

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Risen and Ascended King and from the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. Amen

Language. We are surrounded by it! From the first breath we take to our final. I'm sure you all who are parents most likely remember the first words your children spoke. Language is an important part of relationships. Language is involved in every relationship from the most intimate of relationships as husband and wife to the most general. We use it to communicate our thoughts and feelings. We use to share knowledge and facts. It's everywhere.

Have you wondered where language actually came from? The first written language was something of Hieroglyphics or Cuneiform. Yet, the story of language, of words, is even older than human history. From the very beginning, the Spirit and the Word of God was living and active. The whole story of Scripture IS the story of language.

This story of language begins all the way in the beginning when we read in Genesis 1. ³ *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*¹ In Genesis 2:19 we read when God gave mankind language. ¹⁹ *Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.*² Here we see that God gave mankind the gift of words and language. He did this by breathing into Adam His Spirit and inviting him to name the animals.

Language is a great gift of God that was one of the first gifts at creation. But by the time we get to Genesis 11, our text for today, people began to use a great gift of God, words, in a tragic way. It's a story that's all about language and words. As we hear again the first verse of our text: *Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.*³

As this account of Babel unfolds we see the problem with language as the tension builds and the hearts of this whole mankind are revealed by their words. 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."*⁴ Let's make this clear...there is nothing essentially wrong with wanting to make bricks and build a city and a tower.

There's a problem here. They were becoming idolaters. Why did they want to build it? They wanted to build the city and tower to make a name for themselves and not be scattered. This was definitely a clear violation of God's command to fill the earth. God told them, "Be Fruitful and Multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." It was a clear violation of God's command to call on the name of the Lord.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ge 1:3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ge 2:19). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ge 11:1). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ge 11:3-4). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

I don't have to tell you this...but there is great power in language. Our media, whether we like it or not has great influence. They are even reshaping people's view on social issues and political issues. The media through their language I would argue has the ability to get someone elected or not elected. Gossip does great harm to a person. Even with Cyber-bullying there are cases of depression and suicide linked to words. Language can also assist with encouragement. Perhaps mom or dad offers you a gentle word after a discouraging day at school or your husband or wife offers that encouraging word after a difficult day at work.

God indeed recognizes this power of language and states the potential power even of human language. Yahweh God says this, 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."*⁵ The great problem really is that mankind had given up on calling on the name of the Lord and breaking the Law that was written on our hearts and would end up being the second commandment. "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God." What does this mean? "We should fear and love God that we do not curse, swear, or use Satanic Arts, Lie or deceive by His name, but call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." What a great invitation God has given us to call on His name by the power of the Spirit living in US! You and I we were given God's name in our Baptism...when we were baptized into His Triune Name. In His name you have protection from the evil one, you have the assurance that you belong to Him.

And yet the builders of Babel, who thought they were so clever in their use of language, wanted to make a name for themselves. To name the animals was a task given to them, but to make a name for themselves was not. We do this in a variety of ways that show our idolatry of self. We use our words to get ahead of others or even beat down those around us. We use our words to bully others either to their face, behind their backs or on social media, Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat or whatever else is out there today. We use words to make our name great by tearing others down when we just don't like them. We spend a majority of our time and income to have us excel in our sports and make a name on the field or court or rink. Perhaps you even try to make a name for yourself in the church, you use your self-acclaimed power to get your way. Perhaps you focus only on your career to get ahead. We do so many other things where the idolatry of the self is seen and HEARD.

And so God came down! This is the first time in the bible where we see God "coming down. That's an astounding statement. The tower was to reach the heavens, but it's so small God has to leave the heights of heaven and come all the way down to inspect this tiny little structure of men.

God came down! The early Christian church understood this verse to refer to the preincarnate Christ. When God appears to human in the Old Testament, we can expect that it is the same way He appears to us in the New: in the Son.

Doubtless, this is the way God appeared to Adam and Eve, to Moses, and many others. The Son of God, after all, is himself the Eternal Word later to become flesh. John makes this clear: **1** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* **2** *He was in the beginning with God.* **3** *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*^{6 14} *And the*

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ge 11:6). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Jn 1:1-3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

*Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*⁷

And the punishment that the Word of God inflicts is to confuse the word of man. *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.*⁸ Consider the irony: WE talk Big! Then God's Word is always the final answer...His Word is always the biggest.

Thankfully, this wasn't the last time in the story of language God came down to earth. HE came down many times after Babel through the Words of His prophets, Moses, Elijah, Ezekial, and Isaiah. But ultimately, God came down in the person of the very WORD made flesh, to live, died, rise, before Ascending. It's through the Word's Word that we have life. "It is finished," declared that all our sins of self are forgiven. Those times that you use your words, attitudes, and actions to make your name great, and make someone become lesser and make God lesser, know that even those sins are forgiven – in His name, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

These very words of Absolution along with receiving a great name in Baptism and the Words, "This is my Body, this is My Blood for your forgiveness, are all God coming down powerfully to change the world, all powerful even through speaking. You see Words have great power, they have power to hurt and destroy, but they also have power to heal. "I forgive you," and actually meaning is of great healing value. "I love you," has value when someone is struggling with rejection and even depression. Words...especially the Word of God has power.

It's not our Words that accomplish a lot, but rather the Lord's Words.

At the Tower of Babel, God came down to confuse the language of the people, but on Pentecost, God came down in the person of the Holy Spirit and stopped the confusion...for the Holy Spirit caused the people gathered from many nations, tribes, peoples, and languages to hear the Word of God preached in their language.

The Holy Spirt continues to come today, in the Word preached, and He was bestowed to you at your baptism. Instead of confusing the languages as was done at Babel...the Holy Spirit is constantly bringing the saving message of Christ to all nations, tribes, peoples and languages.

Even now the church continues to answer the Call to translate and proclaim the message into all the languages of the world. It's His words...not ours! The language of God continues to be saving message of Christ...a saving message to all people, from every nation, tribe, people, and language. A Saving Message that Jesus Christ lived for you, He died for you, and now lives again for you so that you may be free from sin and death.

⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Jn 1:14). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ge 11:6–9). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

In the name of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.