

## Genesis 11:1-9

“I refuse to believe in a God who would condemn the person who has never even heard of Jesus.” Every now and then I encounter individuals who express themselves in this way. One such individual told me that God would not be so unfair to damn such a person to hell. My response to him was, “And yet the Gospel teaches that God damned His Son in our place, even though Jesus was without sin...doesn’t sound very ‘fair’ to me.” It’s interesting that many of the same people who sit in their little corners criticizing God, do not lift a finger or contribute even one dollar to help spread the good news of Jesus to those who, they say, are perishing unfairly.

Rather than tell God what He can, and cannot do, we will look at today’s text which puts its finger on the problem. The reason why people have been, and are now, perishing without any knowledge of Jesus Christ is not because God acted cruelly and unfairly, but because we sinners have brought this curse upon ourselves.

Our text is the Tower of Babel, but the story begins about one hundred years before that with Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, coming out of the ark after the Great Flood. The only one of those sons who, along with some of his descendants, continued in the faith of their father, Noah, was Shem. Japheth was not a bad son, but his family members soon forgot the worship of God and the promise of the Savior. Ham is another story altogether. He acted shamefully, and his sons and grandsons walked even further in the direction of his wickedness.

It was the descendants of Ham who built the Tower of Babel, and they did this in defiance of God. God had commanded them to fill the earth. Instead they said, “*Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower...lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.*” God told them one thing; they did the exact opposite to defy Him. The sons of Ham rejected the worship of God, replacing His church with their own. They built the tower with its top “*in the heavens*” it says. This was no office building, no lookout tower. It was to be their place of worship. They rejected the worship that Noah had taught them--making sacrifices to the one, true God. They would worship their own way, in their own place, in a tower they had erected. And they would not worship the name of the true God. “*Come,*” they said, “*let us make a name for ourselves.*” Ham’s children were not about to recall the promise of God to Adam and Eve, the promise of Him who would be born of a woman, who would save sinners from eternal condemnation. They named themselves. They had no need of a Savior that God would name. They could build cities and towers.

They were gods. Who needed the God of their father, Noah?

God had destroyed mankind once on account of their wickedness. And He promised that He would never again flood the entire earth. But He had to do something. Their wickedness was so great that God says, “*Nothing they propose to do will be impossible for them.*” Picture a great roaring fire sweeping away forests, towns, even cities in its path. Such was the wickedness of the children of Ham. Nothing could stand up to them. They were devouring everything with their open defiance of God. Even the children of Shem who feared the Lord were in the path of this evil blazing fire.

God put out the fire once with the mighty floodwaters. But no more. From now on, wickedness would grow, and not stop growing and spreading until it filled the entire world. And then the end would come--the Last Day, the Judgment. The first time that wickedness filled the earth, the Flood of Judgment came. The next time the earth fills up with wickedness, Christ will return in Judgment.

And so when God saw the defiance of sinful men with their Tower of Babel, He acted not to put the fire out, but to disperse it, to put a stop to this great blaze that was quickly spreading by smacking it with one great blow and sending the burning embers all over the world. He did this by confusing their language. In an instant, without warning, those working on building the city and tower could not understand each other. They began to speak, some in Chinese, others in Japanese; some in French, others in German; some in English, others in Russian. Every language spoken in the world today came suddenly at the Tower of Babel. Arguments would have erupted. Fights would have broken out. They were forced to stop their work and spread out and fill the earth.

Now, instead of one, great, evil blazing fire consuming everything with its wickedness, there were a thousand glowing embers all scattered over the entire earth. These fires would also grow, but it would take time. Time for God to call Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Time for Him to lead His people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Time for Jesus to be born, to suffer, die, and rise again. Time for you to be born and be baptized into Christ, and grow into a mature Christian, and lead your family to Christ.

Even now we see the fires of wickedness building. Once again the earth is filling up with the defiance of God, with open rebellion, with the rejection of authority. Do you think the scandals in our government as of late are a mere coincidence? The days are becoming more and more evil. The fire is growing and consuming all in its path. Unlawful divorce, homosexuality, abortion, pornography, couples living together apart from marriage, church attendance becoming less and less, pastors compromising the Faith and preaching to fill their pews instead of preaching the truth of God--His Law and Gospel.

And make no mistake--the fire is also within us. The same sin and wickedness we see in the world, and which we detest so much, has a home within our own hearts. Which is why we also commit sins of weakness. We fall and stumble as Christians every single day because the defiance of God and the rebelliousness and stubbornness out there lives also in here.

But on this day we say, with grateful hearts, thank God for Pentecost! Thank God for sending His Spirit into all the world through faithful preachers and teachers of Christ so that we who have been scattered into all the earth are drawn together into Jesus, safe within His church. Were it not for Pentecost, you and I would be among those who are perishing without any knowledge of Jesus Christ. But what happened at the Tower of Babel also took place at Pentecost. At Babel the people were forced to spread out and fill the earth. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to fill the disciples, and He led them and their message of good news in Jesus into all the earth. At Babel the world was cursed, for the people who filled the earth did not have the good news of the Savior in their own language. At Pentecost the world was blessed, for now the Word of the Cross is seen making its way into every nation, every people, every language.

At Babel the fires of wickedness spread into all the earth, but now because of Pentecost, many of those fires are being put out. God will never again flood the entire world, but He does come in mercy to flood poor, lost sinners one person at a time through Holy Baptism. The water in this font will not flood the entire earth, but it was used to put the fire out within your heart.

Before you were baptized, you spoke a different language. You had a strange tongue. Not one that praised God and called on the name of Jesus. But when the water and word of baptism was poured over you, putting out the fire of wickedness in your heart by forgiving your sin, you were given a new language to speak. The language of faith in Jesus, prayer, and worship. The language of love for the Lord and for His church. The language of true repentance. Once you were a part of the fires of

wickedness which are born of sin, but now being baptized into Christ, your fire is put out. Your baptism into Christ was a flood of God's grace. He pulled you out of the fire. He washed you of every sinful stain. He declares you holy and innocent for the sake of Jesus.

You see, Jesus did not cry "Unfair!" when God let the fires of wickedness consume Him. They arrested Him. They condemned Him. They crucified Him. He was engulfed in the fires of hell. And all this He did for you. Because of the cross, you have a Savior from sin, death, and hell. Because of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit through water, word, bread, and wine makes you a believer, kept safe from the fires within Jesus' church.

After a fire has destroyed a home, it is sad to look at all the devastation. Looking at our own past--at all the sorrow our sins have caused over time, all the devastation the fires of our own sins have done--we are speechless and can only repent. God forgives. He forgives you. He forgives your past. He forgives because you have a Savior by the name of Jesus. This is the message that is spreading into all the earth--which is also for you. Thank God for the cross. And thank God for Pentecost. Amen.