

Sin and Scattering

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Date: 11 June 2017

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] Father, thank you again so much for your word. We thank you that you have not left us in the dark to wonder about how we got here in this world and what we are to do and whether there is any hope in this world and beyond.

But that you've given us your word, which points us to the living word, your son. And so, Heavenly Father, we do pray that you would give us minds to concentrate upon your word this morning and hearts that would seek to live in light of it.

For you ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I wonder if you can guess this famous person. It's not a hard... Who am I? So, who am I? I gave one of the world's most famous speeches.

I'll give you a bit more, okay? It's in 1963 and I used the repeated phrase, here we go, I have a dream. Martin Luther King. Yeah, that's right.

And in his speech, he said a number of things, but one of them was this. He says, I have a dream that the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

[1 : 1 6] I have a dream. And on it goes. It's one of the most rousing speeches in all history. In other words, his dream was for peace and unity in America.

And it's a dream that is echoed by millions around the world, is it not? People want peace. And particularly in our time, as Joe said at the start of the services, we've got all these terror attacks still happening around us and even here in Melbourne.

We want peace. And this dream for peace and unity is often joined by other dreams like the end of world poverty, the curing of diseases like cancer, the restoration of the environment like the ozone layer.

And for Australians, the great Australian dream is still owning your own home, which is getting harder and harder. In other words, humanity's dream is for everyone to have health, wealth and happiness, and especially for ourselves to have it.

That's what humanity has dreamt for. And that's what humanity has worked towards. And so we have come up with cures for diseases like smallpox. We have abolished a lot of forms of slavery, not all.

[2 : 3 6] We have lowered the percentage of poverty. We have raised the standard of living. In fact, one of the big promises of recent Australian governments, which is being rolled out now, is that every home in Australia will have the internet, NBN, if it ever arrives.

What's more, we have created organisations to achieve our dreams. So after the Second World War, the United Nations was formed to bring about world peace.

We have organisations like Make Poverty History, which aims to end poverty. We have G8 summits, where world leaders meet together to consider the environment and so on.

And yet, despite all these human advances and organisations, are we there yet? Of course, the reason we have gotten this far to start with is that God created us with the capacity to rule his world together.

So on the next slide, we read from Genesis chapter 1, those first foundational verses. Then God said, So God created mankind in his own image.

[3 : 51] In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said to them, You see, God created us to reflect his good rule over the world.

That's what it primarily means to be made in God's image. To work together as man and woman to represent God's good rule over the world. And that involves filling the earth, as we saw.

It's a bit hard to rule over the whole world if you're just clumped together in one part of the world. But the thing is, as we fill the world, we are still to work together to rule it.

And by doing so, bring God glory. We are to make his name great. As his image bearers who represent him, we are to point to him.

And bring him glory by the way that we behave and rule, you see. It's a bit like children. Children can often bring their parents glory by the way they act. I mean, if you see some children behaving really well, we often think, Oh, wow, look at those kids.

[5 : 05] Those parents must be terrific parents. And then your children don't act like that. So you go and ask them for some tips. Or perhaps maybe to do a trade with your kids. But you see, the children's behavior can bring praise and glory to the parents.

And it's a bit like that for us. We bear God's image and are to reflect his good rule in the world. And by doing so, we are to fill the earth with his glory.

That's how the earth was to be filled with the glory of God. By people reflecting his good rule together. Under him. And over creation. And yet humanity, as we've seen over the past few weeks, has not done that.

As we've seen, humanity rejected God and his word. So instead of the earth being filled with his glory, it was filled with violence and evil. Chapter 6 we saw.

And so last week we saw God make a fresh start with the flood. Where he washed away the wickedness of humanity. And then after a drunken episode from Noah, it seems like things are now back on track.

[6 : 08] Because as we come to the next account in chapter 10, Noah's sons are filling the earth to rule over it. So point 1, chapter 10, verse 1.

We read, this is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth. Noah's sons who themselves had sons after the flood. Now chapter 10, verse 1 has that phrase that the writer of Genesis repeats throughout his book.

Do you remember? The phrase, this is the account of... Or literally, these are the generations of... And then he lists all the generations, like here in chapter 10.

This is how the writer breaks up his material in this book. And so this new section begins with the generations of Noah's sons. With Shem, Ham and Japheth.

And the writer will go on to list 70 generations which comes from those three sons. Although as he lists them, he actually reverses the order. So verse 2, he starts with the last one, Japheth.

[7 : 14] And then in verse 6, you can see there, he then goes to the sons of Ham. Chapter 10, verse 6. And if you just scan your eye down the page, you'll see that Ham's descendants become Israel's enemies.

So down the bottom, you've got Egypt, where they were in slavery. Right down the bottom, verse 15, you've got Canaan with all the Ites, Hittites, Jeprushites, Amorites, and so on.

This is probably why they get a longer list, because that was more meaningful for Israel. These were their enemies. And then over the page, in verse 21, we're given some generations from Shem, from whom Israel would come.

Which is probably why the writer saves Shem to last, because this was most significant for Israel, the first readers of this book. And now while there are more generations the writer could have given us, he lists these 70 generations to show us that humanity did, in fact, increase in number and fill the earth.

Just like God said in Genesis chapter 1. And in case we didn't pick it up with all this list of names, the writer puts it plainly for us in verse 32, the last verse of chapter 10.

[8 : 25] He says, And so at first glance, chapter 10 is rather positive.

Here is humanity filling God's command to spread out, to fill the earth and subdue it. So they might represent God's good rule as his image bearers in the world.

And so bring God glory, make his name great. And yet there are actually signs that we skipped over that not all is well.

So come back a page to chapter 10, verse 8. Here we read that one of Ham's descendants was Cush, and he was the father of Nimrod.

Sounds like a cool name, kind of like hot rod carpet. Anyway, he was the father of Nimrod. And Nimrod's name actually means we shall rebel. So that's not a really positive sign to start with.

[9 : 35] And you notice in verse 10, one of the first centers of his kingdom, Nimrod's kingdom, was Babylon or Babel. Same word in the Bible. And Babylon, of course, becomes representative, the city that represents all that opposes God.

So that's not a good sign. What's more, if you look up the page to verse 5, we've got this refrain that is repeated throughout this chapter 10, which kind of speaks of division.

So verse 5, from these, the maritime people spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language. And then turn over the page to verse 20.

Last turn. Verse 20, these are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages in their territories and nations. And again, down the bottom, verse 31.

These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages in their territories and nations. You see, we're given an impression that people are divided, divided into clans and languages.

[10 : 43] Yes, they are spreading out over the earth, but they're not ruling as united humanity, but a divided people. There is division.

In fact, verse 25, the name Peleg, I keep wanting to say peg leg, the pirate, but anyway, Peleg's name means division because, verse 25, in his time, the earth was divided.

You see, something has happened before this chapter, which actually puts a dampener on the positive tone of it. Yes, humanity is filling the earth to rule over it, as God said, and yet, not as God wanted.

Something has happened. And the writer now tells us what has happened. He's actually put these two chapters in reverse chronological order. And so he says, humanity rebelled.

Point to chapter 11, verse 1. He says, now the whole world had one language from Noah. I mean, presumably they spoke one language at home. Had one language and a common speech.

[11 : 53] And yet, people moved eastward. They found a plain in China and settled there. They said to each other, come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly. And they used brick now instead of stone.

There's an advancement of technology. And tar 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.

Otherwise, we'll be scattered over the face of the earth. Now, at first glance, it doesn't seem, you know, too much wrong with this. You know, they start building a city and a rather tall tower.

Which, as I said, is an advancement in technology for those days. And it shouldn't surprise us because God has given humanity the ability to do that. But they were always meant to rule with God.

Trusting in God and following God. And yet here, there is no mention of God. Here is humanity ruling, yes, but without God.

[12 : 53] They're seeking to be independent from God. And we see this in a number of ways. First, they move eastward, which is a subtle hint. They are moving further away from God and the Garden of Eden.

Remember, the Garden of Eden, where God was, was in the east. And these people now moving further east, further away from God. Second, they build a city so that they can settle down together and not be scattered over the face of the earth.

In other words, they're rebelling against God's purpose to fill the earth, aren't they? Instead of filling the earth, they're now gathering in one place.

What's more, they seem to be worried about being scattered. And yet, instead of trusting God to look after them as they fill the earth, they seek security in themselves and in their city.

They put their trust in themselves, you see. Let us build a city so that we're not scattered. Third, they build a tower to reach the heavens. Why?

[13 : 55] To talk to God? To relate to God? No. Verse 4. So that they can make a name for themselves. So instead of bringing God glory as his image bearers, they now want to bring themselves glory, you see.

It's as though they want to lift up their own names instead of God's name. In other words, this city and tower were a symbol of their autonomy, their independence from God.

Here is humanity ruling together, yes, but ruling without God, independently from God. It's all about humanity by themselves.

It often reminds me of when an adult tries to help a little child do something and the child turns back and says, No, by myself. Has that ever happened to you? Maybe it's just my kids, I don't know.

But anyway, here is humanity saying to God, No, by myself. Yes, we want our kids to grow up and be independent, but never independent from God.

[15 : 03] But yet this is what this generation of the Tower of Babel are doing. Why, though, is that such a problem? Well, two reasons. First, because it's God who not only gave us life in this world, it's also God who gives us eternal life in the world to come.

And so if people continue to live without God, you know, reject God, then they will miss out on eternal life. They will miss out on heaven, which only leaves, as the Bible says, hell.

That's a real problem, is it not? Secondly, we've already seen that the human heart often tends towards evil. And so on the next slide, we read last week in chapter 8, verse 21, where God says, Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.

Now, I know people can do good in this world, but our natural inclination is to be selfish. Last week, my wife, Michelle, had her car parked on the side of the road and someone reversed into it, smashed our car and then drove off.

Now, immediately, you think that's the end of the story because that's normal, isn't it? Because the inclination of the human heart is evil. And yet, in this occasion, the person left a note with his name, his mobile number, his license number, and the name of his insurer, and the note was left on his e-tag receipt, which had his home address on it, so he knew it was legit.

[16 : 45] How amazing is that? But the very fact that we find it amazing tells us it's not normal, doesn't it? If the human heart was inclined to do good, then that story would be normal.

But it's not. Because the human heart is naturally inclined to do evil, to be selfish. As I've said many times, you never have to teach children to be naughty, it just comes naturally.

And so if humanity continues to rule without God to direct them, then yes, they'll do good, but because of their heart, guess what will be there right alongside it?

Evil, you see. And so God responds. Point three, verse five. But then the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building.

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.

[17 : 49] Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that they will not understand each other. Here in verse five, I wonder if it's a little kind of go at humanity's progress.

I mean, you can almost imagine humanity looking up their city and their tower with pride. Look at what we've done. And yet verse five says, oh, it's too small for God to see. He's got to come down and take a closer look to see what's going on.

It's almost this funny poke at humanity here. And when God comes down and sees, he decides to scatter, sorry, confuse their languages. In fact, when our children were little, this was their favorite Bible story, Tower of Babel.

Because the Bible we read from put it like this. On the next slide is a picture of the page. It's too small to read. Let me read it for you. It says, one morning they went out to work as usual to build their tower, but everything was different.

Their words were all new and funny. You see, God had given each person a completely different language. Suddenly no one understood what anyone else was saying. Someone would say, how do you do?

[18 : 56] And the other person thought they said, how ugly are you? You could be saying something nice like such a lovely morning and get a punch in the nose because they thought you said, hush up, you're boring.

You can see why my kids liked it. That's what God did. God confused the languages so they couldn't understand each other. And by doing so, he divided people into different groups.

That's what language does, doesn't it? It divides people to those who can speak and understand and those who cannot. That's what we saw in chapter 10 with that refrain where Noah and his sons had their own clan and nation and language.

And by confusing their language, God not only divides them, it also leads to them being scattered all over the earth as they were supposed to. So verse 8, so the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city.

That is why it was called Babel, which the Hebrew word sounds like confusion because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

[20 : 09] You see, by confusing their language, God divides them and they scatter. This is God's judgment on humanity who sought to rule the world without him. And yet, it is also an act of kindness or grace.

Remember verse 6, God saw that if they continued to work together then nothing would be impossible for them. And while that would mean amazing advancements in science and technology because of the human heart, remember, it would also mean horrifying advancements in evil as well.

For whenever humanity advances in good, the human heart means it also advances in evil right alongside. So, for example, humanity has worked together in science and medicine to create cures for diseases like smallpox and measles and yet at the same time we've used diseases as weapons like anthrax and Ebola.

Or take Zyklon B. Chemists discovered this chemical which started off as an insecticide and then it was used by Nazis in their gas chambers to kill over a million people.

Again, humanity has worked together to do amazing things with technology like 3D printing. So now do you realise we can actually print a human heart, a working human heart with a printer, 3D printer, and yet we can also print a working gun.

[21 : 44] In fact, last December police raided a house here in Melbourne and seized 14 working guns from a house that printed them with a 3D printer.

Advancing good things and evil is right there alongside it, isn't it? Just take the internet. We can send an email from this side of the world to the other side of the world which is extraordinary.

In an instant we can do it. And yet, alongside that comes email scams and an increase in pornography. See, God's dividing and scattering of people here is a just judgment, yes, but it's also a kindness because it slows down humanity's ability to do the impossible but along with it the evil that always comes.

God is limiting humanity's opportunities for evil, you see. What's more, by dividing people God limits their ability to help each other which sounds harsh at one level but he did it so that they might be forced to turn back to him for help and find life eternal.

So on the next slide, Paul puts it like this in Acts 17. He says, from one man God made all the nations so that they should inhabit the whole earth and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

[23 : 09] God has divided people, given boundaries, confused their languages and so on. But why has God done this? Well, God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he's not far from any of us.

You see, the scattering of people here, the confusion of their language is a just judgment, yes, but it's also a kindness because it limits their ability to work together so that they might be forced to turn back to God and look to him for help and by looking to him not only find help but life eternal in the world to come.

And yet people today don't look for God, do they? Instead, people continue to live like those people at Babel did and people continue to move further and further eastward, as it were, away from God.

They seek to rule this world without God, independently from God, whether it's as individuals or nations. And people still put their hope in humanity as we heard from the start.

People hope in humanity to achieve the dream of peace and unity, health and happiness. And yet, has the United Nations actually united the nations?

[24 : 28] Has it ended all war and brought world peace? Has the movement of Make Poverty History actually made Poverty History? Have the G8 summits fixed the environment and what we're doing to our world?

No. Now, don't mishear me. These things are helpful organisations, as is science and technology, but they are limited. For no matter how hard these organisations try, no matter how many human advancements we make, we will never achieve our dream of unity and peace, of joy and contentment.

Why? Well, because we cannot cure the human heart, nor can we reverse the judgement of God, which is divided people.

But God can in Christ. And so, in our second reading from Acts 2, we heard about the day of Pentecost, which we celebrated last Sunday. Today is Trinity Sunday, just in case you didn't know.

And last, on Pentecost Sunday, we heard how God's Spirit enabled people to hear God's wonders in their own language. Do you remember hearing that from our second reading? To symbolise that Christ brings unity.

[25 : 51] God's Spirit did not remove different languages, but he removed the barriers and division that those languages created. there was a reversal of sorts of Bible, you see.

And as people back in the early church heard about Jesus and put their trust in him, they found not only unity, but peace. They found not wealth, but they didn't find poverty was gone.

And they found joy. So have a look at the next slide, where Acts 2 continues. We didn't read this bit, but Acts 2 continues by saying, all the believers were together, unity, and had everything in common.

They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. There they are, ending poverty. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

There's happiness. And notice praising not themselves, but God, making his name great and enjoying the favor of all the people.

[26 : 58] You see, here is a picture of unity and peace without poverty. Here is a picture of people praising God as his image bearers, as we were created to do.

And it all happens because of Christ. Christ Jesus is the one who died for us to forgive us and bring us together as one family.

It was 1994, and I remember hearing the news about Rwanda. Do you remember the Rwanda? Where the Hutus killed their fellow countrymen who were the Tutsi.

Neighbors killed neighbors simply because they were from a different tribe. Nearly 20% of the country was murdered.

That's extraordinary, 20% of the country. It was a horrific genocide. A year later, 1995, a pastor I knew from Sydney was conducting a Bible study in Sydney, and in it was a Tutsi who had fled Rwanda the year before and the Hutus.

[28 : 03] She was a Christian. She joined the Bible study in Sydney of this pastor friend. And it was this one night in 1995, at Bible study, the Tutsi was already there, and in walked a Hutu to the Bible study group.

Now, immediately those two recognized each other. And for the Tutsi, this person was the reason they had fled their home country. This person was the very type of person who had killed her relatives.

And they looked at each other for a moment, and the minister suddenly realized what was going on, but before he could do anything, the Tutsi who had fled signaled, come, sit next to me.

And the Hutu came in and sat next to her, and they chatted with friendship, peace, unity. You see, they both knew Christ had died for them and brought them together into one family, God's family, and so their former division was now superseded by their unity in Christ as sisters.

And there was peace, peace between God and them, but also between each other, and there was joy and contentment. The United Nations cannot do that, but Christ can.

[29 : 21] In Christ, Babel is beginning to be reversed, you see. We can have peace and unity with joy and contentment now, and health and wealth later in heaven. Not in the city of Babylon or Babel, same word, but in the city of God.

And so, if you are here today and you've been living life without God, like the people of Babel, if you've been seeking to rule or work in this world, independent of God, then do realize where that will lead you.

It will lead you to judgment, just like it did back then. Only this time, the Bible calls this judgment hell. And so, do turn and trust in Jesus.

Do put your hope in him for forgiveness and life. And for us here who already have, then we are to keep living life with God and under God, following God.

We are to keep listening to his word and obeying it. I know life is busy and cold, and so it's very easy to forget God and do life without God. In fact, in Britain, a few years ago, a leading political advisor was quoted as saying, we in our political party don't do God.

[30 : 37] And yet, we were created for life with God. And so, if you trust in Christ, then keep living with him, keep listening to God in his word. And that includes seeking to make his name great, and not only praising him with our lips, but with our lives as well.

Secondly, give thanks for the many good things God has enabled humanity to do. I mean, the medical advancements and all the good things we enjoy, God has enabled that by creating us in his image to rule over the world, to give us brains and imaginations and the wills to do it.

And so, give thanks for them, but do realize they are limited. They cannot achieve the dreams that humanity has. So, do not put your hope or find your security in them, but rather put your hope in Christ and find your security for life in him.

For he alone is the one who can bring true peace and unity now, with the hope of wealth and health later in heaven. And finally, given it's only the gospel that can bring these things, then while we are to pray for world peace, we are to especially pray and pour our energy into seeing the gospel proclaimed.

Because it's the gospel that will bring true peace and unity, you see. I remember, I'll finish with a story about five years ago, I was at a minister's conference up in Bendigo, and we had a guest speaker, Peter Costello, former treasurer of Australia, a Christian, I think he's at church in Hawthorne, I think.

[32 : 22] Anyway, he said something like this, he said, as a human government, we can only ever tax and spend to change lives and help people. That's all we could ever do.

And then he said, but you ministers have the gospel and that changes lives. Best speaker, all conference. But it's true, he understood the limit of human institutions and achievements, and that what really brings peace and unity with joy and contentment is Christ.

Christ. And so please do keep praying for the spirit of the gospel. Please do keep pouring your energy into seeing Christ proclaimed, because he alone will reverse Babel and bring what humanity dreams for.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning that while you have created us to do great good in this world, the human heart also does great evil.

And so all human achievement and human organizations are always only going to be limited in what we can do.

[33 : 36] Father, we need Christ. And so Father, we do pray for the proclamation of your gospel in our nation. We pray that the message of Jesus will ring out and that people might find true and lasting peace and unity, a deep joy and contentment now with the hope of heaven where there will be health and wealth for eternity.

Father, help us, we pray, to keep putting our hope and security in Christ. For we ask it in his name. Amen.