

Making a name for ourselves

Sermon – Melville Junction Church

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- We are in the last week, of the second chapter of the story of God and us (paradise lost).
- Up to this point we have been telling the story of God and man as told in the bible.
- We have been covering familiar ground, stories we have known from childhood but have tried to understand them from a different perspective.
- We have tried to understand them as part of a **larger story, what was Gods intention for man, what is Gods part in this story and how has man responded.**
- The aim of going through the biblical narrative like this is to give us a clear understanding of **what the gospel is.**
- **What is it we are doing here on earth,** what are we calling people into; when you are into it how you should interact with God and the people around you.
- So we have looked at Chapter 1(wholeness) – **Gods perfect plan for the world and humanity,** a world where people live in shalom with God and each other. An abundant life of no suffering death or illness (how the story starts and how it ends)
- A life that involves **freedom to choose this life,** not to have it forced upon us.
- This choice led us into chapter 2 (paradise lost), the choices man faced were **life as God intended... vs... life away from God.**
- **Man consistently chooses away from God** (the direction away from God is described as east).
- God continues to provide man with the choice to walk with Him - **some people do but the majority continue to walk away.**
- We looked at the choices made by **Cain and Able,** Cain's path leads to building of an Empire without God , from his choice to put the fruit of his labour in the place of God...**we see the decline of humanity.**
- In contrast the line of **Seth** (Abel replacement) **people start to follow God.**
- The next person in this story is **Noah,** we see how Noah remained faithful in a generation that had completely turned away from God.



- Noah's faithfulness **saved his family and all the animals**. We see a picture of a God who wants to save, and the actions of one man's obedience allowing many to be saved.
- A new age is birthed, a covenant is set up between God and creation Gen9:1-

¹ Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth... Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

- Chapter 1 – **Wholeness tells us how God intended the world to be.**
- Chapter 2 – **Helps us make sense of why the world is not as it was intended to be. Why the world is broken?**
- Now we come to the last part of this chapter - a **deeper look into our humanity** and the choices we make that lead us away from God.
- Turn to **Genesis 11:1-9 (Tower of Babel)**
- Read text...
- We have gone from **Gen 9 (Noah) to Gen 11, Gen 10** gives a genealogy of the descendants of Noah, in this genealogy there are different tribes with separate languages already. **Gen11 gives us an account of how this came to be.**
- So **don't be confused** if you read it, it is not chronological because the story of Babel takes place somewhere inside the Gen10 genealogy.
- This story seems to look at:
 1. **Mans perspective on the one side.**
 2. **God's perspective on the other.**
- Let's look at **mans perspective** first to get a better understanding of ourselves...
- The first thing to note is that man is **moving eastwards**, Adam moved east out of the garden, Cain moved east away from God's presents and **now the descendants of Noah are moving east.**
- This **easterly direction** generally shows a movement **away from the garden**, away from life as it should be.
- **So how are they moving away?**
- In the story of Cain, **God tells Cain that he will be a nomadic wanderer** – so what does Cain do?
- **He settles down and builds a city**, he builds so that he no longer needs to be dependent on God (explain).
- In this story (Babel), God **told Noah and his family to be fruitful, to increase in number and fill the earth (They would live in the tents of Shem).**
- God wanted them to go out and fill the earth but **they chose to settle down** and build a city.
- They settled down and built a city so that they **did not have to be scattered over the face of the whole earth.**



- **God's wisdom** was to **fill the earth**, their wisdom was to settle in one place and build a city.
- Now they did not just build a city **but also a tower** that would reach the heavens so that they could **make a name for themselves**.
- This is a **story** about man **deliberately disobeying God**, the same God who saved them, set up a covenant with them – now they are aspiring to reach the heavens.
- The last time that this happened was with **Eve**, the fruit from the tree of knowledge...the temptation was that it **would make her "like God"** knowing good from evil.
- This is an **age old dynamic**, God giving us life, showing us the way but we tend to choose away from God towards our **own promotion - to be more like God**.
- It boils down to **trust** and **pride**...
- We **don't trust that God's** way is the best way, that he has our best interest at heart and that he ultimately knows what is good for us.
- We choose to **trust in the work of our own hands**, trust the technology of the day, the things we can control and manipulate.
- Ultimately we try to create a **society that does not need God**.
 - Think about how we still **do this today**, how God has left us a direction or a word.
 - God has said trust me in this or that - but we can't.
 - We help God out; **we put structures in place that ensure we don't need to be dependent on God**.
 - We are not secure in the fact that **faith in God (through Jesus) is enough** - so we **build, create, and advance** in directions **away** from God to make a name for ourselves.
 - To **leave a legacy** that does not necessarily involve the will or plans of God.
 - Think about some of the things...**if you only work hard enough**, if you **make enough money** or **have enough possessions**, if you **study hard** you may make a name for yourself.
 - We create a story that involves us reaching the heavens, being noticed, **ensuring that we are in control of your own future or destiny**.
 - The **more security** you have, the **more control** you have over your future.
 - **How does God fit into this future of ours?**
 - The reality is that **most of us live in this space**, a place where **our comfort and financial security supersedes the will of God**
 - So we **create a god that can fit into our world**, our comfortable life style etc.
 - Instead of embracing the **vast open abundant destiny that God** has for us we settle for a confined cramped unfulfilled destiny of our own making.
 - **This tower they were building**, in Mesopotamia on **the plains of Shinar** would have been known as a **ziggurat** which was a tower that reached the heavens.
 - Typically, at the **bottom** of the tower was a **temple** and at the **top** of the tower was a **bed**.

- This tower was built with a stairway around the outside and was literally a **stairway to heaven**.
- The **bed** on the top was for the **god to sleep on**, and the **stairway was so that the God could descend** from heaven to earth and accept the offering in the temple and then bless the people responsible for the offering.
- **It is a way of controlling the god**, he has to come down their stair way and bless the work of their hands.
 - So God has **made a covenant with his people**, part of this covenant was that they increase in number and fill the earth.
 - Instead of doing that they do the opposite so that they don't have to be scattered over the earth.
 - They use the **technology of the day, brick and bitumen** to build a structure that could control god.
 - **Fit god into their world.**
 - They still want to be in a **relationship with god, they want the blessings of god** but they don't want to follow the way of god.
 - **How much of our lives look similar to that...?**
 - God has asked us to **look out for the poor, to go into all the nations and make disciples, to live such good lives that people will see our lives and turn to God.**
 - He has asked us to **love one another**, even our enemies and to have **no other Gods before him.**
 - He has asked us to make **the Kingdom of God a reality here** and now - but we live to make **a name for ourselves.**
 - To **build up our company**, get promoted, outsmart those around us.
 - To build **bigger houses**, drive larger cars and have more expensive holidays.
 - To **accumulate wealth** – so as to not rely on Gods provision.
 - We have **constructed a smaller god, one who is prepared to bless us on these terms**, a god who is prepared to 'let us off the hook on a technicality'.
 - Rather than a **God who created everything**, a **God who knows what is best for us** and **expects us to obey His commands.**
 - We cannot continue **building our own personal Babel** and ignore the commands of God.
 - **That is the tame god** that we created to allow us to live the way we want to. **This god can bless us on our terms, and relate with us even when we choose to walk away from His wisdom.**
- In the book of **Matthew 19**, there is a story about a rich young ruler who wants to know what good things he can do to get eternal life. Jesus sets out some commands for him...'**Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony,** ¹⁹**honor your father and mother,**' and '**love your neighbor as yourself...**'the young man says that he has done all these what else does he need to do?
- **Jesus says sell all your possessions, give to the poor and follow me.**

- The **rich young man has a lot of wealth** and is unable to do it.
- He has **amassed a name for himself** on the one hand and there is the call to **follow Jesus on the other**.
- **Do what is right in Gods eyes** or do what is right in mans eyes.
- Every day we live with those choices - **being a Christian does not make you immune to those choices**.
- It makes us **responsible to make the right choice**, the right choice is to **believe in Jesus enough to follow him, follow his commands**.
 - **So man is standing at the foot of this tower**, looking up as it touches the heavens.
 - **Thinking wow**, what a great structure we have built.
 - Looking at it **from Gods perspective** though is different.
 - You get the sense that God is looking down at them saying what on earth are they doing, **they have built some tiny spec**, let me go down to them to see the city with the tower.
 - **Man's best efforts** to make a name for himself does not impress God, it **makes very little impact on God**.
 - God looks at what man is doing and realises that **unless he helps them out** they are going to really mess things up for themselves...**nothing will be impossible them**.
 - So God does **not punish** man but instead **puts preventative measures** in place to save humanity from themselves.
 - He **confuses their language**, they stop building and are scattered over the face of the whole earth.
 - **A lot of brick and bitumen, time and toil**.
 - **Effort trying to build away from God**...for what, **God's will is done anyway**, they are scattered to the ends of the earth.
 - There is the **easy way** to bring about God's will by obeying His commands and then there is the **difficult way** (or the long way) but **ultimately Gods will is done**.
 - **Can you relate to this story?**
 - I can tell you **so many stories about times** when God has specifically asked me to do something that I have chosen not to do.
 - It always **ends badly for me**, but the thing gets done in the long run.
 - Now **so far in the Story of God and us** we see what Gods plan is, we see that God wants to **restore all things under His authority**, he wants to be our God and for us to choose to be his people. To live in harmony with him and with each other.
 - **This is His will and it will be done**, we have been asked to bring that reality to the present through our life style, through our following the way of Jesus.
 - The way of self sacrifice, the way of loving our neighbours and our enemies, the way of selling our possessions and giving to the poor.
 - **That has always been Gods will for his people** - he has made that possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus.



- If you allow yourself to be **led by the Holy Spirit**, that is the kind of life you will be led into.
- **A day is coming** when more and more people will actually start to follow the way of God, and **not the way of man**.
- On that day **we will see the kingdom of God grow**, our following of God will literally bring heaven to earth and life will start to look more and more the way God intended.
- **Do we believe Jesus is the way** - that following his ways, his truth and his life is right? If so - **are we living such lives?**
- Or have we built **for ourselves a ziggurat**, a stairway to heaven that allows god to fit into **our world, our way, our truth and our life**.
- **It is time to make that choice**.
- **Do we continue this cycle east** or **do we stop and turn towards God, towards his abundant full life**.
- Do we **start to trust that following** him may seem foolish but it **brings life and goodness, hope and peace?**
- **If we do believe** it then let us ask God to give us the **wisdom to act on this belief**.
- Prayer

Next week we look at Gods specific intervention through a people starting with Abraham who starts the journey west.