

As always, my thanks to our pastor for the invitation to bring the message this morning. I thank the Lord, time and again, that He made Dan's path to cross with mine—and ours—because we are all the better as men and women of God with Dan serving Jesus with us.

For twenty-one weeks, we are on a journey through the book of Genesis, the book that started it all. If we are fifteen minutes late for a movie, we will not fully enjoy or understand the movie. Similarly, if we do not start at the beginning of the Bible, we will not fully understand the rest of the story of God.

Can you bring to mind famous towers in the world? One that most likely comes to mind is the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Named after Gustave Eiffel, it was built for the 1889 World's Fair and has become one of the most recognized structures in the world. Some of us may be thinking of the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy, where some 5 million annually see the tower leaning nearly 4 degrees because of its weak foundation. Only a few hours north from us is the Willis Tower, first known as the Sears Tower. It soars 110 stories over the Chicago skyline. Perhaps we remember the Twin Towers in New York City, also known as the World Trade Center. The world's tallest twin skyscrapers were destroyed in the largest terrorist attack in the United States on what has become known as 9-11. We could go on and on when it comes to famous towers in the world today, yet the very first famous tower is found in Genesis 11, and it also has a name: the Tower of Babel.

Context Before Content

WHEN→ After Noah and his family finished their “world cruise” and disembarked from the ark, roughly 100 years passed between the flood and the tower of Babel. How do we know? Genesis 10 provides us with a genealogy of Noah's sons and based on a generation being 40-50 years in length, we speculate that roughly 100-plus years have passed. Since all sinful humanity died in the global flood, only 100-plus years passed until the tower of Babel—and humanity is right back to being sinful and rebellious towards God.

WHERE→ Though we do not have the *exact* location for the Tower of Babel, we do know that it was in the plain of Shinar, which in Hebrew means Babylon—and we do know where biblical Babylon was. This region, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, has been called “the cradle of civilization” (i.e., the “fertile crescent”) for this is where humanity had its start. The Garden of Eden was in this geographic region. To the north and east is Mt. Ararat where Noah's ark came to rest. Living in the region between the ark and the tower would be like living in the Midwest. Once Noah's family of eight disembarked from the ark, they began multiplying and staying in the same region.

WHY→ Genesis 10 describes how Noah and his descendants reproduced and relocated (vv. 5, 20, 31). So, why does Genesis 11 describe all of humanity being together and then being scattered in all directions? This may seem backward, but this type of writing is common in the opening pages of Scripture. Chapter 10 tells us of people multiplying and being scattered in multiple directions, whereas chapter 11 tells us why it happened. This is like the opening two chapters of Genesis. Chapter 1 describes the creation of the earth, the universe and human life, whereas chapter 2 tells us of the details of creation.

Now the Content

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 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.”

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 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. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 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. (Genesis 11:1-9)

Let’s work our way through this story, and as we do so, we will discover that there is more happening than meets the eye. We need a reality check.

Verse 1: Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.

The word “language” and “common speech” are synonyms. They mean the same thing. For example, dinner and supper mean the same thing, as do soda and pop. Roughly one hundred years after coming off from the ark, there was still one language.

Verse 2: As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

People “moved eastward” stands out to us. When Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, an angel was placed on the east side of Eden to guard the tree of life (Genesis 3:24), implying that Adam and Eve were moving eastwardly. In Genesis 4:16, after killing his brother Abel, Cain moved east of Eden to live in the land of Nod. And after the flood, people were moving to the east and they settled in the plain of Shinar.

In Hebrew, Shinar means “country of two rivers,” and those two rivers are the Tigris and Euphrates, placing this plain in the cradle of civilization, the fertile crescent near the Garden of Eden. Moreover, Shinar is the ancient name for Babylonia, affirming the location of this plain. Hence, the descendants of Noah and his family are “settling” near where life began. They have not traveled very far from their roots. This was in disobedience to the Lord’s command. After Noah and his family disembarked from the ark, the Lord gave them a command and then repeated it.

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1).

“As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it” (Genesis 9:7).

Not once, but twice, God clearly and explicitly told them to 1) reproduce and 2) relocate! The Lord even gave the same command to Adam and Eve. “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’” (Genesis 1:28).

After the flood, they were fruitful, and they did multiply, but they did not fill the earth. They did not spread out. They settled in one place as one people.

Reality check: It *looked like*, it *seemed like* they were obeying God (i.e., being fruitful), but *in reality*, they were not. They “settled there” in one place on the plain of Shinar. They intentionally disobeyed God.

Something very similar happened between Jesus and His disciples. “‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 1:8). The disciples, “a group numbering about 120” (Acts 1:15), did not leave Jerusalem. Instead, they were “forced out” of town. “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1).

Verse 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.

Notice “come let us” in verse 3 and later in verse 4. This is a declaration that they were going to launch their ambitious act of rebellion. People were driven by personal ambition and pride. Notice their building supplies. It may be that natural stone was not readily available. But then again, if it was, these builders are choosing brick and mortar. Why? Building with brick is much quicker and less tedious than trying to fit stones of various shapes and sizes with one another in hopes of building a great tower. Think of building a fireplace of brick instead of stone. Building with natural stones of various shapes and sizes takes much more time than building with bricks.

Verse 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.”

Notice that they were building three different things, not only one: a city, a tower and a name. WHY? So that “we will not be scattered over the face of the earth.” Disobedience and rebellion against God, that was prevalent from Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) until the flood, is now once again on full display so quickly after sinful humanity had been destroyed in the flood! They were being self-reliant (“build ourselves”) and it was all for their self-image (“make a name for ourselves”). To them, it was “our city, not His; our tower, not His; and our name, not His.” Think about this. All of humanity was in one place, so who were they trying to impress?

A tower of this scale had a couple purposes. First, a tower was built to see any approaching enemies, but again, there were no enemies to threaten them for they were all one people in one place. Secondly, towers of this scale were for religious use. Called ziggurats, these were towers with stairs that would reach upward as if into the heavens so that gods and goddesses could come and go from one realm to the other, a crossing of the barrier between human and the divine. Such

towers were common in this region of the ancient world. Archeologists have discovered nearly thirty ziggurats. This was a city built by man, for man, and without God.

Reality check: It *looked like*, it *seemed like* they were being industrious and hard-working, but *in reality*, the problem was not with their architecture but with their arrogance!

Verse 5: *But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building.*

Verses 1-4 are the actions of people, and now in verses 5-8 we find the actions of God. Their tower was so small, so inadequate that God had to “come down to see it.” When people ally themselves against the person and purpose of God, little is achieved.

Verses 6-7: *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. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”*

In one moment, they were working together stacking bricks and in the next moment, they could not understand one another. When one said, “Throw me a brick,” the others heard words they had never heard before! Imagine the panic, fear, anger, and rage. There was immediate and unimagined chaos!

Reality check: It *looked like*, it *seemed like* God was punishing them, but *in reality*, God was protecting them.

Do not look at this text and think of God as being mean, that in some way, God felt threatened by mere humans and He responded against them with unspeakable punishment. To the contrary, God was not being punitive. He was protecting people from being destroyed by evil. Together as one people, they could grow stronger and gain momentum in their rebellion against God. Evil would advance and win. This is so simple to understand, particularly when parents have to separate siblings from one another because they are working to bring out the worst in each other. Remember those moments?

While the people were building a city, a tower and a name for themselves, there was a dark side to what looked like the people’s apparent unity, a unity that could produce a concentration of evil. Their sin and rebellion against God posed a united front and, left unchecked, would produce massive destruction. History repeats itself. Adolph Hitler wanted to rule the world, and Hitler’s evil destruction was amplified when Mussolini of Italy and Emperor Hirohito of Japan joined him.

When God scattered the people on the plain of Shinar, it served as a pre-emptive strike against the escalation of evil. This was an act of grace, of mercy, on the part of God.

Verse 8: *So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.*

Notice the emphasis was on the city, not the tower. God prevented a civilization from being united in working against Him, and wherever they went, they took their sin with them: their pride, rebellion, and idolatry. Moreover, ethnicity was created. Social customs were formed and even biological

features developed. For example, as people moved closer to the equator where sunshine is both intense and constant, skin became darker to protect their health.

Verse 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.*

The Hebrew word “babel,” meaning “confused,” is used roughly 200 times in the Old Testament and it also means Babylonia or Babylon. That name is used to denote evil. The ancient city of Babylonia and the nation of Babylon were condemned in the Old Testament for their arrogance. Even Satan is described in Isaiah 14:4, 12-15 as Babylon. He attempted in pride to be just like God but was cast out of the presence of God and thrown to the earth, only to be thrown eventually into a pit of everlasting destruction.

Reality check: It *looked like*, it *seemed like* that at Babel, the people had it all together, but *in reality*, they were a chaotic mess because their pride made no room for God.

Ego can easily be defined as e.g.o. → edging God out. It happened then and it is happening now.

We need to do a REALITY CHECK in our individual lives. It may *look like*, *seem like* we have it all together, but *in reality* we have a problem with pride just as people did in the opening pages of Genesis. Come to think of it, even the Apostle Paul had a problem with pride. There was a time in his life when he was “caught up to the third heaven” (i.e., the dwelling place of God). While there, Paul saw and heard things that he could not put into words as they were “inexpressible” (2 Cor 12:1-6). To further describe this experience, Paul went on to say:

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Paul was and will always be considered as one of the giants of the Christian faith and yet he struggled with ego, edging God out. Paul knew that he was broken and weak and admitted that he needed Jesus Christ. We must develop a theology of weakness and brokenness. In the 21st century, we think of celebrity, power, wealth, strength, success, renown, thus “making a name for ourselves.” Our culture treats weakness as failure, but Jesus sees it as strength. Do we?

We edge God out of our lives. Beginning with me, each of us struggles with pride. Across America, Christians want to manage God. Christians want a convenient, comfortable relationship with God, a relationship with Him that we have established on our terms. It’s as if we declare the words of Frank Sinatra’s classic song, “I did it my way.” Instead of E.G.O.—edging God out of our lives—we can use three questions as a *reality check* to keep God at the *center* of our lives. These questions are rooted in the story of the tower of Babel.

- For whose **G**lory am I living?
- Who are the **O**thers in my life?

→ How Distant am I from God?

For Whose Glory am I Living?

The people of Babel lived for “me, myself and I.” Is the same true for each of us? Do we live for HIS glory or are we trying to “make a name for ourselves”? Are we focused on having the right image with the clothes we wear, the house we own, the vehicle we drive, the trips we take, the wealth we amass, the roles we have at work or school, etc.?

“...everyone who is call by my name, whom I made *for my glory*, whom I formed and made” (Isaiah 43:7). God declares WHY each of us is alive—to bring HIM glory. Each of us has great purpose in life: to bring God glory each day we live!

Take notice of His words, “who I formed and made.” Scripture declares that each of us has been handcrafted by God. King David wrote, “For *you* created my inmost being. *You* knit me together in my mother’s womb. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. *Your* works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalm 139:13-14).

We have been handcrafted by God with a purpose: to bring HIM glory with every breath we take each day that we live. If you play chess, you know that each piece has a name and a purpose. Whether it is a pawn, a rook, a knight, a bishop, or even the queen, each piece moves across the board with the purpose to protect the king—even to be sacrificed to protect him. Does that describe how you and I live? That our purpose is to bring glory and honor to the King of kings, even to the point of sacrificing our lives for King Jesus?

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, I urge you to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is; His good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-1)

Do we wake up each day realizing we have been given an incredible gift from God, the gift of another day of life—to live for HIS glory by intentionally presenting our bodies (i.e., time, talent, treasures, etc.) as living sacrifices? Or do we wake up wanting to “make a name for ourselves”? Do a reality check and answer the question: for whose glory am I living?

Who are the Others in My Life?

The people of Babel lived as one giant people group and they were all headed in one direction: away from God in rebellion. That mass of people would only have picked up speed and increased in their evil wickedness and rebellion against God. Are you and I like them? What kind of crowd do we hang with in life? Who are the others in my life and yours? The Apostle Paul said to struggling Christians in the church in Corinth, “Do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Are the ‘others’ in your life and mine good for us or just the opposite? If we put a single drop of ink or food coloring into a crystal-clear glass of water, it is not long before the entire glass is permeated

with the color. Likewise, the least amount of evil, sinful influence permeates our lives by the company that we keep. Who are the others in your life?

Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers; but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law this person meditates day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. (Psalm 1:1-3)

Notice the gradual progression in verse 1. When we start “walking” with people who are not God-followers, and then we start “standing” alongside of them, and then we actually begin “sitting” with them (i.e., doing life with them), we will become like them. The ‘others’ in our lives influence our thinking, and how we think determines how we live. Bad company corrupts good character. There is truth in the saying, “Show me your friends and I’ll show you your future.” The New Testament has more than 50 commands that we “love one another” (love *one another*, forgive *one another*, serve *one another*, etc.). We are to do life WITH one another! A growing mass of strong, committed, bold followers of Jesus can grow in hunger and thirst for all things that are good and God-honoring! Do a reality check and answer the question: who are the others in my life?

How Distant am I from God?

The people building Babel *appeared* to be ascending *towards* God when that could not have been further from reality. It may *look like* you and I are close to God but that could not be further from reality. For example, the Barna Group recently released statistics from a survey of Christians in America that revealed a sad and crushing reality. People claiming to be committed Christians attend church 1.6 times a month. The generation most often at church are those of Generation Z who attend 1.9 times a month! Over a period of one year, people claiming to be committed Christians attend worship 37% of the time! Do we send our children to school 37% of the time? Do we go to work 37% of the time? Do we pay 37% of our bills? When you and I think of our engagement with The Creek (worship on Sundays, being in a life group, giving time and talent as a servant of Jesus, as well as our treasure as we bring our tithes and offerings to the Lord), are we close or distant to God?

In Revelation 3:14-22, Jesus sent a letter to the Church in Laodicea, and it is well known because of a line in the letter. Laodicea had bad water—really, really bad (similar to the water in Franklin Township!). Being a wealthy city, they built an aqueduct to nearby Hierapolis, a town six miles to the north with abundant hot springs. It is speculated that Laodicea obtained cold mountain water from nearby Colossae. But by the time the water came from either town, it was neither hot nor cold. Jesus then said something that those Christians understood immediately. “I know your deeds, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16).

This is the only time in the New Testament that the word “spit” appears. It is a rare and powerful word that means “to hurl, to vomit.” What made Jesus sick to His stomach? The lukewarm commitment of believers! Because Jesus is the “same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), the same is true today. No one walks into Starbucks and says, “Hey, please give me a venti lukewarm dark roast.” No one wants lukewarm coffee! Iced or piping hot? Yes! Never lukewarm. And who wants lukewarm tea? No one! What made the water in Laodicea lukewarm? DISTANCE! What makes a Christian spiritually lukewarm? DISTANCE! How close are we to God when it comes

to His Word, to prayer, to having a hunger and thirst for living holy, God-honoring lives? We might *look like* we are close to God, but when we do a reality check, we must admit that there is too much distance between us and God. Convenient, comfortable, ho-hum, run-of-the-mill Christianity does not shout closeness to God.

Nicholaus Copernicus (1473-1543) was a brilliant Polish scholar, mathematician, and astronomer. One of his discoveries was heliocentrism, that the earth revolved around the sun. Until this discovery, people believed that the earth was the center of the solar system. People—including the Catholic Church—believed Copernicus was radical for his thinking and teaching that we (i.e., earth) are not the center. Sadly, many people need the same discovery today that the SON of God, Jesus Christ, is alone to be the center of our lives. Only then will we live for His glory, with a host of others alongside of us, as we close the distance between ourselves and God.

Is that your reality and mine?