

**"FROM BABEL TO PENTECOST"**

(Genesis 11:6-9; Acts 2:1-2, 5-6)

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--I: THE PROBLEM--

1. [11am ONLY... Read Scriptures: Genesis 11:6-9; Acts 2:1-2, 5-6 and Pray]
2. There once was a man who saw his neighbor struggling with a heavy, bulky washing machine in front of his house, so he decided to go help him out. The owner was very thankful, so he got on one side of the appliance, with the neighbor getting on the other, and they both struggled and struggled to get it to move, but to no avail. Finally, they both just stopped, exhausted and frustrated.  
 The neighbor spoke up: *"At this rate, we'll NEVER be able to get this washer in the house!"* ...To which the owner glared at his neighbor in surprise and said, *"IN the house?! I'm trying to move it OUT of the house!"*
3. Well, isn't that typical of human communication? ...Often so distorted and filtered by our own assumptions and presuppositions that turn out to be plain wrong!

A--As a society, we've actually experienced a lot of this in recent years, where pride, prejudice, mistrust, and simple misunderstanding have often worked against effective communication between people.<sup>1</sup>

B--That's why I honestly believe that the most powerful weapon that evil has in its arsenal against humanity is *not* anger, hate or violence, but ***mis-communication*** -- it seems to be the root of most all *other* problems we face, whether in our families, marriages, communities, churches, and even in our country and world.

4. Of course, the present isn't the only time in history that humans have faced a communication crisis.

A--[9am ONLY -- Let's listen to a story from the Bible describing one of these... (from Genesis 11:6-9), "6 And the LORD said, "There is now one people and they all have one language. This is what they have begun to do, and now all that they plan to do will be possible for them. 7 Come, let's go down and mix up their language there so they won't understand each other's language." 8 Then the LORD dispersed them from there over all of the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 Therefore, it is named Babel, because there the LORD mixed up the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD dispersed them over all the earth."]

B--[BOTH services...] This/The story from Genesis 11 tells the story of humanity wanting to build a great tower to the heavens (called the "Tower of Babel") as proof that we didn't need God anymore.

C--But it goes on to say that in our self-centered and prideful construction of this tower, pride, prejudice, mistrust, and paranoia resulted in a form of miscommunication that scattered people throughout the world with different languages, leaving us unable to effectively communicate with each other.

--II: THE SOLUTION--

5. [9am ONLY... Yet, there's a second scripture I want to read today that can change all of this... the story of the gift of God's Holy Spirit, found in Acts 2:1-2 & 5-6)... *"1 When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting.... 5 There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered. They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages."*]

[11am ONLY... Yet, in today's second scripture from Acts 2, we find something in the story of Pentecost that can change all of that... the gift of God's Holy Spirit.

A--Think about the two stories, and notice that everything described in Acts 2 is a mirror *opposite* of what we find in Genesis 11:

<u>Babel</u>	<u>Pentecost</u>
Prideful humanity tries to <i>be</i> God	Humanity gathers, realizing they're <i>not</i> God
Humans build tower <i>UP</i> to <i>reach</i> God	God sends Holy Spirit <i>DOWN</i> to <i>reach</i> humanity
God causes <i>confusion</i> of communication	God sends Holy Spirit to bring about <i>understanding</i>
God scatters the nations and they begin to mistrust each other	God brings (Vss. 5-6) <i>"persons from every nation" together</i> in reconciliation and love.

B--In other words, through the gift of His Holy Spirit at Pentecost (that we're celebrating today), God gave to every single person a *potential* for communication that had previously been destroyed and distorted by our self-centeredness and pride.

C--Notice I said that God's Holy Spirit gives us communication *"potential"* -- e.g., it's *not* automatic just because we're Christians or believe in God.

1--No. Even though you and I live in a time *after* Pentecost, many people today (including many of us as *Christians*) are still living in Babel.

2--We still allow pride, prejudice, mistrust, paranoia, & selfishness to distort and cause problems in our communication with one another. <sup>2</sup>

6. So, in the time we've got left, I'd like to offer two observations from today's story of Pentecost that I believe can help us better communicate.

## --III--

7. First, Pentecost invites us to experience **a better way of SPEAKING.**

A--Remember that at Babel the people gathered to glorify *themselves*, but at Pentecost they gathered to glorify *God*.<sup>3</sup>

B--So let me ask...Does *WHAT* you say and *HOW* you say it glorify GOD (whether you say it *verbally* or in what you *write* in your social media posts)?

1--Ephesians 4:29, (CEB) "*Don't let any foul words come out of your mouth. Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community so that it benefits those who hear what you say.*"<sup>4</sup>

2--Do your speech and social media posts reflect "*what is helpful... to those who hear/read?*" Does it "*build others up*" and display respect for others?

C--Well, that means we've got to get rid of things like jokes about a person's skin color, politics, sexuality, and theology -- we don't have to *agree* with a person's beliefs or lifestyle in order to treat them like human beings!

D--It means, too, that we have to get rid of rumors and gossip -- because even if we are "*right/correct*" about something, glorifying God sometimes means we simply need to keep that knowledge to ourselves, rather than using it to tear others down.

E--We can communicate better, you see, first by *speaking* (& posting) in ways that glorify God.<sup>5</sup>

8. But in addition to giving us a better way of *speaking*, the story of Pentecost also reminds us of **the importance of LISTENING.**

A--At Babel, humanity was so busy talking to itself about how to build the tower that there wasn't time to listen to God.

1--In like manner, it seems that we today are often so busy talking about our own agendas (and what's wrong with someone *else's*) that we don't really bother (or have time) to listen to *each other* OR to *God*, either.

2--Yet, at Pentecost, the sole reason people were gathered there was to listen to and hear from God through the speech of Peter and the other Apostles.

B--That's why I believe that the true miracle of Pentecost was *not* really a miracle of *speaking*<sup>6</sup>, but of people being able to *listen to and understand* each other and God in a new and fresh way.

1--As a general rule, "*speaking divides, but listening unites.*"

2--And it's why James Russell Lowell once wrote, "*Blessed are they who have nothing to say and who cannot be persuaded to say it.*"

3--When I was in seminary, I had a professor (Dr. George Morris) who taught us a simple prayer that I'm still working on today: "*Lord, make me a better listener*"

4--And you may also have heard that perhaps that's why God gave us *two* ears and only *one* tongue: so we can listen *twice as much* as we talk.

C--So... How well do you truly *listen* to others? to your spouse? your children? your parents? your friends? your workmates? your fellow church members? to those with whom you disagree? to God?

1--You see, even when we disagree with others, we dishonor God when we criticize or demean them without taking time to truly listen to their view.

2--So whether we agree or not, we can at least *listen*.

--IV--

9. Bottom line is that much (if not all) of the fear, mistrust, prejudice, and paranoia we live with in today's world is the result of ineffective communication (even in our churches!).

A--And the reason for this in many of us is because we've never truly experienced a *personal* Pentecost in our *own* lives -- at least in terms of our ability to properly communicate, many of us still live in Babel.

B--Yet today's story reminds us that if we can allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives...  
 (1) to Enable us to *speak* in ways that glorify God, and...  
 (2) to teach us to be *better listeners*,...

C--...then we'll be better-equipped to help solve our world's communication crisis by helping people (including *ourselves*) move "*From Babel to Pentecost*."

10. [PRAY... *Invitation for people to experience their own personal Pentecost by inviting the Holy Spirit to reign free in their lives...*]

#### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> The late Edwin Cole (Christian author & speaker) once wrote that "*[Relationships] die when the [persons or the entities involved] either refuse to communicate, or when too much distortion prevents understanding*" [Edwin Louis Cole, Communication, Sex and Money: The three most common obstacles that challenge relationships between men and women (Tulsa, OK: Honor Press, 1987)].

<sup>2</sup> One thing today's story teaches us is that until we appropriate the communication potential available from God's Holy Spirit through our own *personal* Pentecost, you & I will *always* have problems with communicating with one another: husbands and wives (men and women, boys and girls) will continue to struggle to truly understand one another; parents and children will continue to have difficulties communicating; communities, governments, and entire nations will continue to misunderstand and mistrust each other.

<sup>3</sup> The Jewish festival called "Pentecost" was an annual time to celebrate God's goodness through their crops and farms each year.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps you know the story of a man carrying a pitch fork one day being attacked and bitten by a dog as he was walking down the road. In self-defense, the man struck the dog w/the prong of the pitch-fork and killed him. The owner of the dog came running up and asked, "Why didn't you strike the dog with the other end?" The man wasted no time in his answer: "Why didn't your dog come at me with the other end?"

<sup>5</sup> Related to this is the point that Pentecost teaches us the essential-ness of GRACE in our speech. After all, our words can be deadly, and we should always make sure that our words reflect the grace of God BEFORE we say things that we may regret later. Some people think we have to speak our mind in order to get our point across. But we can always get our point across without having to use sharp words or sharp language -- we can learn to be tactful and grace-filled in our speech. An ancient proverb says, "*A wise person REFLECTS before they speak; a fool, however, speaks, then reflects on what they have said.*" Related to that is another proverb which says, "*It's better to listen and let people think you're a fool than to speak and leave no doubt about it.*"

<sup>6</sup> e.g., "speaking in tongues," although this IS a legitimate (though often misunderstood) gift of the Spirit.