

Making a Name for Ourselves



Genesis 11:1-9

Happy Mother's Day to my mom, my wife, and my gran, I hope you and all you ladies have a wonderful Mother's Day. I have a question for you. Have you ever shown up somewhere prepared or ready for something, and when you got there, you realized you were in the wrong place? That happened to me about a year ago when I showed up for Lakers for Christ. Normally, a student will text to ask me if I can do Lakers for Christ that morning. Unless I have a major commitment, I always try to say yes because there's nothing better than gathering with students before school to share the gospel. So I go into the middle school, and I am pumped to share with them a message I believe God has given me. I see Mr. Pile, and I say, "Hey!" He says, "Hey, uh, glad to have you. What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm coming for Lakers for Christ." He says, "No, we have a speaker and it's not you." I say, "A student texted me about it and it is this morning." He says, "Oh, it's probably the high school Lakers for Christ." I showed him my phone, and he said, "Yes, that's a high school student, it's

right across the parking lot at the high school." I began to panic! I had a book by Max Lucado with me called You are Special. I thought it would be the perfect lesson for middle schoolers. I had a package of stickers, stickers of stars and stickers of dots. If you haven't read this book, I encourage you to read it whether you're a kid or an adult. It's about a little boy named Punchinello. He's a wemmick, and he wants to be special. He sees the way to become special; it's by doing great things. The more you do the more stars you get. Of course, he's not a very good doer. He does a lot of bad and he messes up, he's not very good looking, so he gets a lot of dots. Dots are not good. He goes through his whole little life trying to get stars, but he only gets dots, so instead of happiness, it leads him to be sad. Then he meets a girl who tells him about Eli, and she said Eli made us. Little Punchinello takes a trip to Eli's house and there he realizes that he is actually made by a maker. It doesn't matter what everybody else says, how many stars or dots you have; what matters is what Eli, the maker, says about you. It changes Punchinello's life. I thought great middle school lesson, I'll come in with stickers and dots to put on them, I'll read them the book, and it will be great. Now I'm teaching high schoolers, and I don't have a backup message. I walk across the parking lot, panicked, holding a children's book, thinking what am I going to do. I just roll with it. I walk into a group of high school students, guys in football jerseys, and I open up this kid's book and begin to share the message of Punchinello and the wemmicks. I began to put stickers and dots on them, and spread the word that I was just going to be silly to them because they don't struggle with these kind of things, and I began to feel the weight of the room. I saw a guy wearing a football jersey who had a tear running down his face. I could see some cheerleaders boohooing. They connected with the reality that most of their life they are trying to seek the approval of everyone around them. Most of their life is trying to seek stars, trying to become great by doing great things, and it had failed them. They weren't ultimately happy. They were all pretty sad. I realized it wasn't just a book for middle schoolers; it was a book for high schoolers. High schoolers struggle with the same sorts of things. We want to be great by doing great things. That's how we think we build our identity, but as I left that high school, I soon realized that I am also Punchinello. When I walked across

that parking lot, I struggled with the same thing. When I walked into that room, I wanted them to give me stars rather than dots. I realized that is really a human problem. The human problem is that we were made by God. We are stamped with His image. That's our identity. Yet, in rebellion, we seek to make a name for ourselves. Rather than knowing that we're made by our creator and settling into that identity, we leave that and say I'm going to gather my own identity by building things, doing things, and we work and create in order to be something great. We try to work and build a name for ourselves, not realizing that we already bear the perfect name of God. We are already image bearers of God.

So, we're in this series about 20/20 vision and we're trying to deal with different topics. We're in the topic of man, and we talked last week about man being made in the image of God. Now, we're going to see a twist to that, a distortion of that. After the fall, we reject the image of God and seek our own image, our own name. We try to build our own kingdom. We try to take the gifts of God and leverage them to build our own kingdom rather than to use them, ultimately, for the Kingdom of God. Forgetting who we are, we try to become something that we can never be. Let's go to Genesis chapter 11 and see this project of making a name for ourselves.

Scripture

"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, '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, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.'"

In this text, we see that it really starts off well. We have a people who are migrating from the east. They're leaving Eden, there is a fall that's happened, and they're migrating. It seems they're doing what God told them to do because God said go, fill the earth, and spread out. Then we see they have one language for one people; they're all unified. The Bible is repeating this because that's not going to be true in a moment. In a moment, they're going to be divided, diverse. We will see it is actually God's doing, for God's good intentions. The people find this space, this place, the plain of Shinar. They all come together and say look at this place! This looks like a better idea than being dispersed over the whole earth. Let's come here and build something great. This valley of Shinar, the place of Babylon, will soon be called Babel. The people said come let us make bricks. They have this idea of settling down to build something for themselves. They want to build this city so they want to start making bricks.

I want to pause and ask a question. Is brick building bad? Is it wrong for them to want to build bricks? Is it wrong for them to want to build a city? Is it wrong for them to want to use what God had created to create something different? Absolutely not. Building bricks is not a bad thing; it's actually a good thing. It's what God actually intended. We see in Genesis 1 that the creation mandate was to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. But then, God says something...as you fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over it. That word, subdue, literally means to twist, to force, to assault, to refashion. God says I've made this whole earth filled with raw material. Now, as I have created you, I have created you to be a creator, and God invites man to use his or her imagination, to use the gifts God has given them, to take the raw material of the world and to twist it, mold it, to use it, to make it into something else. They could take rock and make it into bricks. They could take trees and make it into wood. They could take material, fashion it into glass, and make an iPhone that you are now hearing the sermon from. This is raw material that men and women have taken, twisted it, put force on it, and made it into something different. Why? Because of God's good intention. He's the creator, and he wants us to create under Him and for Him as part of God's good plan. It is good for them to want to build bricks. It's important for you to know as a human

being that God has created you to be a creator. He's given you talents, time, influence, and He wants you to use those to take the resources that He has and fashion those in ways that glorify Him. It is a good thing to want to build bricks. God intended us to build culture. Some of you think culture is all bad. No, God intended us to build culture and cities, and to have art and music. God intended all of those things. He stamped His image in us so that we would go and create. The problem is that sin distorts that purpose so that now rather than creating, subduing, and having dominion for the glory of God, we make bricks for ourselves. We don't use bricks for God; we use bricks for ourselves. Sin distorts the good designs of God. Instead of using our time, talents, and energies to love God and serve neighbor, we love self and exploit neighbor. We do that because we're sinful people amidst a rebellion.

So, it's not bad for them to want to make bricks, but it's their motivation and plan for the bricks that is a bad thing. They said, "Come, let us build bricks for ourselves... let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves." You see their motivation. Why did they want to build bricks? Why did they want to build a city? Why did they want to build a tower? It was because they wanted a name for themselves. Not a name that is dependent on God, not a name that is derived from God, not image bearers and children of God, they wanted to be the children of man. They wanted their own name, their own fame. They don't want to have to be dependent on anybody. They want to be independent, free, and autonomous to do what they wanted to do. They want a great name for themselves. Notice how they do it. They seek to build their name up by creating something great. They want to become great by creating something great, not realizing they're already great because someone great created them. It's the reverse, the rebellion; we don't want our inherited image of God, we want an image of ourselves. We want to be us. We want to do us. I'll be me and you do you, and let's just live life, have no regard for authority, not regard for God's Word; let's do things our own way. Let's build for our name's sake. They're building for identity. They wanted their own identity apart from God. There we find the fall of man and the rebellion of man. It's been happening in the garden, now it's happening in the tower of babel, and it's been happening ever

since. It's happening in your home this morning. There is a struggle with do I live for the glory of God, or do I live for myself. That's the very root of our rebellion. We want independence from God; my body, my rights, my life, I do what I want, I'm authentic to me, I'm true to myself. If I have a desire, I should exploit that, I should do that because I don't have to answer to anybody. I am my own person, I'm my own name, I'm my own identity, and I'm going to live my own life. It didn't just start with our culture; it's been happening ever since Adam and Eve stepped away from God in the garden. Creation says you have an identity from God; you bear His image. The fall says I don't know who I am, so I have to create an identity for myself. I have to do something great in order to have value. I've got to gain those little stickers like little Punchinello wanted to do. I don't want to get dots I want to get stars. I want people to applaud me and love me so I'm going to work really hard to build an identity so my name is great. Some of us are really hard, we have a great career, a great house, and everything looks great, but perhaps we're building bricks for the wrong purpose. It's not for the glory of God and the good of our neighbor, but it's for the good of ourselves. We want to be known, and we want to be made known.

We see in the text that we're building in rebellion against God's plan. Here's the thesis of creation. It is God made man and woman to fill the earth and spread His glory everywhere. That's the thesis that the whole world would know Jesus is Lord. That's what the cosmos is about. In creation, God made us to do that very thing. God told Adam and Eve to do that very thing; I want you to fill the earth, spread out, and be dispersed over all the earth. Notice what these people are doing. They build a city and build a tower to build a name for ourselves, lest we dispersed over the whole face of the earth. The whole reason they're building is to do the exact wrong thing that God had intended them to do. God wants them to spread out. They say, no, we're going to settle in. Instead of building out, we're going to build up. If you think about it, what does dispersed look like. Well, if you're dispersed, you kind of fade into the background. If you're dispersed, nobody knows your name. If you're dispersed, nobody is going to see you. Instead of dispersing and going into the background of God's grand story, they want to all get together and build up so that

everyone would see them and know them. They don't want to go into the background; they want to be in the foreground. They want to be right in front of the camera. They want everybody to know them and see their face. They want to build to do the exact opposite of what God had created them to do. They want to settle why God wants them to disperse.

I just want to ask. Are we in danger of doing the very same thing? God intends you to use your life to be about His glory amongst the world, amongst your neighbors, and amongst the nations. He wants you to use your time, talents, your brickmaking, whatever that looks like, for His name and His glory. If you do that, you're in the background. If you do that, you're not the star, not center stage; instead, you're in the back. Instead, you're dispersed. It's about someone else. It's about King Jesus, not King you. Here are a people that were meant to disperse; they wanted to settle in and build up. They wanted to do it for their own name's sake. God had given them talents, raw materials, and He said go be a builder, be a creator, but they build with closed hands rather than open hands. A closed hand means I am going to take my talents, my opportunities, the raw material that God has given me, and I'm going to close my fist and use it for myself. I'm going to build something great that will glorify me and my house. It's a close handed approach to how God made you. There's another way to live. Instead of having a closed fist, have an open handed approach towards God. You're saying, God, You're give me talent, abilities, time, influence, resources, and I want to have an open hand and use the things that You have given me to give them back to You and to serve the world. It's not about me; it's about You. It's about others. It's about the nations. You've created me to be a creator; I don't want to build my own kingdom and build my own name. I want to create Your goodness across the planet. I want to build Your Kingdom. I'm going to have an open handedness to everything I have and I want to use it. I want my life to be leveraged for the sake of Your glory. That's what you were made for. If you do anything other, you're going against the fabric of creation.

These people are building against the fabric of creation. They were meant for something greater, but they're living their lives for themselves. There is even an element of their own religion that they add to their own self-made

glory. It says that they build a tower that reaches the heavens. In the Hebrew, it doesn't really say it reaches their heavens. It could mean a tower for Heaven, a purpose for Heaven. Martin Luther would actually say the point of this is not that they were trying to get to Heaven; it was that they were trying to have an object of worship, a place they could mean, but they could do their worship. The reason is because everyone is a worshipper. You are a worshipper. Part of being created by God is you were made for worship. The truth is you will find something to worship if you don't worship the one true God. We live in a progressively secular culture. When I listen to podcasts, to people talk, and I see commercials, it is amazing how spiritual we are becoming. We're all on the calm app now. We all want to do mindfulness. We all want to chant. We're all into yoga. We are all into spirituality. We want to connect spiritually, but we don't want to have a creator God. We want to build our big house and have a yoga studio because we have that idea that we have to have something spiritual, but I don't want God. Here were a people who wanted to have a piece of Heaven, a piece of spirituality, but they wanted to disconnect with their creator. The reality is if you worship something other than God, that's an idol, that's idolatry. It's not going to fill those longings in your heart.

Here we have a people who are going against God. God says spread out, and they say no, we're going to settle in. God says spread My glory and they say no, we're going to build our own name and our own glory. We're going to have our own religion and do it our own way, and the purpose is to make our name great.

Now we're going to see the very grace of God. God comes in and He stops them in their tracks. Let's pick up the story in verses 5-9.

"And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth."

Here we see God in His grace, God in His goodness. He sees man trying to make a name for himself, and He says there is a problem, so God comes down. It's kind of amazing. You have man who's trying to build a tower to connect to God, trying to build a city towards God, and the whole gospel is we don't climb up to God, but God comes down to us in His Son, Jesus. God comes down to us, but there's a little irony in the story. You have this people building this great city with access to Heaven, and it says God has to come down to see it. It's like the Eiffel Tower looks really amazing when you're looking at it, but if you get in a spaceship, it's really small. The reality is that as human beings our greatest achievements are really, really small compared to God in the cosmos. It's like this people saying we've built up, look how great we are, and God is like I'm going to have to come down there and put My glasses on to see this because it's really, really small. You think it's great, but it, indeed, is very, very small. So, God comes down and sees what they're doing. They're trying to build a name for themselves. He says they're altogether and they're going to keep doing these kind of things. Nothing they propose is going to be impossible, so God intervenes; He says I'm going to do something. God comes and disrupts their lives. He disrupts everything. He confuses their very language so that they can't speak to one another. They were all speaking one language, and now, they have multiple language so they can't hear or understand one another. They are in utter confusion.

Why does God do this? He knows their project will not work. Just imagine if you played this story out a little bit. Imagine if they got this city and tower built who would be the king. I could imagine there would be a fight about it. When one person got to be the king, I would imagine there would be a war for another king to take over because we've seen human history. Things don't go well when we all want to have a great name; we end up killing each other. God knew if they built this city, they were going to tear it down themselves. So in His grace and mercy, God comes down and

confuses. He disrupts their lives to spread them out and He changes their languages. Now, God is forcing their hand to do the thing they were always created to do, and that is to fill the earth with God's glory. They want to settle, God comes in, disrupts life so that they will go, so they will fill, so they will spread, so they will subdue, so they will have dominion. He is forcing their hand to do the thing that they were actually created to do.

God causes a disruption. I just want to pause for a moment and ask how much has our life been disrupted over the last two months. For some of us, we've been building bricks, a career, building a name for ourselves, and all of a sudden, everything got disrupted and we've been quarantined to our home. There's been a disruption. Is it possible that a disruption has come so that we would get a lesson? The lesson is have we spent too much energy building our own kingdoms and names, and we haven't been paying attention to the reason we were created for. That is to live for the glory of God, to serve our neighbor, to spend time with people. We've become very good brick makers, but brick makers for our own name, and God says I want you to be a brick maker for My Kingdom.

If you zoom out just a little bit in Genesis, I remember in hermeneutics, Dr. Vicker first showed this to me and it absolutely blew my mind, so if you haven't seen this, just buckle up for a moment. If you look at chapter 10, you see for the first time in the Bible that the word, nations, comes up. It's never mentioned in the Bible except for Genesis 10. In Genesis 10, God names the nations, He names clans, and He tells who those people are and where they go. In Genesis 11, we back up and God describes how He made the nations. It was by confusing their language and spreading them out. Then we find in Genesis 12 that God is going to push play on His redemptive plan. In Genesis 12, we meet a man named Abram. What does He say about Abram? He first says I am going to make your name great. It's ironic. In Genesis 11, you have a whole people who want to make their name great apart from God, and God takes one man and says I'm going to make your name great, but it's going to be through Me. It's going to be because of Me, and in you, I'm going to bless all of the nations of the earth. You've got to check that progression. In Genesis 10, God names the nations, Genesis 11, God makes the nations, and in Genesis 12, God

promises to redeem all the nations of the earth. This story unfolds and it culminates with the birth of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus. What does He say in Matthew 28? Go therefore. He's talking to a Jewish group of disciples, looking at them eyeball to eyeball, and He says go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. In other words, because of My resurrection, the promise to Abram has come true today, now you stop settling up, stop building up, start going, and tell the nations they can have life in My name.

Then we see the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. The reverse of Babel happens. At Babel, God confused the language to spread the nations out, and on the Day of Pentecost, God empowered the apostles and they spoke in tongues and everyone from all the nations says, how is this happening? We can hear them speak in our own language. So God used language to spread the nations, now He's using language to gather all the nations together. We see in Revelation chapter 7 that people from every tribe, every tongue, every language singing and praising God. It is a picture that we can hear. The disciples not speaking English, and all the people could hear and understand them in their own language, culture, and dialect, everyone praising the Lamb of God.

The thesis of creation is that Jesus is Lord would go to the whole world. How does that happen? It first happens by the creation mandate, subdue, have dominion, and fill the whole earth. They wouldn't do that so God forces their hand. He uses languages and nations to spread out over the earth, but then God, through the church, is building something great. Now through the church, He is, by His gospel, calling all of the nations to know who He is and to worship His great name, so that all throughout the universe, all throughout the earth, there would be people who are praising the name of God, that the glory of God would fill the land as the water covers the seas. That is the glorious picture that we get to participate in.

Here's the question, believer. Here's the question, church member. Are you participating in that bigger purpose? Or, are you just like the people in Genesis 11? You've been given the gifts of God, the talents of God, the raw materials from God, you're making bricks, but with your bricks, you are building your own kingdom. You're building your own empire so that your

name would be great. See, that's the same struggle with us as Christians. We have a mandate. It's called the great commission. 'To go therefore and make disciples of all nations.' That doesn't just mean we get on a plane; it means, for one, we are the nations. We are the nations right here. Your street is part of the nations. Your neighbor is included in the nations. We don't just go somewhere; this is our neighbor and the nations. So, what do we do? We live a life connected to God's bigger plan for us. He created us to be a creator. What do we do with those gifts and talents He has given us? We make bricks, not to build our house up, but we use our time, talents, energy, vocations, and our families to leverage them for the sake of the gospel to our neighbors and to the nations so that God's glory would fill the earth because that's the bigger story. We've been given things, but they are to be used for greater things. We've been given instruments, but our instruments are not to just play single notes, they are to play a melody in a bigger song. We often just want to play our own thing.

We went to Grammy's house and they have a big piano. My boys go over there and we're playing Baby Shark. That's all I can play on the piano. Then my little girl, Evie Kate, come and sits down, and she just bang, bang, bangs on the piano. I say, "Evie, let me show you how to play Baby Shark." "NO!" She just keeps banging on the keys. "Hold on; let me show you so you can play a song we can understand and all sing along." With that little cute face, she says, "Huh-uh. I'm not doing whatever you say." She didn't want to play a song, a melody, or anything we could all collaborate in; she wanted to do her own thing independent of everyone else.

How much are we like that? We've been given a life, and we want to just say my life is mine. I'll do what I want, I'll play my own notes, and I don't care who likes it or what it affects. God says no. I've given your body as an instrument to play a certain note in a certain melody because there is a song above you, and it's a song that will last throughout the cosmos. You've been given a pen and we want to write a few little words about ourselves. God says no, the pen was meant to write a few lines in a bigger story that I'm telling that's going to go global and eternal forever. You've been given a poem to just hum a bar, but it fits with a bigger poem that's

been going from creation to new creation. You are a brick maker, but the point of your bricks is not to build your house; it's to build the kingdom of God. How do you use the things that God has given you? To leverage them for the sake of the gospel to your neighbors and to the nations for the purpose of God's name being worshipped by all people. That is the greatest thing. If you're not living for that and leveraging your life for that, then you are missing life. What God, perhaps, is doing right now in this moment in this time is disrupting everything! He is canceling the buildings. He is canceling the brick making because He says you have lost focus. The focus is not to settle and build up; the focus is to disperse and go out and fill the earth with My glory. That's what God wants for us. That's what God intended for us. It was grace that God stopped them in their tracks because He knew that no matter how high they built, it wouldn't be high enough because they were made for an out of this world Kingdom, an out of this world God. Until they found their joy in Him, they would always be restless. They would always be wanting, as Augustine says.

I just want to ask. As we've seen these last two Sundays, you're made in God's image, but you're also made for a purpose. You're created to create. You're supposed to make bricks. You're supposed to have a life that is filled with doing things. The question is what are you doing? How are you using your life? Are you using your life to build up your own kingdom to make a name for yourself? That is the great rebellion of man. All sin is wrapped up in that little thing. We want to make a name for ourselves. We don't want God's name and God's glory and God's stamp. We want our own name and our own glory so that we would be prized and valued. That is the rebellion of man. How are you using your life? Is it close fist? All my things belong to me and I going to use them for me. Or, is it open handed? My life is God's and I want to leverage it for God's glory and God's Kingdom.

I can still remember that panic I had walking into that high school holding a kid's book with a message for kids. But as I saw the tears in their eyes and then left and felt the weight of my own soul, I realized that I am Punchinello. I often forget there is a God who made me, and because of Him, I have identity. Because of Him, I have worth. I am great because of a great God, not because of the great things I do. I reverse that order and

I wake up and say I need to build something great because I want a star; I want somebody to tell me I'm worth something because then I will be worth something. But the opposite is true. God says you're worth something because I made you, because you are made in My image. Now go and do things for My glory, not to gain a name, but to spread a name, and that name is the name of Jesus Christ, the only one who deserve fame and glory spread to the nations.

So I just want to ask how you are using your life. If you're not a believer, if you don't know Jesus, maybe you realize you're living your life against the song of creation, the poem of creation, the building of creation, the thesis of creation. You realize this whole thing is actually about God's glory and not your own. What do you do? You stop making bricks for yourself. It's called repentance. You repent of your sin. You repent of building a name for yourself. Turn from that and turn to Jesus. You say, Jesus, because of Your life, death, and resurrection, because You rose again on the third day, I believe that You died for my sins, rose to forgive me of my sins, and I'm making You my Lord and Savior. By confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior, by leveraging your life to worship, love Him, and spread His glory, you get brought from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, and you can become a believer. If you are a believer, if you know Jesus, then maybe you realize you've been building bricks for the wrong project. You've been building up your kingdom for your name's sake. Open up your hands; turn loose of your talents, time, and everything so God can use you for His Kingdom and the spread of the gospel to the nations. That is also repentance. Repent of holding your life tightly and give all to Him to be used for the sake of your neighbors and the nations so that God's glory can fill the earth because that's what the creation of the world was made for. It's the creation mandate. It's the Great Commission command. If you're a believer, it is the thing to give your life for. All the stickers and stars we can accumulate, at the end of the day, will fall off. But what God says about us is what matters forever.