

Making a Name for Yourself

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[0 : 0 0] Well, sorry to talk while some of you are eating, but please keep eating and enjoy the meal.

As I said before in that little interview, which was totally impromptu, I didn't know what any of those questions were going to be, I did mention the fact that when I was little, I dreamt of being a famous cricketer.

I dreamt of being the captain of Australia, like I guess many teenage boys do. And my way of relaxing out of studying for school was that I had on a string and then a sock hanging from the clothesline, a cricket ball.

And I would stand and bat and bat and bat all day. And that was my sort of relaxation and dreaming and fantasy.

I made thousands and thousands of runs in the Chadston backyard. And I heard all the batting records for 12 Robert Street that will ever, ever stand.

[1 : 0 4] My favourite book for many years when I was a teenager was a P.G. Woodhouse novel. P.G. Woodhouse is the writer who invented Jeeves and all those characters, those great snobby British characters.

And he had a series of books about Smith. Smith with a silent P. So P-S-M-I-T-H. Of course, if you're going to be upper crust English, then you don't want to be a common Smith.

So you need to be a little bit, sort of, pick that out. So you put a silent P. And Smith and Mike played at one of the sort of English schools. And there's one of their books, Mike and Smith, that Woodhouse wrote, that is really about cricket.

And there are runs and runs and runs that are scored in this book. And I read that book many times. That was me making thousands of runs. The sad thing about my life is that the fantasy was so far removed from the reality.

My highest ever score in any sort of, you know, semi-official match was 35. Admittedly, I made it when I was playing county cricket in England.

[2 : 1 4] I was playing for Gloucestershire. I should say it was the Gloucestershire Anglican clergy team. In the Church Times Cup.

And I got a place on the team by virtue of being Australian. And that was the year that Australia, well, it was one of the years, many years in fact, but one of the many years Australia toured England and won the Ashes, 1993.

And I made 35 runs. That was it. I had just got to the point of thinking, I'm not sure how many I'm up to, but I wonder whether I could even get a 50. But it didn't quite happen.

I got bowled sort of playing on, trying to sweep a ball, and it came around my legs and bowled me. But some of you won't understand what that means. But it's vivid in my memory. And I still, that's another reason I see psychiatrists most days of the week.

Your fantasies may be different, but most people have a desire, a dream, a fantasy of being remembered, of even being famous.

- [3 : 18] And as I look around society and as I talk to people, I see how much we crave that fame and memory.
- For example, I remember taking a funeral a while ago of somebody who had been single. And the great tragedy from some people's point of view was that there was now no memory.
- That person wasn't living on in children, for example, or grandchildren. The desire of many of us is to make a name for ourself in some area or other.
- And of course, that desire for fame means that our area of fame becomes more and more minute. That is, if you can think of something so obscure, then you become the best in the world at it.
- The Guinness Book of Records, of course, is something that many people aspire to be and they do the most bizarre things just so that they can be famous, in inverted commas, to be in the Guinness Book of Records.
- [4 : 23] You know, the oldest person who balances 25 turnips on their head while playing the bagpipes on the Adelaide Cricket Ground on a Friday in August when it's raining, for example, because somebody else did it when it was sunny.
- You see what I mean? There's an element of us that likes to be famous. And over recent years, we've seen the century, the century, sort of, the 20th century lists of the best this, the greatest player of this.
- Now we have these endless cycles of halls of fame. I think, gosh, who's going to walk down all these halls all their life looking at all this fame? But we keep sort of generating ways of making people famous.
- So there are more and more awards and honours that people can achieve. There's federal awards and state awards and our local member has the Menzies Awards and if you're playing football, now they have Rising Star and Setting Sun Awards, I suppose they're coming next.
- And now in cricket over the last 20 years, they've introduced the Man of the Match Awards and all that sort of thing as though somehow we're creating all these avenues for fame.
- [5 : 33] Well, let me tell you about some people who craved fame. They belonged to a town, a city in the ancient world. At that time, the whole earth had one language and the same words.
- And as these people migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar, Mesopotamia, Iraq, really, as it is today. And they settled there.
- Not that anyone settles there these days, but in those days it was before George Bush and they could. And these people said to one another, come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.
- And they had bricks for stone and bitumen for mortar. And 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.
- Otherwise, we may be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. Well, there's nothing wrong with building a city. I don't think there's anything wrong with using bricks instead of stone or even bitumen for mortar.
- [6 : 42] The actual practice of what they did was okay. But they made two disastrous mistakes. Disastrous mistakes that people in society have been making generation by generation up to our own and they will be making it in the generations to come as well.
- In building this city, first mistake was that they were claiming an autonomy and a self-security. That is, they acted independently of God.

They were the ones who thought themselves to be in control and in charge. They looked to the best technology to build their city. That's the emphasis on the bricks and the bitumen.

That's a new advance in technology to build something stronger and more stable. Nothing wrong with technology, but they are, in a sense, the masters of their world.

world. And they're building this city not because they want to enjoy the benefits of technology per se. They're building it so that they will not be scattered.

[7 : 53] That is, as an act of security, strength, and might in numbers and sort of community of living in this city.

in a sense, it's a defiance of God. It's a refusal to actually obey God's earlier commands at the beginning of the Bible about spreading out over the whole earth and subduing it and multiplying upon it.

They build this city with its top in the heavens, maybe because they want to be so tall that they will be above the levels of the next flood that might come, so that they are again safe and secure from anything that will come to them because they're God.

They've got this wonderful new technology and there's might in numbers. They want to make a name for themselves. They want to be famous in effect. And of course nothing's changed.

Our world uses every advance of technology playing God, acting independently of God. But more than that, their building is committing a second mistake.

[9 : 02] It's not just that they're acting with autonomy and self-security, independent of God, but actually the building of this tower is really an assault on God because we're told the building has its top in the heavens and the heavens are the place where God dwells.

So not only are they trying to be secure and autonomous and play God, but literally by building this tower with its top in the heavens, they're saying in effect, we are God and we are going to make this advance on God's own territory.

Heaven is God's place and in effect their act is a defiance and an attack on God himself. These are humans who are overstepping the bounds of human limitation.

Something that humanity is always doing. Nothing's changed. Again, there is a naked ambition here, a pride and a presumption. There is a self-importance in this great fame game that they are playing and very little today has changed.

This is society playing God. Think about how we do that in the 21st century. We play God, some would say, with things like the United Nations as though somehow this organisation of human creation is actually going to be God over the earth.

[10 : 37] We play God with latest medical advances, playing God with life and with death, playing God with the space invasion. Not that there's anything wrong with exploration, but the sense in which, well, we're really God, we're in control and this act of independence of God and indeed an assault on God is the same mistake as this early generation.

When I lived in England before I came to Doncaster many years ago, I was part of the staff of the Anglican Church in the centre of the town I lived in England.

And in the 19th century, this church was built, 1870s, not all that old. We had two churches and the other one was much older, about 800 or 900 years old.

But this one was built in Victorian times to cope with the booming population of this town. It was a big church, it could have seated in its original formulation about 1500 people. And down the street was the Roman Catholic Church.

They had a spire on their church and in the 1920s apparently, the Anglican Church decided that they should have a spire and they built it, guess what, one foot higher than the Roman Catholic spire.

[11 : 55] It fell down. The Anglican Church spire fell down in older times and was never rebuilt. But in effect, it's the same sort of thing, trying to be famous, better, to be bigger, bolder, brusher, whatever it is, than somebody else.

It's making a name for ourselves. Some of you will have read the famous book *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, a magnificent book. And if you've never read it, well, let me urge you to do it.

It's one of the things that my school gave me by reading that book in English classes, for which I'm thankful. William Golding is a fully bleak writer, and he wrote another book called *The Spire*.

And this book, *The Spire*, is virtually the story of what I've just said about this church I went to in Cheltenham, although it's a make-believe cathedral in the Middle Ages in England. And again, in effect, it collapses.

But it's a story of this old community told near the beginning of the Bible, who tried to make a name for themselves, a city with its top in the heavens. And it's a failure.

[13 : 02] God is not impressed with what these people do in building this city with its top in the heavens. In fact, the way the story's told, it mocks their great achievement.

It makes it look as though God can't even see this magnificent building with its top in the heavens. Because the story goes on to say, the Lord, that is God, came down to see the city.

Now, if you were building a city with its top in the heavens, I think you'd be expecting that God in the heavens could see at least the top of your building. But the way the story's told, God has to, in effect, come down to sea.

I've got a children's version of this story, and it says then that God said something like, what's that little pimple way down on earth? Let's go down and have a look. It's mocking this human achievement.

It's saying it's a joke. It's really a folly that they've tried to do. So much for human achievement. Human achievement, of course, at its best, is amazing.

[14 : 10] But in comparison and contrast with God, it is small and comes nowhere near God. So God goes down.

And then God says, look, there are one people, and they all have one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. Nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.

Come, let us go down and confuse their language, so that they will not understand each other's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the earth, and they left off building the city.

Now, it's great irony in what God does. The very purpose of building is so that they will not be scattered. That is defending themselves against God.

God comes down and he scatters them over the earth. The name of that town was Babel, Babylon, as it later came to be known, sadly in ruins these days.

[15 : 17] But it becomes a symbol in the Bible for human culture at its most creative and powerful, but in defiance of God. a city at the end of the Bible in visual, metaphoric language that is finally destroyed by God.

And nothing's changed. The values of Babel are the values we see reflected in our society time and time again. That we're on about making a name for ourselves individually, as a community, as a society, as a country, indeed as a universe or globe.

All the values of our society, the prized attitudes that our world looks up to, are so often these very things that are in defiance of Almighty God.

The reality is, of course, we're not God. For all our creativity and ingenuity, for all our intellectual achievement, for all our manual dexterity, we fall very short of the great power, majesty and achievement of Almighty God.

God. What that story is warning us is that ambition without God is ultimately futile. That greatness in human eyes may be almost unseen to Almighty God.

[16 : 45] Making a name for ourselves without bringing God into the equation is a waste of time at best, fatal at worst.

The Bible shows us how to make a name for yourself, or at least how to have a name that is great. Let me ask you, what were the names of those people who built that great city thousands of years ago?

We don't know. Not one of them. None of them is mentioned in any hall of fame.

Find an ancient Mesopotamian hall of fame, if there is such a thing. Their names are long forgotten. But in the very next part of the Bible, we read about an obscure man from Mesopotamia, a man who was old, married, childless.

And God said to him, amongst other things, I will make your name great. What's his name?

[17 : 55] We know. In fact, it's a name that's revered today, not only by Christians, but by Jews and Muslims as well.

The name Abraham, whose name is great not because of any achievement, he accomplished, and not at all because he acted in defiance of God, but rather because he trusted God and followed God's directions and commands.

Greatness comes from God. And the greatest name of all, the name that is above any other name, is the name of God's own Son, Jesus Christ, whose great achievement is not something that our world looks up to, by and large, whose great achievement is actually regarded by our world as abject failure, whose great achievement was willingly to die on a cross to bring us into a reconciliation and relationship with Almighty God, to bring us forgiveness for our ambition, our autonomy, our acts of defiance and assault on God.

Abraham, Jesus, great names, and for all the fame and adulation that is poured upon human beings by other human beings today, in the end it's nothing.

in the end it is small by comparison to Almighty God. If you want to make a name for yourself, a name that is known by God, a name that is written by God, then you don't need to be somebody who's building tall towers, who's trying to get their name into a Guinness book of records that will pass away.

[19 : 56] the place to get your name written is in God's book of life. Those names will be recorded forever and are honoured by God.

And to have your name put in that book of life, in many respects, is actually very simple. You don't have to try and outdo anybody else. It's not an act of competition to be the greatest, the oldest, the youngest, the fastest, the tallest, or whatever.

It is simply about saying to God, God, I'm sorry that I've lived my life playing God myself. I'm sorry that I've actually lived my life thinking that you are nothing, that you're unimportant.

I'm sorry that I've lived my life thinking that I actually would do a better job of being God than you. Please forgive me. Please help me live with you as my God.

Not to try living independently of you, but rather depending and trusting on you. And that's about it, really. God is the one who forgives us our failures by his son's death on the cross for us.

[21 : 13] The greatest act and greatest achievement in fact ever. And when we place that trust in Jesus and turn to God, our name gets written in his book of life.

That's far more valuable, far more important and far more long-lasting, far more rewarding than any Hall of Fame, than any Guinness Book of Records, than any honour roll at a school of captains of cricket, than any plaque in a church or a graveyard, than any other register of human achievement.

moment. My friends, the most important place for your name to be written, and the only way for your name truly to be great for eternity, is by turning to God and letting God be God, saying sorry and thanking him for Jesus dying for us.

I encourage you to do that. And please talk to me or one of us from our church if you want to find out more. Come tomorrow and hear a bit more about why turning to God is the most important and worthwhile thing that you can ever do with your life.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[22 : 43] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. You& You. You.

You.