

## I. INTRODUCTION

Happy New Year! Just curious, who amongst us has made a resolution this new years?  
Anybody here already *broken* their new year resolution?

Well whether you consider it a resolution or not, I hope you'll take the challenge this year and read through the Bible with us. For those of you who did this last year, you know how much it can mean to your relationship with God, spending time in his Word every day. And reading through the entire bible in a year...what an awesome way to engage in scripture!

Well, I'm glad you woke up for this today. We're glad you're here!

Let's pray together:

*God every day is a gift from you, thanks for another new day! And thanks for another new year. God as we are gathered together here, about to dig into your Word, may you break down any barriers we might have up, that might come in the way of hearing what you'd have us hear this morning. God teach us, inspire us, and empower us. Thanks for your Spirit's presence here with us. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*

*[Hold up copy of current "People" magazine.]*

Well, I'm not a giant fan of People Magazine but it seems like every year around this time this, and other magazines like it, publish a 'Best of' the past year edition. It can be quite fascinating to read this actually, as I think publications like this can, in a way, represent the pulse of our culture. People in particular has been a very popular magazine for quite a while. And I'm actually quite fascinated by this actually. Not so much the content maybe (this is just me but I could care less about who the best dressed people of the year were.)

I'm more fascinated by the *premise* of this magazine. On its own website, People describes itself as "a cultural force, defining celebrity, driving conversation, and inspiring action. We are America's trusted connection to the people you want to know and the moments that shape their lives."

I think this says something about the culture we live in; the fact that we have magazines that are based on the principle that ordinary people are fascinated by extraordinary ones.

We are *enchanted* by fame!

Sam O'Neal, an editor for Christianity Today, recounts [this](#) news story from a couple years ago about the White House Party Crashers. You may remember:

*"In November of 2009, President Obama and his administration held their first state dinner in honor of the visiting Indian Prime Minister. It was a gala affair, with guests ranging from high-ranking politicians to Hollywood celebrities. But a few days after the dinner ended, a media firestorm was ignited by the only two attendees who were not invited: Tareq and Michael Salahi. [Tar-ek and Mick-el]*

*America was shocked to learn that the Salahis, socialites from the Washington/Virginia area, had crashed the party and entered the White House without an invitation. But they did more than enter the White House. Photographs published on their Facebook page confirmed that they met and shook hands with President Obama, hugged Vice President Joe Biden, and interacted with several other people of note.*

*Subsequent digging by the media revealed the Salahis to be notorious "Facebraggers"—people who seek out connections with fame and power, then document them on the popular social networking website. The Salahi's were also working to achieve a role in the reality television series Real Housewives of D.C., and even had a camera crew documenting their arrival at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue."*

*O'Neal continues,*

*"In many ways, Tareq and Michael's story is a microcosm of the American culture—most notably our obsession with celebrity and our desire to achieve the "fifteen minutes of fame" we feel we deserve."*

Truly, we humans have a fascination with fame, famous people, and the desire to become famous ourselves. Let's take a look at our Bible text for this morning, and we'll see that the allure to become prominent has been around since the beginning.

If you have your Bible with you, turn to Genesis 11:1-9. The text will also be up on the screen.

## II. HUMAN ARROGANCE

Let's dig in to the first 4 verses here to start with.

**<sup>1</sup> Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. <sup>2</sup> As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.**

**<sup>3</sup> They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. <sup>4</sup> 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 and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."**

Here we have a group of Noah's descendants who are roaming around and find a place that they deem as suitable for settlement. But notice what happens. We quickly see what motivates their desire to settle down and build a city. In verse 4: "...let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves." Notice the pronouns used in that sentence. Let US build OURSELVES a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that WE may make a name for OURSELVES. Essentially they're saying, it's all about us!

Let's take a look at another word that clues us in to their reason for enthusiasm. This word NAME carries pretty significant weight. The original Hebrew word used here is SHEM, which in English can be translated RENOWN, REPUTATION, MEMORY, or FAME. So essentially, we are able to see exactly what is motivating these people. Notoriety, prominence, distinction. The desire to be KNOWN.

On some level we can all identify strongly with this desire. We all want to be known, to be remembered, to be held in high esteem.

*As a kid, I remember pretending to be a super hero! But I was way better than your ordinary super heroes, I was a warrior super hero! I'd make bows and arrows out of tree branches and shoe strings. And I'd make up my own super powers and use them against the forces of evil that threatened our planet. And in my imagination, I would be recognized and idolized for saving the world again and again, from imminent annihilation!*

We all want to be great: to accomplish great things.

In fact this longing in us to be great was put there by our creator. We, in fact, were *made* to be known. We were fashioned with a craving for intimacy God. And what could be better? To be closely and personally known by the maker of the universe! What a privilege! But something along the way got messed up. Our original 'God-wiring' got rewired, and this has had a significant impact in our hearts and in the world.

Rewind to Adam and Eve for a second. They had it all; they walked in perfect communion with God. They knew, and were known by God! But they were tempted to believe that there was more. Something God was keeping from them; something that might make them better. And at that moment of first sin, this is when our blameless and natural desire for significance turned into something else entirely: ARROGANCE. We now have become prisoners to a voice that tells us, we are better left to our own efforts to achieve what we long for most. We have developed the habit of ascribing greatness to ourselves.

History demonstrates this desire for greatness over and over again. We can see this in the Old Testament's King Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 4:30, he proclaimed: "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" And King Herod in Acts 12, as he was giving an address before an assembled crowd, they shouted out, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Or what about Alexander the Great and his compulsion for military conquest and domination. And as an example from the modern era, we can point to Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, and his strategy of consolidating more and more power, gradually putting down all opposition groups that threatened him.

Surely, our history and even the world around us today, demonstrate the human predisposition to arrogance and pride. And this has led to our race's inclination to displace God, or even become God himself!

So what, exactly, brings about prideful arrogance? Well, we can see it in our text. There are at least 2 factors at play here.

First, it was brought on by what we can think of as 'The Illusion of Self-Sufficiency'. Let's take a look back at verse 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." Moses, the author of Genesis is pointing out here that there was a lack of what he and his original audience would have thought of as appropriate building materials (namely: stone and mortar). Instead the tower builders fashioned bricks out of the earth. This would seem to be a pretty good use of human resourcefulness. And really, it was. And as the bricks were being laid, you can imagine they were impressed by their own effort in building a structure that was meant to reach to heaven. But the whole project, and the motivation behind it, was misguided. Their idea was to construct a connection point between God and humans. They felt that through their work, God would certainly grace them with his presence and blessing. Well the whole tower thing (and their effort to reach the divine) didn't really impress God. We'll read more about that in a bit.

In fact, we, like the tower builders, are NOT self-sufficient. As much as we would like to believe we can do it all on our own, it's simply not true. Yes, God has gifted us with certain abilities. I often marvel at how, creating us in his very image, he has given us creativity, ingenuity, intelligence, resolve, adaptability...we have a lot going for us! But you see, these things are not FROM us. Without God, we'd be nothing. The very breath we breathe and the heart that beats inside all of us wouldn't be providing life for us, if God hadn't given us these things in the first place.

Another factor that brought about the tower builders' prideful arrogance was insecurity. Their earnest effort to "make a name for themselves" was likely, in part, brought on by a fear of not

being known, respected or remembered; they had a fear of becoming ANONYMOUS. Part of "making a name for themselves" was this longing to leave a legacy, an imprint, some evidence of having eternally impacted the world.

Well we all want that to don't we? --to be remembered, to leave a legacy. To, in effect, build our own monument, memorializing the impact that we will have had during our time on earth.

But let's be careful here. We must always keep our motivation in check. We have to ask ourselves, "Is my desire to be remembered based on selfish incentives? Or will the legacy I'm leaving point to the only One who's name is worthy of fame and renown?" Our attitude should resemble the psalmist's who in Psalm 135 says,

**"Your name, O Lord, endures forever, your renown, O Lord, through all generations."**

What a perfect reminder of the sovereignty of God; it reminds us of the correct order of things. He is permanent; our life on earth is temporary. He is worthy praise; we are to be the ones praising Him. Our purpose on earth, everything we do and everything we stand for, should be about him, not about ourselves.

### **III. GOD'S AWARENESS**

Let's get back to our text. Verse 5 continues the story of the tower builders.

**"5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.**

It shouldn't surprise us that God was aware of all that was happening. The jig was up, almost before it started. This serves as a reminder to us, that God is all-knowing. As much as we sometimes forget, we are not able to pull the wool over his eyes. Psalm 139 poetically speaks of God's intimate knowledge of us:

**1 O Lord, you have searched me  
and you know me.**

**2 You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.**

**3 You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.**

**4 Before a word is on my tongue  
you know it completely, O Lord.**

**5 You hem me in—behind and before;  
you have laid your hand upon me.**

**6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.**

**7 Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?**

The fact that God is aware of what we're up to should be comforting. Instead of remaining distant and aloof, he's actively involved in our lives. But I think it's during those times when we're trying to make a go of it through our own effort, that we can easily forget about God's awareness; or more, his awareness threatens us.

#### **IV. GOD'S INTERVENTION**

So God knows what's up with the tower builders. Let's see what happens next. Verses 6-9. Here we see God enacting judgment on the people:

**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—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.**

Notice here that the text describes God coming down to them. This is a very interesting literary element that Moses uses. Years after the event, as he is telling this story, he's trying to make his audience understand the absurdity of what the tower builders are trying to do by adding in a little satirical flavor. He explains that God "came down" to the city, signifying that despite their attempts to build a tower that reached to heaven, it was still insignificant to God.

*The picture I get in my head when I think about this resembles this image of Rick Moranis's character in the great 80's movie, "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids." There he is with his magnifying*

*glass, doing his best, searching for his kids who he accidentally shrunk to the size of an aunt while testing his new invention.*

I think this imagery of God coming down confirms the fact that God was not threatened by the ingenuity of the tower builders. Instead, he was troubled by what would happen to humanity if they were left unchecked. So while this indeed is an act of God's judgment, it's at the same time, an act of Grace.

*Many of you in the room are parents and can understand exactly what we're talking about here. When it comes to disciplining our children, so often our punishment is interpreted by our kids as mean, even overly cruel. (at least that's true our house!) But, as parents, of course we see things a little more clearly, understanding the bigger picture. Our discipline is really an act of love. The punishment ushers in a lesson to be learned, or it's a way of protecting our kids.*

God loves us dearly. He wants the best for us. And he can see the bigger picture. We were never meant to live feeling insecure or prideful. We were never meant to construct monuments to ourselves. God knows that fame in the eyes of the world will only leave us feeling empty.

*NFL quarterback Tom Brady has tasted a level of fame that almost nobody ever reaches. He has been selected to 6 pro bowls, led his team to 3 Super Bowl championships, and won the Super Bowl MVP twice...accomplishments that already set him apart as one of the best quarterbacks to ever play. He is revered by fans all over the world. In 2005, Tom was interviewed on 60 Minutes where he revealed that despite the fame, career accomplishments, and salary he had already achieved, it felt like something was still lacking in his life. (Take a look):*

[view video clip] <http://vimeo.com/7683381>

Summary of video:

In the interview Brady says: "Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what is.' I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me, I think, 'God, it's got to be more than this.' I mean this isn't, this can't be what it's all cracked up to be."

What's the answer?

"I wish I knew. I wish I knew," says Brady. "I love playing football and I love being quarterback for this team. But at the same time, I think there are a lot of other parts about me that I'm trying to find."

*(Brady finishes his response by saying, "I love playing football and I love being quarterback for this team. But at the same time, I think there are a lot of other parts about me that I'm trying to find.")*

## V. CONCLUSION

So what is the answer?

As we try to live lives of significance, it's difficult to not make a break from what God would want for us. It's easy to want to go at it alone and attempt to "make a name for ourselves." So what hope do we have?

The Old Testament prophet Zephaniah gives us a glimpse of the renewal that God had in mind, even as the tower builders were laying the first brick.

**9 "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples,  
that all of them may call on the name of the Lord  
and serve him shoulder to shoulder.**

**10 From beyond the rivers of Cush  
my worshipers, my scattered people,  
will bring me offerings.**

**11 On that day you will not be put to shame  
for all the wrongs you have done to me,  
because I will remove from this city  
those who rejoice in their pride.  
Never again will you be haughty  
on my holy hill.**

-Zephaniah 3:9-11

Here we see a vision that true unity can't be achieved apart from the will of God. And that pride has no place in a full life offered up to His purposes.

The greatest hope we can have, ultimately, is found in Christ himself. The life he lived and the sacrifice he made is a perfect example of humility. As Paul reminds us in Philippians, chapter 2:

**<sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

**<sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:**

- <sup>6</sup> **Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,**

Christ, the only one worthy of fame, embodied humility even to the point of death, and God gave him the name above all names!

...the name above all names! Above my name, above your name, above Tom Brady's name, above President Obama's name.... the name Jesus. The Lord.

Jesus deserves all of our praise, all of the recognition, all of the glory!

So what can we do? Here's our challenge. Maybe even a New Year's resolution!

Certainly one action step for us in light of the truth of God's message for us today is to submit to Him. Humble ourselves. But I think there's something deeper here for us today. Try as we may, humility may be impossible unless we trust that what we're giving up, is less than what we'd be receiving. What I mean by that is that if we don't trust that God's way is better than our own way, than the attempt to become humble will become a losing battle.

So let's trust. We can trust in God's presence. He is with us, He guides us, He takes us by the hand, he embraces us, he comforts us... we don't need to worry.

*To help us understand the difference God's presence makes I want you to imagine this with me: imagine a parent and a child in a busy shopping mall. They walking hand in hand, enjoying each other's company, completely care-free as they walk along. Now imagine how different that child's experience would be if she was separated from her parent and lost. The busy mall, which was no threat at all before, is now a completely different world; a frightening world of uncertainty and danger.*

*That's what God's presence is like for us. Knowing he is there makes all the difference. We can feel secure and safe, knowing we are cared for and protected while we enjoy his company.*

Along with God's presence, we can trust in God's provision. God is going to give us everything we need. And we don't need anything he doesn't give us. Remember God's promise to us that he will provide from Matthew chapter 6:

**<sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"**

**<sup>28</sup> "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"**

Let's have faith that God will be with us and give us all we need. Let's trust!

And when we trust in his presence and in his provision, we'll stop trying to secure our own future. We'll see that the monuments we build to ourselves, will eventually only crumble and fall.

Let's pray.

God, thank you that you ...

Amen.

## **Benediction**

*May we begin a new year, leaving Babel behind, with its prideful ambitions and God-defying ways; may we abandon any empty search for security in making a name for ourselves; and may we put our hope in Christ, the one who promises to give us his presence and his provision; proclaiming the name that is above all names, Amen.*

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Preacher: Darrin Geier  
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