

Victory of the Lamb – Origins – Origin of Pride – Genesis 11 –

October 16, 2022 – Pastor Ben Sadler

11 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar 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.”

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^[a]—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

1981 movie *Chariots of Fire* is based on the true story of 1924 British Olympic team. The story is told of two runners: Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams. Eric Liddell is a Christian missionary and his sister believes he should not be running in the Olympics. It is just a distraction from serving God as a missionary. But he tells her, “God did make me to serve in China. But **“God also made me fast. And when I run I feel his pleasure.”** Harold Abrahams is also a gifted runner. But unlike Liddell his is insecure and frustrated. When he is about to run he says, *In about an hour I will lift up my eyes and look down that corridor, that four foot stretch, and “I have 10 seconds to justify my existence.”*

I feel like both Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams live inside of me. Sometimes I preach and teach and write and serve because I feel like God has called me into his service and given me these gifts. And when I carry out my duties as a pastor I feel God’s pleasure. Then there are those times when I feel more like Harold Abrahams. I’m not doing these things because I want to serve God, but because I’m trying to justify my own existence.

When I live like Harold Abrahams, I do the things I do in order to build my own monument to myself. I want to justify my existence. I want to be seen as someone good and superior. Sometimes I work really hard on a sermon, not because I want to serve God, but because I want to be seen as a good preacher. Sometimes I write a book or a blog, not because I want to serve people, but because I want to be remembered as a good writer. I do all these things to make a name for myself, to build a monument to myself, to be remembered as somebody.

Can you see these two characters in yourself. Sometimes you do the things you do because God made you this way, and when you do them you feel his pleasure. But sometimes you do your job at work because you want to be remember as a hard worker. Sometimes you do these things at home not to be a good spouse or parent, but out of pride and arrogance, to build a monument of yourself, to make a name for yourself. To be remembered.

Today we are finishing up our sermon series through the opening chapters of Genesis called **Origins**. As you read through the opening chapters of the book of Genesis, you can see the origin of two different landscapes. There is the external landscape. We look out at our world and we wonder, where did the sun, moon, and stars come from? Where did the fish and birds come from? Where did the plants and animals come from? Where did human life come from? Genesis 1 tells you that God created all these things. And then you look at how the world looks molded by catastrophic events. We wonder, Why do we have a Grand Canyon and those pointy Rocky mountains? Why do we have all these fossils and fossil fuels? What happened to create the world we have? Well, we can look at the flood. And finally we look out at the nations and cultures and languages. And we wonder where did all these civilizations come from? And the answer is today's story: The Tower of Babel, where God confused their languages.

But throughout this study of Genesis, we have not been so focused on the external landscape of our world. Instead we have been focusing on the internal landscape of our world. We want to know why do we have such strong desires for meaning and purpose? Well, God created us in the beginning for a purpose. We wonder why we struggle with sin and hatred. Well, the story of Adam and Eve tells us of the origin of evil in our hearts. And now we get to the story of the Tower of Babel and we learn about the origin of Pride and how destructive it can really be. So here is the question I want to answer in this sermon: **What is the origin of our pride?**

To answer that question, let's dive back into the text: **Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ²As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.**

After the flood, Noah's family and his sons continued to grow into a large group of people. And the whole world at that time decided to settle in a plain in Shinar, modern day Iraq area. So far so good.

³They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.

This whole group of people has decided to come together and make something with bricks. Now bricks are a superior technology than just using stone. Stones are heavy to move. They are hard to shape. So they wanted to build with bricks. But not sundried bricks, they wanted to make the sturdier bricks that were baked in a furnace.

Why did they want to use such durable materials? What were they looking to build for themselves?

"Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens...

They wanted to build a city for themselves and a tower in the middle of that city that reached into the sky. Now why did they want to build a city and a tower?

....so that we may make a name for ourselves otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

They wanted to make a name for themselves so that they would not be scattered over the face of the whole earth. In other words, they were filled up with pride. They wanted to take the place of God. Instead of God being glorified and praised, they wanted to be glorified. And their pride led them to opposition against God. You see, after the flood, God commanded the descendants of Noah to be fruitful and fill the earth. But in their pride they want to be God and their pride led them to rebel against God.

But we want to dive deeper. We want to see the origin of their pride. And so we have to go back to the beginning. In the beginning God made human beings in his own image, in his own likeness. Human beings were created to be like God and reflect God. But that wasn't enough for the first two humans. Instead of being content with their role in the universe. They usurped their position. In the Garden of Eden they ate from the tree in the middle of the garden, God's tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And now because they put themselves in the place of God, they and their descendants also rebelled against God.

And so now we have a whole group of Adam and Eve's descendants and they are trying to build their own Eden-like city. And at the center of the city is not just a tree, but a tower so that they could be like God. It was like an altar of worship to themselves.

But humans were never meant to be gods and so God decides to intervene. ⁵ **But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building.** Genesis sometimes uses this language, picturing God in almost human terms. I think there also might be a little irony here. The people are trying to become gods, building their great city and tower. And yet, it is so puny compared to God that he has to come down and see it. Like a human getting down on his knees to investigate an ant hill.

God sees what they are doing and says, 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.** God knows that if he doesn't stop them, they will continue to live for themselves, trust themselves, and live only according to the desires of their own heart. And all the people will wind up in the same place they were before the flood.

So God intervenes: **"Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."** Just as the people said, "Come let us build a city and a tower" now God says, "Come let us confuse their language so that they don't understand each other." According to the Bible, this is the beginning of all the diverse languages and cultures. God knew that if they had such absolute power, their corrupt hearts would corrupt everything absolutely.

The account ends abruptly: ⁸ **So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.**

God abruptly stopped all their plans. All of the things they were afraid of came true. They scattered the earth, just like God commanded them to do and they stopped building a city and they were forgotten.

This account helps us answer our opening questions:

What is the origin of our pride?

Pride began when humans tried to take God's place.

We were never meant to be God. And when we live to make a name for ourself, to justify our existence, then we set ourselves up in opposition to God.

And here is the reality: **All our man-made towers will fall.**

Because our lives were never meant to be a monument for ourselves, our towers will fall. Sometimes God works like he did in the Tower of Babel. He destroys our self-made towers. Maybe he takes away

some of our success and we experience failure. Maybe our industry goes under. Maybe we get fired. Maybe we self-destruct. Because we are human and finite, maybe we destroy our career, our tower.

Regardless, whatever we build for our own glory will eventually fall and be forgotten. We are all finite. We are all going to die. All our accomplishments will at best be forgotten. Or we will be remembered for our sins and failures.

This would all be a tragedy, except for the fact that God has been building something since the creation of the world through Jesus Christ. Humans were never meant to be gods. But our God decided to become a human being and enter this world. He did not live to be served and to make a name for himself. He was lifted up, but not to be recognized and praised, but to die and be crucified.

Then Jesus rose from the grave and ascended on high. And the Bible says that Jesus has become the foundation, the cornerstone in God's building, God's temple.

You see, God is building something, the kingdom of God, the Temple of God, his church. All our towers and buildings will fall, but this Temple will last forever. And he wants you to be a brick in his kingdom. The Apostle Peter writes: **(As you come to Jesus) you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)**

God is building this temple and he wants you to be a brick in this temple. Those abilities and talents that you have. Those are gifts of God. He did not give you those gifts to build your own tower to yourself for yourself. He gave you those gifts and abilities so you could build God's temple for God's glory.

So what's that take away point?

Don't build a tower for yourself.

Be a brick in God's building.

That means you know your role in God's universe. You are not God. You are dependent on God. All your abilities and talents and opportunities. Those are gifts on loan from God. And one day all your talents and abilities and opportunities will be gone. Whatever you do work at it will all your might as if working for the Lord and not for yourself.

So if you are a builder. Be a good, honest builder to glorify God. Don't cut corners just to make money for yourself.

If you are a teacher or coach, care about those kids. Don't make your career just about your accolades and achievements.

As one of your pastors, I'm going to try to make my life about serving you, the congregation that God has entrusted to me. Not about making a name for myself.

You and I are going to continue to have a struggle in our hearts. Sometimes we will struggle with pride. We will sound more like Harold Abrahams. We will do the things we are doing to justify our existence, to make a name for ourselves. But when we do that we can repent and turn to Jesus and ask for his renewal and strength. Then we can act more like Eric Liddell. We can serve and lead and teach and help because God create us to be part of his kingdom. So stop build your own tower, your own monument to

yourself. All our towers will fall anyways. Instead be a brick in God's kingdom, the only building that will last for eternity. Amen.