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Not Even the Flood Washed Away Sin

October 22, 2023

Sermon Text: Genesis 11

Scripture Reading: Genesis 9

This morning I want to call your attention one more time to the days of Noah and then we will plan to return to our consideration of the Apostles' Creed next Lord's Day. Follow along now as I read:

Gen 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.

The Flood was a great “reboot” of creation as we might say today. A kind of starting over. All human beings had been destroyed except Noah and 7 others. The Lord always preserves His church, and so He did, small as it was then.

Noah is commanded to go and be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, just as Adam and Eve had been instructed to do. All of the wickedness which had surrounded Noah for so long, was gone. The mockers perished. The earth began to be a kind of Eden once more. But just as in those sci-fi movies where a few people are able to escape the murderous aliens, only to be unaware that one had crept onto their ship, so it was with Noah. That monster called Sin had survived the flood in the hearts and nature of Noah and his family. You

can see hints of it immediately after the Flood –

Gen 9:2 The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered.

Gen 9:5-6 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. (6) “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

Gen 9:20-25 Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. (21) He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. (22) And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. (23) Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the

nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. (24) When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, (25) he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."

So Eden had not been restored. Much more would be required – a Savior would have to come from the line of Shem.

John Calvin preached a sermon 463 years ago on this 11th chapter of Genesis and his title was, *Ambition, Its Consequences and Cure*. With his help let's look at the course of man following the flood.

"We have seen how God, following the Flood, miraculously restored the human race and multiplied it in such a way that, sometime later, the earth was inhabited here and there in very remote regions. Moses [who wrote Genesis] inserts a story here to show men's ingratitude. Whereas they were supposed to prepare

themselves to worship and honor God in those places where He would be pleased to lodge them, they now contrive to rise up against Him. The Flood was always to be in their memory, before their eyes, to hold them in fear inasmuch as they had seen God exercise such a grievous and horrible judgment on the entire earth.

On the other hand, they were also supposed to be moved by the goodness of God, who had preserved them this way and had made a new world. That was also supposed to incite them to align themselves completely with Him. But as we shall see, there is no rigor (discipline) or gentleness that can draw them to the good and prevent them from making war against God." [Calvin, Sermons on Genesis, Banner of Truth Trust]

You see the main point we are emphasizing here and which God would have us learn well so as to give Him the glory due Him. *Man in his sin is totally fallen. Sin is his nature unless the Lord, in Christ, makes him a new creature. Man*

will never save himself. He will never reform himself.

intending to show their contempt of Him.” [Ibid]

(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.”

This terrible, wicked thing called *pride*. Ambition. Self-exaltation. In a way we might say that it is the root nature of sin. Sin is lawlessness, as Scripture puts it, and man the sinner is lawless because in his pride and self-worship, he insists on making his own law, of being, as we say, a law unto himself. So he is hostile to the Law of God (see Romans 8).

Where pride goes, destruction follows inevitably –

Pro 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

How often have we seen it here. The thing is there in a seed in a man, and then it sprouts and grows until the person is consumed by it. All of us must be on guard against it -

Psa 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! (24) And see

Is there anything wrong with building a city? Not in itself, but we have already heard the commandment which the Lord had given to man after the flood. *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*. The motive is what we must always look at, even to our own motives in anything we do. And the motive of these people in building a city was a direct act of rebellion against God. As Calvin puts it-

“Before we are scattered, let us make for ourselves a name, and let us build a city and a tower whose top will reach heaven.’ So we see that they were driven by ambition and pride. In addition, their self-exaltation was so excessive that they wanted to raise themselves up against God, as if they were

if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!

Now, consider this. Noah lived to be 950 years old. He lived, in other words, some 350 years after the flood. Those years must have been grievous for him in many ways. He had seen God's judgment on this world, and so had his sons and their wives. They were give a kind of new start, a new beginning. All the wicked were gone. And yet, slowly at first and then increasingly, the same old story begins to evidence itself once more. Sin. Rebellion. And this *in spite of the fact that the Flood was still fresh in the peoples' minds.*

I don't know how many years Babel occurred after the Flood, but it may be that Noah was still alive?? Perhaps, since the Scripture calls him a preacher of righteousness, Noah continued to exhort people to turn from sin and obey the Lord. But they would not listen. Noah saw it happening all over again and he knew that the Lord would one day bring judgment.

Man in his sin is grossly unthankful to God. The Lord is kind and merciful and delights in giving us good things. But the sinner is filled with ingratitude. Calvin once more-

“Men cannot use moderation when God is bountiful toward them. He bestows such liberality that men not only have what is required for their needs, but they have a superabundance to enjoy. The more God displays His liberality toward us, it is certain we have greater reason to love Him and devote ourselves completely to Him. The good things He places within our hands should serve us, in a manner of speaking, as ladders to lead us higher in our love for Him so that we will not be like [unthankful] brute beasts.

But Moses shows us here how men profane all of God's benefits and that was not just said for the Jews, but for us. In other words, after fattening themselves up, they kicked back against their master. In other words, when God draws us to Himself and allures us, so to speak,

we become wild, ferocious animals, and after stuffing our bellies, after being intoxicated with our lusts and delights, we conceive an arrogance and pride against Him. And this is how the land of Chaldea (ie, Shinar) corrupted those who lived there in Noah's day.

They should have paid homage to God and thought, 'We were forced to change our dwelling place and we came here as if by chance. Yet God has given us this unimaginably beautiful and delightful country, and we are even more deeply obligated to Him.' That is how they should have been moved to praise God and thank Him for such a blessing.

But now, what did they do? The exalted themselves and ambition blinded their eyes."

This is the inevitable pattern and course which the sinner follows. God has blessed America, but what has been our nation's response? Thankfulness? More so in the early years, but not many years passed

by before God was forgotten and the people gave credit to themselves. Their prayer became less and less a plea for God to bless American and more and more a demand that He do so. And we are reaping the harvest of iniquity today. Pride. Ambition. Self-worship. God today is largely disregarded as being irrelevant, a myth only fools believe.

Listen now as Calvin continues –

"Moreover, when it is said that 'they said one to another,' we understand that even though there were some leaders for such an undertaking (ie, building a city and the tower)...Moses does not say, 'Some came up with a plan' or *Someone* in the group suggested, but that 'they said to one another'. And so we have a plot agreed to among both great and small. No one in the group could say he was not guilty of being the principal author of such a wicked thing.

In that sense, we see that men are so inclined to evil that they do not have to go to school, for all are

masters when it comes to rebelling against God, going astray, and devoting himself to every confusion, and there is no one who does not try to corrupt all the others and men scratch like mangy sheep and spread the infection everywhere.

We see here an example well worth noting; that from youth there is only evil in us (see Genesis 8:21), all our imaginations are rebellious and perverse, and that all the compartments of man's soul, his reason, his thoughts, all his desires and all his affections, are worships for forging weapons to battle against God. That, I say, is what we are by nature.

All the more then we must be urged to pray to God to remake us, for it is not enough that he correct the evil that is in us, but we must be *completely changed or we will never be worth anything.*"

Where there is ambition and pride, these truths will be hated. It would be a very good thing for all of us to honestly examine ourselves in this

respect. This truth which we call the "T" in TULIP, Total depravity. *Unless we are completely changed, we will never be worth anything.*

Joh 3:3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Most people who claim to be Christians and who perhaps even speak about being "born again," do not really believe that they really are all that bad and that in fact no good thing is in them when they are born into this world. They will not like Calvin's words here at all. I have no doubt that this is the primary reason so many professing Christians have a disdain for John Calvin. But it is really a disdain for the Word of God.

2Co 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Think on this very carefully. If we must be made a *new creation*, and if –

Eze 11:19-20 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, (20) that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

...then plainly there is nothing redeemable in us, nothing good, nothing to commend us toward God as long as we are still in Adam. This was true of me when I was born and it was true of you when you were born. And unless you have been born again, been made a new creation, a new man in Christ, then no good thing is in you still. NO good thing. Nothing to merit God's approval. The sinner is without hope and without God. And, as I say, many professing Christians even will gnash their teeth at such "negativity." But it is true – *we must be completely changed, or we will never be worth anything.*

Now, listen to still another commentary by Calvin on this wicked rebellion at Babel –

“We have also said that every sinner will want to instruct his neighbors in order to lead them to hell. The devil is a master of that art and we cannot live with one another without walking in the midst of ambushes and nets which are laid to catch us....The world is full of treachery and we must be on guard. The devil uses all the people he has seduced to do evil and be drawn into the same confusion.

Let us be vigilant and let us do so willingly because our enemies are not far away inasmuch as those who should be showing us the way to come to God *seek only to ruin us thoroughly.*” “They said to one another...”.”

When we see people who have been corrupted, let us flee from them as from deadly plagues. Let us flee from them when they come and whisper in our ears, as the wicked and reprobate, those instruments of Satan, have done in all ages in

order to spew their poison everywhere and have always used those deceptive words when they say we do not have to be greatly concerned about facing the judgment, for God spares men.”

We live among the thorns, so let us take care not to be pricked by them.
[Ibid]

Here, then, in this tower of Babel, we see that sin survived the Flood. We see that if we are to be freed from it, the Lord must provide the remedy. Salvation is of the Lord alone. We enter the wilderness of this world dead in sin, hostile to God, so that our only hope is Christ alone, faith alone, by grace alone.

These rebels at Babel detested any such suggestion of course. They were of their father the devil whose motto and motive has always been, “I will ascend to heaven, I will be like the most high.” And that is exactly what this Babel crowd was doing –

(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.”

It is very probable that modern man’s zeal in building skyscrapers – going to incredible lengths to build the highest tower, is energized by this very same spirit. To ascend into heaven in defiance of God. It is quite interesting that the target of 9/11 was the two towers. It was plainly a judgment of God upon this nation, even though He used (as is His common means) evil men as His instrument.

“They committed the greatest evil possible: it is when men band together against God.” [Calvin]

Let’s end with one more very important insight and application to examine ourselves by:

“When our desires and passions (ie, our flesh) carry us along, nothing is too difficult for us. Some who pursue false religion will even stop eating and drinking in order to as they say rise higher and achieve

renown and glory. They will renounce all delights and pleasures and conveniences (ie, monks).

However, if God commands us to do our duty, we will reply, ‘Oh, that would be too hard for me, and I know my limitations. How would I ever do that?’ In other words, we will not be able to wiggle a little finger when it comes to walking where God calls us and it will only take some slight inconvenience to stop us in our tracks. Whatever the circumstance, we will always defend ourselves with the excuse that the thing the Lord calls us to is too difficult for us.

But when it comes to the devil, we are so inflamed by our passions that he wins out every time, and we leap over mountains to serve him, even to our destruction. Must we not then see that there is a monstrous perversity within ourselves. When men give themselves over to evil, such as these rebels at Babel, they will overcome all difficulties. They have not stone with which to build, but they will make their own from the dirt. ‘Well, there is no mortar,

but we will build with clay instead and we will make our own bricks. They are insane in their pride and nothing will stand in their way.’”

So, as I have said, let’s be certain to examine ourselves in these things. What does the Lord call us to do in following Christ? How does our sinful flesh try to rise up against obedience to Him so that all kinds of excuses come into our minds for not obeying?

And in contrast, what great zeal can energize us in overcoming all obstacles when our pride and self-seeking sin are leading us? The person who says, “Oh, I know, but I just cannot do that now. There are too many hindrances,” and yet in that same person’s life we see them letting nothing prevent them from obtaining and accomplishing what they want. No stones? No mortar? No problem – I will build that tower!

And then the Lord spoke. They were scattered by languages. Their tower came to nothing. He speaks, and man’s pride comes to nothing.