

“Are We Building Towers of Babel Today?”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian
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Scripture

Genesis 11:1-9

John 15:1-11

Hymns or Songs

"The Garden Song" by Dave Mallet (YouTube accompaniment)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1oiVEWFHrs>

"Great Is Thy Faithfulness" 56

"Shine Jesus Shine"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC2SZGGIAFc>

Genesis 11:1-9

The Tower of Babel

11 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. **2** And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. **3** And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. **4** Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." **5** And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. **6** And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. **7** Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." **8** So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. **9** Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Mark 10:17-25

The Rich Young Man

17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" **18** And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. **19** You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud,

Honor your father and mother.”²⁰ And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

Insights for Worship

Secrets of Heaven n. 1304 by Emanuel Swedenborg

The nature of religion is such that when charitable love for our neighbor disappears and love for ourselves replaces it, we disregard what faith teaches, except so far as we can turn it to the purposes of self-worship. We also despise everything holy in worship unless it benefits ourselves and so unless it forms a part of self-worship.

All self-love entails this consequence, because when we love ourselves more than others, we hate everyone who does not serve us and refuse to favor such people unless they become our slaves. Not only that, so far as any restraints on us are loosened, we run wild, even to the point of lifting ourselves up above God. Personal experience has shown me that self-love acts like this when it runs loose. These are the things symbolized by the city and the tower.

SERMON: “Are We Building Towers of Babel Today?” by Rev. Kit Billings

Our journey through Lent continues, and as such we are called to spiritually walk alongside our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ out into the desert regions, where He gave us the blueprint for Lent. In these weeks we are in as we make our way slowly toward Holy Week (which begins on April 10th next month on Palm Sunday), our Christian faith calls us into a more intentional experience of repentance and reformation. Lent and Holy Week are not for the faint of heart—they are meant for genuine Christian people, ones with courage and deep sincerity. Lent is really about what our theology calls the humbly repentant souls, which focus in on self-examination (in the light of God’s Word), reflection and purposeful changing inside.

So I ask you, how do you feel about this?

Repentance. Self-examination. Looking deeply and squarely at yourself in the Light and Love of God's Word. Repentance, self-examination and conscious changes in ourselves and growing more into the angelic person God wants us to be—all of this is the core of what our baptism with water represents. Lent just more fully emphasizes these crucial skills in comparison to the rest of our church year. These spiritual abilities are what Christ underlined by His 40 day journey in the wilderness immediately after His baptism by John.

Here's a fun little story around the theme of repentance to help you to relax and settle in even more comfortably as you sit and reflect with me today. A priest is driving home one day after worship, when suddenly his car breaks down, and he must go ask the local farmer for a horse to borrow. The farmer obliges, but says that this is a HOLY horse, so the rider would have to say "Praise the Lord" to make it go, and "Amen" to make it stop.

The priest says okay, and, he starts off. About a mile down the road, the horse gets spooked by a snake in the road, and starts galloping towards a huge cliff. "Stop!!" yells the priest, as on his panic he had forgotten how to make it stop. Seeing as nothing is working, he enters into a long, repenting prayer to God, and at the very end of his passionate prayer he says "Amen." So the horse stops at the very edge of the cliff.

Now the priest is amazed that God has answered his humble prayer, and so what does he say? "Praise the Lord!" 😊

In essence, our story this morning in *Genesis 11* is about what happens to people who chose to turn away from humbleness before the Lord. It's about the desire to set ourselves higher than others in our private lives—that is, in our actual attitudes we hold inside, which we are allowed to hide from others...but not from God, who is all-seeing and all-knowing.

This ancient, sacred legend about the Tower of Babel is about our freedom of choice to seek out our own happiness in life based within *my own rules on doing so*, rather than using the truths and values found in God's Word. It is also about [how we increase our own spiritual confusion](#) by using our own methods of seeking happiness. This story also reflects to us that if we set ourselves above others, to do so is destructive and will cause us additional pain in life.

I will share with you these three main points within my pastoral reflection this morning:

1. We need to keep in mind the surrounding biblical context of this great legend we call “The Tower of Babel.”
2. The amazing people of the ancient world, who studied God’s “Ancient Word,” which was an oral tradition, were much wiser than we are today, but eventually they fell into the trap of egotism, perceiving themselves to be higher and better than God.
3. Just as learned people today can fall into the temptation of being overly proud of their knowledge, so those Ancient Church Era people became full of themselves—and they forgot that the Lord is the only Source and owner of all truth and goodness—and then they chose the spiritually deadening pathway of **separating faith from charitableness.**

So, my first point today is about remembering the literal biblical context of what happened just before our epic saga before us today. In *Genesis 6-10* we find the amazing legend of Noah’s family and the ark they built from God’s instructions in order to avoid being swallowed up by a worldwide flood, which lasted for 40 days and nights. Just like the story of the Tower of Babel, the story of Noah’s ark is not literal truth, but rather it is an extremely important legendary tale that the Most Ancient Church people learned with God’s help. The great story of Noah’s Ark was the Ancient Church’s parable that taught them about the spiritual destruction that befalls anyone who chooses a pathway of separating real faith from real goodness and love. These great, epic stories are here to warn us that we are still dealing with these spiritual forces today. We, too, can set ourselves up for building our own spiritual Towers of Babel if we want to.

The “great flood” from Noah’s time shows us how spiritually the Most Ancient Church people drowned themselves in immense spiritual falsehoods, and yet there was a core group of people who chose to remain true to God. So, **we all need to keep on guard for the tempting choice of subtly going down the road of feeling like the Lord and His Holy Word really are not centrally important in my life.**

So, let us look carefully now at the rest of the vital symbolism of this great legend we call, “The Tower of Babel.” In it we read about the destruction of the 2nd spiritual epoch of humanity, which we can refer to as the Ancient Church era. In this story we read in *Genesis 11:1-2*: “Now the whole earth had one language and the

same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.” After the great spiritual flood symbolized by Noah’s Ark, those who survived enjoyed life for a while in spiritual unity and harmony, and everyone easily understood each other because faith-from-love was their center in life. **So we can say that poetically speaking everyone knew the same spiritual language for a while.** But, those ancient people chose to migrate spiritually “from the east” and go westward into a low valley—which symbolically refers to a low, very natural and worldly plane of thought. They freely chose to build their lives upon a mish-mash of thoughts and values created out of their own self-centered ways of thinking, causing immense confusion and darkness within.

Symbolically speaking then, this is a freely chosen choice to turn away from the great ROCK OF TRUTH found in God’s Word, where stone and mortar are used to build solidly built daily life character. The mortar used to hold together the stone of truth God’s Word gives us is genuine, humble, saving love-goodness-and-compassion. Instead, the people represented by this Tower of Babel story chose to use their own brick and slime to create and build an enormous tower going up high into the sky, up to where the clouds hover above. And in order to accomplish their building project, they left the sacred East and traveled westward into a low valley. It was there that they created their own tower or value system focused on loving themselves above others.

In short, **they wanted to make a name for themselves.**

And then they chose the spiritual fork in the road, which is wide and many take it, rather than the one true “narrow road” that our Lord emphasized throughout His three-year ministry. Building Towers of Babel is still our option today, and the best remedy against it is exactly what our Lord the Savior said it is: “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** ³⁸ **This is the great and first commandment.** ³⁹ **And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Mtt. 22:37-39) In our lesson in *Mark 10* today, our Lord reiterated this all-surrounding truth when He responded to the rich young man asking to know how to receive eternal life. Jesus was looking deep-down inside of his soul and He saw the spiritual Tower of Babel standing in that young man’s heart.

Our Lord was trying to help this wealthy young man to grasp that we must not only obey the Lord’s commandments, but even more deeply we need to come to love following the Lord in spirit. **He was teaching that young man what it means to be spiritually rich and wealthy in God’s Kingdom: that true greatness is only built upon a life centered in God’s Love flowing through a life of kindness and usefulness.**

Many people are brought up to outwardly follow the Lord's commandments, since this enables them to be highly respected and praised in public. But when the Lord asks something of them that involves a real sacrifice, a real giving up of their egotism and self-importance (requiring them to stop feeling pride in their own goodness and wisdom), they are no longer willing to follow Him.

In closing, truly my friends, we can all be of use, no matter if we are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, whether we know one or two or three languages. True spiritual greatness is here for everyone who wishes to receive it, in God's goodness and will to be useful, in any way we can.

Let us pray:

PASTORAL PRAYER