

Series: "Genesis...The Beginning Continued"

Sermon: "The Name We Call"

Text: Romans 1:21-22; Genesis 4:26:26; Genesis 11:1-1-4

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- Have you ever wondered or fretted over why you can't fix the world? Maybe your goal is a bit less lofty. Maybe you wonder why you can't fix just *your* world—your life or even just one aspect of your life. There are circumstances you can't fix. Contingencies you can't control. Some of these are small and slightly irritating. Others are life changing and even heartbreaking.
- If you have been influenced much by A-MUR-can values," you have likely been taught everything can be fixed. And, as "A-MUR-icans," more and more you have been taught WE can fix it!
- It has been a powerful reminder to me to watch this "A-MUR-ican" "We Can Do It!" belief and value played out in connection with the Covid 19 virus. People at very different places on the spectrums of politics, science, punditry, medicine, economics and sociology usually all project one thing in common. They ALL believe humans can "fix" what is broken in our world because of this virus. Each has their different solutions but each indeed has their *certain* solutions!
- Another element most all who have their solutions have in common is a *missing* element. Unless prodded to add it, one rarely hears even a quiet, "**Lord willing,**" as the foundation of any of the human strategies. The common belief in human **autonomy** is obvious. "WE can fix this and we don't need to rely on any supernatural, miraculous, magic, mumbo jumbo to do it!"
- I said this has all been a "*powerful reminder*" to me. A reminder of what? A reminder that humans have a shared tendency to choose *autonomy* from God rather than *submission and gratitude* to God as their Creator.
- Humans, even some who are believers in God, more often live lives independent of God until they finally reach the "end of a given rope" and are facing certain failure and pain in their own efforts at life.

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- Please understand, I'm not a believer in living life passively as a religious human. I believe we can indeed do things—wonderful things! So, this is not an argument against thinking, hard work, innovation or human accomplishment. This is an argument against ***independent accomplishment***—against living autonomously when it comes to God.
- Now that many of us have been vaccinated and we could soon reach that theoretical "herd immunity," I believe the experts would say it is *safe* for us to go back to our study of the book of Genesis.
- Although my last official sermon on Genesis was preached a year ago, the grand, foundational theology of that OT book has still been in my mind and heart flavoring meanwhile all we have been studying together.
- I am grateful to Reverend, brother, doctor Jim Reitman, who bravely continued and completed his current study of Genesis without ceasing for a mere viral pandemic. Jim's work on Genesis has helped me much more easily bring together so many beautiful threads of theology and has introduced me to some powerful new thoughts from the first book of our Bible.
- As I have reviewed, in order to "*begin again in the "beginning,"*" I am filled anew with awe over the ability of this living-book of the Bible to provide overarching patterns. Some of these patterns are of human behavior. They repeat in fractal-like ways being repeated in individuals, families, peoples, cultures and the entirety of humanity.
- However, likely more on Moses' authorial-mind is telling Israel, and now us, about God the Creator dealing by His unwavering purpose and perfect righteousness with the humans He has created.
- Without having to twist even a bit to make it fit, the book of Genesis is able to account for all of human history, civilization, culture,

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triumph and failure in relation to God. Genesis convinces me, more than ever, that our Creator God knows, without fail, His creatures and creation including us complicated humans!

- The insights God reveals in Genesis, when we grasp them as they are intended by Scripture, are never threatened by any so-called human wisdom. This is true whether they are from the fields of our hard sciences or from our more humanistic conclusions about why we are even here in this universe at all. What God tells us about ourselves, in this first book of the Bible wisely, accurately and justly sits in perfect judgment over all that us creatures individually or collectively might concoct on our own.
- It is only a "**fool**," according to the Apostle Paul, who would attempt to claim otherwise.
- The book of Genesis tells us of a Creation—better a Creative purpose and the Creator—that any person who considers—oh say, the stars in a night sky, will actually recognize must be reality.
- Yet the Apostle says, "***For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.***"
- Without acknowledging the truth of God, all humans are either foolishly wise or wise fools. "*Apart from God, we can do nothing*" was about how Jesus put it meaning nothing of true value for LIFE.
- To the Roman believers, the Apostle was simply restating the problem illustrated by so many patterns of God and His Human Creatures so clearly described in the book of Genesis. That problem, spanning all of human history, and we are given some tantalizing

hints that it didn't begin with the beginning of that history—that problem could be summed up in one, simple question: ***Who gets the glory?***

- Who gets the credit for life and life's accomplishments? Whose reputation is enhanced? Or as the book of Genesis puts it, "***Who gets the NAME?***"
- Can human beings make a *name* for themselves without involving the God who created them for His purposes? Can you and I find lasting purpose and significance for existing in this vast universe on our own so that our lives actually have value beyond a materialist, temporary coming together of *chance* atoms and *purposeless* energies?
- Can I make a real, lasting, ***name*** for myself in the bigger scheme of human existence?
- Genesis clearly teaches repeatedly, at every level of humanness the answer to that question is an absolutely certain—"***NO, I cannot!***" But, like every human ever created or born, I will certainly give it my best shot, at least from time to time, and so will you.
- Even when we know God, there are times when we will struggle trying to find purpose and significance apart from Him—struggle with living a meaningful life "autonomously."
- Sometimes humans will abandon any façade of humility and need for God. They will flagrantly attempt to concoct the purpose and significance—of a self-made name—with all of the energy and resources they can muster. Jim has labeled this "***ambitious autonomy,***" and all of us are guilty, at times, of *ambitiously* seeking to make our name—to make life work—*autonomously*—that is, without relying on faith in God and his gracious provision for his purposes. All of us, at times live as if we don't really need God.

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- So, "**Who gets the glory?**" Or, in Genesis, more thematically put, "**Who gets the NAME?**"
- I've talked more than once before about a question that often goes unspoken here but still rises in some of us. That question asks, "**Isn't a glory seeking God, a selfish God?**" Isn't a deity a bit self-focused if He starts things off in His holy Word with a book of "beginnings" focused on the absolute necessity that his NAME alone be **THE** name in all of Creation?
- I've told you before as well, of my experience about 15 years ago reading the words of a Croatian theologian by the name of Miraslov Volf on this very question. Although I am not certain how much of professor Volf's overall theology with which I would agree, I agreed with, and still agree with today, what he said in answering the question about God's exclusive, even jealous, glory-seeking ways.
- What would Volf say about the glory-seeking—own-Name-making God as he is described in Genesis?
- To the accusation of this being an unrighteous, selfish focus he says, "**...(W)e don't have to give up on the idea that God seeks God's own glory. WE just need to say that God's glory, which is God's very being, is God's love, the creative love that wants to confer good upon the beloved. Now the problem of a self-seeking God has disappeared, and the divinity of God's love is vindicated. In seeking God's own glory, God merely insists on being toward human beings the God who gives.**" Free of Charge; Miraslov Volf, p. 39
- As professorial as that may sound to some of us, those words so touched me they received, from me, the very erudite, academic markings of a "WOW" and three exclamation points in the margin of Volf's book fifteen plus years ago. I still would mark them the same eye-catching way today!

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- What Volf is saying, is that, far from God's seeking God's own, exclusive glory being a *selfish* act, it is the act of the God of love, loving his creatures and creation, by giving them true LIFE in a creation he designed in order to share that LIFE.
- In other words, when God is being glorified by us we have aligned ourselves with the only true conduit of real LIFE from the Creator.
- When God is being glorified in a person, a family, a people, a nation, a culture, a universe—when God is being glorified by us, as God, at any of these levels, the outcome will ultimately be an outpouring of true life from God to us as it was intended to be. The ultimate outcome will be all is "good" and right with the created world and us as it was intended.
- In the book of Genesis, when God's NAME is being lifted, magnified, called upon, as the trustworthy Creator, in other words, when God is being **glorified** by humans, the ultimate result is the LIFE God, in perfect love, created humans to experience.
- When humans are experiencing true LIFE from God as the source, humans then also experience their God-created purpose. Humans then understand their God-created significance. Humans then know why they are here AND, humans do not have a need to make up their own name in autonomy from God.
- When humans glorify God—when they make God's NAME **The** NAME, that emptiness in the center of the human heart that can haunt us as creatures in a vast universe over which we have little real control—that emptiness is filled with a Glory it cannot contain and we need none of our own glory. We need none of making our own name.
- We then need none of the endless effort to find artificial, transitory ways to cover the emptiness and pain to give us a fleeting moment

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of artificial peace. That is, when we live to glorify the God, who gives himself to us, we have found how continually to consume the very *bread of life* and drink the very *fountain of living water* no matter our station in life and no matter our circumstances in that moment. That is the "abundant LIFE" we humans all seek and the only way to experience it.

- This week, before we enter into a slightly more detailed review of the book of Genesis, and then move forward, please let me remind us of the most important metric of the book.
- As we will continue to see, Genesis makes many, if not most, of its important points by contrast. This morning I will finish by pointing out just one.
- Remember, Adam and Eve have sinned by choosing to find purpose on their own. This taint of sin is not easily contained. It spreads to their family. Their firstborn son, Cain, in a rage produced because of a desire to worship his own way—a rage born of autonomy—kills their second-born son, Abel.
- To us, it may appear that sin ramped up fast. From eating from a forbidden tree to fratricide—brother killing! The reality is that once autonomy from God—independent living from God—entered the human race, the ultimate, controlling sin, had already infected humanity.
- Choosing **not** to live by trusting God is the root of all sin. It is not a small thing, somehow less than murdering your own brother.
- In the midst of this mess, we see the always-repeated pattern of the Creator God who redeems and recovers his CREATION-plan to share his LIFE. This particular time, God does it by providing another son, Seth, who will replace Abel in the plan. At the end of chapter 4 in Genesis, we find Eve being wise by acknowledging that this birth—

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this *reproductive* redemption to continue God's plan—reproductive redemptions are critical both in advancing and thwarting God's plan to fill the earth with his Life giving NAME—this reproductive redemption is the work of the LORD God.

- Seth is not simply a child born by the will of a human father and mother autonomously from God.
- BTW: no human child ever is born independent of God. This is true, no matter how much Planned Parenthood would like to say otherwise to proclaim their autonomy from any higher authority than their own name-making ways.
- Seth, the child of reproductive redemption by God, in turn has a son named Enosh to carry on reproductively God's purposeful, life-giving plan to fill the earth with his NAME—with His glory.
- Then comes a watershed statement in the second half of *Genesis* 4:26. "***At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.***"
- We could say many things about this statement and I did, a year ago. Today, I want us to focus on a contrast. To see that contrast we just have to keep in mind that "calling on the Name of the Lord" was a recognition, by the humans who did it, of the authority, power, character and sovereignty of the Creator God, the LORD, over their existences. It was a statement of dependence on the LORD. It was a proclamation that lifted his NAME up as **THE** NAME of all Creation. It was as God intended creation to be in order to share his LIFE.
- I could pick many examples from the chapters that follow this verse because the contrasting pattern, I want to highlight repeats itself over and over again. However, let me take one of the most explicit statements of the contrast.
- Look at chapter 11 please. Let me read the familiar story beginning at verse 1. **READ Genesis 11:1-4**

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- The human population has grown quite a bit since the births of Seth and Enosh—since that time when men began to call in their dependence for life on the name of the LORD.
- As the human population grows, will that calling on the LORD's NAME continue as it should so that God's glorious NAME fills all the earth as planned? Will all humans acknowledge that LIFE comes only from God by everyone calling on the NAME of the Life-giving Lord? You already know the answer to that question both from the text and from watching humans in our world today going about life as if God doesn't exist or doesn't really matter. The answer is a loud, rebellious, "NO!"
- Here, in *Genesis 11*, the humans shout it out explicitly, ***"Let's make a name for ourselves! Let's do it in direct contravention of God's plan to make our point! Our name is what matters to us not the LORD's NAME!"***
- This is the contrast that matters in *Genesis*. This is the metric that matters the most in the stories of the beginnings of a relationship between God and his created human agents of his purposes.
- Do they call on the NAME of the LORD in dependence for all of LIFE or do they call on their own name that they can build on their own in autonomous living—independent from God.
- We will see this metric used to measure whole nations—whole people-groups. We will also see it used to measure lone individuals.
- In *Genesis*, we will see the stories of individuals and families as they struggle to live consistently by calling on the NAME of the LORD instead of relying on their own—self-created, facical replacements of that NAME.
- Abraham, and then his family, will be a great example of this struggle as we move forward from where we paused in the book.

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- This is the point of Abraham's story. Will he trust God or will he trust himself? We might say will he have faith in God or will he place his faith in some other infinitely weaker source of lesser life and power?
- Here is the metric that matters first and foremost to God. Are you calling on my NAME or doing that yourself? If you understand what I am asking, you'll realize this is the only metric that matters to God when he measures us and our success or failure to do the Good works he has set out beforehand that we may walk in them.
- "Are you trusting me or trusting yourself?"
- This is what Moses wanted Israel to learn from the book of *Genesis*. As a nation, are you trusting me or yourself for LIFE?
- This is the same point I have been trying to get at for some weeks now in connection with FBC. The metric is not what good works have you done or not done. It is not what potential mistakes have you made as a church or what have you potentially gotten right? The metric that matters is, are you trusting me or trusting yourself for LIFE as a church?
- *Genesis* will certainly clarify for us that this is no easy once-for-all question when it comes to humans individually or as a community.
- When we are trusting God—that is calling on the NAME of the LORD for all of LIFE—we are making his NAME great—glorifying Him—filling the whole earth with his glory. This is what we were created to do. This is what provides us with the experience of ABUNDANT living.
- When we are trying to make our own name a bit greater (in big ways or small ways)—trusting ourselves to build whatever monuments to our significance and success, calling on anyone or anything other than God for LIFE, we are doing the same thing those tower-building fools tried to do on that plain in Shinar.

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- We will end up building, not life—not Jesus' Church, but a momentary tower attesting to our own wise-foolishness or foolish-wisdom.
- In the days ahead, lets' love each other enough to help each other not be fools! May it be said of us: ***"In those days the men and women of FBC called upon the NAME of the LORD!"***