Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

At the beginning of the week we were in Wellington for my Uncle’s funeral. And we stayed with our daughter and her family. And our grandson is right at the end of a stage in child development called babbling. It is when they begin talking but not with recognizable words. They seem to know exactly what they are talking about but all you can hear is babbling. It’s very cute but also a bit frustrating for everybody. Well, the Lord Jesus spoke about another type of babbling. And what He had in view were pagans whose ‘prayer’ was repeating words or phrases or meaningless sounds, over and over again. And what both of these types of babbling have in common is that the sounds are confusing and not understandable. And you have probably guessed that the origin of the word babbling is the account that begins chapter 11. For the place where the tower was built was called Babel after the confusion of languages there. And that is because Babel sounds like the Hebrew word for confused.

But what is going on here? What is this strange tale, wedged in between two, long genealogies? And what can we possibly learn from this part of Genesis? Well, just by way of information, we are almost at the end of our Genesis series. The plan was to work through just the first 11 chapters. We may come back to the remainder of the book at a later date, but it was these early and foundational chapters that we wanted to work through in this series. And that is because **they setup the problem that the rest of the Bible answers**. And that problem is a sinful, dispersed, and largely unbelieving world. So, in recent weeks we have seen God begin again with Noah. And things looked so promising with him as the righteous and blameless man. But we saw that Noah was a sinner, just like us. And there was unbelief and unrepentant sexual immorality already in his immediate family. So, Noah was not the long-promised Messiah. And the need for this long-promised Messiah becomes even more apparent with the passage before us today. But there are also lessons about how the devil works, and why there are different cultures and languages, as well as encouragement from God’s activity here, as we navigate life in an increasingly hostile world.

And the main points of the sermon arise from a word that is repeated in the Tower of Babel section; and that word is “Come.” In verse 3, the people say, “*Come, let us make bricks*…” and in verse 4 they say, “*Come, let us build ourselves a city*…” So, the focus there will be the **kingdom-defying activity of mankind**. And then in verse 7, God says, “*Come, let us go down*…” And the focus there is the **kingdom-advancing activity of God**. And we will end with some application points.

1. So, we begin with the **kingdom-defying activity** **of mankind**.
   1. And to understand what the people said in verses 4-5, about building this tower, we have to take the whole passage and context into account.
      1. After Noah and his wife and their sons and wives left the ark, God established His covenant with them, and told them to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth. God wanted little versions of Noah and his wife, those who worshipped God, to spread out across the earth. And we saw in 9:19 what appeared to be a description of covenant obedience. For we read there that from Noah and his sons, “*the whole people of the earth were dispersed*.” And dispersed means spread out.
      2. But everything that follows explains how this dispersal came about. It began with **Noah’s fall into sin**, and the sin of his son, Ham, and the curse and blessings that Noah prophesied in relation to His grandson and sons. And the prophecy of Noah spoke of a growing hostility or enmity between the descendants of Canaan and the descendants of Shem, as well as a time when the descendants of each his sons come together in the church of Jesus Christ. And our passage begins the unfolding of Noah’s prophecy. It explains **how the dispersal or spreading out of the descendants of Noah came about**. And it was *not* covenant obedience. In fact, it was in fact the polar opposite.
      3. And the way to understand our passage is that despite coming after chapter 10, **the Tower of Babel section explains how chapter 10 came about**. For notice at the end of the section of names and nations and places in relation to each of Noah’s sons, we read: “*From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations …These are the sons of Ham (or Shem), by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations*.” So, chapter 10 is describing the world *after* the Tower of Babel. For that is where the languages came into being. Before the Tower of Babel, everyone spoke the same language, as 11:1 states. And 11:4 explains that the people did not want to disperse. But the Tower of Babel is where God introduced different languages, and “*dispersed [the people] over the face of the earth*.” So, that explains the relationship between chapter 10 and the Tower of Babel episode. The people were dispersed over the whole earth *not* as a result of covenant obedience, but as a result of God’s intervention. This is how the next phase of God’s plan of salvation began.
   2. And we will come to the tower episode in a moment, but just **a few more quick observations about chapter 10** before we do that.
      1. Chapter 10 describes **70 descendants of Noah and 70 languages**. And 70 is the biblical number signifying fullness. So, it is history, but it isn’t a strict genealogy, as such. Indeed, it includes references to individuals, but also to nations, and places in the list. And I will leave it to you to look up each in a Bible commentary. But Egypt, for example, is obvious. Cush refers to the rest of Africa below Egypt. Gomer is probably the ancestor of the Gauls or the French, the Galatian people of the New Testament, and maybe even the Welsh! But the rest is up to you. It is a fascinating study.
      2. And the reason comparatively little is said about **the** **sons of Japheth** is that they basically had nothing to do with the people of Israel in the Old Testament.
      3. In contrast, **Ham’s descendants**, and especially the descendants of Canaan, were a constant thorn in the side of God’s people. You will see many recognizable names from the Old Testament. So, we are told much more about them.
      4. And **Shem is the line of promise**. It begins with the mention of Eber. And Eber was the forebear of Abraham. And it is highly likely that the name Hebrew comes from the name of Eber. So, again, this is the line of promise; this is the line of Messiah.
      5. And just two more names worth singling out:
         1. Chapter 10:25 tell us about **Peleg**, one of the sons of Eber. And we are told that it was “*during his days that the earth was divided*.” And that is a reference to the Tower of Babel episode.
         2. Chapter 10:8-12 describe **Nimrod** – the “*mighty man*” or “*mighty hunter*.” And he must have been an extraordinary individual. The reference to hunting has wild animals in view. And we saw that after the flood there were way more animals than humans. So, Nimrod was a protector of human life. And he did this also through empire-building. We are told that he founded the Babel of chapter 11, and Nineveh. And Babel eventually became Babylon. And if you know your Old Testament, you will know that Nineveh in Assyria and Babylon feature prominently in the story of Israel. But *six* other cities or kingdoms are mentioned as having been stablished by Nimrod. He was clearly a man of incredible strength and ability. And he did many things in service of mankind. But Nimrod’s kingdoms were not about bringing glory to God. It was the kingdom of Nimrod and unbelief and idol gods and social good that Nimrod wanted to build.

* 1. So, with all that in view, let’s turn our attention to **the kingdom of Nimrod in Babel that is described in the first part of chapter 11**. Verse 2 explains that the people migrated east and “*found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there*.” It’s the same plain referred to in 10:10. And although Nimrod is not mentioned by name in chapter 11, he must have been the architect and leader of what is described in verses 3-4, the decision to build bricks, which speaks of permanence and solidity, and the decision to build “*a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the earth*.”
     1. Now, there is nothing wrong with cities. In fact, Jerusalem is later called the city of God. And the New Heavens and New Earth are described in Revelation as the Holy City. But like the city that Cain built back in chapter 4, this was a **secular** city. This was a city of opposition to God and His commandments. This city had nothing to do with honouring the name of God; it was about pride in human achievement.
     2. And the reference to “*with its top in the heavens*” probably has false religion in view. Yes, it was surely a tall tower, but what is most in view is that the top of the tower was a place of false worship.
        1. Can anyone tell us what city is identified in Revelation as the symbol or epitome of false religion? It is **Babylon**, which was, originally, Babel. Revelation 17:5 says, “*Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations*.”
        2. And if you read Roman 1’s description of how unbelievers worship the creature or creation, rather than the Creator, and God giving them up to dishonourable passions, it all sounds exactly like the false religion that flourished in Babylon.
        3. And one other notable aspect of Babylonian paganism was astrology, or the worship of the stars. And this too fits with the description of this tower with its “*top in the heavens*,” or close to the realm of stars.
        4. Thus, false religion and unbelief are in view here.
     3. And let’s pause and think about all this for a moment. **Do you remember the original sin for which Satan was cast out of heaven?** It was pride. And what was the temptation that he offered to Eve in the Garden of Eden? You shall be like God! Pride. And what do the people want to do here at Babel? Make a name for themselves. Pride. And what was another part of Satan’s temptation of Eve? Did God really say? In other words, you will be much happier of you disobey Him. And here it is the same; God had commanded the people to disperse, but Satan had convinced them that they will be happier if they do not disperse. And Satan’s original temptation of Eve was also about worship – don’t worship God; worship this forbidden piece of fruit, which, ultimately, meant worshipping Satan. And here it was the same, worship the stars and worship sex and worship yourself and worship stuff, which was, ultimately, worshipping Satan!
        1. And you know what? **His tactics have not changed in 6000 years**! They are the same things that he lays before everyone, each day – pride, rather than humility, disobeying the commands of God in order to be happy, rather than the hard but truly rewarding work of obeying God, and worshipping other gods, or sex, or self, or stuff, rather than loving Him with all our heart, mind, body, and soul.
        2. And as we saw when we looked at Cain’s city in chapter 4, these things characterize the secular world we live in today, especially in the West. There is lots of concern for advancing the happiness and well-being of all people. And enormous amounts of money are spent on solving social ills. And monuments and buildings and institutions and empires are built. But none of it is to glorify God. It is pride and false religion. What is rejected is the reality of sin as the root cause of all that is wrong in the world, and in each person, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as the only way to be saved and to inherit eternal life in the holy city of God.

1. So, that is the kingdom-defying activity of mankind. But next we see the **kingdom-advancing activity** **of God** in verses 5-9.
   1. And there is a kind of grace here, congregation. For God would have been fully entitled to do flood-number-two. For this is pretty much the whole world in open rebellion against Him, again! But He had promised in chapter 9 not to destroy the world again with a flood. And so, instead, He intervened; He created the circumstances that led them do what He had commanded them to do in the first place. And this begins in verse 5 where “*the Lord came down to see the city and the tower*.”
      1. And this is not in any way to suggest that the Lord could not see from heaven or was oblivious to what was happening, such that He had to come down to see for Himself. This is another **anthropomorphism** – God being described like a man – to help us understand the God who really is beyond our full understanding.
      2. And note also the deliberate and effective **humour** in the anthropomorphism. The people have built a tower “*with its top in the heavens!*” Wow! What an accomplishment! But the Lord has to come down to see it :-) In other words, it just aint that great!
      3. But because of what happened back in chapter 6, where “*the wickedness of man was very great on earth, and that every intention of the thoughts f his heart was only evil continually*,” the Lord knew what would happen if He did not intervene – another universal rebellion of unbelief and wickedness. And so, to advance His plan of salvation, which is to establish Israel and everything about her as His chosen people, and, ultimately, from where Messiah will come, He acted to bring about the separation. And we know this because that is what the next part of chapter 11 is about; the line that leads to Abraham and faith and, ultimately, Messiah Jesus! But it needed the separation of the nations.
      4. And God accomplished this by confusing the languages of the people, so that they were forced to disperse across the face of the world. And the result, as we saw, was the nations and languages and clans and tribes described in chapter 10.
   2. Now, in view of all this, there are several applications that we do well to consider, as we draw to a close.
      1. The first one is cosmic or global. And it is that **the Lord reigns**! We have seen that Nimrod was a mighty empire builder. And today too, there are institutions and governments and organizations and ideologies, more and more of which are global in scale, that are opposed to the kingdom of Christ. And don’t read too much into the following list; it is just symbolic of the sorts of entities that we hear all around us. So, whether it’s what we call transgenderism, or the WEF or WHO, or the whole climate change movement, or the United Nations, or global corporations, etc., they are like empires that just seem to steam-roll everything and everyone in their paths. And we know what is behind it all – the same entity that was behind Babel – Satan and his armies. It is why **Ephesians 6:11-12** warns us to “*Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*.”But listen to what we read in **1 Corinthians 15:24-25**: “*Then comes the end, when [Jesus] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet*.” The empires of the world will *not* triumph; Jesus Christ will triumph. Sooner or later, He will act to crush ‘empires,’ and preserve His church and advance His kingdom. So, do not give in to despair. Be ever hopeful and trusting and confident!
      2. And secondly, the result of the Lord’s intervention was **the separation of the peoples into nations and languages**. And as I said at the beginning of the sermon, this sets up the problem that the rest of the Bible answers, which is a sinful, dispersed, and largely unbelieving world. And this will begin with the rest of chapter 11 and chapter 12 as the focus zooms in to the line of promise and faith, from which Messiah would come.
         1. But before we say a little more about God’s plan of salvation, let’s think about a practical implication of the reality of different cultures and languages. Do you know what the first and greatest commandment in our world today is? It is: **Thou shalt not be racist**. Adultery and any other sexual immorality are fine, because it’s just how you identify or what your genetics make you do. And murder of unborn children in the womb by abortion or of old people who are dying anyway by euthanasia is fine, too. And we could carry on and excuse away all the rest of *God’s* commandments, but *thou shalt not be racist*.
            1. And let’s just say right away that **racism is a wicked sin**. To look down upon a person or denigrate them or make jokes about them because of their skin colour or cultural background is absolutely wrong. We must take great care not to assume things about people because of things like skin colour or cultural background.
            2. But the solution to this problem is not Critical Race Theory or understanding systemic racism; the solution is to recognize that **the very idea of race is unbiblical**. There is only one race – the human race – all descended from our original parents – Adam and Eve. We may have different skin colour or cultural backgrounds or languages or accents, but we are human beings, created in the image of God.
            3. And just as the Lord Jesus reached across boundaries of sex and ethnicity and social and religious taboos to love and care for and eat with and touch His fellow human beings, so must we, especially when it comes to sharing the gospel.
            4. And so, if you look around this room, you will see different skin colours and hear different languages and accents. *Praise the Lord*! That is how it should be in the church of Christ. And in no way is what I am saying a call for us to all be the same. Cultural diversity is something to be enjoyed and celebrated. I mean, I think we would all agree that our shared lunches have gone to a new level because of the variety of foods that different cultures contribute :-) But I once heard a minister ask this question of the members of his congregation: **What is the colour of your hospitality?** Do you make an effort to invite people with different cultural backgrounds to your house? Do you talk to them after church? You should. They are fellow human beings, but, more importantly, they are your brothers and sisters in Christ.
         2. But coming back to God’s plan of salvation, last week we noticed how Acts 8, 9, and 10 describe descendants of the three sons of Noah becoming parts of one church of God through faith in Christ. Well, **Acts 2 is the resolution of Genesis 10-11**.
            1. For in Acts 2 we read about people from a whole bunch of nations, who all spoke different languages, hearing the Gospel preached by the Apostles who miraculously spoke in the tongues or languages of all the different people, such that they all heard the gospel. And the result was that 3000 people were added to the church that day. It truly was Babel reversed! And through the preaching of the gospel in the different nations and languages of the world, since that day, the Lord has been including more and more sons and daughters of Adam and Eve in the church of Christ. And it is one reason to generously support the sending of missionaries and the work of Bible translation.
            2. But further to this, as we heard earlier in **Revelation 7**, when the Lord Jesus comes again, there will stand before Him “*a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*,” who will worship Him through all eternity. And you know what? There will only be one language in the new heavens and new earth! And we are practicing for that day today, as we gather for worship, with our different cultural backgrounds, and worship Him in Spirit and truth.

So, by way of conclusion, **how can a person be included in that great heavenly multitude**? Well, that has to do with one more passage of Scripture that begins with the word “Come.” We find it in **Matthew 11:28-30**, where Jesus said, “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*.” Have you come to Jesus in repentance and faith? For He is the only way to eternal life. If not, please, do so today! Amen.