

2015-12-06 Service

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BABEL MAKES SENSE

Lately as we've been going through this series in Genesis I've found myself thinking about the decisions that some of the people in these stories have made:

- The people of Babel deciding to gather together and create a strong city for their prosperity and protection
- Abram going down to Egypt to get away from the famine
- Lot choosing the best land and settling near Sodom
- Sarai and Abram taking matters into their own hands and using Hagar to get an heir

And the truth is: these choices, from a logical, earthly perspective, make sense and on the face of them there isn't anything inherently evil or sinful about them. They're using common sense to do what seems best in the situation. There's nothing wrong with that, right? Unless...

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY

A guy is out tramping through the woods hunting. He's a regular kind of guy: not rich or poor, married w/ a few kids, has a house, a couple of cars, normal job, nothing fancy. He's hunted on this land for years. His dad got permission from the owner back when he was a kid. They referred to it simply as "The Hunting Grounds". But this year something happens that changes everything.

Even though it's still early in the day and he hasn't bagged his quarry, something happens and he abruptly leaves the woods and heads home. When he gets home he surprises his wife by somewhat breathlessly telling her, "Honey, I know this sounds crazy, but we have to buy The Hunting Grounds!"

She agrees with him...that it sounds crazy! There's no way they could afford that. They live basically paycheck to paycheck. They have a little savings for emergencies and a small retirement fund, but nowhere near enough to buy that land.

"I know, but I've figured it out! We'll sell everything! The house, the cars, the boat..." he declares, grinning.

She's about to...ah... strenuously object when he stops her.

“Wait! Let me show you something,” he says as he’s reaching into his pocket. Then he tells her what happened in the woods.

Minutes later the two of them together, giddy with excitement, are feverishly putting together a plan for how they are going to sell everything they have to raise enough money to buy The Hunting Grounds.

So, what happened to this man out in the woods? As he was hiking around The Hunting Grounds in an area he hadn’t hunted before, he tripped over something. At first he was annoyed, because he almost went sprawling on the ground, but then he became curious about what he had tripped on because it didn’t feel like a root or a rock or the like. So he goes back and looks and discovers what looks like the corner of a metal box jutting up out of the ground.

Now he’s really curious and grabs a big stick and starts to dig around it and sure enough it is a box of some kind - very sturdy and heavy. After some considerable time and effort, sweating and panting, he’s cleared enough dirt away to open the box and when he lifts the lid...

...TREASURE! Beyond his wildest imagination, filling the box! Gold, diamonds, rubies, emeralds...worth millions!

Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (Matthew 13:44 ESV)

What was Jesus trying to communicate with this story? Jesus was trying to tell us that the normal, earthly way we live life - thinking it’s all about making a living, and relationships, and having fun, and helping others, and being safe - all of that makes sense...

...**until you meet him**...and you realize that there is a treasure in this life that makes every other good thing look like dust in comparison, and that you’d gladly trade everything to have it.

That’s what happens to us when we meet Jesus and God saves us.

You see by telling us this story Jesus is showing us that **JOY** is not secondary or a nice optional fringe benefit of Christianity. Joy in God, the realization of Christ’s worth, the absolute conviction that only he can satisfy us is the main **POINT** of Christianity!

Being saved by God's grace from his deserved wrath towards our sinfulness is AMAZING...BUT it's only half the story. That is what he has saved us from - YES - but what has he saved us TO?

As our eyes are opened to our guilt and the judgement we deserve and we cry out in faith for Jesus to save us, God removes our guilt by the blood of his Son shed on the cross and in so doing he makes slaves into sons, aliens into citizens, enemies into friends, he makes the blind to see, the dead to live and he enables those of us who once hated his infinite glory and goodness into people who now treasure it above all else.

This is what happens to us when God saves us. As John Piper recently posted on Facebook, "At the most basic and fundamental level, Christianity is a deep, profound transformation of what we treasure."

THIS is why all of those decisions made by the people we've studied in Genesis were evil. "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:21 ESV)

It's not wrong to want the things that these people were choosing. But their life choices were showing that they were not trusting and treasuring God.

"God is important and everything but so is building a safe, prosperous community."

"Yes, God is great, but we have to eat!"

"I know God promised to make me into a great nation, but we're not getting any younger..."

Finding joy in God as our treasure is what God has saved us TO!

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

In the wonderfully astounding economy of God he is supremely honored when we who were his enemies are not just PARDONED but now find our highest happiness and pleasure in HIM - to the praise of his glorious grace!

The chief end of man is to glorify God BY enjoying him forever.

God is most glorified in US when we are most satisfied in HIM!

BUT...

Can we have some real talk here this morning? None of us in this room are completely satisfied in God right now. None of us is loving the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. In fact, In fact, none of us, even in our best moments, EVER loves the Lord our God with ALL of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

[Are you tracking with me on this? You can come back at me if you want on this - you bring your Scripture and I'll bring mine and we can have a Bible brawl over it.]

To put it another way: at any given time we do not completely lean on God for our joy and happiness and satisfaction and security. We are always, to greater or lesser degrees depending upon where we are in our journey, leaning on other lesser pleasures and treasures instead of fully trusting and treasuring Christ. And really...that is essentially the definition of idolatry - trusting and treasuring something other than God.

[Yeah...that's about the reaction I got when I brought this up at small group recently...]

I'm not bringing this up as a word of condemnation. On the contrary, I mention it as a hopeful word of helpful instruction. Because what's at stake here is not God's love for you, or your identity as his beloved child. If you are trusting in Christ for salvation, that's settled once and for all. No one and no thing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus, Amen?

But what IS at stake here is your joy and your displaying of God's glory in how you treasure him. You see, we have before us the holy duty of getting as much joy as we possibly can and not settling for empty trifles. This is how we glorify God. By enjoying HIM, by being satisfied in HIM, by treasuring HIM, by trusting HIM. And this is also how we can be lastingly and deeply and truly HAPPY. ISN'T THAT A GREAT ARRANGEMENT?!

But, as long as we trod this mortal soil, we are locked in a struggle where Satan, Society and our own Sin all fight to keep us from seeing how wonderful God is and to distract us and lure us away from him with small, empty pleasures.

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do (Galatians 5:17 ESV)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. (John 10:10 ESV)

what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; (1 Peter 4:3-4 ESV)

This is what keeps us from ever fully seeing, savoring and being satisfied with the Supremacy of Christ. These things are real and strong and they get their hooks into us all the time. They distract us. They cloud our vision. They encourage us to believe lies. They lead us astray.

TWO ENCOURAGING THINGS:

“IF YOU SEEK HIM, HE WILL LET YOU FIND HIM”

There is a principle found throughout the Bible that God shows himself to those who seek for him. It's a guarantee from God.

- If you seek him, he will let you find him.
- Ask and you will receive
- Seek and you will find
- Knock and it will be opened to you
- Come to me and I will give you rest
- Taste and see that God is good

This is our main task in life. Laboring to know Jesus more clearly, to love him more dearly and follow him more nearly. Everything else is secondary. Seeing and Savoring Christ, finding our full and lasting joy in God is our main Goal. As the catechism says, “The chief end of man is to glorify God BY enjoying him forever.”

This is what Jesus meant when he said, *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (Matthew 6:31-33 ESV)

When you get the main thing right, everything else falls into line.

Like the old hymn says,
“Turn your eyes upon Jesus.
Look full in his wonderful face.

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
in the light of his glory and grace”

This work, this goal, this pursuit is life-long and takes a lot of effort. But it is the most important and the most rewarding and the happiest task to which you can apply yourself.

HAVE YOU SEEN MY DAD!?

But if all I had for you today was that message - Seek first God's Kingdom! - this would be a miserable message, wouldn't it?

TRY HARDER!
DO BETTER!
STOP SINNING!

That message on its own is hopeless and futile. And the only appropriate response for us to that message is I CAN'T!!! Because we can't! That's what we just talked about!

It's what the Pharisees were doing when Jesus told them, *“Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.”* (Luke 11:46 ESV)

But Jesus isn't like that. Jesus doesn't leave us there!

There is a force in this room that maybe only a few here are aware of and are tapping into. We can't see it or hear it or taste it or touch it, but it is real and it is an amazing source of a powerful thing. [No, you Star Wars geeks I'm not talking about The Force!] This force I'm talking about is called Wi-Fi.

In a similar way there is a real and powerful force available for all Christians called the Holy Spirit. If you have trusted Christ, his Spirit is within us and is working to do many things for us: teaching us, opening up our eyes to the beauty of Christ, strengthen us in our faith, warning us against the danger's of evil, emboldening us to fight against the schemes of sin and Satan and reminding us of WHO we are and WHOSE we are.

As we purpose to seek after Christ as our treasure - to work to see and savor him day by day - and we come up against all of the difficulties and roadblocks of our own sinful hearts, the opposition from the enemy and the cooperation he gets in society from his kingdom of this world...WE MUST REMEMBER that...he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4 ESV)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:14-15)

God's Spirit in us leads us away from fear NOT BECAUSE HE REMINDS US THAT WE'RE AWESOME but because he reminds us that we are his kids and that he is our Dad.

So, when the difficulty that wants to pull us away from treasuring Christ confronts us from WITHIN and from WITHOUT it's not just a matter of bucking up and being strong. We can confidently fight against the pull of Sin and Satan and Society because God's Spirit within us prompts us to say to them, "**HAVE YOU SEEN MY DAD?**"

Oh, you want to pull the suffering card on me? Take away my job or my health or my family? That would really hurt! That would be really hard! BUT HAVE YOU SEEN MY DAD? He's awesome! And he holds me in the palm of his hand!

You want to tell me that I'm too sinful, that I've failed too many times, that I don't deserve God's love? That I should just quit trying? That stings because there's truth in it, but seriously, DO YOU KNOW MY DAD? He's washed me clean! He's loved me with an everlasting love! You can't touch that!

You want to tempt me with little bitty worldly pleasures: money, security, sex, popularity...? Are you kidding me? HAVE YOU SEEN MY DAD? He's all I'll ever want and he gives me everything I'll ever need and one day I'll inherit the WORLD as his kid! You want to tempt me with those baubles?! Please!

Oh, you're going to kill me? HAVE YOU SEEN MY DAD? Go ahead! Usher me into eternal glory and infinite happiness!

You see, if we purpose to seek to know the treasure that Christ is and be satisfied in God day by day, God's Spirit will aid and strengthen and guide and defend us along the way.

So, I urge you: spend your life seeking above all things True and Lasting Happiness by seeking to See and Savor Jesus Christ.

As Richard, Bishop of Chichester wrote in 1253 and the band DC Talk repeated a few years later:

“O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly and follow thee more nearly, day by day.”