FOUNDATIONS · COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY · GENESIS 11

A Tale of Two Cities

A guided conversation from the November 22, 2026 sermon by Kent Keller

SUMMARY

Foundations closes where civilization begins — on the plains of Shinar in modern-day Iraq, around 2,000 B.C., with a tower and a city built to the glory of man. Kent Keller opened with Augustine, who in 426 A.D. wrote City of God and told, long before Dickens, a tale of two cities: the city of man, formed by love of self to the point of contempt for God, and the city of God, formed by love of God to the point of contempt for self. Genesis 11 is an early, primitive portrait of the first one — and Kent was careful to note it is not a myth. Myths say 'once upon a time'; this chapter gives dates, places, and genealogies. Our faith is a matter of acts and facts, and Babel is one of them.

The city of man is built on a foundation of human pride. Kent borrowed C.S. Lewis's distinction: there is a good pride, the opposite of shame — pride in your family, your country, a job done well — and there is a darker kind, the opposite of humility, with older names: arrogance, hubris, the pride that goes before a fall. Babel was built on the second. We saw a graphic exhibit of it this very week in a video game that glories in the very things that should be shameful, and it broke Kent's heart; it put him in mind of Paul's words about those whose god is their appetite and whose glory is their shame. Then he pointed to verse 4 — 'let us make a name for ourselves.' The Hebrew for name is shem, and God had already blessed Noah's son Shem by that name. The builders were saying, in effect, 'You have a blessed line through Shem? We will make a shem of our own.' They did make a name for themselves — just not the one they wanted.

The city of man is also a temple for the worship of self — the religion of selfism, a shrine to the human ego. Kent was clear he is not anti-technology; he uses a phone and a computer daily and sits on about $35,000 of modern rehabilitative engineering. Technology is a wonderful servant and a lousy God. The trouble is we have let the servant run the house until we equate speed and efficiency with what is good — while God says, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' He pictured the city of man as a domed stadium with a retractable roof: most of the time we keep it closed, absorbed in whatever game we are playing, until a crisis comes and we crank it open and cry, 'God, I need You now.' A lot of us are functional atheists, certain we are in control until something proves we never were. His admonition: do not wait for that day. Open the roof now.

Finally, the city of man is built on a charter straight out of the Enlightenment — that man is the measure of all things. The builders wanted a tower to heaven; it stood about 300 feet, and Kent doubted heaven felt threatened. God had to come all the way down to inspect it, and He did not destroy the city as He later destroyed Sodom — He simply confused their language and scattered them. He was not threatened by the tower; He was saddened by it: 'I gave you all this ability, and this is what you do with it?' That word is stewardship — the whole world is a loan we will one day give back. Then turn one page. To the men who wanted to make a name for themselves, God says of Abram, 'I will make your name great.' Augustine said that which man builds, man destroys — but the city of God is built by God and cannot be destroyed. We live in the city of man now, but we are heading for the city of God; the only question is where our citizenship lies.

PRAYER OPENING PRAYER

Father, You are God and we are not, and most of the time we live as though it were the other way around. We build our towers and make our names and keep the roof closed over our heads. As we open this last chapter of Genesis, open the roof. Still us long enough to know that You are God. Expose the pride we have called ambition, and set our hearts on the city You are building, the one that cannot be destroyed. Amen.

START ICE BREAKER

Kent pictured the city of man as a domed stadium with a retractable roof we keep closed — absorbed in whatever game we are playing — until a crisis makes us crank it open and pray. When was a time, big or small, that something suddenly made you look up?

SCRIPTURE KEY SCRIPTURES

GENESIS 11:4 · ESV

Genesis 11:4 (ESV) 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."

PROVERBS 16:18 · ESV

Proverbs 16:18 (ESV) Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

PSALM 46:10 · ESV

Psalm 46:10 (ESV) "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

PHILIPPIANS 3:18-19 · ESV

Philippians 3:18-19 (ESV) For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

REVELATION 21:3-4 · ESV

Revelation 21:3-4 (ESV) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

DISCUSS DISCUSSION

01 TWO CITIES, ONE CITIZENSHIP

Kent opened with Augustine's two cities: the city of man, formed by love of self to the point of contempt for God, and the city of God, formed by love of God to the point of contempt for self. He said both cities open their gates and beckon. Thinking honestly about an ordinary week — your calendar, your money, what you worry about — which city do your days actually seem built for, and where is your citizenship?

02 THE TWO KINDS OF PRIDE

Read Proverbs 16:18. Kent used C.S. Lewis's distinction between a good pride — the opposite of shame, the pride you take in family or a job done well — and a darker kind that is the opposite of humility, with older names: arrogance, hubris. Babel was built on the second. Where in your life has something healthy to be proud of quietly curdled into the kind of pride that leaves no room for God?

03 MAKING A NAME FOR OURSELVES

Read Genesis 11:4. The builders said, “let us make a name for ourselves” — and Kent pointed out the Hebrew word is shem, the very name God had used to bless Noah's son Shem. They wanted a blessed name on their own terms. What are you building right now that is really about making a name for yourself — and what would it mean to let God make it instead?

04 A WONDERFUL SERVANT, A LOUSY GOD

Read Psalm 46:10. Kent said he is not anti-technology — it is a wonderful servant and a lousy God — but that we have let the servant run the house until we equate speed and efficiency with what is good. He asked when, in the mad rush, we ever take time to be still and know that He is God. Where has a good servant — your phone, your work, your calendar — started running your house, and what would 'open the roof' look like this week?

05 FUNCTIONAL ATHEISTS

Kent described the city of man as a domed stadium with a retractable roof we keep closed until a crisis makes us crank it open and cry, 'God, I need You now.' He called many of us functional atheists — certain we are in control until something proves we never were. His admonition was not to wait for that day. What would change if you opened the roof now, before the next crisis, rather than after?

06 THE THING THAT BREAKS GOD'S HEART

Read Philippians 3:18-19. Kent said a video game glorying in the very things that should be shameful broke his heart, and it put him in mind of Paul's words about those whose god is their appetite and whose glory is their shame. Before we point outward: where is something shameful being treated as something to celebrate in your own habits or appetites — and what would repentance there actually look like?

07 SADDENED, NOT THREATENED

Kent said God was not threatened by a 300-foot tower — He had to come all the way down just to see it — but He was saddened by it: 'I gave you all this ability and these materials, and this is what you do with it?' He called that stewardship: the whole world is a loan we will one day give back. What has God loaned you — ability, time, resources — that you have been treating as yours to spend however you like?

08 THE CITY WE ARE HEADING FOR

Read Revelation 21:3-4. Augustine said that which man builds, man destroys — but the city of God is built by God and cannot be destroyed, and John saw it coming down out of heaven, where God wipes away every tear. Kent said we live in the city of man now but are heading for that city. If that is where this is all going, what is one way you could let God work through you to make this city look a little more like that one?

APPLY THIS WEEK

Pick one. Do it before you meet again.

1. **Open the roof once a day** Kent said we keep the roof closed until a crisis forces it open. Before the crisis, build one still minute into each day — phone down, nothing to fix, just 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Notice what changes in you by the time you meet again.
2. **Name the tower** Write down the one thing you are building to make a name for yourself — a reputation, a number, a role. Then write one sentence handing it to God, and take a single step this week that would only make sense if He is the one making your name.
3. **Return something on loan** Pick one thing God has loaned you — money, a skill, an hour — and steward it toward His city instead of yours: give it, serve with it, or spend it on one person who could never repay you. Come back ready to say what happened.

Come back next week ready to say what happened, not what you intended.

REMEMBER REMEMBER

- There are two cities. The city of man is built on love of self to the point of contempt for God; the city of God on love of God to the point of contempt for self. Both beckon — the question is where your citizenship lies.
- Babel was built on the wrong pride — not the healthy opposite of shame, but the hubris that is the opposite of humility, the pride that goes before a fall.
- Technology is a wonderful servant and a lousy God. Do not wait for a crisis to crank the roof open; open it now and remember who is really in control.
- What man builds, man destroys — but the city of God is built by God and cannot be destroyed. We live in the city of man now, headed for the city of God, so let Him make this one look a little more like that one.

The men of Babel wanted to make a name for themselves; one page later God tells Abram, 'I will make your name great.' That is the whole contrast — and the whole invitation. Where is your citizenship?

PRAYER CLOSING PRAYER

> *Father, we have built our towers and kept the roof closed, sure we were in control. Thank You that You did not destroy the city but came down to it, and that in Jesus You came down all the way. Forgive us for making a name for ourselves and forgetting whose we are. Make us citizens of the city You are building, and work through us this week to make this city look a little more like that one. In the name of the Lamb who is its temple, Amen.*

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