

Series: Stories from the Past

Title: An Unfinished Tower

Text: Genesis 11:1 - 9

Key Word: Reasons

Proposition: Everyone will see the subtle idolatry of human achievement and pride, be called to make the Living God the object of faithful service & worship.

We have seen them across our landscape. They are located in urban areas and our suburbs. We see them along a country road or a busy city street. They can be large or small, high or short. We often wonder what has happened to them. What happened that this building became an unfinished monument of someone's hopes and dreams? Did they run out of money? Did they die? What kept the person or persons from completing the project?

In our story of today, we see a building that was unfinished not because the builders ran out of money, or material, or personnel. The building was never finished because God kept it from being completed. Why? What was wrong with building this great and wonderful piece of architecture? What was God afraid of? After all, what's wrong with a beautiful building?

We see nothing wrong with a beautiful building. In fact, many marvel at the various buildings that have been built over the years. But, there was something different about this building. It was not the tower itself, but the attitude of those who were building it. It was a monument of human self-

sufficiency and self-glorification. It was a symbol expressing a culture that had little need for God.

According to Biblical history, the earth has dried out. Noah's sons have begun to re-populate the earth. God's re-population plan required Noah and his sons to spread out and fill the earth. God said, "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth, and subdue it.*" (Genesis 1:28; 9:1, 7) God knew that if humanity would settle in one location, they would eventually starve consuming all the land's resources. He knew that the only way to protect His creation was by scattering them out over the face of the earth. Scattering them over all the earth would also be the best way to multiply the human race.

But, little had changed. Once again, humanity ignored God's plans, settling in one location in what is known as Iraq. They refused to seek God like Noah sought Him. In fact, they wandered further away by constructing this great tower as a monument to themselves. So, the situation develops into something that requires God's intervention before it gets worse.

Genesis tells us that He came down ^(v5) to see the city and the tower the people were building. While observing them, He makes a rather unsettling statement: "*If they can accomplish this when they have just begun to take advantage of their common language and political unity, just think of*

what they will do later. Nothing will be impossible for them!" (Gen. 11:6) Could it be that God knew that their limitless potential would make them forget Him? Could it be that He knew that unlimited power corrupts?

So, He makes what seems to be a very uncaring and harsh decision; *"Come, let's go down and give them different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other."* And that is what happened. Confusion reigned and the tower was left unfinished and God scattered the people across the earth. Why on earth did God frustrate their plans? What was the point of this holy intrusion?

What could humanity have done that not even God could have stopped? Why was God concerned about this empire building and political unity? Shouldn't God be pleased with what He saw? Isn't God pleased when people work together toward a common cause?

One of the challenges of this story is that it challenges our 21st century thinking. We are taught; we are encouraged to think globally; to see beyond the borders of our own towns, cities, states, and country.

To some people the words that we have read and heard this morning would perhaps make them say, "Why would God do this? Doesn't He want human beings to live in harmony and respect? "Didn't Jesus talk about being a peacemaker? Isn't there something in the Old Testament about the Lion

lying down with the Lamb? But, if this is what Christianity is all about, I may not want anything to do with it!"

Others would say, "Let's think for a moment about the implications of what this unity at Babel could have meant for the human race. First, instead of the confusion and misunderstanding that surrounds us today, having the ability to speak one language most certainly would have improved our ability to better solve our problems, wouldn't it?"

"Second, being able to speak as one and work together as one could have made life much easier. Right? Human history could have been written much differently! Think about all that the human race could have done if God would have stayed out of this thing."

Yes, you caught it. Many believe that it would be best if God would have stayed out of it. They believe it is all about humanity. It is all about me, us. They say, "**Let's leave God out of life.**" They don't want God to interfere with their lives.

Does this mean that God does not care about our relationships with one another? Does this mean that God sees conflict as inevitable? Does this mean that God doesn't want to see "peace on earth and good will toward men?" The Bible is clear He does want unified peace among human beings,

but on His terms not ours. He wants peace with Him at the center and human beings respecting His loving authority.

At the beginning of this series we recognized that God is involved with His creation, not absent from it. Once again, God intervenes. He gets involved.

You see, believing in an indifferent God is a problem. Many want God involved. We want His help and His direction. But, some want it on their terms. And that is not the way it works. For us to fully enjoy a beautiful relationship with God, we have to do it His way. So He frustrates mortal plans when they leave Him out of it.

God cares about our relationships. In fact, Jesus summarized our faith, with one word, love: *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."* And equally important: *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* Remember God must be loved, and obeyed, first. And then out of that love, we are to love others. Such love always brings unifying peace.

Jesus spoke to the disciples just before He was crucified about being one in Him. This unity was grounded in Him, with abiding in Him. It was a unity that came of a common life lived together in God.

God disrupted these human plans so that there would be unity in Him and not by human achievement.

Another reason why God disrupted their plans was because empire building disrupted Kingdom building; human ambition got in the way of holy ambition. They wanted to collect all their stuff in one place. God wanted them to scatter and fill the earth. They wanted store up. God wanted them to give up. They wanted to stay put. God wanted them to go out. They wanted to fill a building. God wanted them to fill the earth. Friends, God frustrates human plans until they do things His way.

A few years ago, David received a phone call at his desk. A girl in the college department called to say that her car had broken down and she was stranded about two miles from the office. So, he drove over to the location and found her leaning against her car, looking flustered.

David leaned against the car next to her and asked what happened. "Well, I was just driving down the road and it quit running," she said. "So I pulled off to the shoulder." "Could you be out of gas?" he asked. "No, I just filled it up."

Well, that one question pretty well exhausted David's automotive diagnostic abilities, but he persisted. "What happened? Did it make any noises?" "Oh, yeah," she replied. "As I was driving down the hill, it went

'brump, brump, brump, POW!'" In an effort to be an active listener David reflected back to her, "You say the car went 'brump, brump, brump, POW!'" "Yep."

David was feeling a little more confident, so he asked, "When was the last time you changed the oil?" She gave him this puzzled look and said, "Oil?" As it turned out, she had owned the car for a year and a half and never changed the oil. I get that same look when I ask frazzled friends, "When was the last time you set aside time to be with God, your family, or your friends?"

You see God wants two things: **First God wants His people to fulfill great commissions.** God said, "*Be fruitful and multiply! Be masters of the birds of the air and the fish of the sea.*" **God expected humankind to bring order to creation not build monuments to itself.** Jesus said, "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" **God expects His Church to build his kingdom and not steeples.**

Second, God wants a personal relationship with every human being. Personal ambitions and achievements can create a huge gap in that

relationship. God must be first. God can only be first. We were created to serve and honor God, not ourselves.

God will frustrate our plans when His desires go unmet. His ways are not our ways. So, we're invited to arrange or rearrange our hearts and our lives so that God, and God alone, is first place.

I ask this morning, "What are we building our lives toward?" Is it our own agenda, focused solely on our goals? Or, is it God's agenda for us? True unity, true life comes as we build our lives toward God and His purposes.

When we make the on-going decision to build toward God and to working toward doing our part in bringing the Kingdom of God to pass, we build on the firm foundation - Jesus Christ. Build well by building God as the foundation of your life. Amen.