

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through the working of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Amen.

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and 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 and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men 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. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Christian Friends,

People have become fascinated with tall buildings. In ancient times they built a tall tower called a ziggurat that usually had a temple or altar at the top. For many years the US had the tallest buildings in the world but that honor has since gone to Dubai and next year it will go to a building currently being built in Saudi Arabia. Right now the tallest building in the US is One World Trade Center in New York City. Many times people see these tall buildings as symbols of power, wealth and accomplishment. Sort of like a beacon on the horizon that says, “Look at what I can do.”

Today we want to look at another building project for a tall tower – the Tower of Babel. As we consider this building, we want to ask ourselves, **“What do you see in this building?”** As we consider the answer, we have to note that the people of the day saw it as, **“A Great Monument to Themselves,”** but as we take a careful look at this building, especially the events that happened because of it, we see, **“A Symbol of God’s Love and Faithfulness.”**

I. The building of this tower took place about 100 years after the flood. Noah’s sons had children and the number of people on the earth was beginning to grow. There was one common language and the people were unified in many ways. After the flood God had given his people this command, **“Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.”** (Genesis 9:1).

The people were increasing in number but we are told, **“As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.”** This sounds innocent enough but the problem is that all the people were moving eastward when some should have been going north and others south and some west. These people weren’t looking to fill the earth. They wanted to stay together and so they ignored part of God’s command and found this fertile piece of ground to the east and settled there.

If there was any doubt as to their motivation and attitude towards God, the next words tell us a lot about what they had in mind, **“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 and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”** These were smart people and they wanted to build a huge, complicated skyscraper and they were going to do it without any cranes or trucks or steel or power equipment.

They were going to use oven baked bricks instead of the normal sun-dried ones. That way the bricks would be stronger and last longer. There was an abundance of tar and so their mortar was made out of tar instead of powder and water. Again, so that this tower would stand up to the elements and be strong enough to reach higher than any structure ever built.

They didn’t hide their purpose and motivation. They wanted to make a name for themselves and this tower would be a monument for all to see – a monument to show they were strong and smart and could do anything they wanted to do. In a way they were saying that they didn’t need God and didn’t have to listen to his commands. This building project would prove it.

But this building in Shinar was doomed from the beginning because it represented the people’s rebellion against God. The psalmist wrote **“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.”** (Psalm 127:1). Here was proof that even though sinners had perished in the flood, sin had not. It’s amazing how prosperity, a blessing from God, can also be a curse that leads God’s people into thinking they can take care of themselves and don’t need God in their lives.

That begs the question for us to consider, “Have I built any “monuments” to myself in my life?” I’m sure you don’t have a tower going up in the back yard but have you ever felt so secure that you start to forget about God – you don’t openly turn your back on him, but you have let him slip from being the center of your life? When life is going good, pride can easily lead us down the path of thinking my life is all about me and what I want to do and my accomplishments rather than what God has accomplished for me and what he has done in my life and how he has blessed me.

That’s not to say we shouldn’t be proud of our lives – but keep everything in perspective and recognize that everything we have and everything we are able to do comes from God. Whether life is good or bad, we can’t make it on our own. We need God and we can be thankful he is patient with us, even when we lose focus of what is important in life.

Hopefully you will keep one monument in your life – the cross. That is what keeps everything in its proper perspective. The cross is the most important monument in our lives because at the cross Christ suffered to bring us life and everything else we have. Without the cross, we are spiritually poor, even if we have an abundance of worldly wealth.

The cross shows us God’s great love and faithfulness for us and, believe it or not, the unfinished Tower of Babel was also a symbol of God’s love and faithfulness.

II. “But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.”

There are a lot of names for God and they each tell us something about God. You would expect the name used here to be the God of judgment and power but it isn't. It is the name for the God of grace – the covenant God. And even though it says, “He came down to find out what was going on,” that really is a form of speech connected to a human action to indicate that God is about to act. He already knows what is going on and he is going to do something about it.

My first thought is that he should just destroy the tower or at least some or all of the people as an example that you shouldn't disobey God, but he doesn't. **“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.”** Instead of destruction we see preservation. God had a plan for his people and he wanted to preserve them to carry out this plan. Without his people the promise of the Savior would be lost and God's plan of salvation ruined so God was going to carry out his plan in spite of the people and he did it in a loving way.

All of a sudden the people couldn't understand each other. We don't know how many different languages were created that day but I would venture to say that it was a lot. And if you can't understand your neighbor it doesn't take long before distrust arises and the people scattered. They wanted to live only with those they could communicate with. The people thought they could change God's plan but God's will is always done and his plans always are carried out in spite of what the world might do.

The disruption of the languages divided the people for thousands of years and still does to some extent today. But as we celebrate Pentecost we are reminded that God sent the Holy Spirit to undo what the Tower of Babel had done. The Holy Spirit unites us under the cross and one message of salvation. There are still many languages, but the message of Jesus Christ as Savior of the world is sweet music to the ears of all who hear it – no matter what language conveys this message.

God confused the language of the people out of love for them and us, so that he could keep his promise to send a Savior. Jesus Christ has come and has completed God's plan of salvation by paying for your sins and mine. The Holy Spirit brings us the benefit of Christ's work by planting faith in our hearts.

We see God's love in preserving his people 1000's of years ago by confusing their language and we see God's love on that first Pentecost as the Holy Spirit cut through the language barrier to bring salvation to 3000 in one day.

Listen to God and follow his commands. Never doubt his love for his people and for you. He is in control of this world and of our lives. There are those who think they can live without God and will try, but the Spirit is at work keeping God at the center of our lives. May the cross of Christ always be our “Tower of God's Love” and remind us of his grace and his faithfulness to us. Amen.