

Christ Community Covenant Church
Beginnings: Beginnings of a Nation - Genesis 11:1-9
Pastor Dave Scherrer - May 1, 2016

When is bad news good?

Never

When God says so

We know from scripture that God is sovereign and that He is in control of **all things** (Colossians 1:15ff). Let's remind ourselves from Scripture:

Deuteronomy 32:4 The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

Psalms 18:30 His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is pure ...

Proverbs 21:30 No wisdom, no understanding, and no counsel will prevail against the Lord.

Isaiah 46:11 ... Yes, I have spoken; so I will also bring it about. I have planned it; I will also do it.

Daniel 4:35 All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and He does what He wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can hold back His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

We are about to study one of the great portions of literature, not just in the Bible but in all of literature. We tend to overlook this passage, we read the narrative and say, "That is an interesting story, I wonder how much of it is true and how much of it is legend"? It is the story of the scattering of humanity and the start of diversity in languages. We often call it the "Tower of Babel" but, like so much of scripture, the presenting story is only the canvas for the more intriguing story of God and his dealings with humanity. It is a story of bad news that it really very, very good! Let's dive in.

Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ 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, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 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.

Let's just explore the surface of this text for a minute before we bear down on its real content. Two obvious things are happening;

- People were living in community and God scattered them
- Language was once all one and God divided it.

Community and a common language . . . these seem like good things and God does something bad. Now we have already established that God is in control and gets to define what is good and what is bad. But all the same, why would he do this? It seems kind of mean spirited and capricious of God.

Let's think about it for a minute. The Godhead in perfect community and in perfect communication – it cannot be that these are wrong or immoral. In fact some day we will again enjoy perfect community in Christ and uninterrupted 'Pentecost-like' communication with each other when we find ourselves in Heaven and join the church eternal. But obviously, something was going on that God felt the need to intervene and put a stop to their endeavors.

A quick note on this common language idea . . .

(This chapter actually pre-dates chapter 10 and serves at the explanation for all the nations and scattering going on.)

Dr. Harold Stigers has an interesting summary of this matter:

"Though there are countless languages and dialects yet ultimate derivation from a parent language is revealed through the continuing studies being made across the boundaries of the major language families. Common features of syntax and vocabulary, which are similar enough, yet different enough not to be labeled borrowings, indicate that one must posit a common ancestor".

Interestingly, secular linguistic scientists who, using computers to compare languages, are speculating that there may indeed be a mother tongue, which they are calling "proto-World." One writer went so far as to say:

"Maybe the Bible is right, and there really was a Tower of Babel. Or at least, maybe there really was once a single human language, before we were all cursed with a confusion of tongues" (Dyer 1990).

All of that to the side it is a compelling story. Here is artwork by Valkenborch 1568 and on the cover is a Dutch painter from 1553 Pieter Bruegal.



Lucus van Valkenborch, 1568 (Flemish)



(Pieter Bruegal, 1553, Netherlands on the cover)

Without some digging you would not know how important this passage is to Hebrew national history. This is a key text and every child would not only know of the story they would have memorized this account. If

you were to read the passage in the original Hebrew, you would see that the passage is written with great intricacy, using alliteration and like sounding words to create a rhythm and cadence that would have made it easy to put it to memory. Almost like a child's nursery rhyme, but with so much more importance as we will see. Look at the design of the passage. It is of the traditional Jewish chiastic form, the closest we can come to it is some of the almost mathematically created sonnets of William Shakespeare, Johnson and John Donne. Look at the design with me . . .

Chiastic Structure in Genesis 11:1-9

A – 'The whole earth had one language,' v1
B – 'there,' v2
C – 'each other,' v3
D – 'come let us make bricks,' v3
E – 'let us build for ourselves,' v4
F – 'a city and tower,'
G – 'The LORD came down,' v5
F¹ – 'the city and the tower,'
E¹ – 'which mankind had built,'
D¹ – 'come . . . let us mix up,' v7
C¹ – 'each other's language,'
B¹ – 'from there,' v8
A¹ – 'the language of the whole earth,' v9

The modern day moral of this story that was so familiar to every Jewish child from 2500 BC on is that it is **a study of significance and security. . .**

Significance and Security

Larry Crabb was a shaping author for me early on in my counseling career. In the 70's he wrote a book called Effective Biblical Counseling. In it he said these characteristics of security and significance are partially gender linked traits that are at the core of every human need/soul.

“There is one basic need, the need for personal worth, which is satisfied in two ways. The first that has to be met is for significance; purpose, importance, adequacy for a job, meaning fullness, impact.”

“The second input to have a person feel personal worth is the need for security; unconditional love that is expressed continually, permanent acceptance, and longing for relationship.”

“All personal problems result from trying to fulfill or meet these needs apart from God.”

~ Larry Crabb, Effective Biblical Counseling.

Significance

Let's look at verse 4 for the clue here in our examination of these traits in our passage:

“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.”

People have been doing this kind of thing for a long time. Building tall buildings on high places so that everyone can see their name and can see their influence and importance and significance from even a great distance away; The pyramids of Egypt and the Mexican Mayans and Aztecs, the Babylonian ziggurats and the Pharos lighthouse of Alexandria, the Colossus of Rhodes. Even in modern times people have been trying to exalt their own names by building huge towers to themselves to prove their significance.



We build towers too. Out of good looks, charming behavior, false bravado, exaggerating the truth, pushing for influence, swearing harder, drinking harder, looking good in the gym or on the dance floor; trying to make a name for ourselves. Trying to be known and admired and respected for our good looks and clever performance. What a colossal waste of time. In short order it all passes away.

God says our significance is in Him and only Him. We are not to be defined by our accomplishments or intelligence, by our attractiveness or our influence. We are not to be defined by our age or our skin color or our gender or our country of origin. We are to be defined by our relationship with Christ. Christ and Christ alone establishes my value and make no mistake! It is of eternal proportions! While I was yet a sinner Christ died for me, paying the price for my freedom not with mere silver and gold but with Holy Eternal blameless blood. We cannot add to our significance by anything we do or say can add to the value that God has already placed on our souls. In their human pride, and their desire to be significant, they were building a name for themselves with their tower. OK, so what about security?

Security

“ . . . Lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

This lesson on significance and security has much to say to us in our daily lives. It is a constant theme in my family and in my counseling. I believe it is a \$5,000 sermon. You should be paying attention – God is revealing to you right here priceless truths that will transform your lives if you heed my words.

What if we treated each other as if we were each infinitely valuable and that the things that matter in each of us have to do not with our appearance and performance but with our character in Christ? Instead we train our children from birth that appearance and performance are the key factors to establishing significance and security (shopping example – cute little girl being praised/loved for being so adorable, hugging example little snot-nosed whiney 2 year old boy – they live with this all their lives!).

Husbands, wives and families need to learn this lesson and live and choose accordingly.

The lesson that every Jewish child learned by memorizing this passage is this deep theology . . .

This is deep theology!

- **God came down to see**
- **God judged the circumstances**
- **God acted to redeem the circumstances**

The Name above all names

"His name (is) Jesus, for it is He Who will save His people from their sins (Mt 1:21). There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11). These things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn 20:31). Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). He who believes in Him is not judged (Jn 3:18). Only believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ" (1Jn 3:23). Because as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (Jn 1:12).

Discussion Questions:

What story of the Genesis account so far has most captured your imagination (Chapter 1-11)?

When you first read the account of the tower of Babel, what do you think is happening here? Does it seem to you that God doesn't like "the competition" and so he comes in and kinda kicks over the sandcastle? What in the account makes it seem that way?

Dave said that in much of scripture there is a first or presenting message, but then with further looking there is even more beneath the surface. Do you agree with that? Can you think of a story/account/teaching that had deep personal meaning for you?

Dave suggested that this message would have been a critical teaching for the Jewish culture of that time? Does that surprise you? How so? Have you heard of the *Chiastic* form of Hebrew writing before (Impressive isn't it!).

Verse 4 of this passage seems to be the heart of the problem and verse 5 is the answer. Dave spoke of significance and security being the problem of the city and also the problem of humanity? What do you think of that idea?

Dave referenced an author by the name of Larry Crabb. Here are a couple of quotes from him:

"There is one basic need, the need for personal worth, which is satisfied in two ways. The first that has to be met is for significance; purpose, importance, adequacy for a job, meaning fullness, impact."

"The second input to have a person feel personal worth is the need for security; unconditional love that is expressed continually, permanent acceptance, and longing for relationship."

"All personal problems result from trying to fulfill or meet these needs apart from God."

~ Larry Crabb, *Effective Biblical Counseling*.

If it is true that people are 'hard-wired' to need significance and security so that we turn to God, why is it that we so often go astray to other substitute answers for significance and security?

What alternative forms of significance do we sometime pursue? Does it change throughout a lifetime (different stages of life)? How might they change and what makes them change over time?

Which is harder for you, false significance or false security?

How can we assure ourselves that we "Set our minds on things above" and on the "Author and Perfecter of our faith" instead of worldly charms and answers?

I believe that hiding the truth in our hearts will help us to fight off the accusations and temptations of the evil one. Here are some passages suggested by Dr. Neil Anderson. These might be a good place to start:

	I am secure...
<u>Romans 8:1-2</u>	I am free from condemnation.
<u>Romans 8:28</u>	I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances.
<u>Romans 8:31-39</u>	I am free from any condemnation brought against me and I cannot be separated from the love of God.
<u>2 Corinthians 1:21-22</u>	I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
<u>Colossians 3:1-4</u>	I am hidden with Christ in God.
<u>Philippians 1:6</u>	I am confident that God will complete the good work He started in me.
<u>Philippians 3:20</u>	I am a citizen of heaven.
<u>2 Timothy 1:7</u>	I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.
<u>1 John 5:18</u>	I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.
	I am significant...
<u>John 15:5</u>	I am a branch of Jesus Christ, the true vine, and a channel of His life.
<u>John 15:16</u>	I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.
<u>1 Corinthians 3:16</u>	I am God's temple.
<u>2 Corinthians 5:17-21</u>	I am a minister of reconciliation for God.
<u>Ephesians 2:6</u>	I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm.
<u>Ephesians 2:10</u>	I am God's workmanship.
<u>Ephesians 3:12</u>	I may approach God with freedom and confidence.
<u>Philippians 4:13</u>	I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.
(From <u>Victory Over the Darkness</u>, by Dr. Neil Anderson)	

Neil Anderson stated "The more you reaffirm who you are in Christ, the more your behavior will begin to reflect your true identity!" Do you agree? What are you all going to do about this? How can this Community Life group help in moving this reality forward?