

May 19, 2013
Pentecost

"Foolish Tower Builders Need the Holy Spirit"

GENESIS 11:1-9

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶ The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." ⁸ So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Noah was 600 years old when the waters of the great world flood covered the earth and all flesh perished. What we often forget is that he lived 350 years more after the flood. That means he was able to speak first had to over ten generations of people about the judgment of God that came upon the world through the flood and about the mercy of God that saved him and his family in the ark. 2 Peter 2:5 describes Noah as a preacher of righteousness. He spoke to people about the righteousness God offers people as a free gift through the coming Messiah.

Did the people listen to Noah? We know the people before the flood wanted nothing to do with Noah's message. Can't you see Noah hoping and praying one more person will repent before the door of the ark is closed and the waters of the deep open up? What about the people after the flood? Oh, they listened for a while, but soon they are off on their own to establish their own religions apart from what God had offered.

This morning we see a group of people going off on their own to make a name for themselves apart from God and his Word. They want to build a tower that reaches up into the heavens. They want to build a great city that will allow them to flaunt their greatness apart from God and his Word.

Our loving Lord God saw their foolishness. He destroyed their building project in which they had so much pride and self conceit. He did not use fire bolts from heaven to turn their tower to dust. Instead he confuses their tongues and causes them to start talking different languages. The construction project comes to a screeching halt. Man in all his pride and arrogance is humiliated and God is glorified.

The world in which we live is waiting for the destruction that will come not by water but by fire. The world needs the Holy Spirit to come and convict people of their sin and turn

their hearts to Jesus for salvation. Let's look at these proud tower builders and see how God comes down to rescue them from their foolish pride and self-conceit.

The failed monument to man's glory

"Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there." There is nothing wrong with moving to a different part of the country to find a better job or a better place to live. There is nothing wrong with buying a different home or starting a business or establishing a new city unless this activity is done deliberately without the Lord. Psalm 121 begins with these words, "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain." These people wanted a whole new world that did not include the Lord and his righteousness. Jesus says in Matthew 6: "See first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Are you seeking God's righteousness first in all your endeavors of life?

These people are so determined to live their life apart from the Lord that they settle in a place where they can build a great city and a tower that reaches high into the sky. They want to glorify the foolish lives they are living apart from God and his Word. "Come let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." Forget the arduous task of carving stones as the Egyptians did in the great pyramids. Gather the clay. Add the water and straw. Bake the bricks in the hot sun. Mortar them together with the tar that was seeping out of the ground in this oil rich part of the world. The sooner we finish this great tower, the more people will gather around us and honor us for our greatness. They knew how to plan the work and they knew how to work the plan. It sure helped that all spoke the same language. There were no communication problems. Nothing was lost in translation. They were united in building a life for themselves that did not include the Lord.

The Los Angeles Zoo once had a cage with the title on the front that said, "The Most Dangerous Creature on Earth." What ferocious beast lurked behind the shatter proof glass protection? It was two life-like figures of human beings dressed in normal clothes. Why two and not one? One person can cause a lot of damage. When two people conspire together to place bombs at the Boston Marathon the evil becomes much worse. Think of all the careful planning and strategizing that Hitler and his followers used to control the people of Germany. Man's inhumanity to man becomes much worse when it is a carefully calculated collaborative effort. It is not uncommon to see families and even communities of people locking their arms together to get the Lord out of their lives.

Is there a concerted and cooperative and collaborated effort world wide to get the Lord out of the lives of people so they do not turn to Jesus for their salvation? You bet there is. Satan is alive and well on planet earth. He conspires to unite people to build their lives together away from the Lord just as he did with the people who moved to the plain of Shinar. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes the most dangerous creature on earth in Romans 1. "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." Some have suggested that the people who wanted a tower that went up to heaven wanted to worship God through the stars. They did not want the Lord as he revealed himself through Noah and his faithful followers.

I wish we could point to these foolish tower builders and say that they were the only people in the world suffering from swollen head syndrome. The foolish sin of pride affects us all. We go off and do our own thing as if we were more important than God every time we open our hearts and lives to sin. "We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." As we sing in the hymn, "The Shepherd dies for sheep that love to wander."

In his love and mercy our Lord and God will not leave these people to their foolish ways. He comes down to show them how foolish they are so they repent of their sin and come back to him. The Lord did this on the great day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit convicted the people of their foolish ways and turned them to faith in Jesus for their salvation.

The unfailing grace and mercy of the Lord

The foolish builders want it their way. The Lord wants to have it his way. "But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building." The Lord certainly knew what these people were doing. He saw every brick that was hardened in the hot sun. He saw the sticky black tar applied to the bricks. He watched as the door grew inch by inch and foot by foot. The Lord knew. When it says, "He came down to see" it is God's way of speaking in human terms about his desire to help people. We call this anthropomorphism.

The Lord knows. The Lord always knows. He sees the evil and pride that lurks in their hearts of people. Psalm 139 says, "O Lord you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise. You perceive every my thoughts from afar." You see every brick that is laid. You see every meal that is eaten. You see every keystroke of the computer and every text message on the cell phone. You see my thoughts as I drive down the freeway and muse on life. The Lord knows, yet people foolishly think that God does not see what they are doing. I like what Martin Luther said on this in his teaching on Genesis. "While the sinner is engaged in sinning and is engrossed by it, he does not see God, does not speak of Him, and is not aware of Him, for the sinner assumes that God does not see and is not aware of what he is doing." He adds, "When Cain falls upon his brother and kills him, he is likewise thinking that God is asleep and does not notice what he is doing." Think of a time you opened yourself up to sin. While you were engaging in the sinful activity momentarily you convinced yourself that God was not seeing what you were doing.

The Lord saw the construction project as it went up brick by brick. He saw the foolish pride in each one of the workers who worked hard like busy bees to flaunt their glory. The Lord came down. As we said earlier he could have destroyed the project with a thunder bolt from heaven, or an avenging angel. Instead he humbles them by confusing their language. "Come let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." The call goes out for more bricks and no one can understand a word the boss is saying. The call goes out for more mortar and no one can understand what is being said. Notice the Lord says, "Let us go down and confuse their language." The Lord God who said, "Let us make man in our image" is determined in love to restore these people to his image by first convicting them of their sin and their foolishness.

Jesus said that he will send the Holy Spirit who will "convict the world of guilt, in regard

to sin and righteousness and judgment, in regard to sin because men do not believe in me." On Pentecost the people heard Peter and the others speak in their own language about the wonders of God. They heard in their own language the miracle of Jesus' death on the cross for their sin and the miracle of his resurrection from the dead. They were convicted by the Holy Spirit as they called out to Peter, "Brothers what shall we do?" Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins." All over the world in these last days the Holy Spirit is destroying the towers people build and replacing them with trust in Jesus as their tower of strength and hope for forgiveness and peace with God. The Holy Spirit has convicted you of sinful pride and left you trusting only in Jesus for forgiveness and peace with your God. What a blessing the Holy Spirit, your Comforter, is in your life. Amen.