



This morning we continue the series “the gospel and the public square” with “the gospel and Hollywood”. Hollywood! The city known as the dream factory. Hollywood, with its global reach, has influenced all other cities.

Many years ago... thirty of them in fact.... I worked in Hollywood. I was a technical director for The Disney Channel, at the corner of Sunset Blvd and Vine. My job was to put programming out over the air. It wasn't long after I had moved out there that my Disney Channel colleague Ken took me out for the local tour. One evening we drove to the top of the Hollywood hills, where you can see a constellation of lights glowing in the Los Angeles basin. Ken told me the saying that there was a twinkling light for each soul that Hollywood had stolen.

Our aim here this morning is to learn something from Hollywood. Yes, you heard correctly, learn something from Hollywood. Hollywood has many problems. I could reference the high point of the Hollywood's annual calendar, the academy awards event, where Hollywood's own glorify their achievements by handing what appear to be small golden idols to the winners. But, then again, we have the magnificent inspirational film “Chariots of Fire”, a riveting and beautifully filmed true story that features Eric Liddell, with his Christian faith driving the movie's plot.

I'd like to tackle right up front a key question, what should a Christian do about Hollywood and entertainment in general? For me, that's an easy answer. Do what I have done. Buy the complete 5 season set of the hilarious 1960s sitcom “Get Smart” ... all 125 episodes.

But we know that there are many different ideas on how to engage with Hollywood, whether it is movies or TV. Hollywood content can be very dangerous. It can lure a Christian mind to the secular. We *should* grapple with the topic. My suggestion would be to approach the topic in the way the apostles grappled with the question “what should we eat”?, following Peter's vision about clean and unclean food in Acts 10. Following Peter's experience, in the “what to do about kosher food” working session we read about in Acts 15, the apostles struggled to determine what to do. Their approach remains helpful for decision making ever since. They did three things; they searched the scriptures, discussed it with one another, and they prayed. On the topic of entertainment, we need to do this.

This morning we're going to work through a movie review together. We'll review the movie that, of all movies ever made has been called the best ever, year after year. Citizen Kane.

Citizen Kane was crafted by Orson Wells. And crafted is the right word. Wells was an artist. He has been called a genius. Wells had created the radio sensation "war of the worlds" with his mercury theatre group, which had many believing that the world was being invaded by Martians, and now, at just 25 years old, he turned his efforts to film. In his first film, wells took the screenplay and totally reworked it, directed, and even cast himself in the title role of Charles Foster Kane.

A few of you would have seen this film, most would not, so let me walk you through it

At the film's beginning, we see a castle, which is named Xanadu... there is a "no trespassing" sign at a gate. It is a dark, lonely place. Then the camera takes us inside. We see a hand clutching a snow globe.. Then we see a close up of the man's lips as he says the one word... Rosebud. His hand goes lifeless and the globe falls and crashes on the floor. A nurse comes into the room,walks up to him, and pulls a sheet over him. The man has died.

Then a reporter is assigned to crack the code of rosebud. The movie becomes the reporter's search for the meaning of that single, cryptic dying word Rosebud. This single word drives the film's plot. The reporter looks for clues to the word's identity by researching Kane's life, through interviews with several of Kane's former friends and colleagues. Was it a favorite pet or nickname of a lost love?

The story of Charles Foster Kane is a troubled one: Kane's life was corrupted and ultimately self-destructed by a lust to fulfill the *dream* of success, fame, wealth, power and immortality. His final days before his death were spent alone and unhappy in Xanadu, which was filled with innumerable possessions to compensate for his life's emptiness.

But how about that tiny detail that Kane's would-be biographers believe is the key to everything? The murmured word on his deathbed: "Rosebud". It is a mystery which they fail to solve, but the viewers, do.

As the film ends, the camera reveals that Rosebud was the name of the sled from Kane's childhood in Colorado — a time when he was happy. Thought to be junk by Xanadu's staff, the viewers see the sled being burned in the fireplace

Citizen Kane is a story that is a human tragedy. Kane invested his life building an empire in which he ruled. He was a builder ruling what he considered to be his creation. What he created was impressive, but Kane did not live a God-based reality.

As we move into our Bible passage today, we'll read the account of the actions of a group of builders, the original Babylon city builders. There is the impressive

achievement of Kane... and we will see an impressive achievement of Babylon. Both of these building projects end in failure. While the Hollywood movie Citizen Kane is fiction, the Bible account of Babel is history

Before we have a close up look at the tower of babel account, and in keeping with the Hollywood theme, let's pull the lens out to a wider angle. The chapter headings of Genesis were later additions. A better way to look at organizing the book is by an opening account of the creation and fall, followed by a repetition of the phrase "these are the generations of"

Genealogies are very important in the Bible. So much so that the Bible contains them in Genesis, Chronicles, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Nehemiah, Ezra, Matthew and Luke, and other books too.

The Genealogies Point to the Fact that Scripture is Rooted in History.

Skeptics and secularists want to place the Scripture in the mythical genre, saying that the Biblical stories of the Old Testament are simply mythical accounts that have truth tucked inside an outlandish tale.

However, these genealogies confirm a different genre, historical narrative. When you read through and grapple with the names and lineages of the genealogies of the Jewish people and of Christ, not only do you come away with the sensation that you are reading through a family tree, you are struck with the fact that these were real people. The genealogies connect the text to the historical context.

Here in Genesis chapters 10-11, dropped into these genealogies is the account of the tower of babel, and in this account we need to consider three questions..

What are the builders trying to construct? vv 1-4

We read in 11.1 that the world had one common language... as we would expect due to the people's common descent from Noah.. Some of the people moved eastward and settled on the plain of Shinar. They had been following the command God had given Noah's descendants to "increase in number and fill the earth in Gen 9.1. This is, by the way, is the same command he had given Adam and Eve earlier in Genesis, in 1.28.

However, we read that they are not spreading out, but instead they are organizing a city with a tower at the center. Genesis 11.4 reads like the minutes of a planning meeting, "let's build a city, with a tower"... and these meeting notes then give us the answer to our next question...

"What is their aim?" ...

Which is "let us make a name for ourselves"...and therefore to avoid spreading over the earth as God had instructed. In an alternative translation... "let **us** make a name for **us**" is their aim.

These were early ignostics... they ignored their creator. No reverence. No room for God. They built God out of their city. As Psalm 10 puts it “God is not in all his thoughts”

Our third question, how does God respond and why?

Verse 5, And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.

Let’s consider this occasion. Picture it. A ribbon cutting ceremony. What a magnificent tower! What genius! The contrast is amusing. They think their tower is so great... yet God is described as coming down to have a look.

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 the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

The people were exercising a spirit of unity it seems. However... It wasn’t unity that was the problem... *it was unity in disobedience*. A unity that was pursued with no room for God, and did not take seriously what he wants

Therefore God does not just inspect their plans, He thwarts them. He disrupts their work.

Seeking a name for themselves was the worship of themselves. Language, which God had gave as a gift to name things and rule things was used to defy His word.

God mixed up their language for their own good... to keep them from self-destructing. Scattering them slows down the evil. It is merciful. As William Drumbrell summarizes God’s response... “in a God directed world, this is an *arrogant* human assertion to which at the very beginning of its manifestation, there must be an appropriate divine response.”

In Daniel 4, there is a similar account that illustrates this point of God’s intervention for mercy’s sake, in this case to one individual, who is full of himself.

²⁸ King Nebuchadnezzar.... was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

³¹ Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you.

³² You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat

grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.”

³³ Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox.

Then... we see that this intervention by God was merciful...

³⁴ At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

The Babylon tower builders sought to build a society, with a center, which was in fact, to be realized in themselves. A quest for security through city building, without a God based reality.

Doesn't this sound contemporary to you? How much of life seems good... from our urban centers with magnificent towers, to the great outdoors, urban or pastoral... all these seemingly great things can be experienced as a world without God

Genesis 11 is up to date in its account of this human centered spirit.



This tower building continues. Compare the two towers that you see behind me. The artist rendering of the Babel Tower with the original artist rendering of Walt Disney's EPCOT, the acronym standing for *Experimental Prototype City of Tomorrow*. The EPCOT vision had a tower at the center... a 30-story Hotel.

EPCOT became an amusement park rather than the city Walt Disney had wanted

Disney's inspiration for EPCOT was the Carousel of Progress, an attraction he developed for the 1964 World's Fair in New York. The Carousel of Progress sketched out Disney's vision of an American technological utopia.

In it, guests stayed in their seats watching the tireless Audio-Animatronic actors in the four acts of the show depicting the evolution of the science and technology in our life through the eyes of the same family. (by the way, aging characters in a movie storyline was an innovation of Citizen Kane in 1941)

The 1964 World fair's theme was "Peace Through Understanding", dedicated to "Man's Achievement on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe"; Traveler's Insurance summed up the humanist spirit of the fair with its exhibit titled "The *Triumph of Man*" The world's fair expressed a naïve and total confidence in human achievement and progress.

But how enduring is human progress?

While human history over these many years has been a process of tower building... there has likewise been scattering all along as well... empire after empire. Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, Hittite, Roman... and more recently Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, English. Empires have come and gone.

What about America... we don't know at this point in time. All man's plans eventually break down... the world empires, with all their cool stuff, yes even the Apple devices, will end up in dumps.

Returning to Hollywood...How did Orson Wells do it at age 25? How did he nab the top honors ever in a century of films? Number 1 of a quarter million films made.

Yes, there was stunning craft to Wells film...

- use of a subjective camera
- the first Hollywood sets constructed with ceilings because Wells decided to put the camera near the floor and shoot upward when he needed to make characters appear more sinister
- flashbacks, flash-forwards and non-linear story

But... the craft of the film cannot account for its enduring acclaim ... what is going on? The Rosebud factor is going on... remember? the sled that reminded Kane of his youth.

Orson Wells himself provides the key explanation of the Rosebud factor.

"Rosebud is the illusory flashback effect of memory that will affect all of us, particularly at the very end of our lives: the awful conviction that childhood memories are better, simpler, more real than adult memories. We all have around two or three radioactive Rosebud fragments of childhood memory in our minds, which will return on our deathbeds to mock the insubstantial dream of our lives."

Well... that's bleak, however life outside of a God-based reality is bleak... but life does not have to be lived that way.

In my college days I took a class called "introduction to theatre". Dr Charlie Rodgers opened the class with his explanation of why theatre, television and movies draw people

in so powerfully. His reason... “because we live in the real world, and the real world is boring”... he said with conviction

That saying has stuck with me because I knew there was something profound about it... but for a Christian, something profoundly untrue. If all we have is Citizen Kane’s Rosebud factor... then I would agree with him... call it boring ... call it “insubstantial”, as the Rosebud factor conveys. I don’t agree with Dr. Rodgers because there is another citizenship possible and needed more than anything in life... Citizen Christian.

I propose that we turn Citizen Kane into a trilogy this morning, which takes us from Citizen Kane to Citizen Christian. I will loosely base the approach on CS Lewis’s descriptions of two wrong ways to live life, and a right one that he describes in his book Mere Christianity. The Fools Way, the way of the sensible person, and the way of the Christian make up the three ways.

Lewis describes the “the fools way”... as people who go through life thinking if they had done things differently, they would have found that mysterious something they were looking for. Citizen Kane, the original, serves the purpose of illustrating “the fool’s way”. It is such an enduring classic due to its approach of the Rosebud plot device, which brilliantly exposes the folly of Kane’s life

Citizen Kane II, the second of the trilogy, seems at first to be a great alternative. This is Lewis’ 2nd way to live life... the way of the sensible person. In “Kane II” ... Kane is resuscitated... But the Rosebud flashback on his near-deathbed helps him change... much like Ebenezer Scrooge from the visitation of the spirits...He sells off Xanadu.... He learns to treat people with kindness.

Many movie plots are like this. The animated film “cars”, where the brash Lightning McQueen, changes to the good. Groundhog Day, where Bill Murray’s character uses the endless daily loop as an opportunity for self-growth and achievement.

However, Kane, even a nice Kane, remains trapped in a very real sense. He is a far better guy to be around... but... there is no still God-based reality in his life. So his trust is in humanity and human progress. The City of Man. And that point of view still fits with the way of the Babel tower builders.

Citizen Kane II ends again with a single word spoken by Kane. We can picture it in Disneyesque terms, Kane goes to the 1964 Worlds’ Fair, he comes out of Disney’s carousel of progress very confident of its message. He says one final word yet again, as he had done with Rosebud before, and the word this time is... *progress*.

Citizen Kane III completes the series and it is third way of life described by CS Lewis.

It picks up where Citizen Kane II left off, at the World’s Fair... But after the Carousel of Progress Kane decides to visit another exhibit, Man in the Fifth Dimension, which had

been placed there by Billy Graham's vision. The reference to the 5th dimension was to the spiritual one.

Graham explained his vision for the exhibit... "We are living in a world of continuing crises and tension. Millions of people of all races are consciously or unconsciously searching for truth and reality. The World's Fair will provide an unparalleled opportunity for the Christian faith to present its message of peace and hope.

By the way, a young lady named Mary Weller visited the Billy Graham Pavilion in 1964. She was a young lady in search of a God based reality to her life. She watched the film in that pavilion. Mary Weller, who would later be wooed by a dashing young man we know here at Westgate as George Rideout, was to embrace the reality, the truth of the Christian faith in 1964, and she would later become Mary Rideout

So Charles Foster Kane, in this final episode of the trilogy, does indeed become one of the million people who see Billy Graham's film. It gets the wheels in his head spinning, processing, thinking about a God based reality. But he resists an opportunity to make a decision of what to do about that reality right away.

However, he does make a crucial decision, which is to read the Bible for himself. He begins by reading Genesis. He begins, as they say in the film business, at the top. He plows through the first ten chapters to get the flow. He gains an understanding of God's creative power, particularly how God made humanity in his own image to be in relationship with him... then, he reads on and understands, sadly, the general rebellion of people. Continuing to read and think, Kane picks up on something unexpected, something extraordinary.

After sin entered the world, successive movements of divine grace accompany each episode of the spread of sin in Genesis chapters 3-11. The fall, Cain's murder of Abel, and the flood all move beyond the act of punishment which the acts of sin deserve, to God's forgiveness. There is protective support for Adam in 3.21 ²¹ *The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them*, Cain is marked less he be slain in 4.15, and Noah and his family are spared.

Kane reads on. The Tower of Babel account is followed by the family genealogy of the line of Noah's son Shem, which leads to Genesis 12.1-3, the account of God's call to Abram in response to human need.

12 The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

²"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

Kane sees a link between Gen 11 and 12. God clearly has in mind a contrast of the Babylon builders' plan of making their own name great with His plan to make Abram's name great.

Kane reads on and on. He traces the plan of salvation from God's covenant with Abraham, to the covenant God made with David that promised a forever kingdom, to Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant.

.³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Kane finds, in the opening book of the New Testament, a genealogy. This family tree connects Abraham with Jesus, whom he realizes brought the new covenant foretold by the prophet Jeremiah. He repents and commits his life to Jesus.

He has changed from Citizen Kane to Citizen Christian. A new life of faith was begun. Kane, like Abraham as described in Hebrews 11, began looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God.

Five centuries ago, a guy named Martin Luther's underwent a glorious conversion through his experience of reading the Bible. Listen to this verse from one of his hymns

Biblical study follow ups...

1. Read the account of Nimrod in Genesis 10.8-10. As with the Tower of Babel account, this is "dropped into" the genealogies. How does this "Nimrod" Babylon account relate to the "Tower" Babylon account?
2. What kind of artistry does the author use in telling the story of Babel in Gen. 11:1-9 (e.g. repetition, imagery, contrast, surprise)? What does the author convey about the situation or the characters in the story through this artistry?
3. What do you think of the contrast made between the Babel tower builders making their name great, and God's pledge to make Abram's name great in the call of Abram (Gen 12.1-3)? Why does God pledge to make Abram's name great?
4. The account of the confounding of human language in Gen 11.5-9 is reversed on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.1-13. Please discuss.

Application follow ups...

1. What do you see as the most challenge aspects of entertainment culture today? What are the most encouraging aspects?
2. What are some of the major messages of our entertainment culture today? What aspects of these messages affirm elements of the gospel message, and what aspects contrast or contradict the gospel message?
3. What should be a Christian approach to entertainment from a "time spent" perspective? How much time is "about right"?

4. What should be a Christian approach to entertainment from a content perspective?