

Judgment

Genesis 11:1-9

Here is a simple story. On the surface *it sounds like an innocent building program*. But under the surface it is anything but innocent. If a group of people wanted to build a big tower, why did God react in such an extreme way? It looks like dramatic overkill!

It seems like middle schoolers having a sleepover that breaks out into a pillow fight and the host parents come in to break up the pillow fight by blasting all the kids with machine guns. Dude. It was just a pillow fight! Lighten up!

Genesis 11 – they’re just building a tower. *But God reacts to this tower by confusing the language of the whole town* and thereby scattering people to the ends of the earth. Imagine if you were there. One day you’re working beside someone, chatting about the weather and your kids. The next day you show up to keep laying bricks and the guy is spouting nonsense. You think he’s just had a stroke. He thinks the same about you. Friends and co-workers suddenly can’t understand each other at all.

You scramble around the whole tower and town until you *stumble on someone who understands your greeting*. If you’ve ever been overseas to a country where most people don’t speak English – do you know the feeling of being surrounded by people you can’t really understand for days and weeks. And then you come across an American. You know that feeling?

I spent a summer in Costa Rica to help me learn spanish and I lived with a Costa Rican family to force me to use the language. The weekends were really long, with no English speakers. And it was so refreshing to get back to class on Monday with my American friends! That’s how the people at Babel felt after God confused their languages. And with that, they scattered out with the others who could understand them and left the tower to slowly disintegrate.

Our word today is JUDGMENT.

Open the Bible

LIFE	CURSE	SALVATION	JUDGMENT	PROMISE
Creation	Adam	Noah	Babel	Abraham

This is our fourth word of 50 that we will use this year to tie the whole Bible together as ONE STORY. LIFE in Genesis one was corrupted by the CURSE of Genesis 3. We saw God’s SALVATION in the flood story last week. And today we come to JUDGMENT. Why does God respond to this building program with such severe judgment?

The answer is another important Bible word: IDOLATRY. God’s judgment is so severe because God is at war with false gods. God is at war with IDOLS. And He continues that war today. So as we walk through this story, consider what your tower is.

What towers are you building?

- Where do you go for security, comfort, fulfillment and happiness?

What do you run to for security, comfort, fulfillment and happiness? What do you love? What do you trust? What do you serve? THAT is your functional god. That is your idol. And God will not share His glory with any other gods. **“You will have no other gods besides me.” (Ex. 20:3)**

Of course we should have no other gods BEFORE God. But His rule is **“You shall have no other gods PERIOD.”** We’ll see in the 10 commandments in a couple of weeks that God is a jealous god who will not share our worship with anyone or anything. God will not have any rivals.

But our hearts, John Calvin said, are idol factories. We are constantly producing new false gods to worship and serve. Like the nation of Israel, we are constantly turning away from the true God to bow down to the gods of our culture – the gods of **romance, power, success, money, sex, fame and SELF.** The Lord Jesus Christ is at war with all of these other gods. He alone is worthy of our praise, worthy of our trust, worthy of our zealous commitment. And He will not share that place of supremacy with anything or anyone – including you and me.

So let’s do some exploratory heart surgery today. Let’s dig around and look at the root system of idolatry and compare it to the root system of godliness. We’ll see three roots of idolatry in contrast to the roots of godliness.

THE ROOTS OF IDOLATRY	THE ROOTS OF GODLINESS
Self-Reliance	Trust
Self-Focus	Service
Self-Exaltation	Worship

Idolatry is rooted in the SELF. We trust in ourselves instead of God. We focus on ourselves instead of serving God. We exalt ourselves instead of worshiping God. Me. Me. Me. From those roots you can **fill in the blank** with the fruit of idolatry – money-reliance / money-focus / money-exaltation; sex-reliance / sex-focus / sex-exaltation; romance-reliance / romance-focus / romance-exaltation; achievement-reliance / achievement-focus / achievement-exaltation. Here’s how Pastor Tim Keller puts it – as you can see printed in your worship program:

“What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give... **‘If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning , then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.’** There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship with something, but perhaps the best is **worship.**” *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller

What is your tower? **What is your IF ONLY?** “If I have THAT, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.”

- Maybe it's a certain number in your **retirement** account. If we just reach that amount, we'll feel safe.
- Maybe it's a certain level in your **company**. If I can just make VP of so and so...
- Maybe it's a certain kind of recognition or **influence**. If only I were on that board, or in that group...
- Maybe it's a **relationship**. If only I find a wife, or a husband – or a new one instead of the one you have. Maybe it's about kids or grandkids. If only... THEN life will have meaning.

Do you see the roots of idolatry? **ANYTHING that is more important to you than God**. Anything you love and trust and obey. That is your idol. That is your tower. And God will tear that tower down. He will fight that building campaign. You may wonder why God takes certain things away from you or why He disciplines you for a season. Often the reason is that thing was too important to you.

The picture for me is of **the abominable snowman with Bugs Bunny** [include image only in PPT] a long time ago.

The huge beast picks up Bugs or Daffy and squeezes them tight saying, "I will love him and pet him and squeeze him and call him George."

We are like that with our idols. We love them too much. No person can bear the weight of your worship. You will suffocate them. No possession can fulfill you. No achievement can satisfy your soul. You will crush that thing under the weight of your expectations.



Think of **the woman who just wants to have a baby**. She is past 30 and hasn't found the right guy yet. She's getting desperate. And she has convinced herself that if she just has a BABY life will make sense. She will have meaning and value and she'll finally be happy. So she finds a way to get pregnant and she has a baby. Can that little baby deliver on all of those expectations?

Or the man who puts the burden of his worship on **his career**. Can any job meet all of your needs? You squeeze that thing too tightly you will crush it. And in the process, it will crush you.

The towers we build always come crashing down eventually. Anything we worship instead of God or in addition to God will let us down. ALWAYS. God Himself will be sure that they do.

So let's walk through these roots of idolatry and then look to the better way to dig roots of godliness.

First, idolatry is rooted in Self-reliance.

1. **Self-Reliance** – "I'm in control"

"And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.'" Genesis 11:3

In the days of Seth people began to **call on the name of the Lord**. In other words, they learned to pray and ask God for help. There is none of that here. Here the people gather with no reference to God and only reference to themselves. “LET US make bricks.”

Do you see how this root of self-reliance is the opposite of faith? Instead of trusting in God and aligning around His purpose and plan, these people create their own plan. To understand the rebellion of this building project we have to remember God’s instructions. First to Adam and then again to Noah God said:

“Did God really say...?”

“Be fruitful and multiply on the earth... multiply and fill the earth... increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.” Genesis 8:17; 9:1; 9:7

God’s instructions were very clear and simple: **have lots of babies and SPREAD OUT!** Fill the earth. There’s lots of room – spread out and worship my name everywhere you go! Tell of the glory of the Creator!

Just a few generations after Noah the people have successfully multiplied but at this moment they refuse to spread out. That feels a little dangerous and they want the safety of some strong walls around them and a giant tower. Plus they like the feeling of being all together. Why spread out when we can all hang together and have bigger parties?

You can hear the voice of the serpent taking those clear commands and whispering, “Did God really say that? Do those rules really apply to us? What’s the harm in building a tower? Those rules aren’t reasonable. Enlightened people shouldn’t be limited by archaic religious laws...”

1. Self-Reliance – “I’m in control”

“And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.’ Genesis 11:3

Do you see the parallel to church today?

The enemy is whispering in OUR ears – “Did God really say... go and make disciples of all nations? Does that rule apply to us? Is it reasonable to expect everyone to uproot themselves and move to Africa?” Those are **the whispers of self-reliance**; questioning God’s word, confusing God’s will.

Brothers and sisters, God’s word is crystal clear: **God has sent us to the nations** – to tell of the glory of our Creator and our Savior. But it’s so comfortable and safe right here where we are all together. God’s will is explicitly spelled out for us in the great commission: “GO and make disciples of ALL NATIONS.”

Yeah, but we like OUR nation. We love America. We love our nice houses. We love our nice jobs. We love our nice suburbs. We love our precious little TOWERS – our little household IDOLS.

Do you remember how God finally got the early church to spread out to obey the command of Christ to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth? **A great persecution**. Do you know what’s coming

before and during the great tribulation that will conclude history? A great persecution. Why don't we GO in obedience?

The answer is **IDLATRY**. Self-reliance. We prefer OUR way to God's way. We prefer the feeling of being in control. We have bought into the LIE of security – as if anywhere on earth is actually safe. The only safe place, people, is HEAVEN. This world is dangerous and in the end we all die. It's not a question of if but when and how. Will we huddle together in fear, self-reliance, rebellion and idolatry or will we scatter out to complete the mission our commander in chief has given to us?

Idolatry is rooted in self-reliance. The second root of idolatry is self-focus.

2. **Self-Focus** – “I do what I want”

“And they said, ‘Come, let us **build ourselves** a city and a tower with its top in the heavens.’” Genesis 11:4

This group of people – which was most, if not all of the people on earth at the time, said, “We don't care what God wants – we want to come together and build a tower. So let's do that!” They rejected God's instructions and picked up the tune from Frank Sinatra, “**I did it my way!**” which J.D. Greear calls the anthem of hell. “I did it my way!” You can do it that way, all the way into the pool of fire.

What city are you building? ***What is your tower of security, happiness and fulfillment?***

Madonna, like Marilyn Monroe her idol, was wildly successful for a time. “For Madonna, success is like a drug that gives her a sense of consequence and worth, but the high quickly wears off and she needs a repeat dose. She must prove herself again and again. The driving force behind this is not joy but fear.” (73 Keller) Pick your celebrity. They are driven to build towers and as soon as one move is produced or one album goes platinum they have to get on to the next project – the next FIX.

How many of us work our whole lives building that crumbly tower of success, looking to see how many people “like” what we post? Why does it matter if it's 3 likes as opposed to 300?

We are building for ourselves a city with a tower reaching to the heavens. We focus on our own desires and are driven by them. And that, according to the book of James, is precisely where sin comes from. Desire is conceived in our sinful hearts and once it grows up it gives birth to death after dragging you away into slavery.

“I do what I want” is the cry of every toddler and it is the native cry of our hearts. We have to train the toddler in our hearts just as we have to train our actual toddlers. Left to their own devices small children will take over the world with their demands. And the same is true of our sinful hearts. Every one of us is self-focused by default. We have to work to even be aware of the needs of other people.

“Let's build ourselves a city!” is also the cry of our culture. We have to expose the selfish currents of our culture so we can fight against them – materialism – bigger and better things; bigger and better vacations... This is the path to idolatry.

The third root of idolatry is self-exaltation

3. Self-Exaltation – “It’s all about me!”

“And let us **make a name for ourselves**, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”
Genesis 11:4

All three of these roots are inter-connected. Self-reliance, self-focus and self-exaltation interweave and reinforce each other around the center of this root system: **SELF**. Deep down we are all like **Lucifer**, who was the most glorious of all the angels. But even in that exalted position it wasn’t enough – for he wanted the place of God. And that was exactly how he tempted Adam and Eve – “You will BE LIKE GOD, knowing good and evil.”

Deep down we all want to be like God – and in fact we want to BE GOD. **There is a throne in your heart** – it has often been said. Jesus wants to reign on that throne as the rightful king. But only one person can sit on that throne at a time – and if you are in it, or if you have placed something else in it, then there is no room for Jesus there.

Remember, God does not tolerate rivals. If you set yourself up on the throne of your life, God will oppose you. **“God opposes the PROUD but gives grace to the humble.”** “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” This is a common theme throughout the whole Bible. Do you want God to oppose you? To bring you down? To demolish your towers? Or do you want Him to lift you up and to exalt you?

Notice how the roots of idolatry correspond to the three temptations of the devil in the garden:

THE ROOTS OF IDOLATRY	The Devil’s Playbook
Self-Reliance “I’m in control”	Question God’s Word: “Did God really say...?”
Self-Focus “I do what I want”	Focus on Desires: “Look what you could have!”
Self-Exaltation “It’s all about me”	“You could be like God!”

The devil loves to **question God’s Word** and get us to trust in our own understanding instead of trusting in God and His Word. The devil loves to shift our focus from all God has given us to the few things God has NOT given us but that our sinful hearts desire. And the devil loves to **invite us to follow his way of self-exaltation**, fanning our fragile egos with the desire to be like God.

Who reigns on the throne of your heart? Is your life all about you or is it all about Jesus? Are you laboring every day on towers for your glory, your comfort, your security...? Or are you at work for the kingdom of Jesus?

Brothers, sisters, we don't want God to oppose us. We don't want Him to scatter us unwillingly through persecution. Let's tear out these cancerous roots of idolatry and dig deep roots that will produce godliness and fruitfulness for the kingdom!

1. Trust in God's Word – “God is in control”

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” Proverbs 3:5

When we believe in the goodness and sovereignty and wisdom of God we don't need to build towers for our own security – because we know that God is in control. He is holding each one of us securely and reassures us over and over in Scripture that we should not be afraid. We are commanded, in fact, not to worry about ANYTHING but instead to bring him our concerns in prayer.

Trust in God and His Word. Stand firm in the truth that we know – hold on to THAT and you won't need to run around grabbing on to different people and things, grasping them like life preservers. We will stop saying “If only I had” and will start saying, “***Thank you Lord that I have YOU.***”

Fear is what drives us to idols. Fear is what motivates us to build towers on our own understanding. Faith is the antidote to fear. And faith is fueled by the promises of God. Study God's promises as we journey through the Bible. Take hold of them like lifelines. Those are our true Life Preservers.

Already we've seen in Genesis 3:15 **God's promise** to crush the head of the serpent. Paul expounds on that saying “the God of peace will soon crush satan underneath his feet!” Next week we'll meet Abraham and hear God's promise ***to bless all nations*** through his offspring. That blessing is going out to the nations and nothing can stop the advance of the gospel as Jesus Christ has promised to ***build his church*** and “the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

“No weapon formed against us will prosper.” God promised Joshua – “every place you set your foot I have given you – no one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life – so be strong and courageous for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go!” Isaiah prophesied the Messianic King who would reign on David's throne and of ***his kingdom and his peace*** there will be no end! Our Savior and Messiah will trample all of his enemies under his feet and we will reign with him forever and ever!

Hold on – brother and sister – to these great and precious promises! Trust in God and His Word and do not let fear drive you to false gods.

Second, commit to God's Will.

2. Commit to God's Will – “I do what God wants”

“Your kingdom come, ***your will be done***, on earth as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6:10

This is how Jesus taught us to pray. Not “MY kingdom come, MY will be done,” but YOURS. This is how Jesus prayed in the garden. His human will was to avoid pain and suffering, but he bowed to the Father's will saying, “***Not my will but yours be done.***”

Are you committed, right now, to your own will or to God's will? Are you insisting, like a toddler, that you are going to do what you want to do, regardless? Or are you finally ready to bow? Ready to turn your life over to God and His will – His purposes?

If you keep building your own tower, expect God to oppose it. Expect him to do things to scatter your projects and frustrate your efforts.

Now let's be careful here as a church. Notice that at Babel they were not saying "I" but "we." **"Let's build OURSELVES a city."** Just because a bunch of other people agree with you doesn't make you right. Often in the Bible the crowd is dead wrong. Trident theology is not good theology – "millions of teeth can't be wrong." Yes they can, and often they are!

One of the reasons **we gravitate to people who are a lot like us** is that we share many of the same idols. You have friends over to your house who are likely to invite you back to their house. You drive a car of roughly the same cost and quality of your good friends. Your income and giving patterns are fairly close to your friends. I'm grouping myself right in with you as a middle class American.

One of the problems with hanging out mainly with people who are very much like us is that **we can't see our own blindspots**. We can't see the many ways that we are profoundly selfish and materialistic – because WE ALL ARE. A fish doesn't know it's wet. But we are soaking wet with American beliefs and values. We are saturated with idolatry and much of it we don't even see.

Are we committed to doing God's will, no matter what the cost? Well, **God's will is that the 2 billion people who have never heard the gospel would hear it as soon as possible**. Are we orienting our thoughts and prayers and giving and time and energy around that reality? Or are we more comfortable doing what we've always done – settled in our friendly routines?

3. Worship God Alone – "It's all about Jesus"

"For me to live is Christ." Philipians 1:21

We need to replace our self-reliance with faith in God's Word. We need to replace our self-focus with a commitment to do God's will. And we need to replace our self-exaltation and our worship of idols with a passionate worship of Christ alone. Can we truly say with Paul, "For me, to live is Christ"?

Can we truly say that our lives are all about Jesus? **Do we love God with all of our hearts?** Or do we keep God in a safe little corner of our lives?

William Wilberforce said the problem in the British Empire in the early 1800s was not slavery – it was nominal Christianity that TOLERATED slavery. And while he labored in politics to abolish the slave trade and then to remove slavery from the empire altogether, Wilberforce taught and wrote and labored to reform British culture, calling for a return to what he called TRUE CHRISTIANITY.

And True Christianity cannot be compartmentalized. True faith in Jesus, true worship is like a tiny mustard seed that TAKES OVER. It spreads to every part of your heart and mind and life. Are we seeing that in our lives and in our church?

I suggest that we are not seeing the Kingdom spread throughout our city because **we are not letting it spread throughout our own hearts**. We have relegated Jesus to the outside corners of our lives and have retained the central throne for ourselves and our many idols. We work and work to build towers for our own desires, our own glory and the kingdom of God is left unbuilt.

Listen to how Tim Keller describes the idol of ACHIEVEMENT:

“Achievement is the alcohol of our time... You complete a project, and you feel dynamite... You love the feeling of euphoria, so you’ve got to have it again... More than other idols, **personal success and achievement lead to a sense that we ourselves are god**, that our security and value rest in our own wisdom, strength, and performance. To be the very best at what you do, to be at the top of the heap, means no one is like you. You are supreme.” Tim Keller

I will confess that this is one of my favorite towers. **Success**. Growth. Church progress. Advancement. God has been systematically and consistently opposing this in my life since my earliest days of leadership. I’ll never forget when I first started as a youth pastor, coming into a group averaging 25-30 students. I pictured explosive growth after I came with all of my 22 years of wisdom and knowledge – quickly seeing the group double, triple or more.

Anyone want to guess how many students went to winter camp that first winter after I started? Precisely 6. 7 leaders. 6 students. As I drove the church bus **I felt like a miserable failure**. God was working to demolish the idol of success and growth and numbers. He was opposing that. And once God taught me that my job was to pray and preach and pastor and His job was to bring the growth – we saw many students get saved and through that God brought fresh energy and vitality to the whole ministry. But first God had to get my ego out of the way and make it very clear that if anything “significant” happened there it wasn’t because of my plan but his, not for my glory but his.

If we are working for the glory of Oakwood Church or the name of Darin Anderson, let’s shut the doors of this building right now. **Our mission is not to spread the name Oakwood or Anderson anywhere**. Our mission is to preach the name of Jesus and to life Him up as the only Savior – the all sufficient one who reigns over all things.

Listen to how Keller concludes his introduction:

“**They love their idols, trust their idols, and obey their idols**... False lovers that promise to make us feel loved and valued... False Saviors we make sacrifices to appease who we believe will protect us... The only way to free ourselves from the destructive influence of counterfeit gods is to turn back to the true one.” *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller

We can’t just work to destroy idols. **We must replace them**.

- We must replace fear-filled self-reliance with **faith-filled confidence in the Word of God**.
- We must replace self-focused tower building with **God-focused kingdom-building**.
- We must replace self-exalting ambition with **Jesus-exalting proclamation**.

We are inclined to follow **the way of satan** – who exalted himself to the highest place. If we do, God will devote His limitless powers to oppose us and our towers will just keep crumbling. But we are

called instead to observe **the way of Jesus** – who though he was equal with God did not insist on being recognized as such – he did not grasp on to that right. Instead he emptied himself, he lowered himself. He was born as a helpless baby. He lived the life of a servant, away from all the comforts and glories of this world. And then he gave up his life as a willing sacrifice for you and me. Therefore God highly exalted Jesus and gave him the name above all names.

That is the path we are to follow. ***The downward path of carrying our cross*** and showing the world that Jesus is enough because Jesus is EVERYTHING.

And then instead of huddling together in fear ***we will scatter out in faith*** to wherever God sends us here in Tampa and wherever God wants us in this great big world. Until Jesus gathers all of His people together when he returns!

Let's pray.