

Introduction

Context

- Working our way through Genesis, not exhaustively, but trying to get some sense for the flow of the book...
 - chapters 1-3, which we've looked at so far, describe the **world as God made it and as man spoiled it**
 - in terms of literature, most scholars will group everything up to chapter 12 as "**creation myth**", undated and undateable material from pre-history
 - some will scorn it as unreliable, myth in the popular sense as well as the literary
 - others will recognise God's revelatory action - **as I trust we do** - in either "telling" whoever wrote Genesis down what happened before Abraham, or in helping them select those handed-down stories of ancient times, those "myths", which were actually true!
- These chapters develop the story:
 - **where does sin get you?**
 - **into trouble!!**
 - so we have Cain and Abel - chapter 4 - the first murder
 - the sin of the pre-flood generation, and God's judgement against them in chapters 6-8
 - but now interleaved there we also have the story of God's first rescue mission (the ark), his first covenant with humanity (the rainbow)
 - **and here in chapter 11 we have something of what happens when sinful humanity is given its head...**

Ambition

- "Ambition is part of human nature. It is the desire to improve yourself. It is the desire within society for the approval of your fellow men and women. It is the yeast in the dough of society, and without it we would live back in the caves." - Theresa Gorman MP
- Everyone has ambitions!
- What, I wonder, were your ambitions as a child?
 - engine driver?
 - astronaut?
 - actress?
 - pop-star?
 - or maybe just to eat chocolate all day!
- Often as adults we smile at our childhood dreams, but all of us are still ambitious about one thing or another.
 - and our ambitions need to be chosen carefully, for they will drive the direction of our lives.
- **The people who settled in this part of Babylonia were certainly ambitious!**
 - an **entirely new city**, made from the local building materials;
 - complete with **monumentally high landmark** (probably temple of some description, though that is not ultimately the focus of God's complaint);
 - specifications for the building work suggest a "**no expense spared**" **project** - normal building bricks were sun-dried clay, these were baked in ovens which required fuel and extra labour - and the word used for the tar used to hold things together has its root in the word "boiling", suggesting that it needed special processing - all extra work and expense for whoever was footing the bill!
- **This was a major construction effort:** think Egyptian pyramid construction from one of those epic films of a bygone age with the thousands of extras, people everywhere...
 - and plenty of talking!

Insufficient Ambition

- They had ambition alright - *but the real trouble was, they didn't have enough ambition!*
 - that's right, too little ambition, not too much!
- Their intention was to make a tower that reached to the sky:
 - but looking down from heaven, at the midgets in the midst of the vast Babylonian plain with their little tower, God saw that their ambition was too small.
- They were caught up with themselves and what they could achieve:
 - and great though that achievement was, it is paltry and pathetic in the light of eternity.

Misplaced Ambition

- Often we, like those construction workers from long ago, don't need to make our ambition more modest, scale it back:
 - no, what we need is to make it bigger!
- We need to not just build for earth, but for eternity.
- Build things that last longer than bricks and bitumen, bytes or biochemicals!
- *What are we building here in Fintry?*
 - a church organisation with good facilities and buildings, well maintained and utilised?
 - *or a community of Christian love?*
 - individual lives that achieve material success and comfort, even happiness?
 - *or lives characterised by the peace of Jesus Christ, knowledge of him, truth and integrity?*
 - a large membership? *(even a larger membership?)*
 - *or disciples of Jesus Christ, people who have come to know a Saviour who will take them to be with him in eternity?*
- Talking to the church in Corinth, Paul said:
 - *By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Cor 3:10-15)*

Achievable Ambition

- Paul offered a different set of ambitions for those who earnestly seek the best in God's economy:
 - *Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Thess 4:9-12)*
- The wonder of the topsy-turvy values of the kingdom of God is that things as simple as these (genuine love, a quiet life, minding your own business, hard work, independence) are deemed magnificent!
- *Why is the ambition of unspectacular goodness regarded as Christian greatness?*
 - because it has God riddled throughout it;
 - it points to him, not self.
- Our daily lives, at home, at work, can be used to build for eternity... if they have

God's values watermarked on every page, in every action, in every day.

- Our possessions, be they a Porsche or a pushchair, can be used to build for eternity, if they have God on board!
- Our ambitions for a boyfriend or girlfriend, for family, for grand-children, for friendship, can be used to build for eternity if God is an unseen guest in every relationship.
- **What you are ambitious for makes a difference - think as big as heaven!**