



Genesis 11:1-9

Pentecost, June 8, 2025

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Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." ⁵ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

God Comes Down

To Undo Babel and Unite All Nations *in Christ*

"Deism" is a belief system that revolves around the idea that God created the universe but doesn't really do anything else. In current times, a person who considers themselves as a "deist" might say something like, "I'm spiritual but not religious." They believe there's a creator-God out there, they believe in a "higher power," but they don't necessarily see that higher power as actively doing anything at all—He set the world in motion and then allows His creation to fend for itself.

But that is not what God is like. God is not far removed or uncaring about the troubles of this world. Instead, God comes down. That's what we saw in our text, "I wonder what the sons of Adam are up to," and God came down to see for Himself. Of course, God didn't *have* to come down, He didn't even have to wonder what the people were doing—since He is God and all-knowing. But our text this morning says specifically that "**God came down to see.**" That's said for our benefit, to emphasize that God is no "Deist." He comes down; He works among us in this world at all times and in all places and cares very much about what His people are doing.

Now, He obviously knew that they were up to no good there at Babel, they were Adam's children after all—you can't leave them alone for very long. Maybe you parents can remember moments like that, "I haven't heard anything from my children in a while, they must be up to no good." And it seems like they always *are* up to no good when things get too quiet.

Well, they were up to no good in Babel as well. They had *big* plans. "We can do anything! Just think what we can accomplish if we work together! This is a great place to build a city!" And I suppose they were correct on that point; they were in the Fertile Crescent, so I suppose it was a good place to build a city, they had everything they needed right there. So, they grew emboldened and thought, "We can do anything! Let's build a tower to the heavens, the sky is the limit!" And that's precisely what God was afraid of. You see, no one knows better than the Creator what lofty heights the minds of man may reach. And the problem wasn't what great things they could accomplish; the problem was what *sort* of things man would set out to accomplish.

Think of that terrifying time for parents when your children are between the ages of one and two. That age is so difficult because your child is curious and coordinated enough and big enough to be able to do things like open doors and crawl up stairs and climb up bookcases and stand on tables, but they're *not* old enough to make rational decisions about whether or not it's actually a good idea to do so. They don't think far enough ahead to figure out if something could be dangerous for them. And so, as parents, you feel like you can never take your eyes off them for very long, because it seems they're always figuring out how to do more ridiculous and harmful things.

Well, imagine a child like that that continues to grow, continues to be able to do more and more and more, but simultaneously fails to ever learn what things are good and right and safe. If you were the parent of such a child, every year would be more terrifying than the last. Well, that's precisely what *God* had on His hands. He had sinners, the ***"sons of Adam."***

When mankind fell into sin, he did not lose his abilities; he did not lose his ingenuity or his brains or his brawn. What man *lost* was truth and righteousness and holiness and wisdom. What he lost are the things that made man good. And consequently, nothing that man *ever* proposes to do is ever good. It may be impressive, it may be bold, it may be grand like a tower built up to the heavens—but it is never good. Because the thing that man naturally wants to do and continually *tries* to do is to reach up into the heavens in order to make *"me"* into God. As ***"sons of Adam,"*** we try to do what Adam did—we try to be like God.

The tower that these people were building that day was probably a ziggurat, intended for some form of pagan worship. But what they were really doing was making a monument to man—it was mankind worshipping itself as god, and they *knew* it! Listen to what they said, ***"Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."*** Why would they bring *that* up? Being scattered over the face of the earth? Why would that happen? Well, it was not very long before this when Noah left the ark with his family, and God told them to be fruitful and multiply, to *fill* the earth and subdue it.

At Babel, they knew that's what God had told them to do—to spread out over the earth—and that was the very reason why they didn't want to do it! They despised God's will and hated their Creator. And so it has *always* been with man, ever since Satan's first temptation. Satan had told Adam and Eve that God didn't want them to eat the fruit because He knew it would make them like God, and He was just trying to keep the best for Himself! And ever since that day, humans detest and resist God's will because we think that God designs evil for us. And that's what was going on at Babel. They didn't want to be scattered across the face of the earth, and they needed no other reason for this desire than that God had told them to do that very thing. God told them to leave, so they decided to stay. They would be the gods of their own destiny.

And what about you and me? When we use the brains and the brawn and the abilities which God has given to us in our daily vocations, what do we use it for? *Who* do we use it for? Whose name do we seek to exalt into the heavens when we make use of our abilities? Is it *God's* name? Or is it our own?

And when you hear God's will for your lives, how do you react? Do you say with the Psalmist, ***"Oh, how I love your law!"*** (Psalm 119:97) Or does Babel's paranoia still fester in your hearts, causing you

to hate God's will? Well, the answer for us as Christians is "both," isn't it? We are saints and sinners at the same time. According to our sinful nature, we are afraid of God, and we do hate Him, and when we hear His Word, we naturally desire the opposite. But at the same time, as a renewed person in Christ, you *hate* your sinful nature, you repent of it and turn to God in faith and trust in Him for forgiveness. Sinners-made-Saints through faith, you desire to follow God's will.

The problem at *Babel* is that there were no saints there, or if there were, they certainly weren't many. At Babel, the unbelieving world was united in opposition to God. And it's no wonder then that from that point on in the Bible, the Kingdom of Babylon—which is this same place—"Babylon" is used as a metaphor for the kingdom of the devil and unbelievers united against the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

And when united together like this, mankind can do some amazing and remarkable things. But the trouble is that unbelieving man always proposes to do things which are opposite of God's will. Man does things for himself, to make himself his own god, to elevate his own name. And so, the more that mankind is united, the more great and wonderful things we can accomplish, and the more dangerous we become to ourselves. We convince ourselves we need no God but us.

So, *God came down*. And He didn't do so because He was scared of mankind or because He thought they would be able to reach the heavens and overthrow Him. He didn't come down just to spoil their fun. No, God came down to save these people from *themselves*. He came to destroy their self-aggrandizing self-worship so that they might turn back to Him.

Sometimes you have to do that. Sometimes you have to destroy something to build it the right way. Like in our house, we have lots of Legos. Sometimes the Lego builder will miss an early step and not realize it until much later. At those times, you have to tear it apart and start over. And that's what God did at Babel. He came down to the people of Babel to shatter and scatter them, not because He was against mankind being united, but because they were doing it all wrong. They were united against *Him*. They thought, "We can be united! We can make a name for ourselves and be one nation and have one tongue and speak one language! We don't need God at all!" They united together, and God scattered them. In a moment, God put a stop to all of that. One moment, each man was speaking to his neighbor, talking about how great they were going to be, and the next moment, they couldn't understand each other at all.

Can you imagine how odd that would be? Especially because before this there had not been such a thing as different languages, in fact, the text indicates that there weren't even different accents or dialects. They all "***had one language and the same words***" and could understand each other perfectly clearly, and then suddenly they could not! You know when you have to call a customer service line, and someone picks up on the other end with a thick accent, clearly based overseas somewhere, and you immediately get sort of annoyed with that person? That's what we do. When we can't understand another person, our sinful nature tends to fear them. And so, with the simple act of confusing their languages, God caused mankind to fear one another even as they had been afraid of Him. Their unity was fractured, and they were scattered across the earth as God had commanded.

On that day, God came down because He is no *deist* who just sits up there while His people destroy themselves. He came down to judge them lest their pride destroy them, and so He destroyed instead.

He did so for their good. Because God destroys, but He also builds. And that's exactly what He was doing on Pentecost. The events of that Pentecost in Jerusalem serve as a bookend to this event. On that day, they were all gathered together in one place—the Apostles, that is, not the people of Babel. And they were united together—not in opposition to God, but obeying Christ's command. On that day, God came down again. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Apostles, not to scatter or confuse, but to unite, and to do it *rightly*. And the Holy Spirit came down on *that* day, to build a city—not Babel—but the New Jerusalem, the City of God, the Church of all believers in Christ.

On that first Pentecost, we had people from many different nations gathered together, and they became confused about the languages being spoken—not because they *couldn't* understand them, but because they *could*! The Apostles were speaking in the tongues of all the people, and what amazing things they were speaking! Not declaring the great works of man, but the mighty works of God. That's why God came down. The Holy Spirit came down to proclaim Jesus.

And Jesus also came down. There again, we see God coming down, this time in the flesh as a son of Adam to *redeem* the sons of Adam. He made Himself of no reputation, no name, so that He might be given a name which is above *every* name, so that we can call upon His name and be saved. He was lifted up from the earth on the cross, raised up to the heavens in His ascension, and He did all this so that *we* might be glorified! He did all this to earn for us a *great name*, as He placed His own name upon each of us in our baptisms, the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, so that now we are rightly regarded as Children of God.

And this means that now we don't have to *strive* to earn a name for ourselves, because we have been given one better than *any* we could earn—the name of Christian, a believer in Christ. We have been given a great name, and we also have one language to use. That's the language of sins forgiven, the language of peace with God through Christ's blood and righteousness. And now we *too* are scattered, not like happened at Babel where God prevented them from destroying themselves—no, now God scatters *us* so that we might go into every corner of the earth and proclaim the Savior's name.

That's how *God* builds a city. That's how *God* unites mankind, by coming down Himself. And He continues to come down today, as the Holy Spirit comes down daily to convict us of our sins, but also to bind up our broken hearts through the good news that our sins are forgiven. He continues to come down, building up His church on earth, building a city of His people united by His grace. And He continues to come down to work on you through the Word and Sacrament, to ensure that you remain in this City of God, until that day when you are finally united with the Saints in heaven.

So, while you are still here, in your daily lives, everything you do with your ingenuity and brains and brawn, don't do it to raise up your *own* name before others, but rather raise up the name of your Savior who has raised you up together with Himself. And as you speak in whatever language you choose to speak, may the words of forgiveness be on your tongue, just as Your Savior speaks them to you. He is the one who comes down for you, in love, so that you might be brought up to Him. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.