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Let Me Say That Again: Acts of Justice: Downsizing **by Matt Hook** **July 18, 2004**

Genesis 11:1 *Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.*

2 *As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.*

3 *They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.*

4 *Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."*

5 *But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.*

6 *The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.*

7 *Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."*

8 *So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.*

9 *That is why it was called Babel--because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.*

We American Christians ought to think smaller. We prefer to think big.

We may not have literally shaken our fist in God's face, and we'd be shocked to have someone refer to our ambitions as rebellion. Yet if we were to examine our aspirations dreams with brutal honesty, we'd be embarrassed how much we sound like those folks in Shinar and how much of the Babel-like "*Let us make a name for ourselves*" pervades what we do.

My dream in life, the biggest kick I thought I could get, was to have someone say "Ohhh, so you're Matt Hook." I wanted to make a name for myself. So here's what I did: I wasn't in the popular crowd, because they wouldn't be friends with me, I wasn't a sports star, and my parents would have found out if I'd have partied as much as they did. So I tried to be nice to people and treat them like people. What was funny was, it worked...to a point. Yes, you are listening to the 1984 prom king of Birmingham Seaholm High School... Big deal. That was it, right? Then I'd have to start all over in college. Then I'd have to start all over in performing to "make it really big."

"Let us make a name for ourselves."

- 1-4 "The whole world had one language and common speech." This comes generations after Noah. Gen 10:8-11 Nimrod oversaw the building of it. "*so that we may make a name for ourselves*" = pride. Rebellion and independence from God.
- "*So that we may not be scattered*" = direct opposition to God's command to spread out and fill up the whole earth. (9:1).
- 5-9 What the people would not do in obedience, God did for them in judgment.
- Shinar = area of Babylon. In Hebrew, Babel is similar to the verb confused.

- Written Babylonian accounts of the building of the city of Babylon refer to its construction in heaven by the gods as a celestial city, as an expression of pride. These accounts say it was with the same process of brick-making, with every brick inscribed with the name of the Babylonian god Marduk. The Babylonian temple was said to have its top in the heavens.
- Brick is simply hardened clay – a fitting symbol for humankind.
- Genesis views this city as the predominant force in the world – the anti-kingdom. God acted swiftly – their greatest strength – unity he destroyed. Their greatest fear – scattering came naturally.

Maybe, in working for justice, Christians haven't been thinking small enough.

Of course, big isn't necessarily bad. It's probably a God-given trait in humans to want to set new records in bigness. (Olympics?) Whether it's the Big Mac or a big SUV, or a Big Gulp, or the pyramids in Egypt or the Sears Tower in Chicago, whether it's the annual earnings of Microsoft or the number of sources that can be scanned by Google in a nanosecond, God made us to enjoy having our minds stretched with numbers and dimensions we can barely comprehend.

But all too easily, big becomes bad – for 2 reasons. Big is bad when it makes us forget what is even bigger. And big is bad when it makes us forget what is very small.

Babel prompted its big dreamers to forget about an even bigger God. It's so easy, isn't it? When we have a government that pretends it can give us everything we need, it makes it just that much harder to sing "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow."

But big government is not the only giant that threatens to divert our attention from an even bigger God. Big corporations, big entertainment conglomerates, big universities – even good things like big families and big churches – all these can deflect and reroute our trust from God himself as the source of everything we need. When God commands us "Don't have any other Gods before me," a good place to start checking is with those influences that have become the biggest in our lives. God wants to be bigger than any of them. In the face of the Babel towers around us, have we forgotten how big God is?

But big is bad also when it makes us forget what is very small. We forget that nations and communities and companies and churches and even families are all built one person at a time. It's easier to march to Washington with a quarter million like-minded people than it is to sit down for an evening with a neighbor who disagrees with the issue that was central to our march. It's more dramatic to get caught up in mass evangelism than it is to speak personally about Jesus to someone in our neighborhood we've known for 15 years.

Does big automatically mean "effective?" or does big mean "anonymous?" With so many big operations, it's easy to blend in to the crowd where no one holds you accountable for doing your part.

A reoccurring theme in the Bible is that it is the task of God's servants to be faithful in the small things – and then to trust a wise Father to assemble all those little matters into the accomplishment of His global purpose.

What if we tried to tell the truth,

live faithfully,

pay the bills on time,

live within our incomes,

care for those needy who are closest to us, and

worship faithfully?

Are you thinking small enough?

- Vs. 4 make a name for ourselves, to have some kind of a legacy...
- We don't want to simply go through life and have life not count.
- You want your life to count! They decided to do it their own way.
- "We're going to build the city, etc."

- We don't want to be scattered.
- V.6 "if they speak the same language, nothing will be impossible with them." When you take foreign languages, you learn a way of processing information. If they think as one, they can accomplish anything. (A kingdom principle – used by believers and unbelievers. Correct methodology used for the wrong cause.) When we work as one, we can do most anything.
- V.7 "God steps in and their language is confused." Why'd God step in and mess it up?
- **Sin always brings division, not unity.**
 - o History: Do not self-exalt. In conversation we exalt ourselves.
 - o **What's the epicenter of all of life? Is it humanity, or God?**
 - o When you come to Christ, everything belongs to him: my life, my day, my job, my family and all else belongs to him. "I'm making it to the glory of God." If so, I work on it differently. I offer up praises, now I offer up my work to God. Somehow, they work more diligently and productivity goes up.
 - o **It's not the way it appears:**
 - Be aware of "Under the Influence." Different from what you hear in the media. The positive impact of JC on Western culture cannot be overstated. Yet ironically The marketplace of ideals fails to credit its Christian foundational roots – from education to women's rights, to medicine and the sanctity of human life,... these major values can be traced to the spiritual and cultural revolutionary named Jesus. Those who act in his name develop the form of culture.
 - Jesus was no political leader. His message and his physical resurrection transformed his followers spread his love and forgiveness and did not defend themselves. When Christ comes in to enough human hearts and changes them from the inside out, it is not longer "let us make a name for ourselves." What would happen if Christ came into enough human hearts in a nation to make it "not about them?" And what happens to the world who comes into this?
 - "Human accomplishments" by agnostic Charles Murray. "Major stream is fostered by a culture when the most talented people believe life has a purpose. Christianity underlies much of human accomplishment and is not what has been stifling it. It is harder for an agnostic or atheist to find meaning and devotion than for a Christian. The incentives of forgiveness of sin and eternal life are as powerful as incentives get, rather than those available to agnostics and atheists. 1400-1950 is truly amazing."
 - We are riding of the blessings of the residual impact of Christianity. "I was raised a Christian. I have never tried to abandon the legacy of that upbringing. I have a strong sense of living the human life that are coordinated with Christian values."
 - **It's not a story of humanity doing its best and God being jealous.** Human effort leads to destruction unless God is the center of it. Our blessings are the outgrowth of God stirring within us. We are dependant and reliant of the heritage of the Gospel having gone before us.
 - When human heart bows at the foot of the cross, accomplishments are impacted. Because there is greater meaning and purpose in everything I do.

This passage explains how the nations came to be scattered across the face of the ancient world. It is a message of judgment: what they prided themselves in became their downfall, and what they feared most came on them.

From the beginning, God has had a plan to bless humanity. From just this side of the beginning, humanity has failed to trust God and enjoy the good God planned. Humanity has been tempted to grasp the "good" on its own rather than trust God to provide it.

The Tower of Babel concludes the primeval events. It describes the families of the earth hopelessly scattered throughout the then-known world. There was no sign of hope, as in the other stories - no protective mark for Cain the fugitive, no rainbow in the clouds for Noah. There is no solution for the plight of humanity...

...until the verses following the genealogy: out of the scattered nations God formed one nation which became his channel of blessing. God was not done with the human race. And Israel was called...

One simple requirement was that they obey. If they would, God would establish them firmly. But if they lifted their heads in pride and rebelled against God, they too would be scattered across the face of the earth. As it turned out, Israel followed the same disastrous course as the Babylonians (who built the Tower of Babel).

But, when we glorify God, and make him famous, and make a name for Him, things will be different. Zephaniah anticipates the reunification in the God's final kingdom, when everyone will speak one pure language and worship in God's holy mountain, being gathered from the nations into which they have been dispersed. 3:9 *"For then I, the Lord, will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder...In that day you will feel no shame because of all your deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will removed from your midst your proud, exulting ones, and you will never again be haughty on my holy mountain."*

Are we too building a society from which God is excluded?

When they announced my name as prom king, the coolest thing wasn't dancing with the queen, Tracy Kemp. The crown didn't even fit – it was too small. The coolest thing was I remember in that moment announcing my name saying "God, you didn't have to do that!"