

pSt. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
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The Tower of Babel? Really?

Genesis 11:1-9

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

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

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

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

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Do you think that, if we all pulled together, we could pull the cross off the wall?

I'm not suggesting that we do that, but when we are united, we have a lot of power for good or evil.

1. The Frightening Power of Unity

That's what the LORD saw in Genesis 11. When people are united, there is practically nothing that they cannot do.

Now when we read this lesson, it doesn't seem like such a big deal. They want to stick together. So what? They want to build a city. So what? They want to build a tower and make a name for themselves? What's wrong with that?

But take a look at verses 1-4 again. Do you see what is missing? There is no reference to God in that section.

When God is not present, unity is frightening. Remember what the LORD said about our hearts: “Every inclination of a person’s heart is evil from childhood” (Genesis 8:21). When God is not present, the human heart is what drives that unity.

The unity at the tower of Babel was not a neutral unity. It was a unity built to defy God’s position as ruler. By that tower, the people were trying to pull God down from his throne.

That frightening power of unity apart from God is evident to this day.

- A few weeks ago, there was a protest at Mayfair Mall. Two of my friends, members of our congregation were working there. It was a peaceful protest, but a frightening protest. Unity of the crowd allowed people to scream and shout in people’s faces in a way that they never would have done if they had been all alone.
- Even our founding fathers understood the frightening power of unity. When power is unified in one person, horrible things have happened over the course of history. They devised a government with three branches: Executive, Legislative, Judiciary. These branches are supposed to be at odds with each other because unity apart of from God is frightening.
- Even in our own lives we see this frightening power of unity. Why is it that living together has become commonplace even among Christians? Has God’s word changed? Or is it the power of unity apart from God? The pressure of society leads us to accept what would have been unacceptable a generation ago.

At the Tower of Babel, we see the frightening power of unity.

But we also see another unity present. This account is recorded so that we see:

2. The Gracious Power of Unity

Look again at Genesis 11:5-9. Do you see evidence of another unity? For only the second time we have the privilege of listening in on a conversation taking place in the midst of the Trinity. At the creation of Adam and Eve, we heard this conversation, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26). Now we hear it again. Mankind was trying to unite against God. But God was perfectly united with the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to accomplish his saving work.

There is something else amazing in Genesis 11:5-9. God comes down in judgment on the people, but notice the name for God that is used. It is not the word “God” which emphasizes God’s power as we see in Genesis 1. It is the Name – LORD – in all capital letters. Five times this Name is repeated. This is the name that we learned about in Genesis 2 where we saw God’s love in action in the Garden of Eden. God explained his name in Exodus 3. “I Am that I Am.” His love is unchanging. His love is independent of our actions. The LORD who loved Adam and Eve before the fall into sin still loved them after the fall into sin and promised the Seed of the Woman who

would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15) and still loved them on the day that he fulfilled that promise by sacrificing his own Son on the cross.

It is this God of unchanging and independent love who confuses the languages and scatters the people across the face of the earth.

Now, I'm going to be honest. I don't see how this was the best possible idea. The confusion of the languages has made it harder for us to share the gospel. The confusion of the languages has made it more likely that we will go to war against each other. I don't understand this plan of the Savior God.

But I don't have to understand God's plan. Instead, God calls me to be like a little child and simply trust the gracious power of his unity. I hold on to the words of Psalm 131:

*My heart is not proud, LORD,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
² But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.
³ Israel, put your hope in the LORD
both now and forevermore.*

I often find that I don't understand. But the LORD has revealed himself to me as the Savior God, exercising the gracious power of his unity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit with one goal in mind: my salvation. I don't understand. I simply trust his plan.

This is the point of the Romans 8:28

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose [or plan] (Romans 8:28).

I'm sure for the people at the Tower of Babel, it seemed like the world was spinning out of control. It seems to us that the world is spinning out of control. But the Trinity is united in carrying out his plan.

How do I know? Again, it goes back to the empty tomb. If Jesus has risen, then he is also ascended to the right hand of Father and rules all things for our good.

"God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way"
(Ephesians 1:22-23).

In the dispersion of the tower of Babel, in the pandemic, in the economic uncertainty that many of us are experiencing, in the sickness that many of my friends are dealing with, the Triune God is still in control.

He rules for the church! We are his body. When you and I hurt, He “hurts” because you and I are his body. In fact, you are his “fullness,” you give him joy and satisfaction.

From our perspective things are spinning out of control. Our nation, our world is divided. But the gracious power of unity comforts us. We trust his gracious plan.

3. The Saving Power of Unity

But there is a way that we shall be united. Take a look at three verses of Genesis 10, the table of nations.

*From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their **clans** within their nations, each with its own language (Genesis 10:5).*

*These are the sons of Ham by their **clans** and languages, in their territories and nations (Genesis 10:20).*

*These are the sons of Shem by their **clans** and languages in their territories and nations (Genesis 10:31).*

At the summary of each of Japheth, Ham and Shem’s story all include the word “clans.” I find this amazing because that is also the word that is used as the story goes on.

There is a change halfway through Genesis 11. Up until this time, Moses has recorded the history of all humankind. But in verse 10, the story narrows to Terah and ultimately to the family of Abraham. But God is still desiring a perfect unity for the entire world. Look at Genesis 12:3.

And all peoples (clans) on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:3).

The three strands of the human race will all find salvation in Abraham’s seed, the promised seed of the woman.

This is where true unity is found. As we draw closer to the Savior, we draw closer to each other. We will begin to look and act more like the Unity of the Trinity.

That was the Apostle Paul’s approach to ministry.

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win

those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

This is our approach to ministry. Let's read our mission statement together:

By every possible means we bring every person within our area of influence closer to Christ.

It is frightening what humans can do when they are united to pull God off his throne. But it is amazing what our God can do as he draws us to himself. People from every nation, tribe, people and language are drawn to the Savior. This is the saving power of unity.

This is the unity that we will celebrate at the end of time:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

*"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)*

My Next Steps

Dig Deeper: Learn more about how worldviews shape our approach to difficult questions about the ancient world. Read *Creation & Evolution: Compatible or in Conflict?* by Jay Seegert or watch his presentation at AwakeAlive.com/June-Ultimate-Authority.

Shape Your Worldview: How do you see that the impossible is possible with God? Only by allowing the Holy Spirit to shape your worldview. Begin a pattern of daily Bible reading, using Pastor Pete's daily readings or your own. Email him at ppanitzke@stpmuskego.org.

Our Celebration of Unity

A Study of Revelation 7

In Revelation 6, the Apostle John saw visions of **war** (6:3-4), **famine** (6:5-6), **pandemics** (6:7-8), **persecution** (6:9-11) and **judgment** (6:12-17). Quickly read over Revelation 6 and write the bolded words in your Bible at the appropriate verses.

Jesus' goal in these visions is not to terrify us, but to prepare us for difficult days of sickness and unemployment and uncertainty. Notice that he began with a vision of gospel conquest (6:1-2). In spite of everything, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

In Revelation 7, we see the dispersion of the Tower of Babel will be reversed in the resurrection at the end of the world.

1. **Read Revelation 7:1-8.** Even though difficult days are coming on the earth, "the Lord knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19). How does it comfort you in the midst of this pandemic to know that the Lord has marked you as his own child?

2. **Read Revelation 7:9-10.** The rebellion at the Tower of Babel brought division into this world. At the resurrection, we shall see that division reversed. How does this vision help you as you think about, and discuss with others, the issue of racial inequality in our nation?

3. **Read Revelation 7:11-12.** On communion Sundays, the sentences leading into communion announce that we join with the angels in praising God. How would worship be different for you if you could actually see the angels joining in our praise?

4. **Read Revelation 7:13-14.** How could you use these verses to comfort someone who is filled with anxiety because of the fear of death?

5. **Read Revelation 7:15-17.** What do you think will be the best part of our "Celebration of Unity" before the throne of God?