that truth about our hearts from many angles, a bit like walking into a changing room with a mirror on each side. Our sin has so many aspects to it.
- And tonight we see yet another one, as Genesis holds up a mirror to our human pride. But God, as usual, as we've seen, follows up with a response. And in his response, we see the message yet again, as we've heard throughout our series, that this has not stopped being God's world, as it was in the beginning, so it still is now.
- He is the good and gracious king of heaven and earth, and all things fall under his sovereign and loving reign. And in the face of our pride, he holds out to us yet again peace.
- And the promise of peace, and the promise of a rescuer from our sin and pride. So as we close our series in Genesis, let's see, firstly, a proud peace.
- A proud peace. So the nations are busy, now spreading out, from Noah's three sons, as we saw in chapter 10. But at this point, in verse 1, the whole world still had one language, and a common speech.

- [3 : 40] Everyone understands one another. And even though the nations are being scattered, notice that this group of people is gathering. They're going in the other direction.
- Verse 2, as they moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar, and they settled there. They're gathering together. Now, Shinar maybe should ring a bell for us.
- If you remember last time, we heard about Ham's grandson, Nimrod. If you were called Nimrod today, you might take it as an insult. But not back then.
- Back then, Nimrod was a household name. In the same way that if I said to you, Boris, you wouldn't need to ask which Boris I meant. So it was with Nimrod in his day.
- He'd gone down in legend. He founded great cities. And if you glance at verse 10, I think in chapter 10, the first were in Shinar, and one of the first was called Babylon.
- [4 : 42] And so when, in chapter 11, people begin to settle in Shinar, and they begin to build a city, they call it Babel, I think Genesis is giving us a flashback, if you like, to the time of Nimrod and his city building.
- Because this is almost certainly the same city, the same settlement. Historians make this connection as well between the ancient city of Babylon and its early beginnings in Babel.
- Now, if that's true, and Genesis gives us every reason to think that it is, well, isn't it interesting that nowhere in chapter 11 do we find Nimrod's name?
- In fact, isn't it interesting that no one's name is connected to this vast building project? Isn't it interesting that, in fact, the only names in the whole chapter come from verse 10 onwards, but the great city builders are nameless and anonymous.
- Now, Wanda, do you see the irony in that? What is the irony in this chapter? Well, the whole point of the building project is verse 4, so that we may make a name for ourselves.
- [5 : 59] They want their names to be remembered, and yet they are blotted out. These guys took themselves so seriously, didn't they? Genesis is almost, almost kind of poking fun at them.
- You think you're great, it's saying, but for all your pride, it turns out that you are nobody. Now, that might sound harsh.
- After all, their work is groundbreaking. They're ahead of their time. They're developing new technologies, baking bricks out of mud rather than using kind of cut stone. The tower would have won all sorts of architectural and engineering awards.
- No doubt if they'd completed it, it would have been one of the wonders of the ancient world. But a few things in what they say to themselves in verse 4 tell us that their hearts were not in the right place as they set out in this work.
- Firstly, they want to build a city for themselves. They wanted to be able to look at their city and say, this is ours. We have carved out a personal, private corner of God's world for us.
- [7 : 14] It's a kind of independence campaign. They want to be independent from God. Of course, they have no right to do that. They can't do that.
- And what's more, not only do they want to become independent on earth, they want to be God's equals in heaven. And so in this city of their very own, they want a tower that reaches to the heavens.
- Not so much a skyscraper as a heaven opener. And if it wasn't enough to have their very own patch of earth, they want a stairway to heaven to go with it.
- And the implication is they don't want to simply sort of pop up to visit heaven or even just live there, but to invade and to take the throne and to rule at least alongside of God, if not instead of him.
- And if they have no right to a city of their own, well, certainly they have no right to God's throne. But these guys think otherwise, don't they? Their pride is shown in their reasoning.

[8 : 16] All this, all this is to make a name for ourselves. This whole thing is about human greatness, human glory, human ingenuity, and not God's glory, and not his name and his honor.

And finally, who is it all, well, who is it all for? It's for them. Who is it all against? Well, it's against the creator. God is here busy spreading people out.

He's filling his world again after the flood. But these guys say, we have to build this city, otherwise we will be scattered out over all the earth. So at heart, they just simply don't want what God wants for them.

This city is a rebellion against his design. They are putting God's blueprints for humanity through the shredder. In short, we see that in their hearts, while this city might be great, while their plans might be excellent, at heart, it is nothing less than a declaration of war.

So is Genesis really being harsh to condemn them? Or is it simply bringing them back down to earth? They've got this great inflated sense of their own importance, their own power, but who are they really?

[9 : 43] Well, we have no idea. We don't know their names. They are forgotten. Genesis is cutting these guys down to size. Because before the God of heaven and earth, who are they to say this city is ours for us?

Abraham Kuyper, not a household name, but once a prime minister and a theologian, not to occupations normally shared, he once said this, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine, mine.

So this is the conflict at heart, friends. These city builders are competing with his claim. They are saying ours, and Christ is saying mine.

So they are nothing less than glory thieves. They want what is Christ's. And is that not ultimately the pride that still runs through our human veins?

You have a feeling that if only we were God on the throne, well, certainly we would do it better. Thomas Nagel, the well-known atheist and philosopher of science, once wrote this, it isn't just that I don't believe in God and naturally hope that I'm right in my belief.

[11 : 11] It's that I hope there is no God. I don't want there to be a God. I don't want the universe to be like that. My guess, he says, is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition.

Now that's incredibly honest of him, isn't it? To admit that for all his brains and intellect and achievements and papers and honors that deep down his atheism is rooted in the fact that he just doesn't want God to be there.

In fact, he hopes that there is no God. Now perhaps you're here tonight and you're not sure about God or maybe you are quite sure that there is no God but at heart, well, could this not be why?

Nagel calls it a cosmic authority problem and I think he's put his finger on something important. Do you look at your own life and desperately want to cry out mine?

Is that what your life perhaps is all about? Trying to keep those boundaries nice and firm. Perhaps your great ambition is to have Sinatra sing at your funeral, I did it my way.

[12 : 31] My guess is it's not only atheists or agnostics who suffer from a cosmic authority problem but that it sometimes infects Christians to you. They say, don't they, a person's home is their little kingdom?

Well, when you step through your door into your home, I wonder, do you tell yourself that that is true? Do you treat your home as if it were yours, your kingdom?

Perhaps your home doesn't quite reach to the heavens but do you live as if it did? as if in your life, your home, your heart, that ye were God on the throne and not indeed God himself.

Hey friends, do we have a cosmic authority problem? It's a big question, isn't it? Probably our immediate reaction is to tell ourselves no, we don't, but this question, it gets behind what we want to tell ourselves into the kind of machinery of our hearts.

How do our hearts operate? So as we think about that, let's not settle for the easy answer because the Bible would tell us that at heart none of us wants God on the throne until we get to know him personally.

[13 : 53] By nature, we are all born glory thieves. And sadly, that is one of the only things that does unite humanity.

Interesting, isn't it, that we often hear celebrities and big names wishing for world peace. Well, in Genesis 11, that wish has come true. The world is at one, united, but united around a common enemy and that enemy is God.

It is a proud peace and we don't know ourselves well enough if we don't think we have ever, ever been part of that global conspiracy to topple God from his heavenly throne.

Such is our pride, a proud peace. Now, what does God do about it? Well, this is our second point, a calm confusion, a calm confusion.

Have a look at verse 5 with me, but the Lord, it says, Genesis, came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. Now, again, I think that Moses must have had quite a dry sense of humor because this is meant to be quite funny.

[15 : 06] Now, the tower, remember, was designed to, quote, reach the heavens. That's the phrase you can imagine plastered over all the publicity. So, from a human point of view, you can imagine these guys looking up and craning their necks and saying, brilliant, you know, a few more floors, a few more meters and we'll have done it.

We'll have got to heaven. All we'll need to do is push a button in the lift and we'll be there. Well, now swivel the camera around to a God's eye perspective and how does this tower look to him?

Well, what tower? You zoom in a bit, not, zoom in a bit more, get a bit closer, a bit closer, up to, that's the tower.

You know, that is the picture that Genesis is painting of God having to sort of crouch down from heaven, lean right in, get out his magnifying glass just to make it out. There's a similar contrast in Psalm 2 that we just sang from.

The nations and the rulers have a very serious meeting. They plan to throw God off the throne and his king, let's burst their bonds apart, they say. What does God do?

[16 : 20] He who is enthroned in heaven laughs. You friends, that is how our pride, our claim to be independent from him, our cosmic authority problem, that is how it looks to God.

You know, our sins are like a toddler tantrum. The monuments that we build to our own glory and greatness are like sandcastles by the sea. And that's not to downplay the seriousness of sin.

We've seen in the last few weeks of Genesis that that couldn't be it. It could be sin, could not be more serious. The point is that it simply does not threaten God whatsoever.

If we think that we can remove him from the throne, we simply haven't come to terms with who God is. We started our service with words from Psalm 113.

Here are the next verses. Psalm says, The Lord is exalted over all nations. His glory is above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, the one who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?

[17 : 33] Do these city builders not know who they are dealing with? Friends, do we know tonight who we are dealing with? How seriously do we take ourselves, our claims to know better than God or to have anything new or dangerous or radical to say about him?

He is God on the throne. His glory is above the heavens. This is his world. We are made in his image for his glory. And who are we to say otherwise?

His sin is serious? Genesis 11 is reminding us that sin is also crazy. It is madness. Yet in that context, how does God respond to sin?

Look what this great and glorious God says when he finally sets his eyes on this tower. In verse 6, the Lord said, behold, they are one people. They all have one language and this is only the beginning of what they'll do.

And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let's go down there and confuse their language so that they may not understand one another's speech.

[18 : 45] Now, what is God saying? Surely not that, you know, nothing now will be beyond their capacity to do or their genius to accomplish.

Again, as we've done before, we just need to set this in the context of the book of Genesis. Because this is not the first time that we've been given a stethoscope, a place against God's heart to hear his inner deliberations, his inner dialogue with himself.

Remember, in the wake of Adam's sin in the garden, how God said to himself back in chapter 3, behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.

Now, lest he reach out his hand and also take of the tree of life and eat and live forever, therefore, verse 23, the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

See, God's worry isn't that he might be threatened somehow, but that we might be at risk, a danger to ourselves. If after he had sinned, Adam had reached out and taken from the tree of life and eaten, he would, says God, have lived forever, but in his sin, as a fallen creature.

[20 : 05] In short, the tree of life would have condemned Adam to a kind of living death, and God would not allow it. So sending him away was a punishment, but it was also a mercy in restraining his hand, holding back his hand, from deepening the consequences of his own sin.

He's protecting humanity from the worst possible consequences of our pride. And I think that is what is going on here in chapter 11 as well.

It echoes what God said back in chapter 3, and it reflects that same constant, gracious heart of his towards even, fallen, and lost humanity.

It's as if he's saying, if I let them carry on, this will only be the beginning. Whatever form of rebellion they come up with next, well, it doesn't bear thinking about.

Unless we stop this now, no sin will be impossible or unthinkable for them to do. This is God restraining sin in his world.

[21 : 13] And brothers and sisters, that is a wonderful thing for him to have done. We don't need, do we, to go far back in history or look very far in our world to see that when human beings are given power and left free to do what we want, the results are catastrophic.

Who could have imagined that we would invent such things as concentration camps or the slave trade? Who would have imagined that we would be capable of such things, atrocities as we see coming out of the Ukraine in recent months?

Or closer to whom, you know, no one sets out in life today thinking that one day they will be unfaithful to their spouse or a harsh parent or a bully.

and yet time and time again we prove to ourselves as human beings that we have it in us, left to our own devices to become and to do all those things.

And Genesis reminds us that if God was not on the throne and if he did not keep back our hand from the worst that we are capable of doing, then that's what we would all do and be.

[22 : 27] If he did not restrain our sin, friends, we would not be here tonight. So praise God then for the calm confusion that he brought on that day to the city of Babel.

Calm because God is not boiling over, acting harshly. No, he sees, he calmly considers, he graciously acts.

But confusion because that is the result. Come, he says, let's go down and confuse their language. So they won't understand each other's speech. And so the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of the earth and they left off building the city.

Of course, it was to be built again, not Babel, but Babylon. And in Babylon's reign of evil, we see what Babel could have been, would have been, had God not intervened, nipped it in the bud at that point.

But what a wonderful reminder for the Israelites, who first read this book, and indeed for us tonight, that God cannot be outsmarted, cannot be outplayed by us, can't be dethroned from heaven, can't be uncrowned, the king of the universe, however hard humanity might try.

[23 : 48] Nor can he be provoked to uncontrolled rage. What good news that is, that he is constant, he is faithful to himself, even in judging sin, and in being gracious.

His loving grasp on our world and its events, its rights and its wrongs, is unbreakable. His good and gracious rule, it lasts, brothers and sisters, even in the great face of our great pride and sin, whether it be in Babylon or Britain, in Assyria, or in Aberdeen.

God rules wisely and mercifully and powerfully over all things for our good. And that does give us confidence, I think, finally in his promise of true peace, true peace.

We've seen him restrain sin. well, how is he going to deal with it? We've come, haven't we, to our fifth and final toledote there in verse 10 with the family history of Shem.

And by now, I hope that we've picked up what these toledotes are doing. We've seen throughout our time of Genesis that this book is almost obsessed with tracing one family line, one line of promise.

[25 : 12] promise. And so the family histories often come with genealogies or family trees like this one. And as we've come to expect, the family line being traced here leads to a promise.

The whole book of Genesis, and indeed the whole Bible, it rests on that promise and the prophecy in chapter 3 of Genesis in verse 15, that from the line of the woman, from Eve, God would bring forth a child who would undo the curse and destroy sin and overcome death by crushing the head of the serpent through whose lie he brought all those things into our world and our lives.

And it's that child of promise that God and Genesis keeps pointing us towards, tracing this line of descent down through the long generations. And we finish tonight with Abraham, chapter 26.

But the story of the Bible doesn't end until a son of Abraham, a son of Shem, and of Noah, and of Seth, a son of Adam, and the son of God, steps into world history.

Matthew will begin his gospel and the whole New Testament with these words, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

[26 : 38] Abraham. He is the one God promised so long ago who came and put away sin through his death, and who overcame death through his resurrection, and who has crushed the serpent's head, and who will come again to put it all right.

And so as we read these names in Genesis 11, and indeed in everything that we've read from chapter 1 to chapter 11, we are really reading, aren't we, the family history of the Messiah.

this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the promised redeemer who has saved us. And as we see that one last time, at least for now, Genesis holds out to us three wonderful truths for us to take home with us and reflect on.

Firstly, that it is in the promised redeemer, in Christ, that we find true glory. True glory. I promised, I pointed out rather, at the start, the irony that the only names that are recorded in this chapter aren't the names of the people he grasped at fame, and he wanted a name for themselves, but instead the names of the family of Shem.

See, it's in God's book, it's those who love him, whose names are kept for eternity. And so how do we make sure that our names live on, that our names are written in heaven?

[28 : 07] Well, not by trying to make our own way there and scratch our name in the wall, but going God's way, the way that he has given, trusting in the promised redeemer and rescuer who he sent to bring us there with him, Jesus Christ.

The fame fades. And names are slowly forgotten. But brothers and sisters, there is one place where your name will never die, and that is if it is written in the Lamb's book of life.

There is one kind of ink that will never fade, and it is the blood of Jesus Christ. And if your name is written in his book, with his blood, then there is no greater glory for you to have.

In this world, or in the next? Remember what Jesus said to the 72 when they came home rejoicing from their highly successful mission trip.

He said, do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. And Genesis reminds us this evening that if your trust is in the promised redeemer in Christ, then that is where your name and your fame and your glory is found in heaven with Christ in God.

[29 : 35] Friends, tonight, if you are longing to be known, longing for your name to be recognized, well, be known by God and have your name written down by him in his book, because there is no greater glory to be had.

glory. Second thing we can take home is peace. Remember what brought these people together was their common hostility to God.

It was a proud peace. But this list of names promises a very different kind of peace. Peace not based on who we are, but rather on whose we are.

Peace not based on a common enemy, but on a shared family. Because this family will of course lead to the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. And his kingdom, as we see in the New Testament, is made up of people from every nation.

He is truly where the world comes together, not to fight, but in great peace with each other and with God. That is ultimately the peace, isn't it?

[30 : 42] That people long for and wish for when they long that the world would have true peace, not a fragile and limited and narrow peace based on political alliances, but rather a lasting peace between all kinds of people, irrespective of language or nation or race, based on a person who does not change.

His heart is not like shifting shadows. As we've seen unfolded in this book, God is forever himself, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, full of steadfast love.

And so it's in him and in his son that we find true and lasting peace. And finally, freedom. This is where we began at the start of our series and it's where we finished as well.

We thought about how in the one true and living God we find freedom from fear of the world, fear of its false gods. And now we find in Genesis chapter 11 that is still the case.

There is still one king and he is still on his throne. And so we don't need to worry as we leave here, do we, that one day sin will get the better of God.

[32 : 03] The unbelief will win the day. He can handle the babels of this world and he can handle the chaos of our hearts. He can handle rebellions private and public.

He is not a small God. Genesis has taught us anything, let it be that. He is the king of the cosmos, of his world, of his people, and he will be forever.

And so it is in him alone that we find true security and freedom from fear. So I want to read these lines from a hymn.

I think really capture that, capture what Genesis has been preaching to us these last weeks as we close. This is my father's world.

Let me never forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet. This is my father's world. Why should my heart be sad?

[33 : 06] The Lord is king. Let the heavens sing. God reigns. Let the earth be glad. Let's pray to him together now.

God, our father, we do rejoice in you as we consider your character, who you are, the great sovereign king of the universe, he who rules things great and small.

And not only that, our father, but he who is good and gracious and loving and kind. He who does not wish us harm.

He who does not wish that one sinner would perish, but that all would come to true repentance and eternal life. Father, we thank you that in your heart we find limitless depths of compassion.

We find a love that knows no bounds. Father, how we pray that as we go out into our world that we would go confident in who you are.

[34 : 19] Lord, that you do not change and that you will forever be the ruler of your cosmos. Father, we pray that you would help us please to hold out that hope, Lord, to a hopeless world and a fearful world.

Lord, that those whom we know, those dear to us, might find the freedom that we have in you. Lord, a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

Father, we pray that in Jesus Christ, Lord, those whom we love, those who are in our lives, those perhaps, Lord, who are not yet in our lives, but whom you would have to hear about Christ, that you would open a door, Lord, that they too might come to know him who you promised.

The great redeemer, the serpent crusher. Lord, how we thank you for him. We thank you for his coming. We thank you that you were true to your promise. And how we thank you that in him you have written our names in heaven, our trust is in him.

Lord, let that be our hope. Let that be our glory and our boast, we pray. Nothing in this world, nothing in our hands, but only the cross of Jesus.

[35 : 30] This we pray and ask in his name. Amen.