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HCC Sermon

Genesis 11:1-9

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: Let me begin this morning by telling you a story of a young rabbi.
2. Need: We desire unity with people but have trouble maintaining it.
3. Subject: What kind of unity does God desire people to have?
4. Text: Genesis 11:1-9
5. Preview: What kind of unity does God oppose? What does God do to unions opposed to him? What is God’s plan for unity?

BODY

1. God opposes unity based on pride because it conflicts with his plan (Gen 11:1-4)
2. God planned for man to multiply and fill the earth
3. God gives the initial command to Adam: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:28)
4. God repeats the command to Noah (Gen 9:1, 7)
5. God exercises dominion through man populating the earth
6. People decide to settle in Shinar by building a city to make a name for themselves rather than fill the earth (11:1-4).
7. The people decide to settle in Shinar rather than fill the earth (11:2).
8. Shinar is east of Eden
9. Shinar is associated with Nimrod, the one who rebels.
10. The people decide to make their own building material: brick and bitumen (11:3).
11. The people decide to build a tower to commune with God rather than on the mountains. [Ark rested on the mountain of Aarat (Gen 8:4)]
    1. God appears to Moses at Mt. Sinai
    2. God at appears to Elijah at Mt Horeb (1 Kings 19:8)
12. The people decide to make recreate humanity in their own image (11:4)
    1. The first time that a cohortative is used when God creates man in his image (Gen 1:26)
    2. The people use the cohortative four times (Let us make bricks, let us burn, let us build, let us make a name)
13. The people decide to be creators (11:4)
14. Be cautious of uniting with people to pursue a selfish agenda
15. God’s dissolves unions opposed to him because they lead to trouble (Gen 11:5-8)
16. God disperses the people of Babel by scrambling their language because it would lead to trouble.
17. Although man is far from him, he goes down to examine their work (11:5)
18. Unity for selfish ambition will lead to future trouble (11:6)
19. God decides to scramble their language to disperse them (11:7-8)
20. Be aware that God’s discipline awaits any union opposed to Him.
21. God plans to unify a diverse people in him (Gen 11:9)
22. The dispersion of Babel results in the birth of nations (11:9)
23. God has plans to unify a people from all nations in him
24. God plans to bring people together through a family.
25. God plans to reserve the confusion of language.
26. God plans to bring everyone into his city.
27. Pursue unity in the body while we await the return of Christ

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: God opposes unity based on pride because it conflicts with his plan. God dissolves unions opposed to him because they lead to trouble. God plans to unify a diverse people in Him.
2. Closing Image: Let me close with a story from the Urbana Mission conference in 2009.

MANUSCRIPT

**Let me begin this morning by telling you a story of a young rabbi.** There was a young rabbi that found a serious problem in his new congregation. During Friday service, half the congregation stood for prayers. The other half remained seated. Each side shouted at the other insisting that theirs was the true tradition. Nothing that the rabbi said or did helped to solve the impasse. Finally, in desperation, the young rabbi sought out the synagogue’s 99-year-old founder.

He met the old rabbi in the nursing home and poured out his troubles. Let’s listen to their conversation.

“So, tell me, was it tradition for the congregation to stand during prayers?”

“No”

“Ah! Then it was tradition to sit during the prayers.”

“No”

“Well… what we have is complete chaos! Half of the people stand and shout. The other half sit and scream.”

“Ah… that was tradition.”

Pursuing and preserving unity is hard work. It’s tough to get people to row in the same direction. It’s challenging to get people to agree on a path forward. We see it in a variety of areas in life. We see it in the world. Britain breaks away from the European Union because it doesn’t believe it helps their country’s interests. The Russian space agency is thinking of pulling out of the International Space Station because of the sanctions imposed on Russia. We see it our workplaces. Everyone on the team has a different idea on how to complete a project. Analysts disagree on what caused the dip in profits this quarter. We see it in families. Spouses have different ideas on how to spend their vacation. Children ignore their parents directions. It results in terse words exchanged. Despite all its trouble, people desire unity. You don’t think so? Why do people go through so much trouble dating to find a spouse? Why do you think people look for teammates that they can work together with when looking for a job? It appears God put a desire for togetherness within us.

**How does God then plan to bring people together?** After all, we see so much disunity around us. What does God do to bring people from different backgrounds, different countries, and different experiences together? **How does God plan to unify people?**

To answer this question, it requires us to go back to the beginning. I guess it’s appropriate that we’re already in a sermon series in Genesis titled: “In the Beginning”. We’ll turn our attention to a story that occurs after the flood. It’s a story familiar to many of you. The Tower of Babel. Thank you, John, for doing this morning’s Scripture reading. If you’re not there already, then please turn your Bibles to Genesis, chapter 11. Genesis, chapter 11. That’s where we’ll focus our attention this morning. Genesis. Chapter 11.

From the story of Babel, we’ll answer three questions. First. What kind of unity does God oppose? Second. What does God do to unions opposed to him? Third. What is God’s plan for unity? Again, we’ll be covering three questions. What kind of unity does God oppose? What does God do to unions opposed to him? What is God’s plan for unity?

Let’s turn our attention to the first question. What kind of unity does God oppose? What are the unions that God is against? When does God oppose people coming together?

**God opposes unity based on pride because it conflicts with his plan.** God is against people coming together to promote selfish agendas. He takes with issue with people coming together to promote themselves. God disapproves of people boasting in their achievements because it goes against his design. **God opposes unity based on pride because it conflicts with his plan**.

We see this in this morning’s text. After Noah exits the ark and sets his foot on dry land, he receives a command. This is the same command that God gave Adam. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:28). **God repeats the command he gave to Adam to Noah.** It must be important enough to repeat. It’s so important that God says it twice to Noah and his family. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. This is God’s plan. This is God’s design. Human beings would disperse to the ends of the earth and fill it with people. Why? Remember that human beings were made in the image of God. Part of being made in the image of God is the idea that God expressed his rule through human beings. Wherever humans were, that’s where God ruled. People would make God’s name known to the ends of the earth! This motivation undergirds this command to fill the earth.

So… what do people do? What did this people sharing a common language decide to do? They decide to congregate. They decide to gather. **People decide to settle in Shinar rather than fill the earth**. This is not good. Look with me at verse 1. *Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.*

Now details in the text highlight the disobedience of the people. Shinar is an area east of Eden. Remember how in the book of Genesis, moving eastward is a metaphor for moving away from God. I want to make a tangential note. Being from the East is not a bad thing. Most of us are from East Asia. We like eastern food. We like people from the East coast. So, if you’re from New York, New Jersey, we want you to know that we appreciate you being here. But Moses uses eastward movement to depict a movement away from God.

The location of Shinar has some sinister overtones. Earlier in Genesis, the area of Shinar is associated with a guy from Nimrod. You may think: Cool name! Until you realize what it means. It means: “One who rebels…” People decide to gather in a place associated with a rebel. Not good.

We also see some other ominous signs in text that this settlement is not good. **The people decide to make their own building material: brick and bitumen.** Look at verse three. *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.”* Note what they’re saying. We don’t want to build with stone or mortar. Instead, we’re going to make our own building material from the earth. We’ll make brick and bitumen. We’ll use these materials rather than the materials that God created.

Note the building project. **The people decide to build a tower to commune with God**. If God won’t dwell with us, then we’ll build a tower that allows us to enter the dwelling place of God. And if you recall, then places where God meets with man are in high places. But they are the high places that God created. The mountains. The ark rested on the mountain of Aarat. Moses meets with God at mount Sinai. Elijah meets with God at mount Horeb.

Look at the words that the people speak. It hints as something troubling. **People decide to remake humanity in their own image**. Listen to what they say. I’m going to read a part of verse three again. *Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.* Hear their words in verse four. *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.”* Did you hear how many times they said: “Let us”? They said it three times. But if you heard these verses in Hebrew, then you would have heard it four times. The fourth instance would be “Let us burn them thoroughly”. Why am I making such a big deal about two words: “Let us”? Who is the last time you heard someone say: “Let us make”? It was God. He said it in the beginning of Genesis. *Let us make man in our image*. These people instead of viewing themselves as God’s creation, they attributed divinity to themselves. Not good.

One more thing I want to make note of in the text. It’s the word: make. The people speak to one another saying: “Let us make a name for ourselves”. Throughout the Genesis thus far, there is only one who makes and commands things to be made. God. God makes man. God commands Noah to make the ark. Here, man makes. The people have decided to usurp God and take his place. **The people decide to be creators**.

The people at Shinar decide to unite to elevate man. This is what they mean by: “make a name for ourselves”. They sought their fame. They sought their glory. Their pride leads them to believe in the greatness of man. We don’t need God. We can create our own building material. We can make our way to God. We create. God is unnecessary. We don’t need to follow his plan to fill the earth. We can settle.

We see this type of thinking in our society today. Some think technology conveys upon us divine attributes. When we speak, creation obeys. Think about how we command our phones. Siri, send a message to Ben. Siri, tell me the weather. We’re able to know more information than ever before. You don’t know where Bolivia is? Google it. How do you repair a leaky faucet? Search YouTube. We can also be in two places at once. I may be here in the US, but I can videoconference friends in Europe. They’ll see my image there. There’s even some who follow this movement: Transhumanism that believes that through technology life can be extended. Human intelligence can be augmented through cybernetic implants. Why? It’s all to make a name for ourselves. It’s to highlight the fame of human beings. For some believe that the chief end of man is to glorify humanity. This is deadly pride. God opposes any community that seeks to glorify man. For God planned for man to live in constant dependence on him and follow his commands.

Be cautious of uniting with people to pursue a selfish agenda. Be wary of joining a group that elevates the glory of man above the glory of God. Be aware of how such people might influence your thinking and belief about God.

We can see from the text that God opposes unity based on pride because it conflicts with his plan. Let’s move to the second question. What does God do to unions opposed to him? What does he do to partnership that stands against his plan?

**God dissolves unions opposed to Him because they lead to trouble.** God scatters people who gather to oppose him. He creates division within these communities because they will eventually lead to problems. Unease and agitation would eventually occur in such communities. **God dissolves unions opposed to Him because they lead to trouble**.

We’ll see in the text that God disperses this community at Shinar because their proud attitude will lead to more trouble. He scatters them by scrambling their language. Let’s look some of the details in the text.

We’ve already established that the community at Shinar is far from God. One might say: They don’t want to even relate to God. But even though this human rebellion festers, God goes to them. **Although man is far from him, God goes down to examine their work**.

Look at verse 5. *And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.* I’m sure you hear the irony in this verse. Even though the people built a tower, it wasn’t nearly high enough to reach God. God still needs to come down to even see the tower.

God comes down to see the tower because he has a concern. This is the concern. Their unity to make a name for themselves will lead to future trouble. This refusal to scatter and fill the earth will cause problems for them. Look at verse 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.”* God isn’t concerned that this city of rebels will harm him. He’s concerned about how this settlement will affect humanity. Recall God showing earlier concern when Adam and Eve might potentially eat from the tree of life. This could result in Adam and Eve living in a state forever separated from him. The same type of sentiment is echoed in verse 6. God is concerned that the failure for people to scatter will lead to the intensification of sin in the community. The community will develop a mob mentality that leads a majority if not all its people to sin.

Communities have power to influence you toward good or evil. But a community against God will pressure its participants to adopt a life displeasing to God. We see this played out in communities within the Bible. All the inhabitants of Sodom had the desire to rape and abuse the Lot’s angelic visitors. All the members of Benjamin had the desire to rape and abuse the Levite’s concubine in Judges. Eventually idolatry permeates throughout the community of Israel leading to their exile.

We see it happen even today. Governments use propaganda to ensure that its citizens think and believe faith is an opiate. The highest good is the welfare of the party. Communities will use shame and guilt to accept their view of morality even though it opposes God. They employ peer pressure to force you to accept alternative sexual lifestyles. Peers encourage you to engage in unethical practices at work.

God recognizes the power of communities for evil. This prompts him to act. **God decides to scramble their language at Shinar to disperse them**. Look at verse 7. *Come, let us go down and their confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.*

The settlement at Shinar experienced God’s judgment. A people desiring to gather to make a name for itself found itself dispersed. God dissolved this union opposed Him.

We should be aware that God’s judgment awaits any union opposed to him. But for those of us who are believers. We recognize that any consequence from us participating in such a union is his discipline. If we join a group that pursue values contrary to God’s kingdom, then we will experience his discipline. Be aware that God’s discipline awaits any union opposed to him.

For instance, imagine that you work for a pharmaceutical company. One of your responsibilities is to ensure that the batches of Sudafed match the number on your list. But one day, you notice that one batch missing. That’s odd. You count again and it’s off. You report it to your supervisor. Your supervisor tells you: Sign off on it. I’m sure that they’ll find it eventually. We must get the product out the door. Your conscience says: This isn’t right. But you feel the pressure to sign off on it. You sign off on the paperwork. It comes to light 3 months later that the discover the missing batch of Sudafed. Apparently, another employee at the company had stolen it to make illegal drugs. Now your company is under investigation. They decided to shut down the plant for undetermined time. When you decided to participate in a community that pursued the bottom line rather than doing the right thing, it had consequences. It leads to people investigating you. It results in people needing to stay home rather than work. One could say it’s God’s discipline.

It can happen at work. It can happen in your dating relationships. It can happen in the clubs that you decide to you. It might even be a research group. We must be aware that if we join a group that promotes values contrary to God’s and force us to follow along, then it could get us into trouble. Bad company corrupts good character.

We know God dissolves unions opposed to him because they lead to trouble. It seems like we know what not to do. But it doesn’t answer the question: “How does God plan to bring people together?” What is God’s plan for unity?

**God plans to unify a diverse people in Him**. He doesn’t want people to unite to promote human fame. He wants people to unite in their belief in Him. He desires a people to come together to make his name great. But he doesn’t want just a homogenous group. He desires a diverse people to come together. **God plans to unify a diverse people in Him**.

At the beginning of the tower of Babel story, everyone has the same language. But at the end, God confuses their language. This leads to their dispersion. But **the dispersion of Babel results in a diversity of people.**

Look at verse 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.*

There’s so much irony in this verse. The word: Babel in Babylonian meant gate way to the Gods. But in Hebrew it means to confuse. The gateway to the gods because the place where the God of Israel confused the language of people, so that they would fulfill his command to fill the earth. Now people would speak a variety of language. There would be Mandarin, French, German, Spanish, Japanese and so forth. People would develop their own dress. They would create different cuisines. It leads to the birth of nations.

But if there’s so much diversity, then how would God bring these people together. After all, there’s a desire within us for community. We long for togetherness. But language and culture make it so challenging. How would he bring this diverse population together?

God has plans to unify a diverse people in Him. There are hints of it in the text. Remember how man wanted to make a name for himself. Well… in the subsequent chapters of Genesis, **God will bring people together through a family**. The next chapter, Moses will follow the family of a man named Shem. The name Shem means name. God will make a name for someone in this family. And if continue reading in Genesis, you’ll discover that Abraham comes from the line of Shem. God says to Abraham: I will make your name great and through you all the nations will be blessed. Remember how the Babelites wanted to build a tower to the heavens. Well… God would create not a tower, but a ladder. Abraham’s grandson, Jacob would see a vision of a ladder. This ladder would reach to the heavens. We discover that the unity will come through one of Jacob’s sons: Judah. From Judah, there would come a king. All the nations would come before this king. The nations would unite under him. Israel believed that it would was king David. But there would be one even greater. Jesus. Jesus says to Nathanael: You will see angels of God ascend and descend on the Son of Man. Jesus is the ladder that connects man to God. He is the greater tower. It is at his name that every knee shall bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. For in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. All are now one in Christ. True unity is not found in human glory. It is found in the glory of God located in Christ.

Overcoming language is challenging. I mean even when I speak the same language with someone, it’s still difficult to communicate with someone. I heard someone struggling to say what they were think. In frustration, they uttered: “Arghhh! Words!” But God plans to reverse the confusion of language. After Jesus ascended into heaven, all his followers gathered in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes down on believers. And the different believers begin speaking in different languages. The curse of Babel has been undone. For those of us who are believers, the Holy Spirit helps us to communicate with others. He provides us the words to speak to comfort. He gives us the words that we need to correct. He’s the one who enables us to be gentle in Speech. God has begun to reserve confusion of language. It doesn’t mean that I’ll begin speaking Portuguese. But there will be one day, when we will be able to understand one another in a way that we are not able to now. When Christ returns and we receive our resurrected bodies, we will not need a google translate. We have something better. The Spirit of God helping us.

God disperses people from a city. People are sent out of the city that they decide to build for themselves. But God plans to bring everyone into his city. In the Old Testament, Israel anticipated when the nations would unite in Jerusalem. But there’s an ever city coming. The city of God will come at the return of Christ. On that day, the diverse people of the world will be invited in true city. At the center of that city will be the tree of life. From that tree, there will flow a river that will undo the curse of the world. It is in that city that we will experience true unity.

Are these things all just in the future? Is true unity something we can only anticipate? Is it something that we need to look to the horizon for? No.

Look around you in this church. The unity that we anticipate in heaven, we experience now. There are people from all different backgrounds. Different ages are represented. Newborn. Infant. Child. Youth. Young Adults. Elders. People work in different fields. Medicine. Engineering. Journalism. Law. Research. Teaching. Yet we all come together because of God. We are all one in Christ.

How does God plan to bring about unity? It’s through the gospel. And if we believe in the gospel, then we should **pursue unity in the body while we await the return of Christ**. Build up the church. When someone is sick, provide care. Someone needs encouragement, spend time listening to them share their struggles. Someone needs correction, give them a gentle exhortation. For where else will you find a diverse community? As a we take communion later today in service, it reminds us of this unity that we have in Christ.

This morning we answered three questions. What kind of unity does God oppose? He opposes united based on pride. What does God do to such unions opposed to him? He dissolves them. What is God’s plan for unity? He plans to unite a diverse people in Him.

Let me close with a story that displays that unity that God desires. Every three years, there is a mission conference called Urbana. After the main session each night, students would leave the large auditorium to gather in small groups for prayer. In one banquet hall, there were three groups. There’s a group of mainland Chinese students. There’s a group of students from Hong Kong. There’s another group of Taiwanese students. Large dividers separated each group.

But as these students prayed, some of the mainland Chinese students suggested that they invite other groups to join them. They invited the Taiwanese students to join them, so they opened the wall divider. They sang and they prayed. Then they invited the students invited the students from Hong Kong to pray with them. The students from Hong Kong pulled back their divider. A leader reflecting on this moment said: “In Christ, we are all one family. And Christ breaks down political boundaries. In Christ, we have the desire to make the first steps to connect.” Later, they invited the Korean and Japanese groups to join them. Despite the language barrier and past differences, they gathered to worship and pray. This moment at Urbana anticipates what will happen when Christ returns. Meanwhile, may we each also pursue unity in Christ.