

The human race has got a fascination with grand buildings don't we? **{slide 2}**. I've been pretty fortunate to see some grand buildings, that are a far cry from the iconic 'Post office building' of my small town childhood.... **{slide 3}**

There is something about Grand structures that capture our imagination. In 2015 I saw the tallest building in the world **{slide 4}**, the Burj Khalifa. Who has seen it?

Some of you might've taken the tour to the top, I didn't quite manage that, but it is an impressive structure, but it is intended to be much more. Listen to the description from the official website: **{slide 5}**

'In concept and execution, Burj Khalifa has no peer In Burj Khalifa, we see the triumph of Dubai's vision of attaining the seemingly impossible and setting new benchmarks. The project is a declaration of the Emirate's capabilities and of the resolve of its leaders and people to work hand-in-hand on truly awe-inspiring projects.'

Today we are exploring a grand building, which had no peer. It was physically impressive, but aimed to be much more. Not a point of inspiration, but a point of rebellion. Not just a tower, but a home for the gods. Not just a city, but a symbol of self sufficiency. Not just a building, but a symbol of a way of life.

Today we'll dig into this account in two sections: **{slide 6}**

- i) Rebels reach up vv.1-4
- ii) Yahweh casts down vv.5-9

Pray.

i) Rebels reach up vv.1-4 **{slide 7}**

I don't know if you remember but last week as we rolled through chapter 10 I made note that this account was included. We've had the big picture overview and now we zoom in on the plain of Shinar (v.2), and to the foundation of one of the great enemies of Israel - the Nation state of Babylon.

They are still a people with common language v.1. It's not hard to believe. They come from common family lines through Shem, Japheth and Ham. That common language allows them to speak, and work in unity.

These people have been commanded by God to go, to fill the earth, to multiply. True to their family character traits, as descendants of Ham, they do things their way, not God's. Instead of heeding the Word of God sending them out to fill every corner, they settle down. They stop on the plain of Shinar, and resolve to build.

Despite the difficulties posed by the resources available, they are driven on in their project.

Why? Why labour like this?

Because of pride and arrogance.

Throughout the Bible, Babylon will be a byword for rebellion against God. This theme rolls right through the old testament : Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, right through to Revelation 17-18, where the great enemy of God is in league with the unfaithful 'whore of Babylon', its awful language, visceral, which reflects a deep truth, these are a rebellious people.

In v.4 **{slide 8}** we are shown their hearts; There are four things they hope to achieve; keep your eyes out for them;

'let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we can build a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'

What is their aim? **{slide 9}**

They want security - It's represented in a city. They want a place of safety, where they can guarantee the future.

They want deity - They reach for the heavens. They want to build high to invoke the favour of pagan gods who they have created themselves.

They want fame - They want to be known. They want the who earth to know their names as the ones who have built this mighty structure, to see them as the best, strongest, and most powerful.

They want sovereignty - They want to call the shots, and live where they want to live, rather than heeding the word of God.

The Bible tells us all of that, and so does the Babylonian's own writing in a piece called the Enuma Elish, it records this same account.

Their intent is clear, they have decisively laboured to build a great city, a sanctuary, a place of man made security, a great and impressive building (stretching to the divine which would become the abode of man made gods - Marduk, Enlil and Ea.

What they don't see, in this grand project, is the futility of seeking security outside of God.

In time, their desire for this kind of security will enslave them in the way I described a couple of weeks ago - they will sacrifice children, they will engage in cult prostitution. In

order to have the basics of life food and fertility, the tower of security they try to build becomes a prison.

It traps them, as they devise ways to receive what Yahweh would lovingly provide. Horrific, dehumanising steps are taken to guarantee what can never be guaranteed by any but God himself.

There's a warning here for us, and an opportunity for the Spirit of God to search our hearts. We're constantly tempted to build security aren't we?

It's this desire, for safety and security that has given rise to the deep rift in New Zealand in these past months - It used to be a rift between the team of 5,000,000 and all of those kiwis overseas. When we returned to NZ, some of the discomfort, and disapproval was palpable.

We encountered people who were outraged that families like ours should be allowed to return, and threaten the security of those walled within New Zealand.

The rift is now opening between vaccinated and unvaccinated.

Why? Because of fear of the unknown. The antidote we seek is security. We want to define the rules, build the walls, stay separate and apart.

It's not the way of the gospel is it?

It doesn't look like the way of the Lord Jesus, who went to those who were unsafe, unclean, unloved. The one who was scorned as a 'friend of sinners' embodied the Love of God. There is a challenge here for the church in these times, to show the love of Christ in a way which is radically countercultural, to hold fast together, rather than building dividing walls for the sake of security. We are to trust our heavenly Father in the way our Lord and saviour did, even to death on a cross.

The Rebellious Babylonians fail to see the futility of their pride, as they long to build a name which is great.

The shorter Westminster catechism asks a questions I'm sure we've all asked:

What is the chief end of man? What are we here for?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

But, how can you enjoy someone you are in hostile competition with?

How can you glorify God, if you're glorifying yourself?

Again that family trait rears its head. These people simply have no wish or desire to honour, and glorify the Lord, their heart's desire is to honour and glorify themselves.

Our hearts aren't so different are they?

Those us are who are younger, long to leave our mark on the world. We've seen it amplified with the rise of YouTubers, and Influencers. Some have inherent talents, but the boom in these markets is all about having names in lights, about being known, about making an impact. The young are pursuing celebrity as if it was something valuable. But celebrities come and go as quickly as the ice in the ice bucket challenge melts, and we move on to the next fad.

Those who are older, want to be remembered. In a world that moves on so quickly, none of us wants to be forgotten. We want there 80 or so years we spend here to mean something. Its just a breath isn't it? It goes so quickly, fleetingly, but we want to leave something behind.

There is no permanence in making a name outside of God, it is futile. As futile as trying to build a city, or tower in rebellion against God. 'Moses records this event for a warning to the new nation of Israel: God will subjugate the proud who rebel against his will.'¹

Why is it all so futile? Because no matter how hard the rebellious try to reach up to the heavens, and make themselves something, Yahweh is King. He is Lord. The Creator, God Almighty. **{slide 10}** Yahweh, casts down.

ii) Yahweh casts down vv.5-9

Where is the irony in this second section? Did you see it? Did you give a little chuckle? Their amazing project, to build to the havens is so ineffective as a means to grasp divinity that Yahweh has to stoop down to examine it, its repeated twice in vv.5 and 7.

But, despite the humour in that irony, the condition of the human heart isn't a laughing mater.

God knows our trajectory. He made us. He has seen what is inside us, the rebellion that was in Adam and Eve, Cain, Lamech, and the hearts of all the human race blotted out in the flood, the same hearts in the Babylonians, and descendants of Ham are capable of great evil. 'Nothing will be impossible for them.' If their hearts we're tuned to glorifying God, wouldn't that be a wonderful reality? The heights of what could be done for good, for God, are staggering, but sadly that's not the case.

And so God acts, he strikes their unity v.7, and confuses their language.

¹ Ross, A. P. (1998). Creation and blessing: a guide to the study and exposition of Genesis (p. 244). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

I don't know if you've read the Jesus storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd-Jones, she imagines the situation playing out 'Someone would say "How do you do?" And they thought they said "How ugly are you?", It wasn't funny. You could say something nice like "'Such a lovely morning' and you could get punched in the face because they thought you said "hush up, you're boring"'

It's a fun depiction, of the absolute confusion that brought about another irony.

There is irony in the outcome, v.8/9 that the very thing they avoided, to be scattered, is what results from their impotent attempt to be great and grand, to rebel and call the shots.

God has cast down all of their towering hopes and dreams, rooted in rebellion against him and his clear word.

We're not surprised are we? This God is a God of reversal, his Kingdom is topsy turvy.

He says the first will be last, and the last will be first. He humbles the proud and raises the humble. 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.' Matthew 5:5

Our God calls us to empty ourselves, not to consider ourselves more highly than we ought. To imitate the Lord Jesus, and to bend our wills to the will of our heavenly father, which is only possible when the Holy Spirit is active in our lives.

Our God, is a god of reversal: The scattering that came at Babel, the division of language created separations to limit our evil. God will bring about a great reversal, so that our tongues might be gathered up around his heavenly throne to bring him praise, and worship.

When we cast our crowns before Him, **{slide 11}** and cry out "'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"' (Rev 5:13)

Not only does Jesus **{slide 12}** help us to step away from hearts which want self- built security, hearts that want to worship gods of our own making, hearts that long to leave a memorial behind which speaks to our own greatness, hearts that want to be sovereign and call the shots, not only does Jesus love us enough to change us by the power of the Holy Spirit, one day he will bring us together.

Those who are in Christ, who have put our trust in his atoning death on the cross, the death which took our sin and freed us from the guilt that is rightfully ours - guilt which stems from our misshapen hearts, which make bricks and build fortifications, he unites us as one family, one people, so close, so knit together that we are called a body.

He gives us a name to share. Christian.

His name. The greatest name, the name at which every thing in all creation will bow the knee. It's not a name that is plastered on a building, Trump Towers, Sears Building, Forsyth Barr stadium, Its a name that will unite a scattered people, a name that will see people grow new hearts.

Because that name, Jesus, is more than just a name, he is a person, man become God, heaven come down to earth, to bring us back to our loving Heavenly Father. Jesus is a brother, a friend, a comforter, who is giving us innumerable blessings, so that we might be the people God calls us to be, a people who glorify his name, and enjoy him for all eternity. **{slide 13}**

Why don't we glorify him now, in words of prayer:

Pray.