



“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:1–5).

This is my farewell sermon, me preaching Jesus to you one last time and me saying thank you for everything, thank you for four fantastic years. Four years ago I never imagined God would call me to leave you and California for a city that I visited for the first time just one month ago. It's one of the riskiest things I've ever done.

This text has everything to do with why I'm leaving and with why you and I can let go and trust God with total abandon and trust Him like never before.

“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 bricks 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.’ 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” (Genesis 11:1–9).

The City and The Tower

It's post-flood and Noah has three sons; he's repopulating the earth. Everyone speaks the same language. Imagine, there's no

foreign language requirement, no translators. There's new technology that makes new things possible, like baking bricks in a kiln. Now they can build higher and bigger. This is what people do in cities, they take their talents and discoveries to a big city so they can develop and use them. With this new brick technology they built a city and tower with its top in the heavens. They built a ziggurat.

A ziggurat was a massive staircase structure. They were trying to open up a channel between heaven and earth. They talk like it's the ultimate achievement, as we do today, enamored with our achievements and ourselves.

The Motivation

Why? “*Let us make a name for ourselves.*” That has the same meaning as today, wanting to know you're valuable and distinct, that you matter. Driving it all is pride and insecurity. It's heads and tails of the same coin. Pride says: “Look at what we can do. People will notice. We'll get a name from our great accomplishment.” Their insecurity says, “*lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.*” If we don't do this, we don't have a name; we don't have security. It's also a power grab, building a secular city, kingdom, life, and name with no room for God.

So, the weeks, months and years go by. The people bake their bricks. They haul their bricks. They build their tower taller and taller. They build their city. They build a name for themselves. They're impressed with themselves. Everything is going exactly as planned, but then...

The Lord Came Down

Then God happens. Then verse 5 happens. “*And the Lord came down...*” See His Sovereignty! A human word started the construction project; now a divine word starts the demolition project.

The way God disrupts this whole thing is by confusing human words. God comes down in judgment and in mercy to deal with the tower because this is the wrong kind of unity; it's dangerous, destructive unity.

The Folly of Making a Name for Yourself

You could say that the fundamental problem of the human heart and of the cities of our world is that we're all living to make a name for ourselves rather than for God. It's foolish to make a name for yourself for four reasons.

Their greatest achievement is puny.

“And the Lord came down to see...” (v.5). It’s not even on God’s radar! We are so impressed with our achievements, but God can’t even see it. It’s so puny! Genesis orients us to a Big God Universe; God is big, people are small. It teaches us to take God seriously, not ourselves.

Built into the foundation of their greatest achievement is its own ruin.

What’s missing from this whole project? What’s not factored into the planning process? God! God is not in the blueprints. Trying to build a city, life, name without God always ends in ruin, it won’t last. It’s in the foundation. If God’s not in the cement, not the center brick, it won’t last.

The thing they feared the most caught up with them.

Remember, insecurity and pride drove this whole project. We set out to make a name for ourselves because we are afraid and insecure. Verse 4 says: *“lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”* There was a fear of being scattered. The thing they feared the most caught up with them. Our logic says: “If I don’t _____, then _____ will happen.” We think this tower will protect us from our fear.

The singer Madonna, in an interview in *Vogue* magazine said: “I have an iron will and all of my will has always been devoted to conquering some horrible feelings of inadequacy. I’m always struggling with that fear. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being of worth and then I get to another stage and I think I’m mediocre and uninteresting and worthless and I have to find a way to get myself out of that again and again. My drive in life is from this horrible feeling of being inadequate and mediocre and it is always pushing me, and pushing me and pushing me. Because even though I have become somebody, I still have to prove that I am SOMEBODY. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will.”

“If I don’t push to the next level, then I won’t be somebody...have a name.” What Madonna feared the most caught up to her. If we attempt to make a name for ourselves, what we fear will catch up to us.

The name you make for yourself you won’t like.

The word “Babel” means “confused.” It’s a fitting name when you’re trying to find significance apart from God. This whole story is about the giving and meaning of this name. The Babelites made a name for themselves, but they didn’t like the name.

What name have you made for yourself that you now hate? I see myself all over these nine verses. Pride and insecurity drive me to build a tower that I hope will impress other people, impress

God, and give me a name, but the name I make for myself I end up hating: controlling, self-focused, prideful and insecure. How foolish of me! How much of these past four years did I spend laying bricks for my own name? Do you see yourself in these nine verses? Have you been making a name for yourself? Have you made a name for yourself that you now hate? God didn’t create us to live like this. We were created not to make a name for ourselves, but to make a name for God.

God won’t give His glory to another: *“I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other” (Isa. 42:8).* We are created for God’s glory: *“bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made” (Isa. 43:6–7).* Our life ought to be Psalm 115:1: *“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory.”*

The Remedy

Is your relationship with God, is your life, tower building and name building? Some of you have been baking bricks for a long time and you’re just hoping, like the Babelites, you’ve been working from the ground up, trying to create an opening from earth to heaven.

What’s the remedy? Verse 5: *“And the Lord came down.”* That’s the solution to all our problems: the Lord must come down. We have our directions all wrong. We think the way to get a name is to build a tower from earth to heaven. This is a story of prideful, insecure people building a tower up to God. But Genesis 11:5 on through the rest of the Bible is the story of God building a tower down to us. *“And the Lord came down.”* This is the gospel! Religion says: “Build a tower to heaven.” The Gospel says: “The Lord comes down.”

Writer Os Guinness said: “We cannot find God without God. We cannot reach God without God. We cannot satisfy God without God—which is another way of saying that all our seeking will fall short unless God starts and finishes the search. The decisive part of our seeking is not our human ascent to God, but his descent to us. Without God’s descent there is no human ascent. The secret of the quest lies not in our brilliance but in his grace.”

The first thing God does when he comes down, what He must do, is deal with your tower—in judgment and mercy. That tower that you’re building, that name that you’re making for yourself, it’s destroying you. You don’t see it, but it is. God comes down and He deals with your tower: He confuses and babels your life, He confuses the plans and dreams you had laid out for your life, your little kingdom. He does this, He humbles you like this, because He loves you, so that you can be free, so that you can know

Him and trust Him like never before, so that you can get a name that you'll actually like.

Some of you are in the center of this right now. You think God has abandoned you. He hasn't! He's protecting you, naming you, rebuilding your life.

This is what God did to a man named Abram. Genesis 12:1-2 says, *"Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.'"*

Who's in charge of making your name?

Is your life lacking freedom and joy? Are you ready to admit that you can't do it? Are you ready to let go, to really trust God? The alternative to making a name for yourself is to let God make your name. For this to happen, you must trust—you must trust God like you've never trusted Him before. You must trust God to come down, deal with your tower, call you into new territory, into a life that's centered on His name, so he can make your name.

In the last two years there were times I thought God had forgotten me. My plans were falling apart; I was falling apart. **Now** I see that He was dealing with my tower, teaching me to trust Him at new levels. Where will we place our trust? Our prideful, insecure human voice says, "let us make a name for ourselves" versus God's voice which says, "Go, and I will bless you and make your name."

Pentecost Reverses Babel

It's through the line of Abraham that God came down to earth. Abraham's greatest descendent is Jesus. God came down, Jesus came down into a city: Jerusalem. On a plain of land overlooking the city, a cross was erected between heaven and earth and there Jesus died for your sin and my sin of not making God the center brick of our lives.

That sin has been forgiven!

Ten days after Jesus ascended back to heaven, it was the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is the reversal of Babel: God comes down; there's an understanding of diverse languages; there's unity. Pentecost is the birthday of the Church, the giving of the Holy Spirit. Now the Gospel spreads, churches are planted, people are united in a new community. The book of Acts is a narrative of a church planting movement in strategic cities. Paul went to cities, and as the city goes, so goes the culture.

God loves cities! Throughout the Bible we see God's concern for cities. *"And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right*

hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11). Cities are places where millions of people created in God's image live; yet they're also places where sin is clustered more densely. Today over half the world's population lives in cities and it's growing exponentially. The church is called to be salt and light in cities. God began the world's story in a garden, but it will conclude in a well-planned city. The future of the universe is an urban future. Pentecost launched this movement and it's a tradition celebrated for 2,000 years.

Providentially, today, May 23, is Pentecost Sunday. It's fitting that this is my last Sunday with a church I love as I go plant a church in a new city.

Conclusion

We came pregnant and we're leaving pregnant with a third child. But we're also leaving pregnant with a vision for a new church, to take the gospel to people who desperately need it. Many times I wished we weren't pregnant so we could stay, but I couldn't shake it. I prayed God would put me in a city. I prayed God would give me a Macedonian call. I always thought it would be the Bay Area, but I met some men from Macedonia.

Phoenix is the fifth largest city in the country. It's beautiful and it's broken. It has crime, a drug trade, gangs, the fifth largest gay population, it's the kidnapping capital, it has big immigration issues. It's the Wild West! I'm excited and terrified! It's going to be hot and difficult work. This is where I like to be, me at my best. This is what I get to do: I have a message I get to share with Phoenix.

Ultimately, the only hope for Phoenix is Jesus and His church. I'm leaving the Bay Area for the same reason I came, because of God and His gospel. Our God is a Missionary God. I love Him! I want to tell people about Him! I've fallen more in love with Him here. I know, love, and trust Him more than I did four years ago. I'm more unimpressed with myself and more impressed with God than ever before.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus says: *"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* I'm going to Phoenix because I believe Jesus is calling me to go and because I believe He wants to build something there with God as the center brick. I will fail, but Jesus won't.

Let go, trust God to come down and deal with your tower, mess up your plans, tell you to go to new territory, and let Him build your name. Trust Him.

Central Peninsula Church, I love you! You are why I can do this. You've loved me so well. I'm further putting to the test everything

I've preached and stood for here. Thank you for Four Fantastic Years.

"You'll remember, friends, that when I first came to you to let you in on God's master stroke, I didn't try to impress you with polished speeches and the latest philosophy. I deliberately kept it plain and simple: first Jesus and who he is; then Jesus and what he did—Jesus crucified. I was unsure of how

to go about this, and felt totally inadequate—I was scared to death, if you want the truth of it—and so nothing I said could have impressed you or anyone else. But the Message came through anyway. God's Spirit and God's power did it, which made it clear that your life of faith is a response to God's power, not to some fancy mental or emotional footwork by me or anyone else" (1 Corinthians 2:1–5).

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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