

Genesis Ch11v1-9 - Gathering and Scattering

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 December 2021

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

We need our text this morning, Genesis chapter 11, starting at verse 1. Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.

As people moved eastward, they found plains in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.

They used brick instead of stone and bitumen for mortar. 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.

[1 : 44] Otherwise, we will be scattered over the whole face of the earth. But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that people were building. And the Lord said, if it's one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city.

That is why it was called Babel. Because there the Lord confused the whole language of the world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Before we get stuck in, and I pray just a note in regards to the note sheet, if any of you are using that.

There's maybe some still on the table as you came in if you need one. If you're confused with the title, go with the titles there. There's not too much change, but just so you don't get confused.

[2 : 57] Let's pray and ask for God's help. Father, we thank you that you have spoken to us in a language that we can understand and you have preserved your word for us, written in your word.

Indeed, the nations of the world today, so many, have your word, the Bible, in a language they can understand. We thank you that you speak to us so clearly.

And we pray that we would be attentive to your word today. That it would shape us and mould us. And it would cause us to see your great big purposes for the world.

And how we should live in response. So be our teacher through your word today, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Well, we come, don't we? And we go.

[4 : 09] We have gathered together and we are going to scatter. We have congregated and then we're going to disperse.

That's what the church is all about, isn't it? Remember Jesus' words to his disciples? Jesus gathered his disciples together and then he scattered them.

They came to Jesus. They came to Jesus and Jesus said to them, go and make disciples of all nations. Now, of course, that's nothing new.

It was God's plan and then he was going to do. It was God's plan and purpose right from the very beginning of the story of scripture. Adam and Eve, remember, were in the garden with God.

They were with him together. But Adam and Eve were to expand the borders of Eden. They were to spread out. As God's image bearers, they were to be the visible representation of the invisible God.

[5 : 16] They were to reflect God's greatness and display his goodness throughout the whole earth. And it was the same for Noah.

There was an opportunity for a fresh start. Noah and his family, remember, were gathered together in the ark of salvation. And then what does God say to them?

Well, have a look with me. Go back to chapter 9 and verse 1. Just turn a page back. Chapter 9, verse 1. Then God blessed Noah and his son, saying to them, Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

Now look at verse 7 of chapter 9. As for you, be fruitful and increase in number. Multiply on the earth and increase upon it.

As God began again the fresh start with Noah, he says to Noah, Go, scatter, disperse, fill the earth.

[6 : 24] As God's image bearers, they were to govern the world for God's glory. They were to honour God wherever they went. You see, this is God's purpose for humanity.

This is why we were made. It's why we exist. We were created to display the glory of God. That we would want people to see how good and how great God is.

Well, how are we getting on in that task? How well are we at declaring God's glory and making it all about him? Well, let's see how we are getting on.

Let's go to chapter 11. First, building our own glory. As Noah's family grew in number, they were united in their identity.

Look at verse 1. The whole world had one language and a common speech. So they were united in their identity.

[7 : 33] And they also were united in their purpose. Verse 2. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar. That would become Babylon.

And they settled there. You see, they were united in their purpose. But they were united in a purpose that conflicts with God.

Do you see that at the end of verse 2? Instead of scattering, they begin to settle. Instead of building for God's glory, they start building their own glory.

It seems God's plans have been replaced with their own plans. It's something that we do all the time. We see this in two ways.

First, controlling our destiny. Look at verse 3. They said to each other, Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.

[8 : 38] And they used brick instead of stone and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, Come, let's build ourselves a city. So forget your mobile homes.

Forget your tents. We're going to build a permanent city. A city that's going to last forever. It's durable. It's made of brick and strong bitumen.

It's not going to fall. We say, Well, what's wrong with building a city? Everybody needs a home to live in. That's not such a bad thing, is it? Well, this city would not just be a place of rest.

It would be a symbol of their defiance against God. Look at the beginning of verse 4. They said, Come, let's build ourselves a city.

Why? Look at the end of verse 4. Otherwise, we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth. We're not going anywhere.

[9 : 41] We're staying here. God may have plans to expand and to spread out. Well, sorry. We're in control of our destiny now.

We're in charge. We're not going. Seems humanity has problems accepting directions from the top. Just as Adam and Eve took things into their own hands, so we today take things into our own hands.

And central to this building plan was, look at verse 4 again, was the building of a tower that would reach to the heavens.

Now, these towers were very common. Archaeologists have dug them up all over the place. They're kind of pyramid in shape. So maybe you're thinking of something like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, that kind of tower.

No, it was kind of more pyramid in their shape. More of a temple type structure. Because at the very top of these towers would be the home for their deity, for their gods.

[10 : 49] In other words, they're saying, we're going to make our own gods and we're going to put them away up there in the heavens, out the way. Gods who don't interfere with us.

Building this tower was a statement of independence. We're in charge now. We're going to make our own rules. And we're going to live our own way.

Let's come together. Don't go. But they're not just content in controlling their own destiny.

They're wanting to establish a name for themselves. Again, let's read verse 4. 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.

Rather than proclaim the name of God. Rather than proclaim the name of God. Rather than make the name of God famous. We want to make our own name famous. And again, through our studies in Genesis, this is nothing new either, is it?

[11 : 56] Have a look back to chapter 4 with me. Go back to chapter 4. This is the account of Cain. These are the first sons of Adam and Eve.

The account of Cain who murdered his brother Abel. So chapter 4 verse 12. God's response to that murder was very clear.

Verse 12. God speaks to Cain and he says, When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You're going to have a hard, difficult life. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.

You see, even though he had done something as awful as murder, God's plan was still that they would wander. That they would scatter, not settle. Verse 17.

Cain was in no mood for taking orders. Cain made love to his wife and she became pregnant and gave birth to their son Enoch.

[13 : 01] Cain was then building a city. And he named it after his son Enoch. You see, he begins to settle down and build a city for himself.

Instead of it about reflecting God's glory, it's now going to reflect his own glory. He names the city after his own son Enoch. Instead of look at what God has done, look what I have done.

Instead of look how great God is, look at how great I am. Let's go back to chapter 11.

You see, what happened for Cain, individually, has happened to humanity corporately. Isn't that what we say? Come on, let's make a name for ourselves.

Let's build our own legacy. Let's build our own reputation. Let's display my greatness and reflect my brilliance to the world. Aren't I wonderful?

[14 : 04] Doesn't the world deserve me? Let's come together and make ourselves great. Now, a lot of time has passed since this account.

And the world's population has only increased in number. And as time has gone on, we've got better at building towers and buildings and structures.

But even with all the changes, not a lot has really changed. We're still building for our own glory. In defiance of our creator God, we've set about controlling our own destiny and making a name for ourselves.

We've pushed God out and we've made ourselves the centre of the universe. We are the masters of our fate. We decide how we live.

And don't we see that reflected in the cities of the world today? Cities are places where people now gather. The vast majority, nearly 60% of the world's population, now live in the cities.

[15 : 18] And it's only going to increase. They all gather together and the cities in some way are there to keep God out. Because the cities are where we do as we please.

And great towers are built, aren't they? The towers where we go and serve the God of money. Where we go and serve our own purpose and pursue my career, what I want to do.

Striving to make a name for ourselves. And who knows? It mightn't be just Donald Trump who has a tower. Maybe I could have my name in dazzling lights.

Because I'm great. But it's not just the cities of the world, is it? We see it in our places that we call home.

Instead of thinking beyond our four walls, we build up our four walls. We prioritize my comfort over God's glory.

[16 : 24] We replace God's honour with my security. This is my home. My career. My desire. My life.

Nobody's going to tell me what to do. Nobody's going to tell me how to live. Rather than expand the kingdom of God, we've built our own little mini kingdoms.

Where we live as if we're king and queen of the universe. We build for our own glory. Isn't that what we see happening?

It's what happened then, and it's what's happening now. Second, they were confronted with God's glory.

Humanity, the story there in chapter 11, may be all about keeping God out and living a life of independence from him. But, verse 5, the Lord came down to see the city with the tower the people were building.

[17 : 33] It's rather an amusing scene, isn't it? Here's man, just imagine there, building his cities, towering over the landscape, heaping praise on themselves.

How great we are. Look how wonderful we are. Well, God in the universe looks on and has to come down to see and inspect. I mean that tiny, puny, those little ants crawling around building things.

What are they doing? It's like a child with his Lego bricks, proudly and defiantly informing his father that I'm building a house to live in.

It's ridiculous. It's laughable. Well, God comes, verse 6, and says, 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.

In other words, the purpose, the collective purpose of humanity was to fill the world with their own glory. This is what man is about, to establish how great I am.

[18 : 46] And if mankind can do that together, just think if they're all together, it would defy God's purposes. And God isn't going to stand for that.

God is the creator of all and the Lord of all. He will not let his glory be replaced or be pushed out by his creation.

A later prophet reminds us of this. You can follow on screen. This is what God, the Lord, says, the creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to his people and life to all those who walk on it.

I am the Lord. That is my name. I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.

I'm not going to give my glory up to someone else because I am God and I'm Lord.

[19 : 56] So God confronts humanity with his own glory and he does it in two ways. First, there's a judgment by confusion.

Verse 7. So God comes to the people and he says, come, let us go down and confuse their language. Remember, it was one common speech, one language.

Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that they will not understand each other. You see, by confusing their language, they're no longer a united force.

He's breaking that up. What happens if you put an Irishman, a Chinese man and an Indian man and an Iranian man in a room together?

It's not a joke, by the way. What happens when you put people of other languages together? Nothing happens except confusion and frustration because nobody understands.

[21 : 02] And God will not allow humanity to build for their own glory. So God comes in judgment and disrupts their plans and derails their purposes.

But he comes not just in judgment. God also comes in mercy. A mercy by scattering.

Verse 8. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city.

You see, humanity, they weren't going to listen and obey God's word. God said, I want you to scatter, to fill the whole earth. No, we're staying here. We're doing our own thing.

They wouldn't follow God's vision, his plan for the world. So God, in turn, has to scatter them himself. God disperses them and forces them to fill the whole earth.

[22 : 04] You see, it's not just a judgment, it's a mercy. God scatters humanity to stop them from uniting around self. Because when we build things around ourselves and when it's all about me and it's all about you, we destroy ourselves.

So God, in his mercy, puts a halt to the self-serving, self-promoting, building projects of self-glory. That's what we see going on in chapter 10.

Just flick back to the beginning of chapter 10. Chapter 10 tells us how the world is.

It describes the world with all its different languages and nations and how it came about. So chapter 10 tells us, following on from Noah, verse 1, this is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

They were the three sons, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood. And of course, they increase in number. Verse 5, we have the sons of Japheth.

[23 : 14] They were maritime peoples. They were sailors. And they spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.

Then in verse 20, we have the sons of Ham and by their clans and languages in their territories and nations.

And then we go down to verse 31. These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages in their territories and nations.

So do you see from Noah, the sons, they're all spreading out. These, verse 32, are the clans of Noah's sons according to their lines of descent within their nations.

From these, the nations spread out over the earth after the flood. Then we come to chapter 11. But it's not chronological.

[24 : 12] Chapter 11 is telling us how all these languages and nations came to be. So in chapter 11, verse 9, we read there that this is why it was called Babel.

It would become called Babylon because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

So chapter 10 tells us look, look at the world, look at all the languages and all the different nations. And then chapter 11 tells us this is why there are so many different languages and nations.

And as we look out in the world today, don't we see many nations and many languages? Just as it was then, there's confusion and there's division amongst the nations.

Turn on the news, listen to what's going on in our world. Nations are putting up barriers and borders. People groups are fighting with each other. They fear each other.

[25 : 19] Countries are now threatening war or they're either at war. The evidence is there for us all over the world. Why is it like this? Because God in his judgment brought confusion and diversity.

unity. But at the same time, God is acting in mercy within the nations. Because amidst all the diversity, isn't there a desire and a longing for unity?

Despite all the confusion, there's a hunger for reconciliation. the world longs for everybody to be united under a common purpose that we could all be one again and living rightly as we should.

The world is crying out for a saviour. Someone who will come and rescue us from all the division and all the brokenness and put things right.

You see, God in his mercy confused and dispersed the people of the world so that they would actually turn to him.

[26 : 33] God brought, if you like, a wedge of division. The different languages, the different nations, so that people would come to him and be united around him.

That's what we're told in the book of Acts. Follow with me. It's almost like a commentary on these very verses.

From one man he made all the nations that they should inhabit the whole earth. And he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

And God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far from any one of us. Can you see God's purpose?

His purpose remains the same from the very beginning of time that the nations of this world, the languages, the people groups from all over our planet would seek him, would come to him and would live for his glory, not their own.

[27 : 41] So, we build for our own glory, we're confronted with God's glory and we are to live for God's glory.

You see, despite God confronting the peoples of the earth, we still remain the stubborn bunch of people. We don't easily come to God, do we?

We persist in controlling our own destiny and making our name for ourselves. What will it take to cause the nations of this world to live for his glory?

What's it going to take? Well, it would take nothing less than God coming to us in person. Have a look at verse 5. There we read that the Lord came down to see the city.

He intervened. It's telling us that God took action, that he intervened in what was going on because it was God's desire that people would come to him and centuries later, God would come again, but this time he would act in person.

[28 : 59] He would come to us by his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and through his Spirit. And he would come to restore and to put things right.

Turn with me, please, to Acts in the New Testament. Acts chapter 2. So Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and then Acts.

Acts chapter 2. Acts chapter 2. And in this, we're going to read through different parts of it from chapter 2.

God reverses what happened at the building of the city, the building of Babel. Here God reverses, he undoes what happened.

Let's take a look. Verse 4, chapter 2, verse 4. All of them, he's here talking about his disciples, followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, people who've trusted in him.

[30 : 16] It says, all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues. Or if you look down at the bottom of your Bible, there's maybe a little letter beside tongues and if you trace that down to the very bottom, it says languages.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. Now, they were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

And when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment because each one heard their own language being spoken. amazing diversity.

People from all kinds of different nations gathered together but now there's no confusion because they all hear the same thing and they all understand.

But what is it they hear? What was the message? Well, look at verse 7. Utterly amazed, they asked, aren't all these who are speaking Galileans, aren't they all from the same place and speak just one language?

[31 : 33] Verse 8, then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? End of verse 11. We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues or languages.

They're hearing from the disciples the wonders of God. How God had a plan from the very beginning. His purpose and plan was that all people would be united together in Jesus and that they would declare his glory and live for him.

The wonders of how God came to us in the person of Jesus to die for us in our place for building our own names and setting ourselves in defiance against God.

He came to die for us and his son was raised to life for us so that we would no longer live in opposition to God but that we would now live for him and with him.

They heard the wonders of God. Verse 37, chapter 2, verse 37, when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart, they were deeply challenged and convicted and they said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what should we do?

[33 : 05] What's our response? We want to change, we want to live differently and Peter replied, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 41, those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.

Can you see what's going on here? God is gathering the nations of the world around his son, the Lord Jesus Christ so that they become a new people, the church, the people of God from every tribe, language, tongue and nation all coming together around the son and as we begin to read through the rest of Acts we see them being scattered, being sent out to the nations as they are filled with the spirit of God.

This is God's plan and purpose in action. this is what the church is all about. This is what we are doing here right now.

Two things as we finish. First, we are gathered around Christ to see his glory. That's why we're in this building gathered here this morning to hear about Christ, to see his greatness and his goodness, to see all that the son has done for us.

[34 : 46] And in repentance, as we hear about what he's done, we align ourselves to his desires, not our own desires. Instead of trying to control our own destiny, we come and we submit to his commands.

Rather than make a name for Johnny Grant, we come to live our life for his glory and to build his kingdom. kingdom. We have gathered here today around Christ to see his glory and his greatness.

But not only are we gathered around Christ, we are now scattered by Christ to declare his glory. We go into all the world starting here in Carigaline and into our families so that others may hear this wonderful news of who Jesus is.

To hear about the goodness of God and his saviour Jesus Christ. And in faith we obey and are filled with the power of the spirit and we begin to move out.

We prioritise God's glory over our comfort. Rather than striving to build our own glory, glory, we go to the nations and declare his glory.

[36 : 13] We go. So let me ask us all, what will it take for us to live for God's glory this week? What will it take for you and for me to live for God's glory this week?

What do I need to turn from? What do I need to change in my life, in my family, so that I am prioritising his glory, that I am about making his name great and not my name?

We come and we go. We congregate and we disperse. We gather and we scatter.

The church is God's plan and purpose to unite people around his son and to live for his glory. Let's pray.

Father, we confess that we have so many plans of our own, things we want to do, people we want to be, and yet when we reflect on it, so much of it, has nothing to do with your glory and your honour.

[37 : 46] So would you help us to live our life for the glory of God? Help us to use everything we do as we disperse into our families, as we go to our workplaces, as we meet up with friends, wherever we are, whatever we do, that in all that we do, we would go passing on declaring the good news about the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, so that others may know the joy, peace, and love of God for themselves, because this is our only purpose, and the only plan that is going to last.

So fill us with your spirit, help us to go, help us to disperse, help us to scatter, and to live for you, and not for our own.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, to help us and encourage us to do that, we're going to sing, and this song is all about going