

Building on God's Grace

✦ scattered pride (vv.1-4)

✦ clear truth (vv.5-9)

In the name of the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace, dear fellow redeemed:

Have you heard this before? *All the doctrines of the Bible are contained in the first eleven chapters. The rest of the Bible is God's commentary.* The origins of the world from the only eyewitness, God Himself, are laid out in Genesis 1 and 2. The source of sin, death and suffering caused by man is revealed in Genesis 3, but also the LORD's kindness in promising a Savior, the Seed of the woman to crush the head of Satan, the serpent. Violence filled the earth in those first 2,000 years, and God hates violence. But since He promised to send a Savior, the LORD God kept that promise alive by preserving Noah and his family in the ark. Sadly, only a few generations after the Flood, mankind is rebelling again against a clear command of God. When God blessed Noah and his sons, God said, ***"Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth."*** (Genesis 9:1 NIV84) Here's what man did instead.

✦ scattered pride (vv.1-4)

"The whole earth had one language and a single vocabulary. As people traveled in the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they settled there. ³They said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used mud brick instead of stone for building material, and they used tar for mortar. ⁴They said, "Come, let's build a city for ourselves and a tower whose top reaches to the sky, and let's make a name for ourselves, so that we will not be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."¹

Shinar means *Two Rivers* – the land between the Tigris and Euphrates, later "Babylon" (LXX) the seat of civilization. The gathered people knew God's command to ***fill the earth*** and were working hard to disobey. They did not want to be scattered. Using the materials at hand and their God-created ingenuity, they set to work building a city and tower to defy the Creator Himself. Eventually their engineering skills would appear in pyramids, ziggurats, Aztec and Mayan temples in America. But then together they planned a monumental march in open rebellion and prideful defiance against God's control.

Does this sound familiar? Pride marches aren't just for homosexuals. Armies of tyrants and proud nations have long marched for their own glory in defiance of God. And have we maybe tried try to build towers to our own imagination in business and finance, even millennials saving for retirement "my way"? Isn't it fair to ask, "Were the former Twin Towers in New York City built to the glory of God or of man?"

We grieve when loved ones suffer. We hurt when our own dreams come crashing down. But what if God just let us go? Wouldn't mankind's tower at Babel have destroyed any chance of life with God? That prideful barrier would have wrecked reconciliation and wreaked turmoil for the builders and generations to come. The Creator designed this planet to be inhabited, in spite of modern man's prideful phobias and "green" doctrines. God promised and God was determined to save the planet and its sinners by sending His only begotten Son to bring peace with God eternally. Towers of pride cannot stave off death. And if death comes before the soul that sins is reconciled with God, then eternal death is locked in forever. "Our God doesn't deal in minimums."² Sin brings eternal torment; **Grace** gives unending joy.

¹ Scriptures: EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>). NPH, © 2017. Order: 800-662-6022.

² Daniel J. Habben, "Our very great reward," *Forward in Christ*, May 2019, p.7.

God had to act, but He had also promised never to destroy mankind again with a Flood. His solution is pure genius, kindness and love. You can see it in the Name that **scattered pride** that day in...

✦ **clear truth** (vv.5-9)

Notice who speaks and who it is that acts: *The **LORD** came down to see the city and the tower that the people were building. ⁶The **LORD** said, “If this is the first thing they are doing as one people, who all have one language, then nothing that they intend to do will be too difficult for them. ⁷Come, let’s go down there and confuse their language, so that they cannot understand one another’s speech.”*

God’s Name, *the LORD*, is the saving Name for the God of free and faithful grace. His fervent desire is to save everyone from guilt and shame, from the eternal death that is coming in wrath on the Last Day. So during this time of grace, this little life each of us is given, the LORD God is working to bring sinners back to Himself in mercy and grace. As surely as we need guard rails on bridges and highway lines to mark the lanes, sinful man needs restraint to keep him from charging over the edge into perdition. If you ever drive at highway speeds onto a bridge where suddenly you can’t see the guard rails anymore, staring out into space will raise an awareness of how shocking and deadly Babel really was.

In order to save sinful mankind, the LORD God uses His almighty power with restraint. *So the LORD scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹It was named Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.* Civilizations and gene pools were isolated.

If the LORD had merely messed up the vocabulary, word lists and computer programs could solve all translation problems with a simple: *Word A of my language = Word B of your language.* But the infinite wisdom of God turned the syntax inside out by changing the word order and endings too. For instance you can learn all the pronouns in Mandarin Chinese with *Wa-Ni-Ta – I; you (singular); he, she, it.* Add *–men* for *Wamen, Nimen, Tamen* – you’ve got *us, you (plural) and they.* But English messes it all up with more: *I, me, my, mine; you, your; he, him, his; etc.* Our plural pronouns pile on with *we, us; you, yours; they, them, theirs.* Just be glad if you learned English first as your heart language. I feel for anyone who has to learn English as a second language. Spanish makes Hispanics talk real fast to get in more words to say the same thing. The French tried to fix language fluctuations by passing laws to make changes illegal. Meanwhile, amid the mess of world business and politics, the LORD God in grace and mercy wants everyone to hear and believe the saving message: *“God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16 EHV)

In maximum love the LORD was working to relieve the curse of Babel by making Aramaic the language of commerce in the Babylonian captivity. Daniel and three friends – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – could share the Good News of the coming Savior in Aramaic. Their witness most likely brought the Wisemen to Bethlehem. By then Greek was the world language spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ far and wide. And yet before the Apostles left on distant mission trips, the Holy Spirit came as promised and enabled Pentecost languages and dialects they’d never studied. Today the worldwide use of English blesses our fellowship to teach God’s truth in the Confessional Lutheran Conference. Leaders from Africa, Europe, Asia and America can study God’s Word together in English.

Ever hear foreigners laughing and looking at you? Are they making jokes about you? We had to explain to our Chinese hosts that we were making American jokes about ourselves; then they started telling us Chinese jokes. Spend a little time studying God’s Word together and you soon don’t even hear the accent anymore. Ancient enemies among Asians and other cultures come together in humble faith to kneel at the cross of Christ. We celebrate unity of faith based on the solid doctrines of God’s Word from Genesis through Revelation. Christian love is a miracle that transcends language barriers by the Holy Spirit’s awesome power even today. **Clear truth** – what a gift when the tower of Babel falls again and we keep **Building on God’s Grace** to His glory in Christ alone. PENTECOST blessings to all! Amen.