

Building Towers or blessing nations?
Sermon on Genesis 11:1-9; 12:1-4a; Acts 2:14-21

Teaching Time #1

Hello everyone, my name is Autumn Seacat and I am the Associate College Minister here at Highland and I am so excited to be teaching the word tonight. The name of my message is up or out and the question is are we building towers, or are we blessing nations, because in scripture we see that for believers there are two options and we are going to look at two different stories in the book of Genesis to see them, but the underlying question that I want to talk about it how do we live a life that matters? We all want that. We all want to get to the end of our lives and know that we made a difference, that we did something that made an impact in the world and on those lives around us. So I want to keep that in mind as we think of these two options, building towers or blessing nations because only one of them leads to a fulfilling life that really matters. But before we get into that, i'm sure you're familiar with the poem by Robert Frost called The Road Less Traveled, it is the most searched poem in America and he writes about how there is this road and it diverges into two different paths in the woods and he says that he took the road less traveled and it made all the difference. This poem is used at graduations and other things to glorify individualism, to encourage people to stand out and not just follow the crowd, to be original, and its seen as a great thing. However, I was talking about this poem with my neighbor who is an english phd student and he told me how a lot of people dont think that this is at all what the poem is about. Instead of rejoicing over the road that he took, its really a poem of regret. It was actually titled originally the other road, so its about getting to the end of that road and wishing they would have taken the other one, of regretting this path because they realized it was the wrong one and didnt lead them where they wanted to go. And its scary because if we are honest this is our fear. None of us want to get to the end of our lives just to realize that we took the wrong road. That our lives didn't really matter and that it was all just a waste. And in Genesis 11 & 12 which is where we will be for this first teaching time, we see very clear that as people we have two different paths we can walk down, and we can walk down the path of building towers which always leads us down the wrong path, or blessing nations which leads us down the right one, to a life of fulfillment that matters and makes a difference.

So as you turn to Genesis 11 I just want to give us a brief synopsis of the first 10 books of the bible that lead us to our stories today. In Gen 1 we see God create the heavens and the earth, he speaks the world into existence, he creates the heavens and the earth and we see his power. He creates humans and he commands them in 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply and increase in number and fill the earth. Then in Genesis 2 we see creation in a different way, God is personal, he grows things with his hands he breathes life into humans and we see his relationship with Adam and Eve. The next chapter Gen 3 i'm sure you are familiar with its the story of Adam and Eve being tempted by the serpent and eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil out of disobedience to God and so they are cast out of the garden because there sin has separated them from God, and it says they were cast out of the garden to the east. Then it's the story of their children Cain and Abel, and Cain kills his brother Abel out of jealousy because his offering is seen as more pleasing to God and it says that he is cast out to the east.

And then comes the story of Noah and the ark- the world had gotten so evil and corrupt that God wanted to wipe them out and start over and because Noah and his family were righteous, he saved them. And there is hope, maybe now the world will do it right and choose to be obedient to God and follow him, but what we see is that humanity continues to follow their own way instead of God's and that's where our story picks up in Genesis 11, with the descendants of Noah. And I want us to see this way, the way of building towers and see what it looks like to walk down the wrong path

So let's pick up at verse 1: Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. **2** As people moved eastward,^[a] they found a plain in Shinar^[b] and settled there. **3** They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. **4** Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

So from reading this we see some pretty clear signs that the people in this story are on the wrong path.

1. They are distant from God and it leads them to self-reliance.

One of the first things that we learn about the people of Babel is that they are far from God. The passage says that they settled eastward, and scripture says the same thing about Adam and Eve and the story of Cain and Abel that they were cast out to the east. If you've ever heard of the book East of Eden it's this idea that as they move east, they are getting farther and farther away from God's ideal and him. So we see that though people once were walking with God, now they are walking from him and this leads to them being self-reliant. Two times in the passage they talk to each other, not to God, and they say "Let us" "Let us" Let us build a tower and make a name for ourselves. They sound a lot like us don't they? If I want something I need to do it myself, the only person I can really trust is me. So they are distant and self-reliant.

Then we see that:

2. Their security is more important to them than obeying and trusting in God.

We see in this passage that they decide to build a city, and while a city might not seem like such a bad thing, in Gen 1:28 and 9:1 he tells them the same thing, to be fruitful and multiply and increase in number and fill the earth. So he called them to go, but they decided to stay put and build up. They don't obey God because they are afraid of what might happen to them if they do, so they put security over trusting in Him.

Lastly, we know that they are on the wrong path because:

3. They care more about others looking up to them than they do about going out to others.

Like I said a second ago, they disobeyed God and didn't go out into the world like he commanded them to do because they were afraid and wanted security, but they also didn't because they wanted others to look up to them. They say in this passage that they want to make a name for themselves and to make their own name great. They want to have power, and have others look at them in jealousy and amazement. So they build a tower up and they thought that it reached up to the Heavens, they thought that they had done it, that they were really amazing. But what we see in the next few verses is that was never going to be true.

In the next few verses starting in verse 5 we see how God responds to them:

5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. **6** The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. **7** Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." **8** So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. **9** That is why it was called Babel^[c]—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

So God comes down and sees how they are united for evil and to make their name great and he tears down the tower and confuses their language and pushes them out. And when I read this passage in the past I always wondered if God was insecure or scared of them that they were really going to be too powerful to him and from studying this passage it's very clear this is not the case. God comes down it says, the irony of that is that the people thought they had made it to the heavens and found security and made a name for themselves, but God had to come down from the Heavens just to see it- it's a reminder that no tower or thing we do apart from God will ever be enough. Then we see him respond almost mockingly to their self-sufficient attitude by saying "Let us" go down almost as if to say that it's cute they thought they could do this apart from God. So he tears down their tower and pushes them out and confuses their language which we know from the story of Noah that God had the power to just wipe them out, but instead we see an act of grace on His part. He pushes them back out into their calling to be fruitful and multiply.

So we see very clearly that at the end of this path- to build towers and try to find security and make our names great, there is only a broken tower with rubble everywhere and nothing to show for it. And if this story reminds you a lot of your life and how you spend your time, I want to be very honest and let you know that you are on the wrong path that at the end of life there will be nothing to show for it, but I want us to see that this path is an option for Christians, but it's not the only one and it's not the one God wants for us.

Right next to Genesis 11 is a story in Genesis 12 that I want us to look at. It is no accident that these stories are right next to each other because I think God wants us to see these two different options. So let's look at the next story, the call of Abraham because he shows us what it looks like to go down the right path- the path that leads to a life of fulfillment that really matters. So I want you to hear the difference in this story and the one we just looked at.

Look at verse 1: The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. **2** "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.^[a] **3** I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."^[b] **4** So Abram went, as the Lord had told him

So from reading this we see some pretty clear signs that Abraham is on the right path, that he is living a life going out, and blessing nations instead of just building himself up like the story before.

First we see that

1. He is willing to give up everything to follow God in obedience.

In the last verse it says that God told him to go, and he did. God called him in verse 1 to leave everything he had ever known, his security, reputation, family, wealth, etc. and give it up to follow God to a place that he hadn't even told him yet. And Abraham valued being obedient to God over all of those things.

Then we see in this passage that:

2. He is not under any illusion that he can achieve anything of lasting significance apart from God.

Unlike the story before where they thought they could make a name for themselves and find significance and blessing apart from God, Abraham knows that it is God who makes a name. God tells him that he will make a name for him, not the other way around, and he will be the one to bless him and bring a nation out of him.

And then third, we see that:

3. He experiences the blessing of being a blessing to others.

We see that God tells Abraham that he will bless him, but that it is so that he will be a blessing to the nations. We see that as we are a part of looking out to others, we experience blessing and I don't mean health, wealth, and prosperity but real lasting meaning and fulfillment that comes in being a blessing to others.

So what is that the end of this path? What we see is a fulfilled life that leads to blessing of others and one that makes a real difference.

And the cool thing about this is that even though Abraham had no idea what obeying God would lead to, what we know now is that through that obedience he brought the Israelite people and through that line he eventually brought Jesus who was the ultimate blessing to the world.

So it's obvious that the right path is the one of blessing nations the one of looking out to others instead of up and how we can get higher and higher up. And we are going to spend the next teaching time looking more practically about how we can do this- and the key is the spirit of God, but before then we are going to discuss questions with our tables, and I just want us to be really honest. You don't do yourself any favors by holding back the truth. Looking at the signs that you are on the first path, looking up at your own life and tower or the second, looking out to be a blessing to others which one sounded more like your life? Which path are you on? Because two roads diverge and the path that you choose to take is going to make all the difference. So let's go ahead and discuss and I'll come back up in a little for a shorter last teaching time.

Teaching Time #2

Hey everyone, I hope you had enough time to finish up the questions, but if you didn't you will have some time at the end of this teaching time and you can go back. Well, we talked about how to live a life that matters and how that doesn't come through building towers and going up

but blessing nations, going out. And I hope that you were able to honestly discuss which path you are on right now. But like I said, I want us to look more at how we practically can walk down the right path and the key is obedience and being full of God's spirit.

There is this really cool passage in Acts 2 that I want us to look at. It's the story of Pentecost and what I think is amazing is that it is really the reversal of the story of the tower of Babel, and it's the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all the nations. And so I want you to look for those things as we look at this story. So in Acts 2 the believers are all gathered together and Jesus had already come into the world and died on the cross and rose again and is up in heaven, so now the disciples are waiting to see what Jesus wants them to do- they like us are waiting to know what path to walk next and we see how they are united together, like in the story of Babel, except instead of uniting for evil and for their own name, they are gathered to worship and for the purpose of uniting around Jesus's name. And then the story says that they hear a loud sound and it's a violent wind blowing from heaven and fills up the room that they are in and then they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire split and rest on each of them. And it says that they were full of the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. And there are lots of Jews from all over the Roman empire from different provinces staying in Jerusalem to worship God and they hear this commotion and go see what's going on and they hear all these different languages being spoken by the believers and hear the good news about what Jesus has done for them being proclaimed. And it's this amazing reversal of what we saw in the story of the tower of Babel. In that story they were united for evil and so God confused their languages, but at Pentecost with the arrival of the Spirit, God undoes this- and now all languages and people can be united around Jesus and what he has done for the world.

But we also see the fulfillment of what God had promised Abraham come true, that he would be a blessing to the nations, because with Jesus' sacrifice and the coming of the Spirit, the whole world is able to be blessed.

So Peter responds to everyone after this amazing thing that happens and explains it to them because some people are amazed, but others just think they are drunk, so let's look at verse 14: 14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. *and this is the key verse for us* 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

So it's clear that because of the Spirit's arrival, we can now play an active role in being a blessing to others and going out. What we see in this passage is that the Spirit gives them the ability to share the gospel, to cross cultural barriers, to do amazing things in His name and

more. This passage shows us that it is the Spirit of God that leads to salvation and leads us, we don't have to be afraid of wasting our lives when we are full of the spirit, because He will guide us and call us to look out to others instead of to ourselves. But we have to be obedient to him. Because even though all of this is true- that the spirit of God is working in powerful ways and wants to work through us- we have to choose to walk with him. So I want us to see some really practical ways to walk with the Spirit in obedience down the right path.

First, we see in this passage that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. Some of you tonight have never surrendered to Jesus. You have built your whole life around making a name for yourself and finding security in your own strength and you think you don't need God. You think that if you just do enough good over bad that you can build yourself higher up and eventually you will reach God and find satisfaction, but what we saw in the story of the Tower of Babel is that no matter how hard you try, you will never be able to get there without Jesus. That's the gospel, that we could not reach God on our own so Jesus came down to take the place of the death we deserved for our sin, and tonight you just need to accept that and call on his name. Because if you want to have a life of purpose and meaning you will only find by walking to Him, and others of you need to re-commit to following him.

Others of you, you have been walking with Jesus for a long time, but you are so busy worrying about going up in your own life and not out to others that you have no idea what it looks like to be full of the spirit. So tonight, I want to get really practical and talk about some certain ways to be full of the spirit and to walk out on the right path, the path of obedience tonight.

1. Some of you need to put your bricks down. Your whole college experience has been all about building up your own name and finding security- your doing that by obsessing over Instagram, trying to find security in a relationship, or a third major and while some of these things aren't bad it's not bad to want to make good grades and to date and to care about your future, but if these things are more important to you than obeying God- if they are preventing you from following Him and being full of His Spirit- then you have to be willing to give them up or you will never be full of his spirit.
2. Others of you have sin in your life that is quenching the spirit in your life- you are addicted to pornography or other things and tonight God is calling you to confess that, to stop living in unrepentant sin and to walk with his spirit.
3. Others of you need to be willing to walk out in obedience and stop just letting others bless you, and you need to obey the spirit and be a blessing to others to see others come to know Jesus- and you need to lead a life, you need to share the gospel with your roommate, you need to stop hiding the fact that you love Jesus at work.
4. Some need to join a church- you need to stop hopping back and forth to different churches and plug in and serve and grow in the spirit and loving others in community.

Because the thing about obedience to God is that it's not always comfortable. A lot of times we have to give something up for Him, and sometimes we have to leave what's comfortable to walk where the spirit calls us to go. But when we turn our focus from ourselves and place them on

God and being a blessing to others, we will always find the path to life to the full- if you want to live a life that matters, then youve got to look beyond yourselves. I wish that tonight I could tell all of you what your next step is, but you need to listen to the Spirit in your own lives. SO during our discussion time I want you to really talk honestly about what he might be calling you to do.

And I just want to close our time by talking about the example of Jesus Christ- the ultimate example of what it means to look out instead of up, and one who wanted to be a blessing to the nations. Jesus came down from his throne in heaven as the son of God and came down to earth and was born as a baby. He lived a life serving others, teaching them, not overthrowing the rulers of the world but making himself nothing for our sake. He then gave his life up to die on the cross for the death we deserved, taking our place and rising again and ascending up in heaven and ultimately blessing the whole world so that all who call on his name can be saved. And he is our ultimate example, I want us to read what he told his disciples when they found out he was going to die and they didnt undertand because they are like us, they were focused on Jesus going up in the world, being glorified, but Jesus corrected them and made it clear that his purpose was to go out to the world and thats our call too. In Matthew 16 he says to them and to us,

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **25** For whoever wants to save their life[f] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. **26** What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

If we want to walk down the path of building ourselves up and looking only to ourselves, building our towers- we are going to lose everything, because no matter how hard we try to hold on, those things will never last and we will always end up down the wrong path. But if we want to gain life- if we want to walk down the right path and life a life that matters we have to be willing to give up everything to walk in obedience with his spirit- because we will be a blessing to others and find true life and meaning.