

Sunday Sermon: June 9, 2019

Sermon Text: Genesis 11:1-9

Sermon Theme: God's Loving Response

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. <sup>2</sup>As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

<sup>3</sup>They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. <sup>4</sup>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."

<sup>5</sup>But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

<sup>8</sup>So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup>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.

Have you ever tried to learn a new language? I have often thought of someone who speaks different languages as a person who is blessed with a very special blessing. I am not blessed to speak other languages. I can work through Greek and Hebrew with a lot of books but I would not do well in a group of Greeks or Hebrews. Many say that I might even have a limited grasp of the English language.

When I look at someone who has learned a language, I am amazed at what they can do. Some pick it naturally, which is a gift. Some spend a lot of time working on the language to the point where they can speak and understand it.

As I was studying for this Sunday, there was a lot about Pentecost and the languages the apostles were blessed with and Babel and the languages they spoke. As I studied I ran across this quote that made me think about why we have different languages in the first place. *The many languages on the face of the earth is a monument not to human ingenuity, but to human sin.* --- Herbert Leupold

The reason we have languages is explained for us this morning in this Bible lesson from Genesis. The reason there are many languages goes back thousands of years to this time soon after the flood where we see God's loving response to people's sin.

If you study the textbooks, they all say that early man was little more than an animal. They walked upright, had ability to communicate, but their knowledge was limited, their intelligence lacking. It is said that there were nomadic, family groups who lived in huts with little societal cohesion.

Moses paints a very different picture of people who lived shortly after the flood. These people were anything but nomadic, choosing instead to remain with one another and work together. They were intelligent, hard-working, and industrious. They were even inventive. When stone and wood were not good enough to build with, they invented and engineered a stronger building substance to build a bigger, taller, and stronger building.

They had one common language that united them. But what did these people do with this knowledge, wisdom, and industriousness? What did they do with this unity that came from a common language? All of this wisdom and knowledge did not lead them to the Lord, it led them away from the Lord.

God had reaffirmed his command to spread out upon the earth and fill it, after the flood. It would have been easy for these people to use all of this skill and expertise to go and live in different places, but instead they chose to stay together and build a city. In this city, they planned to build a special tower. It would be so high it would reach the heavens.

Even though they were not following God's command, still, this could have been done to God's glory. They could have built a city that was the central hub to all the other place that they would strike out to go and live. The tower could have been a beacon to all of the greatness God and his blessing. But it wasn't.

Do you remember from our text the words those people of Babel used when they thought about their great city and their great tower? **"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."**

Instead of being a place that could have glorified God, this new city and its tower was to stand in opposition to God. It was to be a monument, a rallying point, to their own glory, their own expertise, their own ingenuity. It would be a monument to themselves! Their own words show that by building this city and this tower they were hoping to thwart God's command and do what they wanted to do.

Does this sound like anyone we know? Of course it does. With all the wisdom and knowledge and ingenuity we have today, people are always building monuments to themselves and not to God. We hear people talk about the legacy they want to leave through their philanthropy, their art, their accomplishments. We hear popular stars say, "I want people to know my name." Who is that giving glory to? It's not giving glory to God, but to self.

This type of pride is not just the pride of others, it is also our own. How many times are we able to give thanks to God for something that we just don't thank him for? How many times do we know we should give God the credit for something and we take the credit for it? How often do we want to build something in our name: a business, a job, a family, a house, a bank account and don't think about what the way God would want us to do?

This type of sinful pride where we refuse to listen to God's command was common in the people after the flood and it is common in us because the same sin that lived in them, lives in us. God has a response to this sin and it may not be what we expect.

Remember this incident is not long after the flood. The thought of God's punishment for sin was something that people knew all too well. Yet, they were not afraid to sin against God by disregarding His command. How would we expect God to answer this disobedience?

**<sup>5</sup> But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."**

If you notice in your bulletin it says the LORD in all capital letters. This is something very special. That's God's special name, the Yahweh God, the loving God. When we see that the LORD came down and saw this, we know that the LORD is not coming down in anger to stamp these people out, but coming in love to stop them from their win which will lead to hell.

The God of love did not allow his people to continue being sinful. In his thoughts, recorded here, we see that if he leaves this sin unchecked terrible things will happen. Nothing they plan to do will be impossible. Their arrogance will go unchecked. Their ego and pride will continue. They will truly think that they are gods and by doing that they will fall away from the true God. So what did God do? **Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.** Let's stop this so that they will not be lost.

This sinful action of sinful people brought a loving response from God. God made it so that they could not understand one another anymore. He made it so that the group was separated into other groups. Now the people, in a natural, organic way, would find others who spoke their language. They would find a place that would meet their needs for life and living and they would follow God's command to fill the earth and subdue it.

Some might say that this is a harsh punishment. Yet, think of the other things God could have done. He could have sent fire from heaven, a great flood, or another natural disaster to destroy the city. He could have sent a plague to the people. He could have done any number of other things. However, his response was loving. He made it so that the people would follow his command as he always intended.

What kind of response does our sinfulness bring from our God? God shows the same love to us that he showed to them. Paul says in Romans, **"God demonstrates his love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Think about that for a moment. Your sin drove God to a desperate act of love for you. Your sin brought a loving reaction from your God. God sent his Son to be sacrificed for you and to save you, even though you may not have wanted it, deserved it, earned it, or even thought you needed it. He sent his one and only Son to be the loving response to take away your sins and bring you to heaven.

At Pentecost we see God's loving response to people who are lost in sin. When Jesus ascended into heaven, God did not let his Word be lost. Instead he prepared the disciples and all who believed and gave them the power gift of the Holy Spirit. This loving response of God to those first disciples strengthened them and helped them preach the Word.

That same loving response that God gave to the Apostles is the same to us. God promises that when we hear the Word, the Holy Spirit is still poured out in us to strengthen our faith. Everyone who believes in the Lord has the gift that God gave on that first Pentecost. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to build and strengthen faith in us even as we reach out with the Word.

God does not want any sin to lead us away from him. His loving response is still the same today as it was thousands of years ago, "What will it take to bring people to me and keep them in me?" At Babel, God's loving response was taking away the language so that they would not fall further into sin and unbelief. God's loving response at Pentecost was to give the gift of languages to these men so that they could preach and teach to people of many nations.

God's loving response today is the Gospel which has been translated into almost every language on the face of the earth. God's loving response is that he entrusts that Gospel to us to share with any and every gift we might have.

Languages may have been a product of sinfulness, but it is through language that God has made his Gospel available to people all over the world. It is through the Word that the Holy Spirit works. The time is right for us to reach out with God's loving response so that others may repent and turn to him.