

God Scatters for Good

✦ **towering human pride (vv.1-7)**

✦ **humble faith in grace (vv.6-9)**

In the name of Jesus, who promised and sent the Holy Spirit, dear fellow servants of God's grace:

One favorite sermon by a former African missionary was preached in my uncle's living room. We were just coming into the WELS with pastors like Bill Bernhardt and Warren Widmann driving over the Cascade Mountains for Sunday evening worship. Old Pastor Habben always got us kids moving at Lutheran Bible Camp with, "Hubba, Hubba!" Pastor Habben was preaching on pride when he held up his hand. A finger was missing. "See this? Things were going well in Africa. I was feeling pretty good about myself, taking God's place on the throne of my heart. God helped me. Pride hurts chopping wood."

Whether it's the loss of a finger, your front teeth, a job or close friends, we all must learn by experience the wisdom of the Psalmist: "***It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.***" (Psalm 119:71 NIV) You see, **God Scatters for Good** whenever He sees...

✦ **towering human pride (vv.1-7)**

"The bulldozer effect." That's what my father-in-law called it when he and his fellow elders were calling on straying members. "Maybe they'll understand the bulldozer effect." Unfortunately, a bulldozer can only move the dirt. It can push up a dike to hold back a flood, but it can't make anything live. In theological terms, God's law can mirror our sin and warn us of God's wrath. And it can do something else which shows up in our text. Can you see God's bulldozer at Babel?

This was shortly after the Flood when God destroyed perhaps billions of violent, godless people and saved a remnant of eight individuals. Only Noah and his wife, three sons and their wives survived along with the animals in the ark. All around us is evidence of a worldwide flood. Ancient cultures mimic God's truth in their myths and legends, but only the Bible has the true account as God preserved it through His inspired penman Moses. True to our lying nature, we humans forget so quickly.

In the beginning "***God blessed [Adam and Eve] and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'***" (Genesis 1:28 NIV) He repeated this command when they left the ark: "***Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.'***" (Genesis 9:1 NIV) But descendants of Noah had other ideas.

"Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there." They were tired of camping, pulling up tent stakes. Here was a green valley where intelligent, powerful people could find sustenance and security. Sound familiar? "***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 and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'***" They wanted to impress. They wanted status.

We don't know their names. But you can imagine four friends we'll call Caesar, Kaiser, Homer and Gomer. They could have started a band. No rock and no roll, so they sang, "We built this city....We built this city on brick and tar....We built this city." They were the best crew on the ziggurat. Caesar saw the ancient crane raise another load of bricks. "Seize her!" cried Kaiser the foreman. Caesar pulled the load over. Kaiser put a spike through his hard hat so he could nod instead of point. Homer would set the bricks while Gomer slimed the tar. All in sync, they kept singing: "We built this city....We built this city on brick and tar....We built this city." They'd tell their grandchildren how they built up to the sky!

How long can God put up with **towering human pride**? Child or teenager, God hears your proud complaints against parents and superiors. Old man or middle-aged woman, God sees your monuments to self. God would lose us all if He didn't turn the talk to babble at Babel. Caesar started muttering, "Sum, es, est, sumus, estis, sunt." Kaiser shouted, "Sprechen Sie Deutsch! I kann Sie nicht verstehen!" Homer got very serious and said, "Andra moi ennepe, Mousa, polutropon, hos mala polla....," and headed off on an odyssey. Gomer looked around, "Golly! You guys sound mighty funny." But there was nothing funny about it. Everything was messed up. We don't know how God did it, maybe mental, maybe physical. You can imagine some getting real red in the neck. Others stretching pencil necks. Some noses pointed skyward. But now they were using different words for the same thing. What some called a "John," others called a "planter." Meanwhile, pointy headed intellectuals walked by shaking their heads, "They growing flowers in a toilet in their front yard." Suspicion and mockery scatter cultures to this day.

✠ **humble faith in grace (vv.6-9)**

What could solve the problem of confused languages, the curse of Babel? Look at who came down. It was the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace. He is the Savior-God who took action to keep the crown of His creation from building walls between ourselves and our God. He got all the facts and sized up the situation. *"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.'*" What began as a monument to human ingenuity, stood for centuries as a humbling sign of human conceit and monumental failure. God does not have to tear down our towers. He can leave them stand while taking away our power.

This He has done to every generation since Babel., *"God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on [us] all."* (Romans 11:32 NIV) In His mercy God has always managed one dominant language to preserve and spread His truth that a Savior would come and rescue every Caesar, Kaiser, Homer and Gomer from his self-chosen rebellion. Hebrew gave way to a new language of commerce known as Aramaic. Some Aramaic is in Bible books like Daniel and Ezra. Solomon used some Aramaic words in Ecclesiastes. And Jesus spoke Aramaic, but it was no longer the *lingua franca*. Alexander the Great saw to that when he raced his army like a leopard all the way across Asia to India. And the Romans kept it going with the love of Greek culture that spread a language God designed for the divine precision of His Greek New Testament.

Believers who first learned, "בִּרְאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ" (Genesis 1:1) could now understand, "Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος" (John 1:1). And when *"the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, We [could see] his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14 NIV) That Word of God in the flesh, God's own Son, suffered and died to forgive all our pride and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He promised and sent His dear Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost to fire up His holy apostles with the world's languages.

"Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!'" (Acts 2:7-11 NIV)

They could return home with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and tell it to all their countrymen. God who scattered the rebels from Babel, removed the curse of Babel at Pentecost. When the Apostles scattered throughout the world, they brought God's Word of **humble faith in grace** to one and all. May God give us the grace to spread His truth and to love people of all races and cultures and languages. They too are washed with the blood of Christ. He is God's tower to heaven. Amen.