

## Sermon Reading: Genesis 11:1-9

*Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. <sup>2</sup> As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.*

*<sup>3</sup> They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. <sup>4</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>5</sup> But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”*

*<sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup> 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.*

### Sermon Theme: Given Meaning and Purpose

What is the meaning of life? Why are you here on this earth? What is your purpose? Mankind has been wrestling with questions like these for hundreds upon hundreds of years. When was the last time you thought about that? As you know, we can get so wrapped up in the day-to-day life, the grind of the schedule, the expectations and demands of others and that we put on ourselves that we may fail take the time to ask the important questions. Think about it: why am I here? What is the meaning to this life? I’ll give you some time to jot something down if you wish; otherwise, just think...why do I exist? What is my purpose?

When we look at this historical account at the tower of Babel, we see people who—whether they recognize it or not—are attempting to answer those questions. We aren’t told how many years have passed since Noah and the flood, but we are told that the whole world at the time shared one language and a common speech. As the people move eastward they find an area they like and decide they want to settle there. They decide they are going to bake the bricks so that they can use them to build structures that are strong and going to last. What they plan to build is really a fortified city with walls having a tower that reaches to the heavens. Here in this place they have what they feel they need: a place where they can grow all the food. They are building to have some security where they are going to be safe from all their enemies. And why? **“We are going to make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”** What they saw as their meaning to life was to survive and make a name for themselves. You could

say it another way: they see their purpose as being to enjoy life as much as possible and be known for it.

But what they are telling God is, “Leave me alone! I have to do what’s best for me!” You see, after the flood God had again given the command as he did to Adam and Eve at Creation: increase in number and fill the earth. He never intended all of them to stay in one place, but wanted them to increase and spread out all over the world. Instead mankind—as Adam and Eve did when they first fell into sin—is once again trying elevate itself to be like God, to be on the same level as God thinking it’s fine go against his will.

History is recorded so we remember, learn from it, and hopefully not repeat the same mistakes. But we are still building fortified cities and constructing towers to reach to the sky. We aren’t necessarily talking about physical cities with walls. But think of the walls we build up to try and protect ourselves from being hurt by others. Walls we put up to protect our pride. Walls we place to find security for our unsure hearts. And we do this because we focus on this physical earthly life, not just being concerned, but worry about tomorrow and what it will bring while saying you are just trying to plan for the future. We worry about the fluctuation of prices and how to make ends meet. We focus on our personal and physical comfort in life looking for that feeling of safety—maybe not behind a fortified city, but—having certain things, the budget not being as tight, having a clearer picture of what the future holds. Like those people of Babel who feared what spreading out would mean for them and their future, instead of trusting God’s promises we hold tightly to what makes us comfortable, what we are used to, because you don’t like change. How many think that the meaning and purpose of life is to protect yourself, your loved ones, doing the best you can to get by while you are here? Do you?

No, we aren’t necessarily building physical towers that reach to the sky. But think of the all the time, money, and energy that is spent building up a name for yourself. There’s the tower of family and the type of legacy you want to leave behind. There’s the tower of accomplishments and what you hope people will remember you by. There’s another tower of acquiring so much land, having certain things, so much money, so many experiences for your children or for yourself. How many think that having and getting those things is the meaning and purpose of life? Do you?

What we can fail to see is how futile and really small those walls and towers are. There’s a little bit of humor there in Genesis 11:5. The people of Babel were working so hard to reach the heavens, but it wasn’t even close. God has to come down to see what they were doing. Obviously, God didn’t actually need to come down in order to get a better look. The point is, their great name they were building wasn’t nearly as great as they thought it was.

Think of our own towers we try and build: great estates and possessions built up and gained in a lifetime are gone in an afternoon at an auction. Names and legacies are often

forgotten in a couple of generations with the only memory left being a tombstone. All that worrying and trying to protect oneself doesn't change the future and shows us how little control we really do have.

Then God says in v.6: **“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.”** God isn't afraid that they could actually reach the heavens and be on the same level as him. However, mankind is able to convince themselves they are on a similar level with God and they don't need to trust God. Mankind wants to believe they can do anything even bridge the gap between us and God.

But what we fail to see is how large of a gap there is between us sinners and the holy and perfect God. We aren't on the same level; we aren't even on the same field. Not only do we not stop to consider those important questions about life but we fail to grasp how offensive and awful each and every one of our sins are to God.

So what does God do? Lovingly he allows life to become difficult for his people so that his will is carried out. At Babel he confuses the languages and then he is the one who scatters the people all over the earth. Think of how terrifying that would have been not being able to communicate with those around you, the struggle of finding others who speak your language, the difficulty of picking up what you knew and were comfortable with to set off and settle in a different area. But without this mankind would have thought they did not need God and would then suffer eternally in hell. God did this not only to punish the people for their disobedience but also to teach them to trust in him for his mercy and love.

So God continues to do the same for you and me today. For someone who trusts in their physical capabilities and accomplishments he might take that away so you learn to trust in the Lord and lean not on your own reason and understanding. For someone who is worried about the amount of things, money, and possessions God might make things even tighter to teach that no matter how hard you work it is ultimately the Lord who gives you daily bread and all you need for your daily life. For someone who struggles to trust God's plan he might send more obstacles and difficulties to teach that God's Will will always be done.

The Lord says to you, “I know it's hard. I know it's difficult. But I allow it because I love you. I want you to stop looking to yourself and, instead, look to me. See your frailty, your weakness, and recognize the gap caused by your sin. It cannot be bridged by anything you do or accomplish. I know you can't reach me. So I come to you.”

And that's what he did. God again comes down to us, this time in the flesh and blood. Jesus understands the temptations to build towers that will not last; he struggled with those temptations too. But Jesus also understood and knew his purpose as well. It was to live and die on the cross in your place (as Luther wrote) to bridge the gap between us sinners and the Holy Father. With his perfect life and innocent death Jesus gives us the path to the

Father. He descends so that we may ascend from this world of sin to holiness through him. He came down so we would be raised up from this world of death to eternal life with him. And with his rising from the grave and ascending to heaven, Jesus prepares a place for you to raise you up one day to be with him in heaven.

And it is God descending on us that brings us there. Jesus had promised his disciples before he had died that he would send the Spirit of truth to testify about him. And that is what he did. After ascending into heaven, 10 days later the Spirit was sent and was poured out on Jesus' followers at Pentecost. The curse of Babel is reversed and the Spirit of God speaks through these disciples in the languages of the many people who were there so that they too would know the truth. This message of Christ crucified and risen from the dead was not only for the Jewish people, but all people of all languages.

That same Spirit continues to be poured out on us today. The Spirit comes through the Word where the Spirit testifies about Jesus who saves sinners. The Spirit testifies in the Word used with the water of baptism so you are saved. The Spirit descends and testifies through the Word used with the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper so you receive Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. The Spirit is poured out through the Word creating saving faith so with believing hearts you call on the name of the Lord and are saved.

It's that Spirit of truth poured out on us that gives us meaning and purpose in life. It's not about the towers you build that eventually will crumble and fall or your own name that eventually will be forgotten. Having been brought to faith, yours and my purpose is to give glory to God and serve your neighbor so that they too may be brought to know the name of the Lord and be saved. The Spirit speaks the truth to us so that we are able to share the truth with others. When we believe and understand this then we can truly enjoy those blessings, those experiences, those accomplishments to God's glory and the praise of His name. Amen.