

Genesis 11:1-9 - Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused^[a] the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Hebrews 11:13 - These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

1. Intro:

- a. I'm a big science fiction fan, and one of my favorite authors is China Miéville. His work is often described as "weird fiction" because of his unusual imagination. His book *The City and the City* is a futuristic murder mystery, but the fascinating thing is the setting. The book takes place in two cities that co-exist and occupy the same geographical space. Two distinct cities that are actually their own countries, have their own governments, languages, customs, economy, but they are right on top of each other. Its actually a crime, called breaching, to interact with the other city, even to look at a building in the other city. So I'm here in one city, and you're across the road in another city, I can't wave or talk to you, even acknowledge you. Each city has its own architecture style, fashion, language, so you can tell which city is which and ignore the other one. So people in both cities are conditioned from birth to "unsee" the opposite city. They are trained to only see the colors, style, and hear the language of their city and ignore the other city even though its right in front of them. This is a bazaar concept, but...
- b. This reflects a spiritual reality that we too live in two cities, but have conditioned ourselves to only focus on the immediate and earthly city. We ignore the City of God, his Kingdom, which simultaneous is also all around us.
- c. The key to seeing both cities accurately, to breach this divide is hope. Hope in the heavenly city that breaks into the earthy one. This is how our vision of the future shapes life today. This morning we'll look at natural hope, real hope, and lived hope.

2. **Natural hope: Genesis 11**

- a. The first city we see in Scripture is the city of Babel.
 - i. After the flood, God establishes a covenant with Noah and his sons, as his people, then tells them again to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, something he had been telling his people to do since in the Garden. They start to spread out then we get to Chapter 11.
 - ii. So here in our Genesis passage, we see the different tribes from Noah's sons resisted this divine instruction to spread out over the earth and instead settle in Shinar.
 - iii. Look at what their plan in verse 4: ""Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens,"
 1. This tower they were building was a ziggurat.
 2. These massive structures built in the ancient near east that were big rectangle buildings like step pyramids.

3. Different cultures designed these structures to make it convenient for the gods to come down to earth, receive their worship, and bless the people.¹
 4. This was a huge undertaking, a massive architectural project, of hard work and getting people to collaborate, which required a strong motivation, an underlying reason to justify all this effort.
- iv. We all function this way of needing a motivation, reason to continue. What gets us out of the bed in the morning, what gets us to return to that challenging job or to still make those trips to see family despite the difficulties?
 1. One day my wife and I were sitting on the couch talking, and our daughter came and asked if she could get us a waterloo, then she came back and asked if she could get us a snack, then she came back and offered to finish the laundry. We said "Sophia that's so nice," and she bluntly informed us "I'm being nice because I want you to let me watch a movie tonight"... I appreciate her honesty.
 2. Our motivations are not always that clear but we always have them.
 3. My daughter was hoping for a future event, the movie, and that informed how she was acting right now. This is how hope works.
 - v. However, there are two types of hope: real hope and natural hope.
 1. Think about what you are hoping for and hoping in right now.
 - a. Election outcome, schools reopening, getting back to work.
 - b. Whatever you're holding on to, or looking to, keep that in mind as we reflect.
- b. The tower builders were practicing natural hope, which can take several forms.
 - i. Ambition – they had a self-confidence driving them.
 1. In verse 4, the builders said "and let us make a name for ourselves..."
 2. Tower builders were motivated to lift themselves up and use God to protect them and their reputation.² But throughout the Bible we see God gives his people a true identity and name like with Abraham.³
 3. You may be relying on this type of hope when you prepare to go into a hard conversation. Just confident you can articulate, argue, or answer any accusation sufficiently.
 4. Real Hope is inherently humble. It doesn't need to prove itself or make a name for itself because God does.
 - ii. Another type of natural hope is just optimism –
 1. This type of 'look on the bright side' attitude ignores reality.
 2. Also, in verse 4, the builders said "let us make a name for ourselves lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."
 3. This was the opposite of God's command for them to multiply, spread out, and fill the earth. They don't want to be dispersed. They want to centralize.
 4. The tower builders thought they could thrive and find happiness while disobeying the Lord. – This is denying reality – deliberately unseeing the spiritual reality in front of them.
 5. I've worked in politics for 11 years and people ask how I can be so optimistic after working in the middle of such an ugly field for so long and I usually say something about having to be optimistic to keep going in the building, but that's not true. What really keeps me in it is seeing the reality of what the Lord has done through our work. Lives saved, vulnerable patients and persons with disabilities alive today because the Lord controlled the outcome and direction of a policy I was able to lead on.

¹ "the tower was not built so that people could ascend to heaven, but so that deity could descend to earth." "At the top of the ziggurat was the gate of the gods, the entrance into their heavenly abode. At the bottom was the temple, where hopefully the god would descend to receive the gifts and worship of his people. -John Walton

² Walton

³ Genesis 12:3

- a. Hope comes from looking at the full reality not ignoring it.
 - 6. When talking about quarantine with friends, someone will say, things are gonna get better, they just have to.
 - 7. This vague feel good attitude is not true hope.
 - 8. Real Hope deals with reality as it is, especially the most important facts about reality – who God is and our relationship to him and his city.
- iii. Another type of natural hope relevant to us today is confidence in progress.
 - 1. Confident that society will learn and do better.⁴
 - 2. This comes from a belief that we can perfect ourselves and our city on our own.⁵
 - 3. This is the false hope some of us fall into when looking at systemic injustices – Just thinking that the right argument, more activism, another march, then people will change.⁶
 - 4. Hope in human progress ignores God and forgets our utter dependence on Him to improve.
 - 5. But real Hope has confidence in God’s plan for history and our city. He has been renewing our city and has a grand plan to redeem individuals and society, we want to be part of his plan.
- c. Look at God’s response to the tower builders working from this sinful natural hope:
 - i. God wasn’t tricked into blessing them or making their name great. Look at what he says in verse 6, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.”
 - ii. God saw how this false hope united them and out of his mercy halted their plans. This was an act of grace for him to strike down their faith in themselves. He saw they were going to continue down this road of false.
 - 1. The boldest prayer you can pray is for the Lord to strike down your false hopes, because he will do it.
 - iii. The Lord knew this would not ultimately lead to their good and flourishing. There’s a divine wisdom in his command for people to disperse upon the earth so they may be fruitful, multiply and flourish.
 - iv. He had a better plan for the world, for humanity than one impressive city in Shinar.
 - v. So, like in the garden, like in the flood, he goes down and casts them out, he goes and “confuses their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”
 - vi. And we see in verse 8 this accomplishes God’s goal of dispersing them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left Babel.
- d. This morning look at what your motivation is, what was driving you last week, find where your heart is hoping and examine it. We have a better option than this natural hope that distorts, rebels against God, and can’t deliver joy.

3. Now, let’s look at Real Hope: Hebrews 11

- a. In contrast to the tower builders, we see another group of people in Hebrews 11 that belonged to another city. The author of Hebrews has been describing different figures in the OT who placed their hope in God.
 - i. Then here the author points out that these figures like Noah and Abraham, lived out their lives following God through trials and struggle without ever fully receiving what was promised to them.
 - ii. Now, God did bless them along the way, they never saw the fulfillment of God’s plan.

⁴ “Although human manners and morals shift and change, and human cultures exchanges one systemic sin for another, human nature does not change, let alone progress.” *On Reading Well*, Karen Swallow Prior, 136.

⁵ Prior, 136

⁶ Like the tower builders this is us working and then asking God to bless it, not seeking to bless him one step at a time. “Along other shortcoming in its account of the nature of reality, the myth of progress cannot account for evil. Hope, however, takes evil into account. These “fundamental structures of hope” are build upon belief in the goodness of creation, the nature of evil, and the plan of redemption. Nowhere is evil more obvious than in suffering.” Prior, 136.

- iii. While they waiting for that bigger promise, Hebrews 11 says these people of God lived as “strangers and exiles.”⁷
 - 1. The passage is saying that its more than a physical reality of not having a permanent country, but “these great figures had a faith that enabled them to recognize their true position as citizens of a heavenly city.”
- iv. Look at V14-15, “¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.” And verse 15 is better translated, “If their hearts had been in the country they had left, they would have the opportunity to return.”
 - 1. All these people of God wholeheartedly accepted his promises. Their hearts were set on their heavenly home and they single-mindedly they walked in a real hope.⁸
 - 2. This is the mindset we should adopt when we look at politics. Neither major party should be our home. We should not be comfortable reading either party’s agenda. Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans live up to God’s agenda for humanity and a just city. We should seek to be wise when voting, but know we’re strangers and exiles and our hope rests in a future country.
- b. Those figures in Hebrews 11 had a real hope.
 - i. **Real Hope can be defined as a justified confident expectation and desire for something good in the future.**⁹
 - 1. First off, its justified, its not ignoring reality, its taking in to account the greatest truth.
 - 2. Ordinarily, when we use the word hope, we express uncertainty.
 - a. Real hope not wishful thinking, it’s a confident expectation for something in the future.
 - 3. Also, its all-encompassing, it’s a desire not just a rational conclusion.
 - a. Real hope is like a reservoir of emotional and spiritual strength.¹⁰
 - b. Whenever I tell my kids they can play Minecraft after they clean their room, that reservoir of hope is poured out in a furious cleaning energy like you’ve never seen before.
 - ii. **Real Hope is a justified confident expectation and desire for something good in the future.**
 - iii. When we look at this definition, we realize we cannot have real hope in anything other than God.
 - 1. Noah Abraham, Moses – they surrendered to the help of God to obtain that promised future good.
- c. And look at how God responded to them:
 - i. The author explains that “*Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*”
 - ii. The Lord delights in his imperfect but hopeful children.¹¹
 - iii. Verse 16 says he showed his attitude towards them, when God prepared a city for them.¹²
 - 1. A future city - a more permanent residence than earths palaces and lush homesteads that won’t last.
- d. Don’t miss, the passages says “God has prepared a city for them.”
 - i. The preparation is complete, though its nots here fully or seen - Its done.

⁷ These are terms Abraham, Jacob, and the psalmist used about themselves.

⁸ Gaebelein, 121.

⁹ Another good definition comes from Pieper’s *Faith, Hope, & Love*, “Gospel hope “is a steadfast turning toward the true fulfillment of man’s nature, that is, toward good, only when it has its source in the reality of grace in man and is directed toward supernatural happiness in God.”

¹⁰ Sermon by John Piper

¹¹ We all know the joke that the worst part of Christianity is the Christians, right? Yes, our public witness hits new lows with new headlines of disgraced Christian leaders, but also with us! What do your neighbors think of God because of you, because of me? Ouch. I’m preaching to myself here, too.

¹² In Verse 10 we’re told that Abraham “was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” City owes everything to God who is the architect and builder

- ii. We see that our hope is not wishing that one day things will get better, things will be more certain, relationships will be easier, anxiety will cease.
- iii. Our Hope is certain because it is done and we have evidence of that city right here.
- e. The arrival of that future city is sometimes called 'the age to come' but the truth is that the future city is already penetrating 'this age,' this city.¹³
 - i. God's city is right here in this same space as ours right now.
 - ii. We have in our city right now bricks from the future city.
 - 1. God has renewed parts of our culture, our personal lives and even us already, and these serve as evidence that the other city is real.
 - 2. These little redeemed elements in our lives, in our stories, they are glorious brick to point to.
 - 3. That restored relationship that you had no hope for – that's a brick from the new city.
 - 4. That time the Lord replaced your fear about COVID-19 with peace and faith in him – that's a brick from the heavenly city.
 - 5. We have sin, anger, darkness, pride, being replaced by what is rejuvenating and transforming us.
 - a. Hearts of stone being replaced with hearts of flesh.
 - 6. We have to be re-conditioned to see where both cities overlap.
 - 7. We need to look around and see that there are scattered redeemed parts of our lives, stories, and community that came from the heavenly city: a brick here, an arch, a pillar there.
 - iii. Often when we tell someone to have hope we act like we don't have proof.
 - 1. We sound like the guy trying to sell his COVID cure to a CNN reporter but it ends up he has no studies or evidence to show. – Just trust me.
 - 2. This is why it's critical in City Group, Fight Club, around the dinner table that we stop and point out evidence of God's grace.
 - 3. When we see these ways God has transformed this city, we have more confidence he's prepared a whole new Jerusalem.
 - a. Parents and kids – on those hard days of school when you just don't like the new way we have to do school right now, talk about how God has shown grace to you in school before – when you were nervous about going into a new class or campus and the Lord brought you really great teachers or really close friends.
 - 4. Point out these glorious architecture features in our midst.
 - iv. The biggest proof we have, the most glorious aspect in this earthly city is Jesus Christ himself.
 - 1. The son of God himself came and died to bring you into his kingdom, he offers forgiveness and renewal for your soul. If you belief in him you have hope to be raised and live in his city after death.
 - 2. This "hope is not a placebo, but it has real substance and is confirmed by Christ's own resurrection as the prototype of what will happen to us."¹⁴
 - 3. That resurrection was effective for our salvation, but also it serves as a taste of what humanity will be like in the future glorious city.¹⁵
 - v. Jesus already broke through with his divine power and grace, so we can have hope that God will break into our daily lives and secure a future city for us.¹⁶
- f. The hard part is that now, we live in a mixed city that has glorious elements and earthly ones. We live in both cities at the same time.

¹³ "The gospel is good news not just as a rescue plan for embattled souls but as a word from the Creator who is redeeming all things (Col 1:15-20)." – James KA Smith, *Reimaging the Kingdom*.

¹⁴ Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 446.

¹⁵ John uses language of the eternal life, not a future reality, but present one. We have been raised, like the down payment for things to come – resurrect bodies in new Jerusalem.

¹⁶ David Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 211

- i. The age to come has started, but it has not reached its crescendo yet.^{17 18}
- 4. **Lived Hope:** So how does real hope balance confidence and expectation like those in Heb 11?
 - a. Hope must be nourished.
 - i. Pointing out evidences of grace, praising the Lord for those glorified bricks all around us.
 - b. Second hope is active, not passive.¹⁹
 - i. Not crossing fingers and sitting around.²⁰
 - ii. Earlier in Hebrews 6, the writer said he wanted Christians to have “the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish.”²¹ Full assurance of hope causes us to be active not sluggish.
 - iii. We need to act in hope, so go serve others, love our neighbor, renew the city because we’re hopeful of what hes doing today and whats he promised to do in the future.
 - c. Real hope is bold.
 - i. After talking about the resurrection, the source of our hope, Paul says “Brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.”²²
 - 1. Are you boldly giving yourself fully to the work of the Lord?
 - 2. During the quarantine its easy to be sluggish and passive not standing firm. We have a greater hope than just the end of stay at home orders.
 - ii. Our hope pushes us to boldly proclaim Christ, what do we have to lose?²³
 - iii. Sharing the gospel with that neighbor is joy not a risk, serving others first is an act of worship, not a chance to build up your reputation.
- 5. Lastly, I want to look at what hope looks like practically? In three specific areas:
 - a. Renewing the city²⁴
 - i. He uses us to renew the city, the HS works through our love of neighbor to glorify parts of our city and redeem what was once broken and dark.
 - ii. We change this city, when we start living like citizens of God’s city, sharing possessions, giving time, thinking of others first, lifting the vulnerable, preference to the poor.
 - iii. The problem is that too often though we act like the tower builders, we want to accomplish something great, fix what is broken and then ask the Lord to bless it afterwards and give us the credit.
 - 1. Instead of joining God’s redemptive agenda for the world, they want God to rubberstamp their agenda.

¹⁷ So we maintain this balance of “certainty of what was accomplished and the expectation of his work to be completed.” Wells, 211.

¹⁸ Like these figures of faith in Hebrews 11, we too are strangers and exiles, still looking forward to that future city. “It is the ‘already’ that is decisively present in the truth, power, and reality of God today. What the ‘already’ points toward and anticipates of the ‘not yet’ is what frames the meaning of life. And this is the cradle in which we find hope.” Wells, 211

¹⁹ In NT Wright’s book, *Surprised by Hope*, he explains hope is not just manifest in eternity, but in the implications of eternity for present realities.

²⁰ “Hope is essentially moral in its character, for it is for a good future for which we may dare to hope.” -John Polkinghorne, *The God of hope and the end of the world*

²¹ Hebrews 6:11-12.

²² 1 Cor 15:58.

²³ “Here Paul is telling the Corinthians that despite the world around them, they must hold their ground, not let up, and not shut up, because they are the vessels of the same divine power exercised in the resurrection of Christ. The future horizon of resurrection gives purpose and drive to Christian living in the present.” Bird, 447.

²⁴ “Our labor in the Lord is this life plants seeds that will sprout forth in the resurrection life; thus, what work we do in this age will flower in the coming age of the new creation.” Bird, 447

- iv. We need to seek him first in our city renewal work and that's going to be a lot less glamorous.²⁵
 - v. Commit to your CG's mercy ministry even if its not your issue or not the way you want to invest in the city.
 - vi. Pray for justice and mercy in our city.
 - vii. As we work and pray we know the city will not be fully renewed until the Lord overcomes sin and unites people from every tongue, tribe, and nation in his future city as "a choir of nations united and gathered in the worship of our" Creator and Redeemer.²⁶
- b. Relationships
- i. Real hope in relationships first rejects the false hopes of pride in in your ability to communicate, or taking a break from a hard relationship and try later.
 - ii. 1 Cor 13 says that love "hopes all things" - this look like trusting the Lord with a relationship and having confidence that Christ can redeem any friendship, any broken family tie, any marriage.
 - iii. One way we can breathe hope into a relationship is by encouraging one another with where we see something renewed in them. "Hey, It's evident the Lord has given you peace over this decision you were anxious about last week. Praise the Lord."
 - 1. One writer explains that "encouragement gives struggling people the eyes to see an unseen Christ."²⁷
 - 2. Gives you both the hope that this renewal work will continue.
 - iv. Seeing that reminds you that no relationship is on your shoulders. We care deeply for that coworker or that family member, but the redemptive work is Christ's brought by the Holy Spirit.
 - v. My strength, wisdom, love, effort, compassion are tools he uses. I can love without worrying about if it will get easier.
 - vi. Parents,
 - 1. What are you hoping in? Quieter house, more free time, less mess? That's putting a lot of weight on this earthly city that it cant deliver on.
 - 2. What do we hope for our children? They obey us? They make our lives easier? Or that they see Christ more clearly today through our ministry to them?
 - a. When I adopt a real hope for them, it means I'm freed up to ask for forgiveness even though they may think less of me.
 - b. I don't have to worry about what they'll think if I show them I need Christ like they do.
 - 3. Also, parenting in hope this means after putting the kids to bed on a hard day, instead of saying, "I hope tomorrow is a better day," pray "Lord, I hope I get more of you tomorrow whether or not it's better."
- c. Our hearts
- i. Replace pride with reliance on God.
 - 1. Every time you go to make plans or decisions like whether you should leave your job or send the kids to in-person classes, stop and prayer – Lord, I don't know what I'm doing, I need you. You can have confidence in his grace and provision instead of your own.
 - 2. This is what the elders prayed just a few days ago when thinking about how to lead during the pandemic and how we plan to get back together. We're gonna try to be wise in our planning, but out of a reliance on God not a false hope that we can pull this off.

²⁵ Scripture is clear we "cannot make the world perfect here and now. The kingdom of peace and righteousness cannot be established in this world of sin and rebellion from God. We don't expect to build a perfect world, but to be realists living by faith following the Lord. Henry Van Til, *The Calvinist Concept of Culture*, 216.

²⁶ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People* 46. However, due to sin, mankind is now in an antithetical situation in which the unity of the human race has been destroyed. And the confession that God has an attitude of favor toward all men, so that he restrains sin and gives them as cultural creatures the ability to do moral and civil good, ought not to be abused for then the recruits of Christ lose sight of the cultural antithesis created by the restorative and regenerative power of the Son of God through the Spirit." Van Til, 214. Also, "Christ as king restores us to our original heritage as cultural creatures." Van Til, 213-214.

²⁷ Timothy Lane, Paul Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, 113.

ii. Hope rejects despair

1. Despair is a hopelessness that stems from the thought that one's hope will never be fulfilled.
2. Usually comes from expecting something that was never a proper place for our hope.
3. Despair often accused God of not being good and giving us the result we want
4. Psalm 42:5 - that is exactly what you have, the soul arguing with itself, preaching to itself. "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God!" ^dWhy are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you ^ein turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation.
5. We need to lift our eyes, lift the eyes of our brothers and sisters out of despair and see the reality of the future city, see the evidence God is breaking into our everyday lives with his grace and redemption.
6. Look to Christ in the middle of our city. Look what he's already done in making us a citizens of his city.

iii. Apathy

1. Some of us are just numb, just burnt out, and not anticipating or looking forward to anything at this point.
 2. Real hope has is not just expectation, but desire.
 3. If you've lost that, ask the Lord to renew your hope, you don't even have to come up with your own words.
 4. Pray what the Psalmist says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."²⁸
6. Brothers and Sisters, we have a great hope to rely on. We have a reservoir of spiritual and emotional strength by seeking the city God has promised and what he's already doing in our city. So, let's go renew the city, persevere in hard relationships, and turn our hearts towards confidence in God. Amen.

²⁸ Psalm 51:10.