Genesis 10-12 July 8, 2018

*He Was in the Beginning, Part 5*

*(The Tower of Babel)*

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Since we started this sermon series we have looked at 3 main events in the book of Genesis: 1). The Creation account of the heavens and the earth and everything in them, including the creation of humankind; 2). The rebellion of Adam & Eve, resulting in separation between God and humanity, the curse against Satan and against the ground, and the revealing of God’s plan to bridge the separation through the promised offspring of the ‘woman’ who would eventually crush the head of the ancient evil serpent – the rebellious, fallen angel – Satan; and 3). The judgement of God against the sin of humankind by flooding the whole earth - and the mercy of God in saving us through Noah and his family, represented by the rainbow as a periodic reminder.

We have seen Jesus in Creation as the One through whom, in whom, and for whom everything was created (and without whom nothing would have been created), we have seen him as the promised offspring after the Fall, and we have seen him as the very Door to the ark of safety against God’s eternal judgement. In all of these we have seen Jesus – because ---- ***because we’ve been looking for him***! He’s always been there. ALWAYS! We’ve seen Jesus because we’ve been looking for him. Isn’t it good to have our eyes opened to see his permanent, pervasive presence from before the beginning of time? Let us pray:

*Thank you, gracious and merciful God. Thank you for helping us to see the marvelous mysteries of your plan to bring us back to you. Thank you that you have tarried in returning to this earth, ever patiently waiting for more to turn from rebellion and turn to you in worship. Help us to stay alert to your Word today. Help us to learn what you want us to learn so that with ever-growing confidence we can share the fullness of your plan of redemption with others around us. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Today we come to the 4th main event in Genesis – the building of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Let’s begin by remembering God’s instructions to Adam & Eve in Genesis 1:28 before they fell into sin, *“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”* After the flood, God repeated these instructions to Noah in Genesis 9:1, *“Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.”* He repeats it again in 9:7, *“Be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”* God’s intention from the beginning was for faithful men and women to grow their families, and then go all the way to the ends of the earth, filling it with flourishing, fruitful, God-honoring, God-glorifying, God-worshipping people! That was clearly God’s instruction. Be fruitful. Increase in number. Fill the earth. Could it be any clearer?

So, we get to Genesis 10 which gives us a Table of Nations. This is what happened to the sons of Noah – Shem, Ham, and Japheth – who themselves had sons after the flood. In Genesis 10:32 we read, *“These are the clans of Noah’s sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.”* Now, we read that, and we look at the map, and we think that they followed God’s instructions all on their own. Be fruitful. Increase in number. Fill the earth. *“Good job, Noah’s family.”*

But the way that Moses wrote this account messes with our minds a little. In chapter 10 he gave us the Table of Nations; he gave us the names of descendants and where they went after the flood. And then in Genesis 11 he backs up and tells us how that all happened. What? Well, here’s an example. Way back on June 10th when we started this sermon series I told you what the plan was. I laid out the idea for the series. In fact, I gave you the road map of where we would be going throughout the summer. On the next Sunday then, June 17th, I backed up and started at the beginning with Creation. We do this all the time. We tell someone that we got a new job and what we are doing at the new job. And then we go back and explain how we saw the job advertised and what we did to apply and what happened in the interview, etc., etc., etc. This is what Moses is doing here. He told us what happened in Genesis 10, and now in Genesis 11 he is telling us how it happened. And guess what? It didn’t happen because Noah’s family and all his descendants were so wonderful and obedient to God’s instructions after the flood. Let’s read it:

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 Shinarand 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.”*

After the flood, after multiple generations had been born, there was only one language. When they decided to move to a new location, they moved together. Some of us might remember the final show of the Mary Tyler Moore TV show when the whole group of co-workers were having a group hug. Someone needed a kleenex, so the whole group moved together across the room to get one. Picture that when you think about the people after the flood. When they moved, they moved together – in blatant disobedience to God’s instructions to fill the earth. Be fruitful. Increase in number. (They were doing well with those two.). Fill the earth. Nope. Not doing that.

They said to each other, “Come, let us make bricks. Let us build for ourselves a city. Let us build a tower that gets us up to God so that we can make a name for ourselves. If we don’t, we’re going to be scattered all over the face of the earth.” And they didn’t want to be scattered. They liked being together. They liked the comfort of the known. Who wants the unknown when we already know that we like the known?

I used to laugh a bit at my mom when I would look in her closet and see the same style of shoes in 3 different colors. I was at that age that variety was the spice of life! “Why do you have the same shoes in black, blue, and brown, mom?” Her answer was that she had long, narrow feet and it was hard to find a pair of shoes that were really comfortable. So, when she found a pair she liked, she bought every color they had in her size.

We like our comforts, don’t we? Don’t tell me you don’t have a favorite shirt or pair of jeans or pair of shoes that you keep putting on even though you have so many other choices. We like our comforts. Our easy chair is starting to fall apart but we don’t want a new one. We like this one. We’ve got it worn in just the way we like it!

The people liked the comfort of being together. They liked the idea of building a great city, of building a big tower right up to God, of making their name great. We can shake our heads in judgment, but we have the same tendencies, folks. Indeed, we do.

A few weeks ago our family put a new desk together for Katy for Sweet Grace Ministries. It’s a good-looking desk that came in a flat box. It was no small feat to get this thing put together correctly. It took hours over several days to do it. And when we finally were finished we stood back and were quite proud of ourselves. We did that! We put that together! And we all do that, don’t we? When we make something, paint something, create something, whether its out of building materials, out of clay, out of flour and butter and sugar and anything else you can put in there, when we put a flow chart on the wall that helps others make sense of a project, when we put together a lesson plan that really brings the teaching alive, when we put an arrangement of a song together that sounds really good – we are so prone to think, “Look what I did!” We might not say it like our ancestors did, “Let us make a name for ourselves,” but that’s our tendency. We live this way. We battle this. And if you’re sitting there thinking, “I don’t have that problem. I always give God the attention first,” you’re revealing your own pride problem just like everyone else. This is mankind’s issue. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have all turned to our own way. We want to make our name great. We want attention. We want significance. We want to be noticed for what we’re doing. We do not want to be nameless. This all comes from the sin nature passed on to us from Adam & Eve.

Listen with me to these words from preacher and author John Piper, *“The spectacular sin of man is that even after the flood, which was a thunderclap of warning against sin for Noah and his descendants, it turns out that we are no better after the flood than we were before. The human condition is just like it was with Adam and Eve. They will decide for themselves what is best. They think they can even rise up and claim the place of God. This is the story of mankind to this very day apart from redeeming grace.”*

Now, I’m not going political, because I think you know by now that whoever is elected as our President, I will support and pray for that person. But I want you to think about something with me which may help us pray according to God’s will for our leaders and our nation. The slogan for President Trump has been, “Make America Great Again.” As he moves towards 2020 it will be “Keep America Great.” When our President speaks, he seems to take great joy in listing his accomplishments so far. *I did this. I did that. We did this. We did that.* I’m not saying that good things aren’t happening in our country because of some of the people who are leading, I’m saying that the way we speak about these things reveals something important about our relationship with God. I want to be part of a country that is one nation under God with liberty and justice for all, with knees bent, and hearts yielded, not necessarily with flashing neon signs that touts how great we are. There’s a deep warning about this in Genesis 11 we need to pay attention to.

The text tells us that God *came down* (notice that the tower wasn’t even close to God. He had to ‘come down,’ to where they were) and confused their language (that’s what Babel in Hebrew means – *confusion*). All of a sudden, they couldn’t communicate with each other. So they found like-tongued people and scattered over all the earth. God’s intention of filling the earth was accomplished by his own hand. The people weren’t obeying. So, God did it himself. Once again, God to the rescue. Be fruitful. Increase in number. Fill the earth. Not *“Good job, Noah’s family.”* It is *“Good job, God. Thanks for bailing us out,* again*.”* God accomplishes what he intended and what he instructed by taking them down a bunch of notches - confusing the languages of the people.

Now go with me back to Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:18-20 – the Great Commission, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* Make disciples of all nations. Well, how can we do that when we are scattered over all the earth speaking 6500 different languages?

Now go with me to Acts 1:6-8 right before Jesus ascended into heaven, *“Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”* [They were still hoping to make their own name great, building their own kingdom, even after 3 solid years with Jesus.]. ***7****He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.****8****But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Do you see how God continues to put forth his intention to scatter his people? Not just scatter people – but scatter HIS people who will be fruitful for the Gospel, who will increase the number of disciples as they fill the earth with God-honoring, God-glorifying, God-worshipping people! So how does God accomplish this?

Acts 2:1-12, *“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.****2****Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.****3****They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.****4****All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.* ***5****Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.****6****When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.****7****Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?****8****Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?****9****Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26959b)*]****10****Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome****11****(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”****12****Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”*

Then Peter stood and preached, pulling Scriptures from the Old Testament, bringing forward the message of Christ as the Promised One. Acts 2:37-41, *“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”* ***38****Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.****39****The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”* ***40****With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”****41****Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”*

At Pentecost, through the coming of the Holy Spirit, the scattering of the nations through the confusion of multiple languages was reversed. The judgment of God on sin at Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) was used by God for the ultimate global glory of Jesus Christ! Think about it. The glory of Jesus Christ now flourishes more fully because of 6500 languages! The first time, at the tower of Babel, the scattering through the multiplication of languages was a judgement against pride and arrogance, against their sinful disobedience to fill the earth. The second time, after Pentecost, when they scattered to go back to every nation under heaven filled with the Spirit of Christ, it wasn’t a judgement it was an assignment. They didn’t leave confused and afraid. They left with a new song in their hearts. They left with a mission to accomplish! They left to be fruitful for the Kingdom of GOD! They left to increase the number of believers in Jesus Christ! They left to fill the earth with flourishing worshippers who were unified as they had never been before to make the name of GOD great!

It’s so freeing to say to ourselves, “I will not get swept up in the world’s frenzied attempts to make my home here on earth my ‘castle.’” “I choose not to find my security and my significance in anything other than in Christ.” This frees us from desiring worldly trophies above desiring a vital relationship with our Creator, and this frees us to obey God’s voice without fretting over what we might leave behind.

Last week my grandson asked me if I ever played golf. And you know what I told him? I told him about the time I was in North Carolina on summer vacation with my family. I was about 12-14 years old and had taken golf lessons my mom had talked me into. There was a tournament, and I won the tournament. I was the junior golf champ at that golf club that summer! “Wow!” my grandson said. Why didn’t I just say, “Yes, I’ve played golf before,” and leave it at that? So while I’m at it, I might as well tell you about some of my other accomplishments. Here’s an award I won in high school: The Frederick Chopin Piano Award. I was proud of that. Here’s an award I was given because of being a co-founder of the Cumberland Valley School of Music. They both are a little dusty. Oh, and here’s my diploma from Gordon-Conwell for my Doctor of Ministry degree. It’s a little dusty too. Oh, and I can’t forget the most prestigious trophy of all that we won here together several years ago – the Donkey Basketball Champions! How many pastors can say that their church won a Donkey Basketball Championship?

And I might as well keep going. How many churches our size would give away their whole Easter Sunday offering totaling $9000 to 3 different missions across the globe? How many churches send mission teams somewhere every year, or put together a local mission team to help our neighbors with significant building projects? Oh, and isn’t it great that almost every Sunday we have doughnuts and delicious treats for our small group attenders? And wow – how many churches have two wonderful organists? And did you know that we are supporting not one but two seminarians?

Are you getting the message here today? Babel wasn’t just about them. Babel is about us. Brick by brick we can find ourselves building a tower – trying to make a name for ourselves – choosing for ourselves what is good and what is not. Oh, how merciful is our God. How patient he is with us. How marvelous is his plan to save us from ourselves. In these days of social media where so many try to elevate who they are and what they’re doing and who they’re with and who’s not measuring up – this message couldn’t be more timely.

Our part is to let go. Our part is to not buy into the message the world is trying to sell us. Our part is to hold the things of this world loosely. I’m not saying we shouldn’t ever choose to have our business branded with the family name or other such things, but we need to be aware of our sinful tendencies and choose wisely. Our part is to be the living stones (not the handmade bricks) of the temple of God to the glory of God! Our part is to be fruitful, increase in the number of disciples being made, and fill the earth with flourishing worshippers who, at the name of Jesus, will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!

Let us pray: *Merciful God, we come being very aware this morning of our sinful tendencies to make much of ourselves and our accomplishments, including the accomplishments of our family members, our workplaces, our church, and yes, our nation. Forgive us for wanting the significance that you alone deserve. Forgive us for needing credit. Forgive us for assessing success by the numbers. Forgive us for putting anything and anyone ahead of you in our lives. Help us to trust that when we live according to your instructions, our lives will be more full and free than they could ever be according to our own plans. Forgive us. Help us. Send your Holy Spirit once again to hit the re-set button and bring us home to you. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*