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## **The Tower of Babel and the Name of the Lord**

Genesis 11

June 14, 2008

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Titanic Movie Clip:

*[Rose releases Jack's lifeless body and he sinks into the black water.]*

ROSE: I'll never let go. I promise.

*[She blows the whistle with all the strength in her body, and in the lifeboat, Lowe heard her and heads the boat in her direction.]*

LOWE: Come about!

*[Cut to close-up of Old Rose's wrinkled face.]*

OLD ROSE: But now you know there was a man named Jack Dawson, and that he saved me, in every way that a person can be saved.

*[We see the wreckage of the Titanic in the dark ocean. We pass over the endless fore-castle deck to the superstructure, moving quickly... almost floating. We enter the ship, and the echoing sound of distant waltz music is heard. The rust fades away from the walls of the dark corridor and it is transformed to its original splendor.*

*We emerge onto the grand staircase, lit by a glowing chandelier. The music is vibrant now, and the room is populated by all the characters from Rose's story. It is exquisitely beautiful. The crowd turns as we descend toward them. At the clock a man stands with his back to us... he turns and it is Jack. Smiling he holds his hand out toward us.*

*In a side angle, Rose goes into his arms, a girl of 17, in an exquisite white dress. They embrace and the crowd cheers.]*

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That's where we left off last time. I like showing movie clips, for they tell us things that our hearts believe and hope, but our minds cannot fully comprehend. They're like Bible stories in that way.

At the end of Titanic, old Rose drops off to sleep (or death), and she journeys to the wreck of the Titanic, deep beneath the sea. She enters the open door and everything old has become new. Jack is waiting for

her at the clock, and all these people we met in the story break into applause... for the groom has redeemed his bride, and a great party has begun; a party that now includes all these diverse people united in adoration and love.

There's an old Titanic, and on the other side of judgment and the sea, a new Titanic. Just like there's an old Jerusalem and a New Jerusalem.

Revelation 21:1-4 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Everything old passes away; every Jerusalem we build is destroyed; every Titanic sinks to the bottom of the sea.

Revelation 21:5 "And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new.""

Everything old passes away and everything old becomes new, for He makes all things new.

Revelation 5:13 "And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped."

All these diverse creatures... yet every creature singing the same song in ecstasy – that's Heaven. In some form, we all dream of it and in some way, we all try to make it happen.

For the last two sermons, we've been talking about Noah's ark. Noah's ark is literally the new creation floating in the midst of the judgment on the old creation. And in the ark is the new community, where the "wolf lies down with the lamb." God builds the ark. I mean He grows the wood, He sets the stage, but He has Noah pound the nail. The Ark sets down on a holy mountain.

Jesus Christ and Him crucified on a holy mountain is our Ark. God supplies the ingredients and we pound the nails. The Ark is built with our sin, revealing God's grace, and body broken and blood shed. Christ's body is the Ark and we become that Ark in this world – His body and His blood. The Church of Jesus Christ is the new creation floating in a flood of judgment upon the old creation. The true church is a life boat. The true church is a new community, governed by a new song.

Last week, I showed you a picture of my high school lunch room, and how communities would form. SLIDE. They'd form in pride and fear, and create walls that become prisons. (Soccer players ate with soccer players, and stoners with stoners, and you'd judge yourself in by judging others out.) That reminded us of communities in our city, and how I saw them. SLIDE. We create dividing walls in pride and fear. "Dividing walls of hostility." Yet the door to the new community is always open when we see

that Jesus, the heart of God, is an open door to us. We open our doors to others and God uses us to save others.

When the Titanic sank, 1,500 people (3<sup>rd</sup> class and steerage) went into the sea. There were 20 lifeboats and all but one came back to save the drowning. SLIDE. We looked at this the time before last. It reminded us of this: our city. SLIDE. And we dreamed of rowing our lifeboats, our churches, our resources, back into the center of the sea. SLIDE. As God uses us to save others, we ourselves are being saved (the folks stuck in lifeboats especially need saving). So as God uses us all to save each other, we grow into that new community – the new creation – the New Jerusalem – the Kingdom of Heaven... even on Earth.

Well, I know that's a lot. But for now, just remember this much: Heaven is the new community, new society, and in some form, we all dream of it, and try to make it happen.

Adolf Hitler tried to make it happen. He called it the Third Reich.

Joseph Stalin tried to make it happen.

We try to make it happen with free market capitalism.

With religion, we try to make it happen. Sometimes we call it "the church." But it usually doesn't feel like the Kingdom of Heaven.

"Thy kingdom come..." How does it come? How do we build it? That's my question, and that's my introduction to the sermon.

Let's pray: Jesus, your church is the new community. And Jesus, many of us believe that you're calling us to be your church, your sanctuary, downtown. Help us understand how it happens.

Genesis 10 begins to give the genealogy of the three sons of Noah: Shem, Japheth and Ham. Genesis gives most time to Shem. The name Shem is also the Hebrew word for "name." The genealogy of Shem is divided into two sections. Each section is the line of one of two great-grandsons that were each "divided," as the world was divided.

After the first genealogy of one of the grandsons of Shem, we read:

Genesis 11:1-4 "Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. (We don't know if it's the right words, but it's the same. For many, there is no difference: what is "right" is what is "same.") And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and settled there. 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. 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."

Let us make a name – a shem – for ourselves. That's ironic, because it's clearly implied that the sons of Shem could have inherited a "shem" (inherited a name) from Name himself. But they say, "Let's make a name for ourselves."

I can relate to that. “Let’s build a church.” “Let’s get unified.” “Let’s get strong.” “Let’s make a name for ourselves.” I think that’s called pride.

“Let’s make a name for ourselves lest we be dispersed...” I think that’s called fear – the flipside of pride. “...lest we be dispersed over the face of the earth.” I think that’s called disobedience, for God told man to “fill the earth.”

Well, in disobedience, they unite through pride and fear, saying, “Come, let us make bricks.” And so they began to build walls, a city, and a tower. You can still see towers in the land of Shinar (or Babylon) to this day – they are ancient Ziggurats. Ziggurats are man-made mountains. They made them of mud bricks and tar, rather than stone and mortar. To make the bricks, they’d place the mud in rectangular forms. These moulds would envelop the mud until it became hard, and could be baked. So you see, all the bricks were square, and just the same. More and more and more of the same bricks.

The city is made out of dust, fashioned into identical bricks. God also makes something out of dust; He makes people, but no two are just the same. And God also makes a city, yet every stone in His temple is different.

When men build societies through pride and fear, they tend to make everyone just the same. And when we live in pride and fear, we want to be just the same. In pride and fear, we want a whole bunch of the same... we want a crowd.

Søren Kierkegaard wrote, “The crowd is like an envelope. One receives a large package, thinks it’s something, but look, it is a package of envelopes.”

People see this large tower, and think it’s something. But look, it’s the same thing over and over and over again.

Kierkegaard writes, “The crowd is indeed untruth. Christ was crucified because He would have nothing to do with the crowd (Even though he addressed himself to all). He did not want a mass movement, but wanted to be what He was, the truth. [The truth] is related to the single individual. Therefore everyone who will genuinely serve the truth, is by that very fact, a martyr.” Jesus is the truth crucified by the crowd.

I visited Romania in 1990. To construct the great society, the communists built cement housing blocks everywhere: square rooms all the same. Endless identical boxes, for your body as well as your mind. Countless Christians had been martyred, for they wouldn’t fit in the boxes. The Communist party built boxes for the crowd. Hitler built boxes. And we the people (the Democratic people) build boxes.

C.S. Lewis said, “A society which becomes democratic in ethos as well as in constitution is doomed. And not much loss either.” If we think that the right is whatever is the same, we’re doomed.

So Paul says, “Don’t let this world (the popular vote) squeeze you into its mold.” In an effort to make a name for itself and seize control, the church (or I should say institutional church) makes boxes too. With every form of church government, we’re tempted to make molds, and shape people in our own image.

“But masses of mimickers, a crowd of copycats are wasted lives,” writes Kierkegaard. “God has been merciful to us, demonstrating his grace to the point of being willing to involve himself with every person. If we prefer to be like all the others, this amounts to high treason against God.”

Now listen closely, and remember this: “Instinctively, man has a tactic he uses against “spirit:” “Let us form a crowd.” “Let us make bricks and build a city and a tower...” A tower with its top in the Heavens.

Genesis 11:5 “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.”

ZOOM CLIP - Ziggurat. I think that’s a joke... He has to “come down” just to see the top of the great tower. PICTURE. See it? That’s actually a broken Ziggurat in Ur (the Babylonian city from which God called Abraham, then Abram).

Genesis 11:6-7 “And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language (It’s not the right language, but it’s the same 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 (If they want to build Hell on earth, they can). Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

Some say God never brings confusion. Well, God isn’t confused, but He’s more than happy to tear down our faulty temples, and confuse our wicked paradigms with the truth – Jesus. Jesus sure did confuse the Scribes and Pharisees.

Genesis 11:8-9 “So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 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.”

Isaiah 2:12 “For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low... against all the uplifted hills, against every high tower, and against every fortified wall.”

God destroys all our towers and you know one day each of us will die, and the dust of our flesh will be dispersed – scattered – over the face of the earth.

The societies we manufacture, the cities we build... they may be titanic, they may be huge, but they are cities constructed with pride and fear. And thus are cities of disobedience, cities of unanimity, and cities of bondage that bear the fruit of death.

There was a particular society (high society) on the top deck of the Titanic. It was made of those that built the Titanic, and controlled the world, and made a name for themselves. And there was the makings of a very different society (a new society) within the Titanic and down below.

Titanic Movie Clip 4:

OLD ROSE: I saw my whole life as if I'd already lived it... an endless parade of parties and cotillions, yachts and polo matches... always the same narrow people, the same mindless chatter. I felt like I was standing at a great precipice, with no one to pull me back.

CAL: Mr. Dawson is joining us from third class. He was of some assistance to my fiancée last night.

GRACIE: Well, join me for a brandy, gentlemen?

ROSE (low, to Jack): Now they retreat into a cloud of smoke and congratulate each other on being masters of the universe.

GRACIE: Joining us, Dawson? You don't want to stay out here with the women, do you?

JACK: No thanks. I've got to be heading back.

CAL: Probably best. It'll be all business and politics, that sort of thing. Wouldn't interest you.

*[Cal and the other gentlemen exit.]*

Jack: Time for me to go row with the other slaves. Good night, Rose.

*[We see him slip a tiny folded note into her palm as he kisses her hand. Ruth, scowling, watches him walk away across the enormous room. Rose surreptitiously opens the note below table level. It reads: "Make it count. Meet me at the clock!"*

*Rose crosses the foyer, sighting Jack at the landing above. Overhead is the crystal dome. Jack has his back to her, studying the ornate clock. It softly strikes the hour. Rose moves up the sweeping staircase toward him. He turns, sees her... smiles.]*

JACK: So, you want to go to a real party?

*[In steerage, the crowd is alive with music, laughter and raucous carrying on. An ad hoc band is gathered near the upright piano, honking out lively stomping music on fiddle, accordion and tambourine. People of all ages are dancing, drinking beer and wine, smoking, laughing, even brawling. Jack and Rose join in, and they dance and laugh into the night.]*

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“So you want to go to a real party?” So Jack meets her at the clock (a decision between time and eternity) and takes her from a society of pride and fear, to a society of humility and joy: every class, every background, united by a song, manifest in a dance. It’s like a taste or an outpost of another world; a life boat; an ark of a new covenant.

Well, God destroys our arrogant towers and sinks our Titanics, and confuses our faithless speech. Listen to Zephaniah 3:

“In the fire of my jealousy, all the earth shall be consumed. For at that time, I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him with one accord.”

He scatters, but then gathers, with a new speech, new spirit, that calls on His name. Well the people that want to make a name (a “shem”) for themselves are scattered. Then Genesis 11 records the lineage of the other line of Shem. It ends with a fellow named Abram. And God said to Abram, “Abram, I will bless you and make your name great.” And God the Father gives Abram the name Abraham, “Father of

Nations.” He inherits his name from God the Father, by grace through faith, and it’s counted as righteousness. (sings) “The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and they are saved.” Proverbs 18:10

Well, through Abraham’s seed God build an ark, a temple, a city, and an entire New Creation. Jesus the Christ is Abraham’s seed. He gives you a new name. You “inherit it,” “run into it.” That name makes you – you don’t make that name. When Jesus was crucified, every paradigm and tower of man was shattered, and the followers of Jesus were scattered. But they returned to the city and waited as Jesus has commanded. And then the prophecy of Zephaniah came true: A flood of fire and a new speech.

Acts 2 “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now, I pray in tongues, and I would that all of you prayed in tongues... but you see, that’s a minor miracle compared to what Scripture describes next: The undoing of Babel.

“Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians – we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed.”

Amazed. All these different, scattered, not the same people... unified by one speech, one word, one song, the song of praise, telling of the mighty works of God. And what are the “mighty works of God?” Well, I think the mightiest work for me is that God saved me. And the mightiest work for you might be that God saved you. Me and you. Same song, different verse; same substance, different form. Like we preached: the form of your disobedience becomes the form of God’s mercy. So the unique form of the old sinful you becomes the unique form of the glorious new you. Your sin forms the void into which God pours the fiery, liquid gold of His grace, so your song of praise is unique in all creation, yet the same as all finished creation.

“Amazing grace (the same) that saved a wretch like me (utterly unique).”

So Paul sings, “Amazing grace – I was the chief of sinners and a Pharisee, and now I’m the Apostle of grace to the Gentiles.”

And Mary Magdalene sings, “I was a prostitute, but now I’m the bride of Christ – a new name.”

Peter sings, “I denied Him three times, I was soft as mud, but he gave me a new name, “Rock,” on which He built His church.”

You see, into the old dirt bag that you think is you, God breathes His Spirit and makes you new, not a square mud brick like all the rest, but a living stone with a new name. Peter wrote, “Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves

built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

We don’t build it; God builds it out of us. It’s the Bride of Christ. Even now she (we, it) is coming down. “The New Jerusalem that is coming down.” Like Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is in the midst of you... among you.” When we gather and speak the language of praise for the wonders of grace, we speak the language of Heaven. We become an outpost of Heaven. We become the presence of the New Creation, as we join all finished creation singing praise to the Lamb on the throne. You see, Heaven is all these diverse, not the same creatures singing the same song in ecstasy.

So now the question is: Do you want to go to a real party?

Acts 2:12 “And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others, mocking, said, “They are filled with new wine.” But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel. “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.”

So Peter preaches the gospel, saying, “Repent and be baptized. Save yourself from this crooked generation.”

Acts 2:42 “So those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostle. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

That’s the kingdom of God. And how did it come? Well, people didn’t make it come, and men didn’t build it, and they certainly didn’t make a name for themselves. Actually, it was just the opposite. They were scattered, and they were humbled, but Jesus appeared and told them to wait in the city, and it appears that they waited in a rented room and prayed. On Pentecost, the fire came, they were filled with the Spirit and God gave them new speech. The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus – the Word. They lose themselves and find themselves, praising God, drunk by His spirit.

All these different people share one Spirit. All these different people sing one song. The song manifests in a dance of love that is their life. Instead of a society of pride, fear, disobedience, unanimity, bondage and death, it’s a society of humility, joy and obedience that is diversity and freedom. It’s life, and it grows. God adds to their numbers. But how? What do people see? How do people know? Well, Jesus said, “By this... all people will know that you are my disciples.” By this: I told you about my high school lunchroom. Imagine if you saw this:

[High School Musical clip of students dancing in a lunch room plays on screen behind Peter, with no sound.] A high school lunch room, full of cliques and dividing walls of hostility, and then all these

different people and groups moving in diverse, and yet perfectly coordinated, movements. I mean, if you just saw that, wouldn't you be amazed? You'd think, "Such diversity: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, soccer players, band geeks and stoners... all different, yet suddenly coordinated as one." You'd think to yourself, "That looks like a dance! So they must be hearing a song that I can't hear." And of course they do. That's a scene from High School Musical with the sound turned off.

Do you understand? The Kingdom of Heaven is a musical. It's a musical and the Spirit of Christ is the music. Yet for some in this world, the sound is turned off. So when people see your love for one another, they think, "There must be a song or some music I cannot hear." Do you get it? It's not a building, not a philosophy, strategy or program. We'll have buildings, philosophies, strategies and programs – they're good. But they are not the Church. You are the Church, the lifeboat. The new community animated by the Spirit of Jesus is the lifeboat. Ya'll are it.

When you love each other in the Spirit of Christ, people look. When you love each other in the Spirit of Christ, people look and think, "They know something I don't know. They hear music that I don't hear, a song I don't sing. And I want to hear and I want to sing, for the dance is beautiful, and it looks like life."

If you were all just the same, like bricks in a row, or soldiers in uniforms, marching in unison, well the world would look and think, "It's just one more Tower of Babel." But because you're different yet united, it looks like a body and testifies to life. You're the dancing body of Christ, the new community... And all that much more beautiful, because you're not all the same. You see, I think that's what God is making out of us.

OVERHEAD. So it really matters that some are willing to drive all this way from the suburbs. And it really matters that some live here in the city. It really matters that some have means and some don't... Some are poor and some are not poor... That some are black and some are white... Some are older and some are young... That some are Republicans and some are Democrats... That some come from one culture and some from another. That mix matters, and makes the dance more beautiful.

And this mix matters most: Some of you struggle with homosexual sins. Some of you struggle with heterosexual sins. Some of you have committed adultery, and "if you look on a woman with lust, you've committed adultery in your heart." Some of you have prostituted yourself... for money, for acceptance, for security. Some of you have committed murder, in the flesh or in your heart, and before God I don't know if there's a difference. Some have stolen, lied, slandered, gossiped, and even disrespected your parents. I've heard just about every sin you can imagine, confessed by people in this room... many of them on this platform before all of you.

Let's do this: At the count of three, would you state the sin which in your estimation has most defined you in the past? Hate, fear, lust, greed, despair, cowardice, addiction... At the count of three, state it out loud. One, two, three... Hear that? See? All sorts of sin, all different.

Now at the count of three, I want you to say the name of the one who saves you, and makes all things new. One, two, three... Jesus! That's beautiful. That's the New Creation. That's the start of a real party.

### ***Communion***

For on the night that He was betrayed, He took bread and he broke it, saying, “This is my body, broken, given to you. Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of me.” And in the same way after supper, He took the cup and He said, “This is the cup of the new covenant, the eternal covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you. Do it in remembrance of me.” And so we invite all of you who just yelled a moment ago, to come forward and surrender that empty place in your heart that is that sin, and receive the mercy that is Jesus Christ your Lord. Because you really are his body, dancing in this world, for all the world to see. So come to the table. Take communion and then dance. In Jesus name, worship him. It’s the language of Heaven.

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### ***Benediction***

And so Heaven is the very best party. And the party starts here and now, by faith. And I don’t know about you, but if I go to a party, I want to go to one with a lot of weird people. I don’t want everyone to be all the same, sitting there with their hands crossed, smiling, all afraid and insecure. I want red-necks having truck-pushing contests in the parking lot, and I want old church ladies, and I want little children dancing to accordion music. You see, I’m describing an actual party... the best party that I’ve ever been to. And that was my wedding party, when everybody in my life came together: relatives, red-necks, church people. They all came together and celebrated with me that I had won a bride. And you see, Heaven is the ultimate party, and it’s also our home.

There are a lot of homeless people in this world. A couple of weeks ago, we had a Ministry Team meeting, and Frances invited a couple people from our congregation who had been homeless, just to share their stories. Very different stories, but both of them homeless. And in both cases, it became pretty clear to me, that what they wanted wasn’t a program, but a home. And we’re all homeless, aren’t we? We all long for the new community that is our Father’s house. And you see, it begins here. You really are it. Oh, if your eyes could just be opened, and see the immeasurable greatness of power that is in you. That is ya’ll. You’re the lifeboat. In Jesus name, amen.