

The Wrong Way to Be Great

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles this morning, I want you to turn to Genesis chapter 11. Genesis chapter 11, it appears that when people come together and act corruptly, that God scatters them, that He breaks them up.

You see it again and again in Scripture. There's a term that is often used in the Old Testament about people who come together and act corruptly.

In Numbers 10 verse 35, Moses prayed that God would scatter or disperse their corrupt enemies. And the word there that's used in Numbers 10 verse 35 is the word in Hebrew puts.

It don't mean puts. That's how you pronounce it. And a variation of that word is used again and again in the same circumstances. In Deuteronomy chapter 4, Moses tells God's people that if they go after the idols, that God will scatter or He'll disperse them.

And they would be left, quote, few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. He tells them that again in Deuteronomy chapter 28.

[1 : 17] In 1 Samuel chapter 11, when Saul led the Israelites against the Ammonites and spent the night striking down the Ammonites in their own camp, God scattered the Ammonites.

Later when the Chaldeans invaded Jerusalem, they captured King Zedekiah. They massacred his sons in front of him and then put his eyes out.

In 2 Kings 25 verse 5, in that same scripture, it says all his army was scattered from him. The prophet Jeremiah warns God's people that God will scatter or disperse them among the nations. In other words, they will lose their centralized power and lose their land. The prophet Ezekiel uses the term more than anybody else in scripture.

19 times he mentions how God will scatter his people when they go into exile. And then in Genesis chapter 10 and chapter 11, we see that same word used for scattered.

[2 : 30] Used for the first time in scripture in Genesis. And it is used about a people who were full of themselves, that wanted to be great, and were willing to do whatever it took.

And because of that, God responds. And you might have guessed how. Let's learn from it. Genesis chapter 11, beginning verse 1, it says, 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 tops in the heavens.

And let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed, that's that same word there, folks, over the face of the whole earth. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man had built.

[3 : 39] 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.

Let us go down and there confuse their language so that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord dispersed, same word, dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left the building, 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.

There's a lot to unpack here, and so let me fill you in for just a moment. After the flood, the earth was to repopulate, and it was repopulated. And instead of multiplying the earth as God had instructed them to do, they became city folks.

City folks that gathered up together and didn't do anybody any good. They become wayward and wrong together. It was their hope to build such a colossal city that they would be invincible, that they would be unbeatable, that they would be completely satisfied, that no one could compete against them.

[5 : 05] There they would reign. No one could break them up. In the midst of that city, they would build a huge structure with the intent of using it for idol worship.

They did it in defiance of God. They did it without God's leadership. And they actually did it to oppose God. They were self-made, independent, even defiant.

And they ignored how God had told them to multiply in the earth because they wanted to be great. Now, don't misunderstand me.

There's nothing wrong with greatness. Unless your effort to be great is the wrong way or for the wrong reasons. What was wrong with what they did?

Well, first they had the wrong mentality. God is great, and if you want to be great, you better include him. And they didn't. They talked about it themselves, but they didn't bring the Lord into the conversation.

[6 : 08] And when prideful, self-seeking people pool their ignorance together, you got a big pool of ignorance is what you got. And they came up with the wrong way to reach their goals.

They should not have left God out. They should have been led by God. And we have it easier than they did, quite honestly, because we have the Word of God. God's given us His Word.

God's given us everything that we need to know. Everything that He wanted us to know is found in His Word. And if we ignore His Word and go about our way with our own plans, off observations that we make, or off the opinions of other short-sighted people, things are going to run askew for us. It leads to leaning on the wisdom of God instead. Excuse me. It leans to leaning on the wisdom of people instead of on the wisdom of God.

And you know what that is? It's humanism. It leads God out. It leaves God out. And things are going to go sideways when you do. They needed God.

[7 : 16] You need God. I need God. We need God. And to leave Him out is a wrong mentality. Not only that, but they also had the wrong materials.

It says they made their structure out of stone, bricks, and pitch. Now, don't misunderstand me. The martyr is not wrong. But the attitude behind it is.

You see, they wouldn't even use the stones that God had given them. But instead, they made their own. Now, to us, that does not seem odd.

Because most of our homes have some kind of brick or block or something. But it's obvious from the text that they didn't want God's help. They would do this themselves.

So they tear down the way that God made the stone. And they make it back their way. It is an effort to rely upon their own ability instead of upon the Lord.

[8 : 22] Now, to see this and to understand the significance of this, I want you to compare this to how the temple was built later. Because when the temple was built, they leaned on God.

And God provided every need they had. And they knew where the temple was to go. And they knew that that temple ground was holy. So the stone that they used on the temple was not shaped or chiseled on site.

Instead, it was shaped and chiseled off site at a quarry. 1 Kings tells us in 1 Kings 6 and 7.

Therefore, not any tool of iron was heard in the house while it was being built. It was holy ground.

It was God ordained. It was God provided. It was God honored. Now, I'm going to tell you something, folks.

[9 : 29] It's fun to be a part of a project like that. I mean, when God's all over something, and God started it, and God provided it, and God honors it, that's the way you do something as a people of God.

Let us never restore or build anything for us. Because, listen, folks, we're not doing anything that we do for our cause.

It's for Him. And if it's not for Him, we better not be doing it. It's not from selfishness. It's not from short-sightedness.

It's for God. God, and He'll provide, and He'll lead, and when He leads, we follow His lead. Use His materials.

Do it His way. They used the wrong materials. They did what they wanted to do. But not only that, they also had the wrong motive. In verse 4, it says, Come, let us build ourselves.

[10:40] The American dream is to work hard and to reach a level of prestige that you no longer have to work hard. And the problem with that is that a lot of people want it without working for it to start with.

And then many that work for it get there and quit. They don't take that opportunity that God's given them in their hard effort to serve others.

Instead, they start serving themselves. And the reality is they should have been serving God the whole time. And, folks, that don't stop until He takes our last breath.

Some think that if we have plenty, that we'll have joy. But I got news for you.

Joy does not come in self-service. Solomon was probably the richest man to ever live. And he had a problem. He began with a lot.

[11:43] He worked hard. He was good at it. And he made a bunch. I mean, you name it, and he had it. He talks about it in Ecclesiastes. He had everything that he wanted, and he experimented with everything that you can imagine.

Combined with that, he had 700 wives and 300 concubines. I'm like the little kid that said Solomon loved women and animals.

And somebody said, excuse me? Said he had 700 wives and 300 porcupines. I think he loved animals. But you know what?

In the end, he returned to his roots. And he said the way to happiness is not by having all those things. The way to happiness is obedience to God. It's doing it God's way.

I want you to look at the motive of these builders. It says, let us make a name for ourselves. We live in a day when everybody wants to be heard.

[12:54] And few want to listen. We are in days of rage. And there's a lot of emphasis upon self. Everybody wants to make a name for herself.

Or everybody wants to make a name for himself. Or for themselves. Or whatever. Or maybe they just need a little attention.

Somebody, please look at me. Please look at me. It's what it seems like the world's crawling out to. Instead of our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. It's become its hallowed be my name. My kingdom come. My will be done. It's all self-centered. It's what John calls the pride of life.

But I want you to be clear. The proverb writer said, in Proverbs 16, 18, pride comes before destruction and a halty spirit before a fall. If you think I've left my text, I haven't.

[13:55] What is the motive for them building? It is themselves. And Psalm 127, 1 says, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

They had the wrong mentality. They had the wrong materials. They had the wrong motive. And they had the wrong method. They said, we'll build ourselves a city and tower with its top in the heavens.

They were seeking to reach God instead of understanding that God was reaching down to them.

They wanted a tower with its top in the heavens.

You know what that means? When you look at the testimony of the Old Testament throughout, what that means is they wanted a high place.

In the Old Testament, you'll find it again and again. There's kings that come to the throne who tried to do right. But many times in Scripture, the way they speak of the weakness of that reign of that king is to say, but they did not remove the high places.

[15:08] They failed to take away the high places. You know what that's talking about? That is places that they put up in the mountains for idol worship. They always had a place to go to turn to another god and they never backed away from that.

With very little reform, they never backed away from that. They wanted high places with their tops in the heavens. Why did they want that?

I'll tell you why. So they could read the stars. They were not literally trying to reach to God as some would suggest.

They knew better than that. They built this on sea level. And the reality is they could have went to the top of a mountain and built it to try to make it even higher, to somehow get above the clouds, to somehow reach God, if that was their intention.

But the ancients of Babylon and the ancients of Assyria built ziggurats. Not cigarettes, ziggurats.

[16:18] And they are Terence-style pyramids. Some of them got much higher than the one you see on the picture. Archaeologists have found, when they went to the top levels of these ziggurats that they've dug up, they have found astrological charts on top of them.

So the top of these towers was no more than an observatory. Now, I love the beauty of the stars as well.

And we enjoy a good starry night when we had a little glimpse of northern lights and all those things. Nothing wrong with that. There's more to this. The very meaning of the word astrology means that there's a word in the stars.

It's the word of the stars. And so some people look to the word of the stars when they need to be looking to the word of God. Now, astrology uses zodiac signs.

And zodiac signs have been found on top of some of the ziggurats. Now, if you move that thought to Egypt and you mix in their animism, which is a worship of inanimate things, you mix in their polytheism, which is a worship of many gods, you're going to get into a real religious, godless mess.

[17:45] I want you to think about the Sphinx. Not the gas station. The structure. The most famous pyramid. And when you look at that, it's got the head of a woman on it.

That's Virgo. It's got the body of a lion. That's Leo. Virgo is the first sign of the zodiac. Leo is the last sign of the zodiac.

And the placement of the Sphinx, they're close to the Nile River. A lot of religious overtones there. They felt like the Nile provided life. That it was a life water.

And close to the Nile, thought of as supernatural area among Egyptian pagans. They say that's supposed to be the meeting points of the zodiac.

The first and the last. The beginning and the end. With that thought, that all of life starts on the banks of the Nile, the Sphinx is a pivotal point of life.

[18:55] And when you read Genesis 11, that's exactly where these people are bowling. That's where they're at.

They called it Babel. When we think of Babel, it's when somebody talks too much and ain't making a lot of sense. They're just babbling.

But in reality, the word in the original language, Bab means gate. El means God. Literally, it was a place, the gate of God.

They were making this to be a gate for their own man-made gods. And their man-made gods and our man-made idols will lead us all down a highway to hell.

God's not silent about those things. God's not asleep on this. Notice in verse 5, it says, And the Lord came down, and don't pick up, I hope you pick up on the irony here.

[20:01] And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man had built. Man's greatest efforts to reach out to God, to somehow get to his level, could only be seen when God came down.

Their greatest attempt of self-exaltation doesn't come close to an omnipotent God. And in verse 7, it says that God said, Come, let us go down.

So here we see in Genesis, we've already seen it in the garden, but here we see in Genesis again, point to the Trinity. The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Right there in the very beginning. And don't be concerned when you read about God saying nothing will be impossible for them. You know what that really is saying? He's saying they think they can do anything, and if they think they can do anything, they'll continue on this bad, wrong, demonic path that this shows.

He said, So therefore I will scatter them. They were wrong in many ways. They had the wrong mentality. They had the wrong materials.

[21:17] They had the wrong motive. They had the wrong method. Do you remember what God told them to do after the flood? After the flood in Genesis 9 verse 1, He said, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

God gave a command after the flood to refurbish the earth. That man were to spread out, to grow out, not up. And instead, they wanted it their way.

They didn't spread out. They stuck together and became a problem. They believed that if they stuck together and tried their best, they could find security apart from God.

And anytime you're selfishly motivated, anytime what you do is filled with pride, anytime what you do is going against God, your efforts are going to be just the opposite of what you hope for.

The great towers of accomplishments still leads to loneliness, folks. Because we can't do it on our own. We wasn't made to do it on our own. And when we do it, God will respond.

[22 : 31] So if you've done it wrong, you look at your life and you see things that you built in your life and you feel like you've done it wrong, trying to build your life up in the wrong way, the question is, is there any hope?

Because this passage kind of leaves us hopeless. So unlike other passages, we're not blessed with the angel guarding a forbidden way, protecting it, keeping us from doing harm.

We don't see what we saw earlier with a rainbow covenant, a promise that God would lift his wrath from the earth. There seems no ray of hope here. There seems no token of grace as we've seen before.

But I want to be clear about something, folks. Where God is, there's always hope. There's hope. I want you to notice that when humanity used all their efforts to come together and to go up, God stepped down and scattered their efforts.

And the world was scattered and the languages became many. What could ever unite that together again? Well, this is in Genesis chapter 11.

[23 : 44] When you turn the page and look at Genesis chapter 12, God begins to build one nation which will become his channel of blessing.

It's a foreshadowing of what we see later in the New Testament that develops it that much fuller. You remember what happened in the book of Acts?

The end of the Gospels, Jesus dies. Three days later, he rose again on the earth 40 days and then he ascended. And before he ascended, he promised that the Holy Spirit of God would come.

Christ had promised after his ascension that the Holy Spirit would come. And in Acts chapter 2, verse 1 through 6, we see that happen. I want you to notice what happens. It says, When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.

And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind. And it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.

[24 : 51] And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

Get this now. And at the sound, the multitude came together and they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

What sin had scattered in Genesis chapter 11, the Spirit of God brought together in Christ in Acts chapter 2.

What was scattered that made many languages, what spoke a common language was the hope that's found in Christ Jesus.

That's what life in Christ does, folks. What is scattered and confused becomes united and clear. Jesus Christ changes everything. And you just wait until we get to heaven.

[26 : 03] Because what's broken shall be fixed. in all the languages of the world, there's only one name that is above every other name and that's Jesus.

As Scripture tells us, every tribe, every tongue, every nation, Jesus is Lord of all. All are united, not in self-efforts, all are united in Christ.

So the question is this, what are we building? As individuals for our life, what are we building? Are we building status?

Are we building position? Are we trying to work our way to God? If any of that is true, it's a vain attempt that leads to confusion.

If you really want to reach God, do you know how to do it? Go to the Word of God. Go to the Word of God. Luke chapter 9, verse 23, Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself.

[27 : 17] Just the opposite of what they did in Genesis 11. Let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. It's just the opposite they were doing in Babel. Don't build yourself up.

Lift Jesus up. Don't live for you. Live for him. Don't be defiant in your ways. Surrender your life to Christ.

That's where the hope is. That's where the joy comes in. That's where things happen that make a difference for all of eternity.

With every head bowed and every eye closed, I want to ask you something this morning. Has there ever been a time in your life when you've surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ? When you've asked him to forgive you of the things you've done wrong? When you've asked him to change your life and you've surrendered your life to follow him? If you've never done that, I'm telling you, you'll spend your life in a tower of confusion trying to build something that you'll never be able to accomplish, trying to find a peace that you won't find outside of Christ.

[28 : 36] Our only hope is Christ. He made the ultimate sacrifice so that we wouldn't have to and we could spend eternity with him. You come to Christ today.

Maybe you've done that privately, but you've never acknowledged that publicly through baptism. I encourage you to come this morning. We're baptizing next week. I encourage you to come and obey God as he speaks to your heart and life.

And maybe you're here and God's leading you to be a part of this church. Will you follow his will and his way? Just do what he tells you to do and trust him with the rest.

Or maybe there's matters in your life, burdens in your life, decisions in your life that you're struggling with today. Will you lay that before the Lord?

Don't try to build your own way out of it. Trust him with it. You can do that where you'll stand or you can do that with a pastor praying for you or you can do that at this altar.

[29 : 39] I just want you to leave here knowing that you've done everything that God told you to do. That you've been obedient and you've followed him. Lord Jesus, I love you and I thank you for your word. I thank you, Lord, for what you show us, dear God.

Through the confusion, through the mismanagement, through the bad decisions of others. Help us learn, Lord, not make the same kind of decisions. Help us do it right.

Not for our glory, but for your glory, oh God. Lead us, Lord, I pray, right now to simply be obedient as you speak to our hearts and lives. In Jesus' precious name, amen.

Amen. Thank you. Thank you.