

"For all the people"

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Nice to see you this morning. We're going to continue this series, Why We Can't Cancel Christmas. Hopefully, through opening God's Word, connecting with Heaven, as we pray, as we hear from Him, He will enlighten our minds to a deeper understanding of what we're celebrating this month.

The world is more connected today than it's ever been before, isn't it? I mean, think of what you can do. You can send an instant message to someone on the other side of the world, just like that. You can give them a video call and see them face to face, as we've been doing. You can have a business meeting with people from all over the world in one virtual meeting. It's amazing how connected we are.

More than ever before in history, people would have given all their riches to do what a normal teenager can do in a minute today with technology. But as sociologists have studied the increase in our technology over the last few decades, this revolution, this technological revolution we've gone through and how we've been able to connect so much, they've been very surprised at one of the results that was unexpected.

And that is that as the world has become more connected, we've also, in many ways, become even more divided. Have you noticed that? I mean, if you look at the news and people's opinions, people are far more opinionated about things than they ever were before.

[1 : 29] There's far more divisions within societies than ever before. In the olden days, you know, countries went to war, but people within societies were coherent. And now it's just fragmented.

And it's partly as a result of our ability to communicate, oddly enough. One of the unexpected results of it. Social media, instead of actually connecting us to overcome our disagreements, has served to intensify our disagreements and put people in echo chambers where they only ever hear things that support their wrong views and cause them to be even more hostile against people who they disagree with.

And so instead of connecting, our degrees of separation have been even worsened. And what that proves, if nothing else, is that our divisions, our problems with people, are not the result of a failure to connect.

Often, we have more problems the more we connect with people. I mean, you might even, I hope you don't, but you might even experience that when the families gather together for their annual Christmas lunch on Saturday.

Often, when you get together with people, it doesn't overcome differences, it brings them out. And so our failure to overcome these differences isn't a result of not connecting.

[2 : 53] It's a result of something deeper, which we need to understand this morning. And we find out what it's a result of when we read Genesis chapter 11, the Tower of Babel.

I wonder when last you read the story of the Tower of Babel. Because this is one of the most overlooked stories in the Bible. And yet, it's so vital to understand what was going on there in Genesis chapter 11, because it explains so much of why our world and why our relationships are in the fragmented state they're in.

And so we're going to look at why we're divided before we consider why Christmas is so important. And the shocking truth that we discover as we read through closely and we study Genesis 11, the shocking truth is that it was God who divided us from each other.

We actually wanted to get along. I know it's difficult to believe. But we, at one point in our history, were getting along just fine. And we wanted to work together.

And it was God, it turns out, who stopped that from happening. It's difficult to believe. But we were once united. Look at Genesis 11, verse 1.

[4 : 16] The whole earth had the same language and vocabulary. We were on the same page. We spoke the same language in more ways than one. We got on. I know, isn't it?

I mean, imagine that. Imagine a world where everybody gets on. We got on at one point in our history. But look at how nine verses later things end up from the very last phrase of that story. End of verse 9. For there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth. And from there the Lord scattered them throughout the earth. The Lord did it.

God did it. So what that means is that all the conflicts that are a result of our differences, all the nationalism, all the racial conflicts, all the culture wars actually have their root right here in Genesis chapter 11.

This is where it all started. And we've got to ask ourselves, why would God do that? Knowing all the trouble it would cause. Well, the answer is, as we study this in more depth, as we study what was going on in Babel, the answer is, yes, God is the one who divided us.

[5 : 31] But the reason is because the alternative would have been even worse. And we find that out when we read just why the human race wanted to work together.

Have a look more closely at verse 4. And they said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let us, this is the important part, let us make a name for ourselves. Otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth. Let us make a name for ourselves. That is what united human beings. We wanted to come together and make a name for ourselves. Now, what's so bad about that? Making a name for oneself means to find value and significance and to find our place and our purpose in life. When you make a name for yourself, you want to show yourself and others that you are important, that you are significant.

And it seems an okay goal to want to make a name for ourselves, doesn't it? But the problem we need to understand is when humans thought they could do that apart from God.

[6 : 43] When we thought we could find any significance or value apart from the Creator who put us here. That's where it all went wrong. Do you see that? That's the problem of Babel, that we thought, we as humans, and we still do, but we thought we could unite to find value, to find significance, to find our place in the world without reference to God and His purposes for us and why He put us here.

And if that had succeeded, if God hadn't intervened, if we succeeded in that project, we would have still been united, most likely. But we would have also been completely cut off from any chance of being who God made us to be.

And so God dividing us like this, even with all its negative consequences, was an act of mercy.

Because to be united in this direction against God would have been the worst thing for us.

It's very hard to stop a crowd who's going in the same direction and who's determined to get somewhere, isn't it? Have you ever tried? Have you ever tried to stop a crowd all heading in the same direction?

Actually, this week I watched a documentary on the Capitol riots that happened in January 2021. Remember, it was all over the news during the U.S. elections, just before certifying the results.

[8 : 10] There were a whole lot of supporters of the incumbent president who stormed the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. People were killed, but there was this massive crowd.

And the Capitol police, good and effective as they were, couldn't stop this massive crowd who had decided to storm the building. And the amazing thing was, as I watched this documentary, so many ordinary people were caught up in this crowd and they found themselves doing things that they would never have done by themselves.

You had these soccer moms throwing rocks through Capitol building windows and breaking into places and smashing things up. Because they were part of this crowd and its direction that it was going, it was unstoppable.

And nobody could go any other way. And that is the same when the whole human race is united in the wrong way against God.

When the whole human race is united in the wrong direction, it would have become impossible for any of us to go any different way, except away from God.

[9 : 28] And so that's why God didn't let us do that. But He divided us up to prevent us from making the worst mistake of history. And that is what Babel is.

That is why it's significant. I hope you see the significance of what happened here at Babel and why it was an act of mercy. But of course the result is our fragmented society and our broken

relationships that we live in today.

We're still all trying to find our own name in pretty much so many different ways. And it's what most people are just concentrating on, whether they know it or not, is trying to build up our own life and our reputation and our value and our significance in our own eyes and in the eyes of others.

We're still working to make a name for ourselves, but we're not doing it together anymore. We're doing it in opposition to each other. And so that's why you get these conflicts of people each trying to make a name for themselves, trying to be bigger than the next person, and then you get these clashes, whether it's clashes of culture, whether it's clashes of individuals.

We clash because of this innate desire to make a name for ourselves and to reduce any threat that others present of us making a name for ourselves.

[10:43] That is at the heart of human conflict. And so we just can't play nice together when we're trying to each make our own name for ourselves. That's why society is like it is.

We keep clashing. It doesn't work. We don't work together. I was trying to think of a way to illustrate this, and so I asked Dylan to tune a guitar for me, this guitar, but I asked him to tune all the strings different.

Not what you would. You know, normally you hear a guitar and all the strings, they work together. But if all the strings are tuned on a different note, out of reference to each other, what does it sound like?

Not very nice, right? Well, that, that sound there, I want you to remember it, because that describes our society today, if you think about it.

Everybody doing their own thing, going their own way, seeking a name for themselves, and we just don't work together. And we don't fulfill the purpose for which God put us here, because we're all in our own tune.

[11:54] We're all seeking our own name. And that is why relationships clash. That is why you do have unpleasant family gatherings, because everybody is being offended by each other, because their name is being offended.

And so you, that, that sound, where all the strings are a different note, that, that is pretty much the description of relationships in society today. But there's good news.

There's good news. The good news is that God didn't leave us like that. And we see that as we carry on reading the Bible in the very next chapter of Genesis.

This is very important. Why Genesis 12 follows Genesis 11. Because you might know that in the next chapter of the Bible, after this division of the nations, God makes a very special promise to humanity through Abraham.

Abraham. But I want you to notice, as I read it again, exactly what he promises Abraham. You've probably heard this a lot, but I wonder if you've noticed this detail.

[12:57] Genesis 12, from verse 2, God says, I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great. And you will be a blessing.

Notice that. I will make your name great. God promises to give a name to humanity, to give value, to give significance to us that we struggle to get for ourselves.

so that we can, next line, be a blessing. When we have a name, we can be a blessing to others because then we can play the tune that our Creator intended for us to play as humanity.

Do you understand? Do you understand the significance of what God is promising Abraham here?

And it's only when we have that name that God promises to give us, rather than trying to find a name for ourselves, it's only then that we can actually be at true peace with each other.

And that is why the news of Christmas, of Jesus coming to this earth, is an announcement of peace on earth. Remember the angels announcing to the shepherds?

[14:06] What do they say? What do they say is the big news? The big news is that peace can now come on earth. Luke 2, verse 14. Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angels praising God and saying glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth to those who He favors.

Peace on earth. That is the news of Christmas. Why is it news? Well, it's because it's something the world doesn't have by itself. Are we able to be at peace with each other as human beings?

Really? I mean, we might have periods of peace where we're not technically at war with another country, but then is it really peace? If you look in our own country, you know, we're not at war with each other, but you could hardly say we're at peace.

And even, you know, if we do look at the geopolitical situation today, Russia is preparing to invade Ukraine. China is wanting to invade Taiwan.

USA and South Africa, we're pretty much invading ourselves just with all the internal squabbles.

And if you consider it, actually, we're not getting any more peaceful as the human race.

[15:21] In the 20th century alone, there were more deaths by violent means than all the other centuries previously combined together. The world is not getting any more peaceful. That's why this is news, what the angels announced, that there is a way to have peace on earth.

And the reason they can announce it is because Jesus came to fulfill God's promise to Abraham to give us a name that we can't get for ourselves.

And that is the secret to being at peace with each other, is getting the name that God promises to give us. And as we read on and we read what Jesus did and why He came, the Gospel writer John puts it this way in John 1.

He says, But to all who received Him, Jesus, He gave them the right to be children of God to those who believe in His name.

That's important. Those who understand His value and significance, as the center of God's intent for the world, as the Son of God, as the Messiah, as the center of history, those who receive His name, who realize His value and trust in Him, in Jesus, they are given the right to become the children of God.

[16:50] That's amazing, isn't it, if you think about it? I mean, you might consider yourself and go, really, do I have that much value? I don't think so. We don't typically think of ourselves as very valuable.

That's why we have to work so hard to try to build up our name in the eyes of others. But here, there's a promise that we can be children of God. That is the most valuable that we could ever be. Why, though? Knowing our sin, knowing our shortcomings, knowing our failures, why is it that we could have that name and become children of God?

Well, Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5.19 like this. He says that in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people's trespasses against them.

In Christ, and what He did on the cross, Jesus has done something to reconcile us with God, to restore that relationship so that we can receive the name that God wants to give us and the purpose that He put us here and the value that He made us for all because of what Jesus did to take your unworthiness and your sins on Himself and your shame on the cross.

[18:09] He took that away if you're one of His people and in exchange He gave you a name you could never get for yourself. Value in the eyes of God who loves His covenant people with an unending love.

And when you realize that, then you can actually stop trying to fight for your own name because you realize you don't have to fight for it anymore because God's already given you a name.

And that is the only way you can ever be at true peace with other people. And that is the only way there can ever be true peace on earth and that is why the angels announce it with the coming of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And it's good news for all people. Remember that's what they said? We announced good news. We saw last week what good news means but they said it's good news for all people.

Why? Because all people need this. No matter what your background, no matter what your previous belief system, no matter what your culture, we all need the name that God wants to give us and the name we can only find through trusting in Christ.

[19:14] And the reason is because our relationship problems always are a result of trying to make our own name. You might not realize it but that is it. The relationship problems you have with other people, the reason that they offend you and you need to fight them back and you need to respond and react like you do which causes a fight, it's because they're offending your name and you need to defend your name.

That is the cause of marital conflicts. I've seen it time and time again in counseling married couples it's because they're offending each other's name and they're making each other feel little and they're trying to boost themselves and suppress the other person or whether it's marital conflicts or fights between friends or family or the fights that happen around the Christmas table after a little bit too much champagne and all the ugliness comes out because everybody's wanting to defend their names.

You know what that means? It means the only way that you can ever have any lasting peace in your relationships with other people is to know your name that God wants to give you and be secure in the value you have in Christ.

That is the only way you will overcome your interpersonal issues with other people is when you have your value secure in Christ and you realize who you are who God has made you because then you don't have to fight back.

then you can let things go and you can actually be at peace. And more than that not only can you be at peace with others when you have the name that God wants to give you but you get to be part of the new humanity that God is making and this is really exciting news that the Bible also reveals to us.

[21 : 01] God is making a new humanity out of these people that he is giving a new name to. So Paul in Ephesians 2 he is writing to the Ephesian church and they were having a problem in that they were clashing.

They had a lot of tribalism going on much like the world today. People of different groups being offended trying to one up each other and the groups that Paul was dealing with in the Ephesian church were the Jews and the Gentiles who are now part of this church and so he writes Ephesians partly to address that but look what he says in or hear what he says in Ephesians 2 14 he says for Jesus is our peace who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility in his flesh.

What he is saying there to these warring groups is that you are no longer two different groups you are no longer defined as Jew or Gentile or black or white or whatever the world defines you as. You are no longer different tribes if you have received the new name in Christ because you are now part of a new humanity who is no longer defined by race and culture but only by your allegiance to the king of the coming kingdom.

That is what causes you to be part of this new humanity and you know what? you will find those people in every culture irrespective of what that culture looks like irrespective of the language difference the cultural differences you will find people who follow the king of kings the Lord Jesus Christ who have been given a new name and that is why Christianity has spread over all the world and it transcends all the dividing walls that the world puts up having received that new name from God.

[22 : 57] and the most evident example of this was actually right at the beginning of where the church started.

Do you know how the church was formed? Do you know where in the Bible the church was first formed? It started to be called Christians and started to be called the church it was at Pentecost in Jerusalem 40 days after Jesus ascended the great sermon of Pentecost Peter declared but there was a whole lot of supernatural stuff going on they received the Holy Spirit in the visible form of flames of fire but one of the things do you remember what happened there when the church was formed and Peter started preaching?

All of these people who were gathered around there from all of these different nations and tribes could understand him in their own languages because God gave Peter and the other apostles for that time the supernatural ability to speak in foreign tongues in foreign languages and he waited until the day of Pentecost where there was deliberately a whole lot of different people from different nations so that the church could start with the uniting of these cultures that were previously divided the formation of the church is the undoing of Babel so just as in Genesis 11 God separated people into different languages through Christ those who come together in Christ and receive the new name that he promises to give them unite again and those barriers are removed thousands of years later church this even if it doesn't look like much this right here is the reuniting of humanity people previously divided people with different cultures maybe from different belief systems different races all the things that the world says must divide you and yet they come together at church and together learn by the power of the

Holy Spirit to live in grace and forgiveness with each other and to work together even despite our differences what we do at church it's not just sing songs and listen to sermons it's actually get involved in God's kingdom work together we work together not for our own kingdoms and our own names like we did at Babel but for God's kingdom and the new creation that he is planning church is the reuniting of humanity it's a much more profound thing than it looks like God is busy making that new humanity right now question are you part of it if you're not you can be you can be part of the

new humanity God is planning to inhabit his new creation without sin and death and corruption in resurrected bodies you can be part of that remember this news that the angels announced it's for all people whoever you are no matter what you've done no matter what your background your history you can be reconciled with

God because of what Jesus did on the cross just by coming to him and trusting in him and if you are reconciled with God if you've received that name then you need to realize afresh just what it means what it means to have a new name what it means to receive what he promised Abraham I will give you a name what it means to have a new name in Christ means that you don't need to fight anymore you know you don't need to fight for a name you don't need to defend your reputation you don't need to react when you're offended that is the way of the world but if you have a new name in Christ you're able to forgive offenses you're able to let them go because your value is secure in Jesus and in being a child of God and in doing so when you learn how to do that then you will be able to show the world around you the way to a true and lasting peace on earth that they will not find anywhere else that's why we can't cancel

[27 : 11] Christmas let's pray Lord we thank you for that promise you made to Abraham we thank you for the mercy of dividing us so that we didn't unite against you and cut off any chance of being the people you made us to be we thank you for all that you've done in history to bring us to know you to hear your revelation and to receive the name that you promised to give us a new name a new identity in Christ help us to live that out Lord as we go to Christmas as we might gather with family who we haven't seen for a while maybe people we don't get on with naturally Lord help us to remember our name help us to remember our name in Christ help us to have the power in that in our security in Christ to forgive offenses to let things go to be peacemakers and to show those people around us what it means to be part of your new humanity and we pray this in

Jesus name Amen