

Fear Not, Your God Reigns

From Genesis

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Bible Text: Genesis 11:1-9

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Genesis 11:1-9. Hear the Word of God.

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech."

So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.¹

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your Word and we pray now that as we take just a short time to look into it you would be pleased to bless us and help us in our understanding not only of a passage of Scripture, but help us that we might better understand you and better understand our place before you. And we pray, Father, that you would give us confidence in you and in your work in this world. So be pleased to bless us to this end we pray in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

¹ Genesis 11:1-9.

Perhaps you have heard the news this last week of this bridge that collapsed in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was quite a large bridge that fell into the Mississippi River and on the Fox News website they noted the fact that some had said it was quite miraculous that there were so few actually that had perished in that incident.

There is a fear in among psychologists and psychiatrists now that people will have a growing fear of going over bridges and it is very interesting that this is not a small fear among people. In fact, it has a name and the name is gephyrophobia, the fear of going over bridges. And I did a little research on this and found that there are many people who actually stay in their homes and don't go anywhere because they have this phobia. Of course, this isn't the only phobia. There are many others. And if you look this up you will find actually there are thousands of phobias. It is quite startling.

Years ago in Sterling, Kansas when I asked our congregation there about topics on which to preach they said, "We would like you to preach on anxiety and fear and worry."

And I did that. And one of the things that I learned was that the cure for anxieties and fears, like the fear of going over bridges, is to understand that God is in control of all things, that God is the ruler of the universe, that God reigns, that your God reigns. And that is the good news. That is the message of the gospel.

And as we look at our world we may have fears and apprehensions because of the things that go on in our world and people who are evil are often very ingenious and sometimes we will have fears in our own hearts and worries about what is going to happen in the world.

Well, fear not, friends, because God is the ruler of the universe. God is in control of the world and despite the ability of those who are opposed to God, God reigns. And I think that is one of the lessons that comes out of our text this evening. And if I were to give Mel the title for my sermon again, I would change it.

This often happens to pastors.

And I would change the title to, "Your God reigns," or, "Your Lord reigns," because despite the abilities of those who oppose Christ, God reigns. And we ought not to fear and we need to remember this good news. You need to remember this good news.

And when you look at our text this evening, one of the things that you find is that those who are outside of Christ, rebel sinners, have great ability and God himself acknowledges that this is the case.

Look at Genesis chapter 11 and verse six.

“The LORD said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.’”²

That is what God says about these people who are rebelling against him.

You see, you don’t have to be a Christian, for example, to be a great athlete, to be good on the football field or to be good on the basketball floor. You don’t have to be a Christian. And people, men and women who are not Christians win championships. You don’t have to be a Christian to design bridges and build great cities and towers. And there are a lot of engineers that are Christians. Thankfully there are a lot of engineers that are Christians. You don’t have to be a Christian to fly an airplane or design computers or to fly a rocket to the moon.

When Neil Armstrong went to the moon and he stepped off of the moon lander he said something like this, “One small step by man and one great leap for mankind.” He didn’t say anything about God, very interesting.

People who are not Christians have tremendous abilities that have been given to them by God. And the sad thing is that they do not acknowledge God and recognize God as the author of those great abilities. And you should not be astonished then and I should not be astonished at the tremendous abilities of people who are opposed to God.

And this text tells us that use those abilities.

Look, if you would, at verses three and four in Genesis chapter 11.

They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name."³

I am kind of fascinated by the order of things here. In verse three it says, “Let’s make bricks.” And then they used the bricks to build cities. And in the city they used the bricks to build a tower . And why did they want to do all this? To make a name for themselves, to make monuments for themselves. And actually as I said when we were talking about one of the Psalms is that we are to make a name for God. We are not supposed to be in this world to make a name for ourselves.

And these people were attempting to make a name for themselves.

Interestingly enough, when you think about towers you don’t have to look very far in the city of Pittsburgh to see some towers. Correct? The first tower I thought of was University of Pittsburgh and the Cathedral of Learning. And I looked this up. It is the

² Genesis 11:6.

³ Genesis 11:3-4.

tallest educational building in the world, very interesting, tallest educational building in the world.

I am sure the University of Pittsburgh takes a little bit of pride in that. And you hear about the Cathedral of Learning when you talk to people about the University of Pittsburgh.

And then there is the US Steel tower. A few years ago they changed the name, interestingly enough, from the US Steel building to the US Steel tower. There is something about building a tower.

A few years ago I had the privilege of visiting in Chicago and went up to the top of the Sears tower, 110 stories. It is pretty high. It is over a quarter of mile high. And the city of Chicago takes great pride in that. And if you go up in the top of that building you can actually feel the building swaying in the wind. It was built that way. It is kind of a little scary, I think, that the building is actually swaying in the wind.

But, you see, this is what the people of the world want to do. See, we want to build cities and towers and make a name for ourselves. And people today are busy about this kind of thing, are they not? And part of what is happening, you see, here is that all of this is an act of self preservation.

Look again at verse four in Genesis 11.

“They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’”⁴

They were saying, “Look, we are all together now and we have a great situation. We need to preserve this. And what do we need to do? We need to build for ourselves a city and a tower so we will be held together and unified.”

The city of Pittsburgh as a whole is not unlike this. We were told that Pittsburgh is like a bunch of little cities connected together before we moved here and after we moved to Pittsburgh we discovered that in this borough people kind of stay together and in this borough over here people kind of stay together and in this borough over here people kind of stay together and that is the way it is in Pittsburgh. And in our borough I know this is the case. And this is how we are. We are united by the place where we live. And we build in order to preserve our identity and it is an act of self preservation. That is what these people were doing.

But the problem comes in, you see, when we do this without reference to God. See, it is not bad to build houses and it is not bad to build towers, but the problem comes when we want to do this to make a name for ourselves rather than make a name for God. And God

⁴ Genesis 11:4.

is in the business of building a city for himself which is the Church of Jesus Christ. And you are privileged to be a part of that great city, the city of our God.

Well, what happened in this circumstance in Genesis chapter 11. Well, the Lord took some action. The triune God took some action and in the end it is always the triune God, the Lord with whom you have to do and I have to do.

Look at verse six, for example.

“The LORD said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language,’”⁵ et cetera.

Verse eight says, “So the LORD scattered them abroad.”⁶

And verse nine says, “Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth.”⁷

Who is in control here? These people who want to build the tower and a city for themselves? Or is God in control?

It is the Lord God who is in control. And despite the abilities, you see, of those who are opposed to God and opposed to Christ, you need to remember and I need to remember the good news that God is in control and that God reigns. That is the good news of the Bible.

Now, I want you to see something else from this text. Look at verse seven.

“Come,” the Lord says, “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”⁸

“Come, let Us...”⁹

This is exactly the same thing that the people said.

Look at verse three again.

“They [the people] said to one another, ‘Come, let us...’”¹⁰

And in verse four they said, “Come, let us...”¹¹

⁵ Genesis 11:6.

⁶ Genesis 11:8.

⁷ Genesis 11:9.

⁸ Genesis 11:11.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Genesis 11:3.

¹¹ Genesis 11:4.

And what is the response? God says, "Come, let Us..."¹²

That is the response. God is in control. And I think this is an index of the fact that God is three in one, that this is not just a Word that has to do with God's being a regal character, as it were, a king, but because of the way the language is used here I think actually this is a statement about the trinity. And it is the Lord who comes in Jesus Christ into this world to affect the work of God.

And what does God do? He scatters. He scatters the people who are opposed to him.

Look at verses seven, eight and nine again.

"Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech."

So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.¹³

He scatters the people and he confuses them, see. How amazing God is when he does this. And, again, this is an index of the fact that God is over all and that the good news is God reigns. You and I have nothing in the end to fear. God reigns.

And God not only scatters and confuses his enemies, but he makes them a byword.

Look at verse nine again.

"Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth."¹⁴

Babel was on the plain of Shinar. You see that in verse two.

"It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar."¹⁵

And if you look on a map of the Middle East you can find the location of ancient Babylon. Do you know where it is? It is in the desert in Iraq just south of Baghdad. And it is a desolate, forsaken place. And for centuries wars and battles have been fought over that land and in that land and the hand of God's judgment for centuries has been over that area of the world. And all you have to do is mention the name Babel or Babylon and

¹² Genesis 11:7.

¹³ Genesis 11:7-9.

¹⁴ Genesis 11:9.

¹⁵ Genesis 11:2.

almost everyone you talk to knows what you are talking about. The place and the name have become a byword.

And who did that? God did that. God did that, friends. Despite, you see—I say to you—despite the abilities of those who oppose God and oppose Christ, the good news is God reigns. He is in control of all things. And you have nothing to fear.

I am glad for that. I really am glad for that.

There is one other thing I want you to see in this text and it is in verse five.

“The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.”¹⁶

The Lord who is the king of all came down and took a look at what the sons of men, those who opposed him were doing and as Psalm number two says, he laughed and he scattered them. He came down.

Do you remember what happened in the Garden of Eden? Adam and Eve sinned. And God came down into the garden and he talked to Adam and Eve. And Adam and Eve hid from the Lord God in the garden. And God put them outside of the garden.

And then, a little while later, when a world that was opposed to God rose up, God came down again in a flood and destroyed the earth.

And in this text here we see that God comes down, once again, to see what is going on in the world.

These aren't the only times that God saw fit to come down and look and see what was going on in the world. God came down in Jesus Christ when Jesus Christ was born. And Christ lived in this world and died on a cross and he paid for the sins of all of the people over all of the centuries that were opposed to him. God came down to do that. And he came down to pay for your sins and for my sins. See, he is the ruler, he is the king and he is in charge despite all of the ability of people who oppose him. God is the one who reigns and is in control and he has shown us this is the case very graphically and very specifically through Jesus Christ.

And do you know what? The promise is that Jesus Christ is going to come down again from heaven, not for the purpose of taking care of sin, but for the purpose of salvation, to take people like you and me into his city and into his heaven. He is going to come down again and do that for you and me.

And so, you see again, despite all of the ability of those who are opposed to Christ, understand the good news, friends. Your God reigns. He is in control of all things and you don't need to be anxious about what is going to transpire that is all around you. You don't need to be anxious.

¹⁶ Genesis 11:5.

You know what one of the great fears is, one of the great phobias is? The fear of death. It is in the top 10, the fear of death.

But because God is the great God of all and he has come down in Jesus Christ, you need not fear death because he has conquered it in his life and death. And because God is the ruler of all and is the king of all there is no need to fear at all. And so that is the simple message, I think, that comes out of this text in Genesis 11 for you and me. Despite the ability of all those who are opposed to God, remember the good news, friends. Your God reigns. And most specifically he reigns in Jesus Christ who is the Lord.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for your Word. And I pray that we might grasp what this text tells us and understand it well that you are the one who is the great God of all and there is nothing out of your control. So we need not fear, but rest content in your hands. Bless us to this end, we pray in the good and gracious name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.