

It's All About Power

Genesis 11:1-9

The Day of Pentecost, May 23, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The great I in our hearts speaks:

The great I says, I want to do things my way. I want my life to go my way. I want things to turn out the way that I want them to turn out. I want to obtain the things that I want. I want my life arranged the way that I want it arranged.

The great I in our hearts does not want anyone or anything else to interfere with its plans.

The great I speaks.

The great I wants to make its own decision. The great I wants to create its own morality. The great I wants to do the assignments the teachers give it only if it advances what the great I wants advanced. The great I will listen to its parents only when the parents are saying something that the great I wants to hear. The great I wants to play video games whenever it wants. The great I wants to watch whatever TV that it wants to watch. The great I wants to eat whatever it wants to eat. The great I does not want to be told what to eat. The great I resents instructions. The great I resents advice. The great I disobeys commandments.

The great I will do what it wants with its own sexual life. It will have sex with whomever it wants to have sex. It will not be told that there are limitations. It will not be told that there is venereal disease. The great I does not wish to be told about marriage. The great I does not want to be limited by marriage. The great I can make its own decisions. It will live with whomever it chooses to live. It will live with whatever kind of people it chooses to live. It will live with however many people it chooses to live.

The great I will decide when it begins a relationship. The great I will decide when it ends a relationship. The great I will decide when it wants to be a friend. The great I will leave its friends when it suits it. The great I will marry when it suits it. The great I will divorce when it suits it. The great I will decide when it has children and if it has children. The great I will decide just how many children it will have. The great I has no compulsion about using birth control or abortion in order to make sure that it has children when it is darn well ready to have children and to determine just how many children it will be having. The children will be at the great I's beck and call. The great I will demand obedience from its children. The great I delights that there is a commandment that commands the children to obey it.

The great I will abuse those people that it wants to abuse. The great I will lie when it suits its purpose. It does not have to tell the truth. The great I is thrilled when the truth suits its purpose. That way the great I can do what it wants to do and look righteous at the same time.

The great I wants to look righteous. The great I wants to look devout and holy. The great I enjoys it when people point out all of the good things that the great I is doing. The great I will do some good things, but it will only do them so that others will sing its praises, so that others will notice and pledge their loyalty to the great I.

The great I will decide what it will do with its life. The great I will set its own goals. The great I will set out on a career of its own choosing. The great I will decide how much money it will make. It will decide what kind of car it will drive. The great I will decide how much land it will own. The great I will decide how it will be farmed. The great I resents it when the government interferes. The great I resents it when others interfere and tell it what to do. The great I will never admit it. The great I wants to look righteous.

The great I will decide when it is tired of where it is living and seek to live somewhere else. The great I will determine when its relationships no longer suit it and it is time to move on. The great I will determine when its career is not going as planned and it will change it at will. The great I will decide on what is good for the great I.

The great I is after fame. The great I is after glory. The great I wants to do whatever it wants to do and yet it also wants everyone to remember it fondly. The great I wants a name for itself. The great I wants a legacy. The great I wants to avoid death. The great I wants to be like God.

God's response to the great I is to come and see it.

God does not permit you to pick how you will repent of your idolatry. God does not permit you to pick how will repent of your idolatry. The people of Babel did not choose for their languages to be confused. They did not bear the fruit of repentance by deliberately taking up differing languages for themselves. Idolatry is one thing that you cannot repent of in the traditional sense of the word. God must come and see you and when He comes to see you and you see Him one thing is fundamentally clear: you are not Him. When you realize that, you have repented of your idolatry. Only God can get you to realize that. He does that by coming down.

There is another way to say this. God will take one thing in your life that you expect will go your way and He will make sure that it does not go your way. When it does not go your way, you can complain that it isn't fair all you want, it won't change God's mind. You can complain that everyone else has what you want to have all you want, it won't change God's mind. It will be something.

Take a natural disaster for example. The people who experience a natural disaster expect life to go a certain way. Then the disaster comes and life is not going the way that they expected it. Instead of living at home, they are living in a FEMA trailer. Instead of having a home, they have to deal with insurance companies. All of the hope and courage that you see immediately after a disaster melts away into fear and anger. The news generally does not show you the frustration and anger that people go through as they grieve their loss of the way that life was, the way that they expected life to go and now must deal with the way that life is.

People expected to have a home. They don't. They have an insurance company to deal with. They have contractors who promise to rebuild their homes and it doesn't happen. They have people that they expected to spend the rest of their life with and they won't because they died in the disaster.

God will do it to all of you. God already has done it to most of you. You expect life to be one way. It turns out another way. The way that it turns out is not as good as the way that you expected it to turn out. You expect a legacy and He will not let you have one. At the very least He will not let you have the one that you desire.

The grief that people who experience natural disaster's experience is a grief that all of us experience. We all experience the loss of a dream that we had. We dream of a certain level of achievement. We don't achieve it because frankly someone else is better at it than we are. We expect to earn a certain kind of living and we don't earn it. We expect to obtain a certain office or position and we don't obtain it. We expect our children to turn out a certain way and they aren't turning out that way. We expect to have children and we are not having them.

No amount of bargaining with God will get us what we want. No amount of promising God this and that will get us what we want. God is not fooled by our bargaining. He is not deceived by our promises. He knows that when we bargain with Him and promise Him things in return for what we want, all we really want is what we want. Even though we are bargaining with Him we are still

worshipping ourselves, because we still only want what we want and not what He wants. God is not fooled. He is not going to give it to you.

You obviously cannot threaten God. He does not respond to threats. It is not like you can hurt Him. You cannot threaten to harm yourself to get from God what you want. That won't work either. He has the power to raise you from the dead. He certainly has the power to watch you die.

No amount of prayer will change it. No amount of struggling will change it. No amount of scheming or raging will change it. It is what it is and there is nothing to be done about it. God has taken His prerogative and we cannot get it back.

You do not get to pick how you will repent of your idolatry. God will do the picking. And when He picks you will have repented of your idolatry.

God comes down to see you. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem. I realize that it is Pentecost, but God came down to see you. His Name is Jesus. God came down to see your idolatry first hand. Oh, He knew about it in heaven, but He wanted to see it for Himself. He came down to see the cities and the towers that you are building for yourself. He came down to see the name building that you are conducting for yourself. He came down to look at your achievements and to overthrow all of them. The reason that He came to overthrow your achievements was to save you.

Jesus does not permit you to make a name for yourself. He gives you His Name. When He gives you His Name you don't have your own name anymore. Your name does not matter. Your achievements do not matter. All that matters is His Name. All that matters are His achievements. That is how He saves you. He gives you His Name. It is not your name, but it is a better Name.

The irony is that when the great I inside of us does not get its way, that is precisely when it does get its way. When we do not build our own names that is precisely when Jesus builds His Name into us. When Jesus builds His Name into us, He saves us.

What the great I really wants is to save itself. What the great I really wants is to not die. There is nothing more terrifying to the great I than to die. Because when the great I dies, the thing that it worships is dead. Once there is nothing to worship, there is damnation.

The great I is defeated when Jesus saves it. As soon as Jesus says, "It is finished," there is nothing for the great I to contribute, nothing for it to add. The great I cannot take any credit once Jesus says, "It is finished." The great I cannot receive any glory once Jesus says, "It is finished." Once Jesus says, "It is finished, the great I is saved. You will not die. Your sins are forgiven. You are saved. But you cannot take any credit. You cannot receive any glory. All of the credit and glory goes to Him. And that's ok, because you are saved. You rise from the dead.

That is why Baptism is a death. The great I dies because the great I cannot do anything. If being able to do nothing isn't death, then I don't know what death is. The great I takes no action. All of the action has already been taken. Jesus took it. The great I does nothing. Jesus has already done it all. There is nothing left for the great I to do. And when there is nothing that the great I can do, it is saved.

The great I wants to cheat death by leaving a legacy behind so that people will remember it. That is why it works so hard at achievement. That is why it works so hard on the accumulation of things or of friendships or of children. The I wants someone out there to remember it. That is why the I wants to own land or buildings or businesses. That is why the I wants to advance in its career. That is why the I wants everyone in the family to listen to it. The I is hoping that it will achieve something and people will thank it for its achievements. If they thank the great I for its achievements, then they will remember the great I.

And maybe they will remember the great I even after the great I is dead and gone. Maybe the great I's legacy will not be scattered if the achievements are big enough, notable enough. Maybe the great I will have some glory. Maybe the great I should buy a really large tombstone.

God overthrows all of this nonsense. God makes it so the great I is forgotten. Only a few of us go down in history and I would be willing to bet that the people we know from history are not the same ones that those people in history wanted us to remember.

God comes down and mixes things up so that we do not get achieved everything that we want. He allows us some things in His grace and mercy. But He does not allow us other things. This is so that we understand that the things that He allows us to achieve are things that are achieved by His mercy. He does this to kill us. He wants the great I dead. For only when the great I is dead will we understand that Jesus has done it all.

God came down and mixed things up. He came down. He was born in that manger. He came down to see us. He came down to save us. He came down and overthrew our achievements and replaced them with His own. He died. He said, "It is finished." He rose.

You did nothing. You are saved.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.