

Every Good Endeavor

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Genesis 11.1-9, Esther 4.4-16
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I. Connecting With One Another

What do you think of when you hear the phrase “make a name for yourself”?

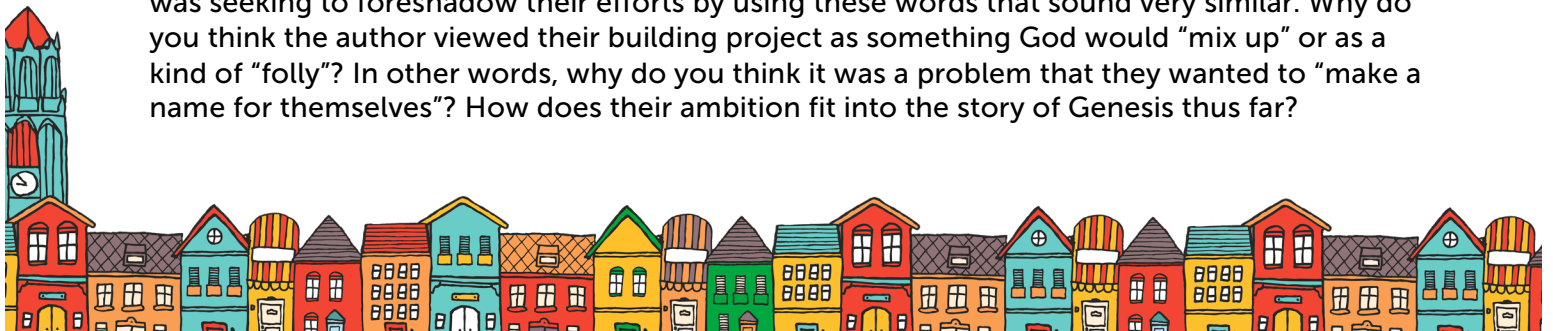
II. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our series Every Good Endeavor, engaging a biblical theology of vocation. We’ve seen how God created the world good and created humanity very good, in His image, and invited us – the crown of His creation – to join Him in cultivating and co-creating. And yet, if you engaged in last week’s study, you know the bad news: Humanity did not live up to this calling.

This week we see the effects of the fall continue in a well-known story known as the Tower of Babel. As humanity journeys “east of Eden,” we see their work life continue to suffer the consequences of sin. In seeking to “make a name for themselves,” they attempt to take God’s place with a new kind of technology. All in all, work becomes selfish and reveals a kind of idolatry.

III. Study the Text

- a. Last week we saw how God intended humans to be gardeners, though, as a result of the fall, we had to become farmers. Read Genesis 4.2b-12. What – if any – connection do you see between Cain as the one who “works the soil” and his punishment in verse 12a?
- b. Read Genesis 11.1-4. The author of Genesis – traditionally believed to be Moses – asserts that the people of the earth continue to journey “eastward” or “in the east.” Why do you think the author takes the time to tell us this? Does this “moving eastward” have anything to do with Adam and Eve’s banishment from the garden in Genesis 3.23-24 or Cain’s banishment in Genesis 4.16?
- c. In Genesis 11.2 we read that people settled on a plain in Shinar. Recall God’s command in 1.28 that humans are to “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it...” Does this “settling” in Shinar, then, fulfill God’s intentions for them? Why – or why not?
- d. Though we may not always think of them in this way, we have discussed the use of tools as a form of technology. What other types of “technology” are evident in Genesis 11.1-4? How do these early humans seek to use such technologies? To what end? For what purpose?
- e. Read Genesis 11.4 again. Scholars note that the Hebrew word translated “let us make a name for ourselves” is made up by the consonants n, b and l, which are later in the words “mix up” and “Babel,” evoking also the word for “folly.” It is likely, they assert, that the author of Genesis was seeking to foreshadow their efforts by using these words that sound very similar. Why do you think the author viewed their building project as something God would “mix up” or as a kind of “folly”? In other words, why do you think it was a problem that they wanted to “make a name for themselves”? How does their ambition fit into the story of Genesis thus far?



- f. It has been written, "From a purely human viewpoint, building a tower as high as the sky is an audacious undertaking, but Genesis views it as a sacrilege. In the sky is also heaven, the home of God, and this ancient skyscraper may be another human effort to become like God... The people's ambition suggests impiety. Mankind is again attempting to usurp divine prerogatives." Notice, however, the middle of the story (and for an ancient Hebrew, the most important point), verse 5: "But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building." In other words, the builders of the tower – with all their human ambition and kiln baked brick technology – were building a tower that God *could hardly* see from heaven! What does this communicate about our use of technology to get a "God's eye view"? Is technology necessarily evil, then?
- g. Read Genesis 11.6-9. At last, the conclusion to which our author has been pointing all along! Their ill-fated plot has been foiled. As aforementioned, we read "mix up" and "Babel," as alluded to in previous verses. As such, for the ancient Hebrews "Babel" means, essentially, "to be mixed up" or "confused." Why do you think God did such a thing? It is certainly a kind of judgment, though, are there elements of mercy here, too? In other words, how does God's "scattering" help humanity fulfill God's intentions for them?
- h. It has been written, "Man must leave Babel, its proud dreams and God-defying ways, if there is to be hope." Do you agree or disagree?
- i. For further study, read and discuss how Isaiah 14.13-15, Zephaniah 3.9 and Acts 2.1-21 engage and comment upon the event at the Tower of Babel.

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. In what ways have you "settled" in a particular place or profession? Have such decisions been a result of God's calling on your life or to fulfill your own desires? Or both!?
- b. How do you understand technology's role in our culture? Does it ever offer a "God's eye view" that takes the place of the divine? How so?
- c. How have you sought to "make a name for yourself"?
- d. Has your work ever been "mixed up" for God's glory?
- e. In Exodus, we read of the Israelites' slavery to the Egyptians, as well as their building project. Under such oppression, the Israelites' work was the sole purpose of their lives. How does God's original intentions for work – including the role of Sabbath – correct our desire to "make a name for ourselves"?

V. Pray

Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Thank God that by Jesus' work on the cross, we can be reconciled to Him and join Him in fulfilling His redeeming purposes for the world,
- b. Lift up the ways you fall into the trap of trying to "make a name for yourself," instead asking that God would help you rely upon His grace and calling on your life,
- c. Pray for the ongoing ministry of Good Shepherd, that we might continue to connect with God through worship, grow in faith through study, and serve God and the people He created, that in all things, He might have the glory.

