

## Genesis 11:1-9

The Great Flood took place about a century ago. Noah is still very much alive, and so are his three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. But Noah's heart is heavy, for Ham and his descendants despise him and the family of Shem - who are the true church on earth. They drive Shem and his descendants out of their land, and they begin to build a city and a tower for the purpose of making a name for themselves. They do not want the name of Noah, their father. They reject his church and way of worship. They even persecute the true church of Shem and Noah. They build a tower "*in the heavens*" to set up their own church separate from Noah and Shem.

This is what happens when wickedness goes unpunished. The wicked become more and more brazen and bold. They claim that God is on their side. And the true church suffers, crying out to God who appears to be sleeping.

We see this today in our world, in our very society. The wicked are becoming bolder while the true church is struggling to survive. The longer God waits to punish wickedness, the more severe His punishment. The children of men, Ham's descendants, are back to building their city and their tower today in defiance of God and against God's true church. How will it turn out? Let's see how it turned out at that time.

God came down, it says, to see the city and the tower they were building, and He inflicted a punishment on them that was far worse than even the Great Flood one hundred years earlier. He confused their language so that they could not understand each other - for this punishment continues forever until the end of time. Now Ham's descendants, rather than coming together, begin to hate each other and fight each other. Misunderstandings, confusion, violence, strife, discord. Were it not for this punishment, the whole world today would be unified - except for the true church of God. Christians would be persecuted just as Noah and Shem were then. But today there would be one nation, one people, one language, had God not sent this punishment.

But now, instead, Americans, Chinese, and Russians have tension. North Korea and South Korea are constantly at each other, and so are many other nations and peoples. Wars break out. Skirmishes take place. Misunderstandings create divisions within families and within congregations. All this flows from the punishment at Babel. Everyone was affected: Ham's descendants, but also Japheth's, and even Shem's. People are dispersed into all the earth ready to fight each other at the drop of a hat.

But there's more. Ham's descendants didn't care about the true worship of God. But what about Japheth's? They were not involved in building the tower of Babel, but now they are cut off from Shem and Noah; from the true church on earth. Through Shem will come Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, King David, and eventually Jesus Christ. But the descendants of Japheth have no knowledge of this. They no longer speak the Hebrew language. They no longer are anywhere near the true church and the true worship of the living God.

This should be of great interest to you, because you and I, my friends, are descendants of Japheth. What Ham and his children did at Babel years ago against God caused God to send our ancestors away from Noah and Shem; away from His very presence. The consequence being that you and I would be eternally damned, for we would know nothing of Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation. We would not have

Holy Baptism or Holy Communion. We would have a place to worship, but our worship would be false, for we would not have the true God.

This would be our lot in life except that God intervened. He stepped in through the great event which we celebrate today: Pentecost. Before Pentecost, the true worship of God remained with the descendants of Shem. But after Pentecost, the Holy Spirit brought the Gospel into all the earth. We see the sign of this as the Apostles, on the Day of Pentecost, are able to speak in other languages - those languages which were created at Babel.

The time of punishment is at an end. Now is the time for the message of salvation in Jesus Christ to be carried to Japheth's descendants wherever they have been scattered in the world. Yes, and also the descendants of Ham. There is no distinction. God has bound up all sinners under the Law so that He might have mercy on all.

My fellow believers in Christ, you are the true church on earth. Though you are descendants of Japheth, and not Shem, God has included you in His true family by bringing you into Christ Jesus. How do you know this? Because on Pentecost Sunday the Apostle Peter pointed his hearers to Baptism. In Baptism a sinner is made to be a member of the true church and belongs to Jesus whether he is a descendant of Shem, Ham, or Japheth. The punishment God inflicted at Babel is no match for the mercy He pours out in the waters of Holy Baptism. Once there was a dividing wall between you and God; between you and God's true church. But now in Christ Jesus you are brought near to Him and are received by Him in love.

So we have before us today two events in history: Babel and Pentecost. The first, God's judgment. The second, His outpouring of grace. It seems like a "no-brainer" question to ask, but which of these two do you want to grab hold of and make your own: Babel or Pentecost? We say "Pentecost," but then we often live in the spirit of Babel. The sin of Ham and his descendants dwells in us by nature, from birth. One common sin infects us all. That tower of Babel is no longer on the plain of Shinar, but our Old Adam erects it daily within our very hearts.

What I mean is that you and I, just like the people at Babel, are stubborn when it comes to God and His church. We resist His claim on us. We despise the time we have to give up for Him. We grow weary of His worship. We, too, want to make a name for ourselves as they did. Who needs Noah and Shem! Who needs Luther and Walther! We'll become our own teachers. We have "itching ears," as the Apostle Paul puts it. We belong to the true church through Holy Baptism, but we resist the teachers God gives us and find those teachers from the world who will scratch our itching ears.

But you are not people of Babel. You are God's people in Christ because of Pentecost. We all speak the same language - the language of the Gospel of forgiveness. We live in that forgiveness and we embrace others with it. Misunderstandings do not need to divide and separate us from one another. We are not people of Babel. We come together in Christ and work things out because we are people of Pentecost.

If you, or someone you know, is resisting coming together; resisting God's name and worship; refusing to reconcile and be at peace; refusing to forgive, it's because Babel, and not Pentecost, is still in control. But we do not live under God's punishment anymore. We live under grace. God forgives you. That's what Pentecost is all about. Jesus went to the cross to die for you, friend, and because of Pentecost the Holy Spirit now gives this blessing to you. Babel cannot control you with its fear, punishments, and divisions. You have a merciful God who, in love, has brought you into His family - the family of Christ, where peace, unity, and forgiveness reign. Amen.