

Live in a foreign country and you'll encounter challenges. Someone was recently telling me about one. What do you do when a light bulb goes out? You go and get a new one. But you find in this country the hardware store is set up differently. All the aisles are behind the counter. The customer has to tell the employee what they want, and the employee fetches it for them. Can you sense the problem? You speak some of their language, but not enough. The clerk can't understand your English. What do we call this dilemma at which you've arrived? The language barrier.

Someone has created a cutting edge innovation to help:  *"the t-shirt that knows no language barrier."* (A chart of icons printed on the t-shirt displays common items.) I'm amazed! What can't a t-shirt do?! What do you think? A tourist might get by with this. But to actually live and function among a people of a different language, you're going to need a much larger t-shirt... or another solution.

There are many relatively harmless language-barrier encounters. Some exchanges even turn out humorous. But many are nothing to laugh at. Have you ever seen where? Confusion builds into frustration. Frustration boils into anger. And anger escalates into conflict. Or, what about suspicion? "Are they talking about me? What are they up to?" Seeds like that left to grow can form into paranoia and lead to tension, even conflict. Think of all the trouble and pain in our world that to one degree or another is connected back to the Language barrier.

Martin Luther observed that the step God took here in Genesis ch.11 was larger in impact than when He sent the world-covering Flood, which we studied last Sunday. In what way? [pause] Every generation since has felt the effects from what took place on the plain of Shinar so long ago. Why would God initiate – cause – the language barrier, with the fallout being so far-reaching? That's a legitimate question. The answer is: A worse problem had arisen, and this was the answer. Wow! [pause] Chew on that for a moment.

Here's an example. A father tells his child, "Don't play on the train tracks" or "Don't walk in front of the swing set." The child after a short while ends up headed right where they are told not to be. As a train careens into sight *or* as hundreds of pounds of humanity hurtles through the air toward their child, the father rushes into action. As the child is about to step to their doom, the father pulls the child back, averting disaster. The child walks away with some painful scratches and a few bruises in the aftermath. The eyes of the child look up toward the father. Tears well up and overflow. The child's eyes are filled with more than that - questions, even some anger, shows through from the pain the child is feeling. Imagine you're there. What do you say to the child in defense of his father's action which brought this pain? "Your father was rescuing you, child, from much greater harm."

Genesis ch.11 records a day our God rescued humanity from the greater harm. Yes, humanity walked away from the site with the Language barrier and the pain that accompanies it. But let's see the crisis that led our Lord to intervene in this way:

Read vs.1-4. 1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people 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; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

They set out to build the first "skyscraper." Literally, a tower with "its head (or top) in the heavens." Now don't get confused. The trouble here is not the structure itself. God raises no objection in His Word to buildings over a certain height. We have to dig deeper to find where the problem lies on the plain of Shinar. The Lord uncovers the attitudes of the people's hearts at this building site. What was their purpose? What was driving their desire for this project?

Two things stand out. One becomes clear in the people's last words in vs.4. You need a little context. The Lord had given the people after the Flood a command: "Fill the earth" (9:1). People here, in 1 of the 2 founding purposes for their building project, state the goal: "we won't be scattered – we won't fill the earth – we want to all stay right here." What do you call that when God says to do one thing, and people do the opposite? Sin. They were taking a defiant stand against God's will. Left unaddressed, think where this self-chartered course would take them in their relationship with God.

Keep in view: This was a crisis for all humanity. This was the world's population united in this goal of rebellion against God's clear word. And the crisis is magnified when we go back and see the other goal of the people. They set out to: make a name for themselves.

It's been summed up like this: the people at Babel had "sustenance, security and status" as their goals. And here's the foundational issue for all of those: Where were the people turning, what source were they trusting, to provide all these things? You hear it in their own words, right? "Come, let **us** build for **ourselves** a city... so that **we** may make a name for **ourselves**..."

Their own power. To bring about their own achievements. Arriving at their own renown. God and His word ignored. And a power grab made for God's glory. Pride and rebellion stand as the foundation of this project in Genesis ch.11.

The devil doesn't need to get people to bow down to him or to fall down in front of an idol, if he can only convince us to rise up and strut and beat our own chest and live to boast and to glory in all we can accomplish.

Has much really changed in the world over all the years since this event (Gen. 11)?

A quote of BF Skinner in his book "Beyond Freedom and Dignity" - in the closing sentence - states: "We have not yet seen what man can make of man." "What man make of man" was precisely where the builders in Genesis ch.11 were headed.

Today we have a label we give to this view: humanism. Humanism says: Believe in yourself. You can do anything you set your mind to. Or, at least, we – collectively – can do anything we set our will to. How often do you hear those types of concepts advanced? You know what you should think to that, right? What gobbledygook!

You know what the most flawed part of such thinking is? What we have so often set our minds and will to do has been sin. We've shown that the many times we've ignored God and His word, turned to our own ways, or trusted in our own strength.

Where does that leave humanity, if left to our own efforts, in the most foundational relationship in life, that between our Maker/God and ourselves? There's a barrier that must be torn down. Sin separates from our holy God.

It's a barrier we have no power to get past. We can't climb or hurdle or break through sin. Here we come to the ultimate failure of "humanism." "Believe in yourself" – phooey! "You can do anything you set your mind to" – bah! Nonsense! Jesus makes that clear when he explains: "It's impossible for a man to get to God by his own effort." We cannot make ourselves even one step closer to God. Where humanism says, "Let's see what man can make of man," God says, "Man, see what you've made of yourself, and admit what mankind can't make happen!" You cannot remove sin. You can't save yourself.

Just spend a moment more here, before we go on to vs.5-9. I want us all to see... the deception and temptation that is at work in our culture, in our present day, is as old as Satan's first attack. Yet it has not lost any of potency. It may come packaged differently, but it amounts to the same lies: 1. "You can be like God" – the height of knowledge, power and glory are within your grasp; or, 2. "You don't need God" – all the potential you need is found within you. So some false religions say man can reach up to the height of God.

Some false belief systems, like humanism, remove God and make man responsible for himself and to himself. Either way, what do you have? People's idol becomes themselves – people make themselves their own god, taking God's glory for themselves.

But "Glory to man in the highest!" will always fail.

Read vs.5-9. 5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people 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.

What would the world without the language barrier look like? Geneses ch.11 gives us a glance into just such a time, when the world all spoke one language. And what do we see? The worst confusion was already at work. The confusion of pride, the confusion of self-reliance. People were running away from God.

So the Lord took action. Note what name for God is used in vs.5-9. It is same name recorded when He sought Adam and Eve after their rebellion. It is the name that highlights His faithfulness and love. In His love, look what the Lord does here...

The Lord went to his work of smashing down towers. He leaves the building on Shinar's plain untouched. It's towers of pride and rebellion – the kind raised in human hearts – that God has his heart set upon breaking apart.

There the people of the world stood united. There they built a grand city and tower. And yet for all the security and stability that they sought through their project, every step further in was taking them a step further from real security, lasting stability. They stood on the precipice of disaster. For as they stood there, and as they built there, they were running away from God.

So the Lord confused their speech, separating them into different languages. Is His intent to harm them? No. His purpose is clear: to limit the harm caused by their own evil devices. The Lord was acting for the people's good. This barrier he set down prevented them from running to certain death. It's people's souls that the Lord is most concerned about. Left unchecked, their present sinful actions would have led the collective population of the world further and further into rebellion and pride. The Lord steps in, and...

What happened to their plans? Their building project? Their goal, in rebellion to God's will, to not be scattered? Their goal to make a name for themselves, instead of acknowledging God? It was all futile; it all failed. The unfinished tower stood as a reminder of this to the people. The very name of the site, Babel, spoke a reminder of this for the generations to come. Babel is a play on words with the Hebrew verb which means "to confuse."

And we are left with some concrete reminders from this page of God's Word... to turn us away from such sins of pride and rebellion. If we make our own strength our god, we're wrong. If our purpose in life becomes our own glory, we're wrong. If we act like we know better than God what's good for us, we're wrong. If we think we can rise up to God's level or live independent from Him, we're wrong.

The Lord uses His Word to tear down the sins that rise up in our hearts, but He also uses this Word to plant and to build faith in Him – faith that turns to Him and trusts in Him to knock down the sin-barrier and bring us to the stability and joy of life with Him.

Glance now from the uncompleted project on the plain of Shinar, and look on to a plan completed on a hill called Golgotha. There towers a cross. There hung the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And though he dies there, His

project and plan didn't end unfinished. For from that tower of the cross, before he died, he shouted: 'The battle is finished! Sin is paid for, in full!' Then on Easter He rose back to life.

This cross towers over the wrecks of time, and gives the ultimate proof: You have a Father in heaven who has rescued you from all your failures in life. You have a Savior, God the Son, who loves you so much He came down from heaven, lowered himself, took on flesh, humbled himself, even to death. Why? In order to be the Way for us to him. He removed the barrier that stood between God and fallen humanity by carrying the wall of our sin to His death. He is back victorious from death. He lives. And everyone who trusts Him, who trusts in His saving work in our place, is assured: You too will live eternally, sheltered in perfect joy and peace. That's the way. He is the Way. Remain founded on Jesus, your faith in him. Be strengthened in faith. And overflow with thankfulness. Amen.