

The Shanghai Tower in China has 128 floors, and stands 2,073 feet tall. The top of the tower does not quite reach into the heavens. A long days' drive away from the land of Shinar, the Burj Khalifa rises 2,717 feet into the sky, and as the air rarifies, so does the company who can afford the highest of the 163 floors, but still, the Burj Khalifa does not offer access to God's heavenly temple. Sometime next year, unless an unforeseen communications breakdown occurs, the Jeddah Tower in Saudi Arabia will be completed so that it stands 3,280 feet tall, becoming the tallest skyscraper in the world. And as it scrapes the sky, it will reach just high enough so that when He comes down from heaven, God Himself will be able to see it!

Human beings are inveterate tower-makers, constantly racing one another to see who can build the tallest. It starts with blocks and Legos, and we haven't yet seen where it ends. By definition, a tower is *taller* than it is *wide*; structurally, it reaches *up to heaven* rather than spreading out to *fill the earth*. And from the beginning, towers have represented man's attempt to climb up to heaven and take a seat on heaven's throne. Whether anyone ever literally thought a tower could reach into heaven or not, the motivations of fame, glory, power, wealth, and making a name for oneself have always been built in to man's tower-making efforts.

Biblically, those seeking the presence of God would climb mountains, God's hand-made towers, and then wait for God to lower Himself down the rest of the way. Mountains are a mid-point; high enough to express longing for God; low enough to stay within the bounds of humility. Towers, on the other hand, represent man's own ladder to heaven, an attempt to make our own way up, not so much in order to *find* God as to *become* God. And so in Genesis 11, God knew that the Tower of Babel was not just a challenging architectural exercise, but an act of *rebellion* against the Lord: *we're going to make a name for ourselves*; the people said, and *we're going to do it by getting ourselves to heaven*.

And although the Bible pokes fun at humanity by saying in v.5 that God needed to "come down" in order to see the tower, it also testifies to the ruined glory of rebellious man that God decided to take action to thwart them. He didn't just laugh and return back up out of reach; He laughed, and punched the idolatrous union of humanity in the face, splitting her lip and scattering people all over the earth so that their rebellion would not keep growing.

God had not told man to climb up to heaven; He had told them to fill the earth. He wasn't *threatened* by man's accomplishments; He was determined that His plan for humanity would be achieved, and that our pride would be humbled, clearing the way for His grace. Proud rebels never make it to heaven; but God lifts the humble up into His presence. And so the Lord dispersed the nations over the face of all the earth by confusing their language, using words and communication as the fulcrum to pry people apart, so that unified man divided into different tribes and nations and peoples and tongues. Cultures and races and languages were God's doing. He broke the human body apart.

Of course, God had done this before, back in the Garden of Eden, splitting Adam apart for God's own glory and Adam's great good. And God would do it once again, condemning humanity to be broken on the cross in the person of Jesus, so that out of His brokenness for our sins, the human race could not only be raised up and knit back together in one new body, but also so that that one new body could be joined to Christ the head to ascend into heaven, to the right hand of God! And of course, you remember how it was that God came down that time: not merely as a heavenly visitor, but as a man. And especially today, on Pentecost Sunday, we remember that God became man *through the work of the Holy Spirit*, which Christians confess in our great creeds.

We cannot *build* our way to God; only the Spirit brings God and man together. We cannot *replace* God and take the throne for ourselves by the power of the *human* spirit, but God can become one of us and place a human being on heaven's throne, by the power of the *Holy Spirit*. And despite all our talk about the brotherhood and equality of man, the human spirit is incapable of bringing about sustained worldwide unity; that glory belongs to the Holy Spirit, who has taken a fractured humanity and united her through the proclamation of the gospel to every nation and tribe and language and people all over the face of the whole earth.

God broke humanity apart at Babel, so that He could restore us at Pentecost, not just as a repaired humanity, but as a renewed humanity made more glorious for having been scattered.

And at Pentecost, as we heard from Acts 2, we see all of humanity come together, beginning with this core group of the new humanity, who v. 1 says are *all together in one place*, and not at this point dispersed over the face of the earth. Additionally, v. 5 tells us that Jerusalem

contained *devout men from every nation under heaven*, and then it gives us a representative list of those nations, just like what we have in Gen. 10, right before the account of the tower of Babel.

And in that place, where all the nations were gathered, God came rushing down from heaven, showing forth divided tongues of fire, filling the disciples with the Holy Spirit not to *confuse* their language, but to give them supernatural ability to *speak* in other tongues so that the *different* people from *different* nations who used *different* languages could be *united* in hearing God's message. God sent His Spirit down to unite the *divided nations* into *one body of worshipers*.

Peter explained the meaning of the Spirit's language miracle by proclaiming that God was fulfilling His Word to the Prophet Joel by pouring out the Spirit *in order to make a name for Himself*. Remember the motivation of the Babel-builders? "Let us make a name for ourselves?" God sent a language *curse* to frustrate *that* goal, but sent a language *blessing* by His Spirit to make a name for *Jesus*, empowering preaching to proclaim that Jesus is Lord (2:36), and to announce the good news (2:21) "that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

We've already heard from Genesis, Acts, and Joel, but I want to add one more verse to complete the picture. Listen to Proverbs 18:10: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe." God has built a strong tower connecting heaven and earth, and His name is Jesus Christ. Run to Jesus, and be saved! [*Cf. David and who builds who a house*]

Now, the Spirit's ministry is not the *accomplishment* of redemption; that's the work of Jesus. But the Spirit's ministry is just as crucial: the Spirit enables the *announcement* and *application* of the redemption that Jesus accomplished. No one runs to the tower unless they hear. No one hears unless preachers are sent. No one understands unless those preachers speak their language! By the Spirit, the message is announced over the face of all the earth! The language barrier that divided the nations is overcome. The Spirit has taken a rebellious, idolatrous world with one *language*, and is turning it into a righteous world with one *Lord*. The Spirit has put a stop to *the tower of self-salvation*, and replaced it with *a tower of salvation in the name of the Lord Jesus*. The Spirit shattered a *corrupt unity* based on *sharing the same words*, and is re-forming a *new unity* based on the *Word of Christ*, many languages, many cultures, but one Gospel, one Christ, one body of Christ joined by faith and held together in the unity of the Spirit.

You thought I was taking a break from Ephesians, but I'm not. This *is* the message of Ephesians! Listen to [read Ephesians 4:1-10]. One body, one Spirit, one Lord who has ascended above the heavens, uniting heaven and earth! Through His Holy Spirit, God has unified humanity, built a tower to heaven, and made the name of Jesus great. What man could not do, despite his proudest efforts, God has done for us in Christ by the Spirit. Here is Jesus your tower, here is the Spirit who brings you up into the presence of God!

The application is this: run to this tower, and be saved! Stop building your own tower! We build our own towers whenever we prioritize our nation, our culture, our people, our families, and ourselves over the strong tower that is Jesus, the whole Christ, head and body. If making a great name for America is more important to you than the gospel of Jesus reaching all the nations, you're working on a new tower of Babel. When you make decisions based on what's best for you and your family rather than encouraging your sons and daughters to follow the Spirit's vision of God's great dream for the world, you are trying to make a name for yourself, and God will come down and wreck your little tower, because God is building *another* tower by His Spirit.

But when God wrecks your tower, He does this *because He loves you*. He predestined you to ascend the Jesus tower to heaven, and when you seek first *this* tower, that's when your family and your nation find their rightful place. Jesus' tower has a place for your tribe and nation and tongue; but your tower will never be big enough for Jesus, and your tower will never reach heaven.

And so God has come down by His Spirit to put an end to your confused efforts to reach heaven by the wrong tower, and to proclaim by His Spirit in every language under heaven that Jesus is Lord, and that everyone who runs to this strong tower and calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

- In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every people and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*