

MANY LANGUAGES BUT ONE WORD

[Gen. 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-22]

Gen. 11:1-9 The Tower of Babel

11 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ²As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

³They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴Then 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; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶The 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. ⁷Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

⁸So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹That 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.

Acts 2:1-22 The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

²² "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

MESSAGE:

The Biblical account of man's attempt to build the Tower of Babel and the fact that it led God to splinter the one original language of mankind into many different languages tells us a lot about how dangerous God considers pride to be to the human community. In the beginning, God gave man three instructions: 1) Be fruitful and multiply and spread out over the entire earth. 2) Rule over all creatures on earth. 3) Call on the name of the Lord. At Babel, men did the exact opposite of what God commanded. 1) Instead of spreading out and populating the earth, they settled in one place on the plain of Shinar. 2) Instead of being satisfied with ruling over all the creatures on earth, they sought to rule in heaven. 3) Instead of calling on the name of the Lord they decided to "make a name for themselves." Their determination to oppose God at every turn shows how pride infects everything man does since the Garden of Eden. It all started when the devil appealed to Adam and Eve's pride by convincing them that if they disobeyed God's command to refrain from imbibing the knowledge of evil they would be like God and know what God knows. Pride is the original sin from which all other sins spring.

Pride rears its ugly head in human thinking by leading man to believe that he can be equal to God. This thought takes several forms, but it usually boils down to the desire to glorify man rather than glorify God. Man glorifies man when he claims that through the power of his intellect he is capable of understanding all things and has no need for divine revelation. At the very least he denies God's usefulness, and more often than not, God's very existence. I think it was Ozzie Osbourne who once quipped; "*In the beginning, man created God.*" The motive that drives pride is the desire to cast off HIS authority and be autonomous. Pride is driven by the spirit of rebellion.

So how did God handle the Babel-builders? He hamstrung their efforts by confusing their tongues so that they couldn't understand one another and work together to build their silly tower. By sowing confusion and disruption among them, he forced them to obey his original

instructions: to spread out and populate the earth, leave heaven to God, and call on His name rather than trying to make a name for themselves.

What God did at Babel is divine testimony to the terrible power that pride can exert over the human imagination. Consider the consequences of fragmenting one original language into hundreds of different languages. Different languages produced different clans, tribes and nations who then proceeded to make war on each other. God's confusion of the languages unleashed the four horsemen of the apocalypse who rode out under the banner of conquest, leaving genocide, economic chaos, disease and death in their wake. God knew this would be the result of confusing the tongues, yet he considered even these to be less injurious to mankind than what would have resulted from their collective, coordinated pride.

So how exactly does pride mess up our daily lives?

One way is by producing in us a compelling desire to **win**—whether it's winning at sports, winning an election, beating out a colleague for a promotion, or winning an argument. It's hard to say which is stronger—our need to win or our hatred of losing. The famous tennis champion Andre Agassi said that for him the fear of losing was much more powerful than the desire to win. Vince Lombardi said, *“Winning isn't the main thing—it's the only thing.”* Leo Durocher said, *“Nice guys finish last.”* According to a recent movie about the life of Ray Croc, the founder of McDonald's, when he was asked to describe his strategy of dealing with competitors as he built the McDonald's empire, he said, *“Let me put it this way: If I see a competitor drowning, I run over and put a hose in his mouth.”* We know that in order for us to win, somebody has to lose, but as we like to say, that's life—and we make no apologies. Pride.

Another example of pride at work in us is our passionate belief that our opinions are the only opinions that any right-minded person should hold. The Oxford Dictionary defines “opinion” as: *“A view or judgement formed about something, not necessarily based on fact or knowledge.”* Given that definition, wouldn't you think we might be a little more tentative about our opinions? But are we? Most of us believe right down to our toes that we are right and anyone who disagrees with us is simply wrong. They have to be wrong because we, of course, have to be right.

But where pride has the most insidious, destructive effect on us is when it comes to forgiveness. We have a problem asking for forgiveness, and we have a problem practicing forgiveness—forgiving others from our heart. Maybe it's because asking for forgiveness means that we are admitting we were wrong and the other person was right—and that makes us the loser and the other person the winner. All I know is that most of us will go a long way to avoid doing it. On the other hand, unless other people who we feel have wronged us ask for our forgiveness we have a hard time forgiving them. Sometimes we even rationalize our reluctance to forgive them by telling ourselves that forgiving them might be bad for them, because if they don't know that they're wrong they might think that they're right, and, as we know, that can't be the case. We were right and they were wrong and they need to admit that for their own good. Forgiving them might even enable them to persist in the errors of their ways. And so the bottom line is that forgiving them might actually be bad for them. Thus

can man's pride produce a conclusion that satisfies his ego, but turns the Gospel on its head. Pride.

Pride divides man against man, woman against woman, and men and women against each other. Winners and losers, those who are right and those who are wrong, those who sin and those who refuse to forgive their sins. Winners exult in their victory and nourish their vanity; losers seethe in resentment and plot revenge. Those who are right consider themselves aligned with the angels and anyone who opposes them aligned with Satan and his demons. Of course the latter category is what a mathematician would call "an empty set," because everyone considers himself right and therefore on the side of the angels. And those who refuse to forgive—who often are the same people who imagine that they have no need to be forgiven—feel justified in their hard-heartedness.

Yet forgiveness of sins is the heart and soul of our Christian faith—God's forgiveness of our sins, and His command that we forgive each other's sins. After teaching His disciples the *Lord's Prayer*, Jesus added the following caveat: "...if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (*Matt. 6:14-15*) Forgiveness is the one condition Jesus places upon our salvation.

But instead of freely forgiving each other in our hearts, we allow our pride to divide us by dictating our thoughts and words and actions. We are fallen creatures living in a fallen world and pride is the flag we serve—as individuals, as clans, as tribes and as nations. It's a terrible problem to have, and we have it in spades, but "whadaya going to do?"

Well, where there is a problem, God always provides a solution. And if the problem is the divisiveness which sprang from God's confusing of the languages at Babel, God's solution was revealed in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, when He restored harmony by teaching men of all languages to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. The cure for pride is repentance. As man's pride at Babel brought down confusion and division, God's Word and Spirit at Pentecost created harmony by giving mankind a common language: the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the the Word of God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the exact opposite of pride. It is submitting to one another rather than ruling over one another. It is serving one another rather than conquering one another. It is becoming the least in order to become great. And most important of all—it is forgiving others from your heart so that you will be forgiven. "*Blessed are the merciful for they shall be shown mercy.*" "*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*" (*Matt. 5:7, 43-45*)

We say we want to take up our crosses and follow Jesus, but do we really mean it? Do we want a conquering hero for our God or a passive non-resistor who embraced his own humiliation and death?

Do we long for a cross or do we long for a throne? It's worth thinking about. Amen.