

A SHAMEFUL FAILURE

Genesis 11:1-9

When the Flood subsided the survivors were Noah, his three sons, and their families. In gratitude for their wonderful deliverance, they "builded an altar unto the Lord" and gathered around it in prayer, making due acknowledgement to Him. When they lifted their eyes, the bow of promise was over them.

Then, God divided the earth among them and commanded them to "go forth and replenish it." In obedience to that command they journeyed toward the west. As they journeyed they came to the plains of Shinar, or Babylonia, and settled there. Over a long period they multiplied greatly. Why should they leave this fertile plain and go further? They were prosperous and content. They reasoned something like this, "If we spread all over the face of the earth, we won't accomplish anything. Let's stay here, where we can have pleasant associations and wonderful protection."

I. A Purpose.

God's purpose was that of scattering the people, in order that the whole earth might be replenished. It was a case of scattering people for enlargement. It was a scattering from selfish centrality to a larger realization. It was for that type of development which was impossible if they remained in one place.

God's purpose was not acceptable to the people. It was their purpose to stay together so that one man, one set of men, one committee, or one league might be able to speak for the entire human race. The purpose of their organization was to frustrate the will of God. Their law of association was mechanical centralization; their spirit was that of independence and rebellion against God's government; their aim was self-interest and self-glorification; their method was autocracy and monopoly; and their unifying bond was fear. What a pity that they attempted to consolidate against the decree of God!

II. A Program.

Their program was that of a united effort looking to the establishment of unity. "And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Genesis 11:3-4. A little knowledge had given them conceit. A small accession of power had made them arrogant. In their newly-won prosperity, they considered themselves the lords of the world. To them, there was little else to be conquered. They encouraged one another to build a city and a tower for their habitation and protection.

Hitherto these people had been dwelling in tents, but at last their inventive genius asserted itself. They cried, "Let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven." This desire had its origin in their deliberate, determined and enthusiastic hostility to the divine purpose. One of their objects in building the city with its great landmark was that they should be self-contained and self-sufficient. They did not want to be scattered. It was God's purpose that they should disperse and possess the earth. So, they were guilty of insubordination in resolving thus to abide in the vale of Shinar. They made the tragic mistake of leaving God out of their reckoning. They never mentioned Him. In proposing to build a tower high enough to reach to heaven they were attempting the impossible.

Since the plain of Shinar did not afford any stones, they decided to dig clay and make bricks for the job. They supplemented their inventiveness with thoroughness.

They believed in doing a thorough job. When they had manufactured the brick, they adapted themselves to their circumstances and surroundings by making use of the materials which were close at hand. Instead of using mortar, they used slime or bitumen, which was a kind of pitch that was plentiful in that area. All gave themselves enthusiastically to the task.

III. A Principle.

The principle, which was underlying the purpose of unity and the program of unification, was that of the glorification of man. They said, "Let us make us a name." That exhortation signifies that they had an inordinate desire for fame. They believed that the building of the city and the construction of the tower would immortalize them. They thought that they would be famed for their wisdom and energy to the most remote generations.

They thought that the dispersion which God had commanded would deprive them of many comforts, and would be attended with many inconveniences. As for the divine will, they were not much concerned about that. All that they thought about was their own ease and pleasure. If obedience to God stood in competition with the gratification of their own wishes, they did not hesitate to sacrifice duty to inclination.

It was terrible to build the tower of Babel in disobedience to God, and it was even worse for them to make it the symbol of self-glorification. When any system glorifies humanity and makes man everything, it is not long before it minimizes God and makes Him nothing. God did not like it when they sought to build in order to glorify man. Those early city planners said, "Let us make us a name;" and they did, but it was not the sort of name that anyone would care to have preserved. Name-making is a common and popular business, but it never pays well in the end.

God was highly displeased with their work and service independent of Him. When God is left out of the thinking, the planning and the working, it will be utterly worthless. Nobody can afford to attempt anything without God. Foolish is anybody who tries to make his own way in defiance of God.

Vitally concerned with the divine glory, God said, "Let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." By this expression, "Let us go down," God gave an early intimation of the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity. He then declares His determination to frustrate their design, and to accomplish His own purposes, by confounding their language. This confusion of tongues at Babel came as a curse upon man for trying to be independent of God. Note that this is the beginning of the numerous tongues. Up to this time everybody in the world spoke the same language.

That day there was an effectual stay of proceedings. Determined to defeat their plans, God came down and confounded their language. The place was filled with confused voices. The workmen, perplexed and bewildered, "left off to build." Thus, the most prosperous undertakings often terminate in miserable failure.

In spite of their unsurpassed ambition, purposeful plans and dynamic energy, they failed ingloriously. But, why did they fail?

1. They left God out of their plans.

It is impossible for anybody to succeed if God is left out of life's plans. Ambition, clever plans and human effort are splendid aids to noble achievements, but, if people ignore God they are doomed to miserable defeat and shameful failure. It is

folly in the highest degree to plan and hope for success if we leave God out of our plans, because He has all forces at His command, He has set a limit to every man's life, and He has positionized Himself against those who dishonor His name.

2. They were actuated by selfish motives.

(1) To live for self is a sin against self.

He who lives for self does not have much to live for. No soul can live the larger life who lives for little self. The selfish life is foredoomed to defeat. Man ought to live for two worlds, but the selfish soul does not live for either. A selfish soul ekes out a miserable existence, and then is gone and soon forgotten.

(2) To live for self is to sin against others.

This is even more tragic. It is not possible for one to live without influencing others. Charles D. Meigs' prayer ought to be ours also.

"Lord, help me to live from day to day
In such a self-forgetful way
That even when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for Others.

Let "Self" be crucified and slain
And buried deep: and all in vain
May efforts be to rise again,
Unless to live for Others.

Others, Lord, Yes, Others,
Let this my motto be,
Help me to live for Others,
That I may live like Thee."

(3) To live for self is to sin against God.

Christ said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it." No self-centered soul has ever won the approval of Christ. If we would succeed, we must be willing to conform to the will of Christ for us.

3. They defied the will of God for their lives.

God commanded them to scatter abroad, to multiply and to replenish the earth, but they deliberately refused to do so. Since the morning of time, not one soul has ever succeeded who refused to do the will of God. The one and only way to avoid failure and to insure success in life is to find and to follow the will of God. The one pathway to happiness in life is that of obedience to the will and Word of God. Do you love Him enough to do His will?