

Brand Management

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 September 2019

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, if you've ever worked in business in any capacity, you'll probably know the title of brand manager, right? You may have even been a brand manager or worked in marketing yourself.

A brand manager is someone whose job it is to promote a company's brand or their name or their reputation amongst the community, amongst outsiders, amongst their clients and the people they hope to be their clients.

And the brand manager's job is also to prevent the company from getting a bad name or a bad reputation. If a customer has a bad experience and they put it on, what's their website?

Hello, Peter. And they complain about it. The brand manager's there to make sure that they are addressed, that that complaint is addressed and that people don't have a bad opinion of the company.

In other words, the brand manager's job is to make a name for their company. Well, here are some examples of when a brand manager has done their job well. Coca-Cola, Ford, Facebook, and of course, Mrs. Ball's Chutney.

[1 : 02] That was my own personal addition because I think that's right up there with Coke and Facebook, in my opinion. But what we often fail to realize is that all of us are brand managers.

We're all in the business of brand management of our own personal brand, our own name, and our own reputation that comes with that name. Whether you realize it or not, the primary goal or a primary goal you have in almost every encounter with another human being is to promote your own name and your own reputation.

You'll say and do things and post pictures on social media that make people think well of you. And you will avoid doing anything that makes people not think well of you.

And so, when we do that, we are all managing a brand. We are all brand managers, whether we know it or not. And even more so in today's world of social media, where for many people their whole identity is bound up in how many likes and followers they get.

And most of their time during the day is spent on whatever device managing their brand. But we all do it, to a greater or lesser degree.

[2 : 17] The thing is, this human desire to make a name for ourselves is nothing new. In fact, it's what this section of Genesis is all about. There's a lot of names being made in this section of Genesis.

If you counted them all, who has time to do that? But I did. There's 89 of them, 89 names in this section of Genesis. But, and it's on, it's throughout chapter 10 and chapter 11.

Names, names, names, names, names. But in the middle of all the names, there's this famous story of the Tower of Babel that Eliel read for us about when humans, according to 11 verse 4, wanted to make a name for themselves.

That's what drove them to do this. And what we need to notice about this story is this human desire to make a name for themselves is not well received by God.

In fact, he actively intervenes and stops them from being able to succeed in their brand promotion project. And this morning we need to see why that is.

[3 : 30] Why God is so opposed to this idea of humans making a name for themselves. Because I think if we understand that, it'll help us to understand how as Christians we should see our own names and our own reputations in the world around us.

And so that's what we're going to do this morning. But to understand the story of Babel and what was going on there, we first need to understand its context, like in everywhere in Scripture.

The passage before and after. How does this fit into what's going on? Especially regards to what's happened so far in Genesis. Okay, so let's have a look. In your Bibles, you've got these two lists of

names on either side of the Tower of Babel.

Do you see them? But they are very important lists of names. It's not just for record keeping or for historical accuracy that these names are in the Bible.

These names are here because God wants to say something to us through them. And I'll tell you why they're so important. Firstly, because of where they fit into the story of Genesis so far. So remember, if you've been with us for the last few weeks, we started at page 1 of the Bible, Genesis 1.

[4 : 40] And we saw a good creation that God made. It was beautiful. And it was working the way God intended it to work. But then sin entered.

And what we discovered is once sin entered, once humans decided to call the shots for themselves, and they didn't listen to God, and they crossed the boundaries that He had established for their good, and for the good of the world, once sin entered, we saw there was a vicious cycle starting. Remember that? When actually, each generation, sin was getting worse and worse and worse. We saw that in the story of Cain and his descendant Lamech. And it was getting worse and worse and worse, to the point that even the boundary between heaven and earth was being crossed by all forms of evil, so that God decides, no, He's got to do something about this.

Do something drastic about it. And He does something drastic about it. Like we saw a few weeks ago, He basically reverses creation, and He brings creation back into its original state of watery chaos through the flood.

And it seems like it was a non-starter from the beginning, and the whole project, the whole human project, has just fallen flat. Except, before the flood comes, God is already hinting that He has a plan to continue His good purposes for the world.

[6 : 01] And we saw that where? Can you remember? We saw it in the lines. Remember, again, this is not the first time we've come across a list of names in Genesis.

We saw Cain's line and his brother Seth's line. And we compared them. Remember that one Sunday, and in our growth groups. And we saw that in Seth's line, while Cain's line is getting worse and worse and worse, Seth's line, you've got these hints of hope that God is dropping.

Throughout the line, as you read it and concentrate, and don't just skip over it because it's a bunch of names, but you actually read what it says. You pick up these hints of hope that God is going to do something still to save the world from sin through that line that He's appointed.

Okay, and so what that means is that the last time we read a list of names in the Bible, reading it carefully actually showed us an important truth about God's plans for this world that we need to remember even today.

That there is a particular line that God is going to use to undo the effects of the curse in Genesis 3. And so as the sin is getting worse and worse, and Cain's line is just getting more and more chaotic, there's this little strand of hope that is knitted throughout these narratives.

[7 : 23] That God says, right from the beginning, right from when man first sinned, God already started this strand of hope through all of this darkness and sin and chaos. This hope that He's going to do something.

He's still got a plan. He's still pursuing His good purposes for this world, believe it or not. And of course, it's no surprise that it was through Noah, then one of Seth's descendants in that very line that I'm talking about, that God continues His good plans for creation.

So He doesn't leave it in watery chaos. He essentially redoes it. But then, of course, last week, we saw that the world is still, even after the flood, when Noah and his family get off the ark, the world is still far from God's final plan for it.

All is not well. Sin is still alive. Sin is still present. Sin is still there. And that means there's more to be done. So that's where we are in the Bible story right now.

Sin is still alive.

[8 : 48] That God is going to carry out His good plans for the world. In fact, in the whole of chapter 10, God is hardly mentioned. He doesn't even feature. So chapter 10, we read.

And by the way, this is Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Right? And we read about their descendants. Now, there were no other humans around. Right? So everybody, every one of us is a descendant of one of them.

Every nation in the world. Every person in the world comes from Genesis chapter 10. This, what's called the table of nations. It was the start, the beginning of all the nations of our world.

And so the human race is growing and expanding. Nations are being built. Cultures are being formed. But God is nowhere to be found. That's the picture we get in chapter 10.

And so we read through chapter 10. There's some quite cool names there, by the way. You should read it at home. But what you'll notice as you read it is that God is not there.

[9 : 55] And so by the end of chapter 10, we're left asking the question, well, what is the plan now? Where is the world going from here? Where is the hope? What is going to happen? And then we read on and we discover, well, nowhere good.

And certainly not where God wants it to go. And that's what the story of Babel is here to highlight to us. It's here to show us and just bring into stark contrast the completely wrong trajectory that the human race has got itself on.

And so let's see what it says from chapter 11, verse 1. Now, the whole world had one language and a common speech.

As people moved eastward, and by the way, that's a little hint already that something is wrong. Because if you're familiar with Cain's story and Adam and Eve's story, eastwards always signifies a movement away from God and his ideal.

It's quite interesting. Anyway, verse 2. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.

[11 : 12] They used brick instead of stone and tar for mortar. 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. Okay, so with God seemingly to have taken a step back from what's going on in his world, humans decide to take over and to embark on their own project to better themselves, to advance themselves, establish themselves, and make a name for themselves with this new technology, the brick, which allows them to figuratively and literally reach higher than they've ever reached before.

Because that's what making a name for yourself means here. Now, I think we've got to understand that in ancient culture, the idea of your name was very important and was a big thing.

Much more important even than it is now. And making a name meant much more than just having followers on Instagram. It meant actually being significant, knowing that your life and knowing that the people around you know that your life is significant, that you're important, that you're valuable. That's what it meant to have a name, make a name for yourself, to be inherently valuable. But more than that, it also, making a name for yourself, was a forward-looking thing.

[12 : 45] It implied a form of immortality, to have a name, to establish your name, was to be more than just dust that comes from the ground and returns to the ground.

It was to have a legacy and progeny that lasted way after you've died. And so, these humans' desire to have a name was wanting to build the city in order to establish their importance and even, perhaps, to reach heaven and find some form of immortality there.

That's what it meant. That's what they were looking for. They didn't just build this because it was going to look nice. They had a purpose. To make a name, to make themselves valuable and to find, even maybe find God up there somewhere and have a chat and find immortality for themselves.

And we can't really blame them, though. Isn't that what we all want? And let's be honest. We all want to know that our lives are worth something, don't we?

We all want to be valuable. We all want to be significant. And so, it's not surprising that they embark on this project.

[14 : 02] I think we all would have done it in their position. What's surprising in this story is God showing up in the middle of it and ruining it all. Let's read on from verse 5.

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 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.

Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that they will not understand each other. So, the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city.

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.

When Alex was a toddler growing up, like one, two, we had this game we used to play. He won't remember it. But I do.

[15:04] I would, we had these blocks and I would build this tower. I would, and he would just watch. And I'd be building this tower and then just before I put the last block on the top he would smash it down.

And then he would sit back and giggle and wait for me to build it again. It was apparently very entertaining. And so it might seem that God is acting like a bit of a child at Babel. Humans are finally doing something significant. They're finally doing something that's going to uplift them. But before they can succeed God comes and smashes it all down and messes it all up. What's his problem? You know, what's so bad about humans building a city? Except if that's what you think. If you think that God is overreacting here. Well then you've missed what the real problem actually is.

You've missed the sin of Babel. And it's actually a very bad sin. And the reason we don't realize what the sin of Babel is is because we do it all the time.

[16:09] Because the real sin of Babel was man's attempt to find significance and value apart from God. Just look again in your Bibles at 11 verse 4 to see what I mean.

This was the sin of Babel 11 verse 4. And then we'll look at just we'll unpack it a bit. 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 earth. Okay so in fact if you read this we realize mankind sinned in at least three different ways here. Firstly they wanted to reach the heavens. In other words they wanted to be like God. They didn't see themselves in the right place as under God and under God's authority. You know we talk about being under someone or something. It means we submit to their authority. Well the whole point of building a tower was not to be under anymore. It was to be above. It was to be higher. And so they wanted to reach the heavens. They wanted to be like God because if you're like God you don't need God anymore.

[17:21] Right? In fact if you remember back to Genesis 3 that was exactly part of Satan's sales pitch to Eve. Do you remember? He said why don't you eat and you will be like God knowing good and evil.

You will be like God. You won't be under anymore. That's what all humans actually desire deep down. Not to be under authority.

Especially God's authority. And so that was part of their motivation here for what they did. And it was a very sinful motivation that undermined God's glory and holiness. Number two I've already mentioned as the main sin they wanted to make a name for themselves.

They wanted to be important and valuable apart from God. There's nothing wrong with wanting to be important and valuable but when you want to be important and valuable apart from the only one who can actually give you any value and the one who made you.

Creatures trying to find their place in the world without any reference to their creator. That's what's wrong here. And not only is that a sin but it's just dumb because it's like an employee of a company sitting at his desk ignoring his job description and deciding to make up his own job description without any consideration of what his bosses are actually paying him for.

[18:33] Imagine some guy deciding, you know, some guy sitting in his cubicle deciding that he is now the CEO of the company and his job description is to play golf all day and use company funds to wine and dine his friends and family.

Well that's essentially what humans are doing here at Babel. They're not only redefining their job but they're misusing company funds which we can see in the third way that they sinned at the end of verse 4.

Have a look. They wanted to settle and not be scattered over the face of the earth. Did you notice that? It's the reason they wanted to stay there. They didn't want to go all over the earth.

Now why is that so bad? Well because of the job description that God gave them in chapter 9. To be fruitful and to fill the earth. That's what God made them for.

To be fruitful, to fill the earth and to be a blessing. They just didn't want to. Now sometimes I tell my kids that they need to pack the dishwasher or help tidy up the lounge.

[19:36] Now it's not the most exciting job, right? It's not like they go, yes, I can't wait to pack the dishwasher. No. But they do it because dad told them to or mom told them to.

Not once, I'm pleased to report, have they crossed their arms and said, no, I don't feel like it. Okay, they haven't reached teenage years yet, but so far they listen to what we say, like God tells them to.

But at Babel, it turns out that the whole of humanity is acting like a stropky teenager. God gives them a job to do and they've folded their arms and said, nah, we don't feel like it. Find someone else. You know, it's the height of insolence towards their creator and their God. It's rejecting the purpose for which he put them on the planet. Okay, so I hope you can appreciate now that God actually has a reason to do what he's doing here.

I hope you can appreciate why he did what he did at Babel. Because not only was mankind wanting to define his own identity apart from God, but they were not wanting to do what God made them to do and rather they wanted to be like God themselves so they could decide what to do with their lives and their world.

[20 : 53] They could call the shots. And of course, when I put it like that, we realize we all tend towards that same sin in our own lives, don't we? Think about it.

Let's be honest. We all tend to be Babel builders. Whenever we think we can call the shots in our lives without considering what God wants for us, which we do every day without thinking. We put aside what God wants for us, we don't consider what God wants for us, and we decide what we want out of this life and where we want to go and how we want to use the breath and the bodies that God has given us.

Every time we do that, we're building at Babel. We live in the selfie generation, don't we? Where we are much happier drawing attention to ourselves than drawing attention to God.

But whenever we try to do this, whenever we try to make a name for ourselves and to glorify ourselves with our skills and gifts that God actually gave us for his purposes and for his glory, whenever we do those things, we're just repeating the sin of Babel.

[22 : 00] Genesis 11 is just happening again. And so what we need to understand next is just what God does in response. God does not let humans make a name for themselves.

In fact, he actively intervenes to frustrate those attempts. God came down. those words in verse 5, structurally, are actually the central point of the whole story, the turning point, the main event.

Those three words, or four, depending on your translation. The Lord came down. It's also a bit funny the way it puts it there in verse 5. God came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man had built.

Reminds me of a dad trying to make out his preschool daughter's scribbly drawing. What is that?

God has to actually come down just to make out what these humans are doing.

What are they doing down there? The point is that it's really not as impressive as they think it is. But the main point is that God still actively does something. He doesn't ignore that.

[23 : 14] Pathetic as it is, the fact that he has to come down and see what they're doing and make it out. What these children are playing with, with, it doesn't take away from the fact that he still does something about it to stop them.

Not so much because of the size of the tower. Okay, the tower was never going to reach heaven. But rather God does something because of the sin that motivated the building of that tower and the danger of mankind growing and becoming more and more hardened in their attempt to take his place.

He knows he can't let that carry on and get worse. It's bad enough as it is. And so you know what he does to stop humans from doing that. It's very, very sad.

It's one of the saddest things that we've come across so far in Genesis. To stop humans from carrying on their attempt to take his place, God has to remove their greatest source of strength, which is their unity.

Their unity. Verse 6, have a look. 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.

[24 : 28] Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from the face of all the earth and they stopped building the city. This is why it is called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world.

from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the earth. Now the famous saying which I'm sure you've seen written on coins or coats of arms, unity is strength.

You've seen that? It's true, isn't it? Unity is strength. When we're unified as a people, we are strong. The African ideal of Ubuntu, finding your identity in community, in unity with others, that is a good thing.

Unity is something we desperately need in our country, don't we? With our history of racism, people of different cultures not appreciating and understanding each other's differences.

And so it's really disturbing when we discover here in the Bible, it was God who did that. It was God who broke our unity with each other. God's confusing languages and scattering people into different nations was a deliberate act to break the source of our strength, which is our unity.

[25 : 50] But why would he do that? Why would he do that? Well, because when that strength that we get from our unity with each other, when that is used for the wrong reasons against God and not for him, well then he will always oppose it.

That's why he did it. Sad as it is, he had to. For his world. And so by the end of the Babel story, humanity is left in a sad state, not only separated from God, but for the first time in human history, separated from each other.

By this point in Genesis, the world has arrived in the state we know it all too well today, don't we? The world we know today is what came from what happened in Genesis 11.

People each trying to build their own Babels, find their own significance without sparing a thought for their creator. Nations in conflict with each other and it's not getting any better.

Don't think that we live in an age of peace and wars only happened, you know, thousands of years ago. More people have died in armed conflicts in the last hundred years than all of the centuries added together before that.

[27 : 05] It's not getting any better. And Genesis teaches us the cycle of sin just increases and intensifies and gets worse. And that's the world we see today.

Cultures divided. Not only nations, but within nations like ours. Cultures. People from different races and cultures, even if they do speak the same language, hardly taking time to understand each other and step in each other's shoes.

No, just judgment and bigotry and jumping to conclusions about other cultures that we don't understand.

Well, we see it in our world all around. And that leads, of course, to culture wars and racism that just keeps on cycling back and forth throughout history with no end in sight. That's the world we live in today, the divided world of Babel.

And we ask, well, what hope do we have if it's just getting worse? You know, those older generations will always say, you'll always hear it, back in my day, things were better.

[28 : 09] You know, kids could walk around and play at the park without worrying of it. Yes, you're right, because it's getting worse. But of course, their parents would have said, well, back in my day. Their parents would have said, back in my day. It's because we're not getting any better.

It's getting worse. I think we can all agree to that, yes? And so we ask, I think, deep down inside all of us, we look at, we read the newspapers, we look at our world, and we ask, what hope is there? In this world, I'm not talking about some insurance policy where I'll float up to some spiritual place someday. No, in this world that we are part of, that we were taken from, and that we are staying on, what hope is there?

Where is God and His good plan? For this world anymore? That's the question we're asking by the end of the Babel story. And maybe that's what you've been thinking this past week, especially as a country where you've suffered violent crime after violent crime.

And you hear it, you read it on Facebook, you read it in the newspapers, and you just go, what hope is there for this country? What hope is there for this world? And it's then that we've got to keep reading.

[29 : 17] Because Babel is not the end of the story. And when we read on, we discover another family line that, if you read it carefully, you would have realized it was deliberately left out of all the lines and nations spoken of in chapter 10.

Here it is, the missing strand of hope. The missing line that wasn't anywhere else in chapter 10.

A line in Shem's family that as we trace down, we find out God has not stopped His plan to fix this world. Because as we follow it, we discover it leads to a guy called Abram.

Now, we'll look in future weeks at how God continues His plan for His world through Abraham and His family. But for now, I want you to notice one thing.

If you skip forward in your Bibles to Genesis 12, verse 2, have a look at this. Look what God's going to promise to Abraham.

[30 : 27] Genesis 12, verse 2, I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. Look at this. And I will make your name great. I will make your name great.

It's fascinating, isn't it? While man tries in vain to make a name for himself at Babel, God promises to give humans a name. God promises to give us significance and immortality that we can't find for ourselves.

And that's a promise He fulfilled by sending Jesus to die for us. And to take our sins on Himself on the cross. All of those sins, all of those building of our own Babels, all of those things that separated us from God's presence and blessings in Eden, Jesus willingly voluntarily went to the cross to take that on Himself.

God's presence and His name became despised. He got spat on so that we could have a name and a future. And then what's really interesting, follow me with this.

What's really interesting is what happened after Jesus died and rose again and ascended to the place of power. Guess what happened? God came down. God came down.

[31 : 47] Again. At Pentecost by His Spirit. Turn with me to Acts chapter 2. Look at how God comes down this time.

Acts chapter 2. From verse 1. When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Oh, interesting. They were all together in one place.

That's the first time I've spotted that right here in the pulpit. Beginning at chapter 11. All the people were together in one place before God came down.

Let's read on. Verse 2. Suddenly a sound like a blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what it seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues. Literally. Other languages. As the Spirit enabled them.

[32 : 50] And so God came down again. But this time, instead of acting in judgment to confuse man's languages, He acted in salvation to do the very opposite.

To unify people again. Do you see that? Do you see what's happening in Acts chapter 2 and how it's a reversal of what happened in Genesis 11? And that's the reason He gave the apostles the supernatural spiritual gift to speak in other languages called tongues.

To spread the message of Jesus Christ to people previously separated from God and from each other. And to undo the curse at Babel for all who come under the rule of Christ.

We are all cursed by what happened at Babel. But those who come under the rule of Christ who died for their sins, they can experience an undoing of that curse in more ways than one.

Because in Christ, as we come to believe and follow Him, not only does God give us the significance that we crave and can't find for ourselves, because by following Christ, our lives here have now meaning and purpose and they're going somewhere as we carry out His mission.

[34 : 00] But also, as we come to believe and follow Christ, God gives us immortality that we can't get for ourselves.

To live in the world to come that God has always been planning from day one. And so, let's wrap this up. In closing, we learn some things from Babel for our own lives.

We learn, I think, two main lessons here that we can take with us as we leave later. The first lesson we get from the story of Babel. And that is, that if you are still trying to make a name for yourself, if you are still living your life trying to find significance and identity apart from God, and you know who you are, where God does not feature in your life, where your life and your goals and your identity are not His, and do not come from Him, if you're trying to find significance and life apart from God, then I want to tell you this morning, God will intervene to frustrate those plans every time.

Just like He did at Babel. God always frustrates human efforts to find significance and life apart from Him, ultimately through death. So you won't succeed.

You will not succeed if you're trying to find significance and purpose and meaning and immortality apart from God as He's revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Know that if you continue to try to live your life without reference to God, all that awaits you is judgment and eternal destruction.

[35 : 42] But know, too, that through coming under Christ's rule and salvation, God offers to give you significance and immortality that you can't get for yourself.

And that is the first lesson we get from Babel. Secondly, we get this from Acts chapter 2 in the New Testament. The second lesson this morning. That in the church, God has undone the curse of

Babel.

The curse of Babel is out there. We read it in the newspapers. We see it in the world outside. But in here, the curse is starting to be undone. In the church, God has once again unified humanity.

People from all different walks of life and cultures and backgrounds. To give us strength, not to build our own kingdoms, but to work towards building His kingdom. And look at us.

Look at us here. People from all kinds. We would never, if we didn't have this common, this thing in common, our submission to Christ and our desire to obey.

[36 : 45] And we would never gather together. We don't have much else in common. But we are united because in the church, God has undone the curse of Babel. We are united together in one aim.

And that is the significance and the identity that we have as members of God's church on earth.

That we are called out of this world with its Babel priorities to promote, not our own name, but the name of Jesus Christ.

That is why He united us. To talk to the people in our lives. The people that you see day to day. The people that you rub shoulders with. The people that God puts across your path.

To talk to those people. Not about how great you are. But about how great Jesus is. To promote His name so that by His strength, we point this broken and divided and hurting world to the hope of a restored world to come.

Will you join me in that mission? Let's pray. Yes, Lord. We look at the brokenness of this cursed world. And we're sober to think that you're the one who cursed it.

[37 : 54] Because human strength was being misused. We as a race of people were not doing what you had made us to do. And so, Lord, we thank you for revealing these things to us this morning through your spirit, by your word.

We thank you for helping us to see why the world is in the state it's in. And we thank you more than anything for showing us what the solution is. Showing us how you are reuniting humanity for a new restored world through Jesus Christ.

And Lord, we pray that we would truly come under His authority. That we would not live to build our own names, but to glorify His name. And that the world would see, the world would be drawn to Christ, and that you would save people through it.

In Jesus' name. Amen.