

# Keynotes from Richard's am Sermon on 29/11/2020

(Richard is our Mission Partner serving in Bible Translation in Africa)

## Mission Month Week 4 – “From Confusion to Worship”

### Genesis 11, Acts 2 and Revelation 7

The theme for Missions Month is ‘**Who can stop the Lord Almighty?**’ and, of course, the answer is nothing (no pandemic, no crisis, no disaster, no power in heaven or earth) can stop him from carrying out his plans and purposes in the world.

We need to be reminded of the answer to this question because, in our own lives, things happen which cause us to lose sight of the big picture. We get tired and discouraged, and find ourselves focusing on our daily struggles. Knowing the answer to this question lifts our eyes to see the big story. It not only encourages us to keep going in our faith in God, but also encourages us to see God’s plans and purposes in what he is doing across the whole earth, past present and future.

Today we will take a panoramic view of the Bible. Using the theme of language, we will see how that carries through from Genesis to Revelation, moving from confusion on to understanding and finally to worship. As we do so, we will see very clearly that **nothing can stop the Lord Almighty** from carrying out his plans and purposes in the world.

**His mission is to rescue people from every nation, tribe, people and language for the praise of his glory.**

#### 1. Confusion

**Genesis 11:1-9** Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup> And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.” <sup>5</sup> And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup> So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup> 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.

We start here with one common language, but by the end of the story there are many languages, and confusion. After the flood, God had instructed Noah's family to go forth and multiply and **fill the earth (Gen 9:1)**, but now we see people in rebellion against God. Instead of following God's instructions, they (**v4**):

- Refuse to spread out and fill the earth
- Want to be noticed and to get praise and glory for themselves, by building a city and a tower
- Consider themselves to be self-sufficient, and able to make it in life without God

In our technologically advanced society, we too can apparently do so much now with our own research and intelligence that we have come to consider ourselves able to manage without God.

Faced with such arrogance and pride, God brings judgement (**vv7-9**). The people didn't want to be scattered but now the Lord mixes up the languages and scatters them – so we have confusion.

- The current estimate is that there are **7,360 languages in use** today, among the many thousand of people groups. Some of them have millions of speakers, and others far fewer. In practice, this is so confusing. We long to talk in depth with someone, but can't get beyond the simple greetings because we don't speak the same language. We can't get our message across.

The Bible tells us that God specialises in turning around the darkest of situations for good. He can turn the mess into a means for him to be glorified, worshiped, honoured and praised. So can he turn around the confusion of the

multitude of languages and use it for his glory? In Genesis 12, we find the beginning of God's solution – choosing one man and his family so that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed (**Gen 12:3**)

### **Nothing can stop the Lord Almighty**

#### **2. Understanding**

**Acts 2:1-11** When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested<sup>[a]</sup> on each one of them. <sup>4</sup>And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. <sup>5</sup>Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup>And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup>both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

Jesus' disciples were waiting in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit. The sound of what happened at that time attracted the attention of the crowds of visitors in the city. They were from many different parts of the world, speaking many different languages, but when they heard the disciples speaking, each one heard their own language. Jews from the east would probably have understood Aramaic, and those from the west would have understood Greek yet:

- each one was hearing them speak in **his own language** (v6)
- we hear, each of us in **his own native language** (v8)
- we hear them telling in **our own tongues** the mighty works of God (v11)

When God speaks, he wants to speak in a language we can understand. There is no one holy language. The Holy Spirit is not a spirit of confusion. His work is to strengthen and empower believers to communicate God's truth so it can be understood. The Bible should be available to everyone in the language they

understand, which is what inspired the English Bible translators such as Wycliffe and Tyndale.

- If people listen to the Gospel in a foreign language (even if they understand it), it gives the impression that the Gospel is foreign and not for them. Yet we are not proclaiming to people a foreign God or a foreign religion.
- It is when we hear the Spirit of God speaking in our own language that we are amazed by the wonders of God, and know deep down that this is our God and the message is directed at us.

One of the translators of the Bible in West Africa (a colleague) said this “People now see that God is the God who speaks our language. He is our God. He is not some God fetched from somewhere else to colonise us”

Yet there are still millions without that privilege. Of the 7360 languages in the world:

- 701 have the whole Bible
- 3400 have portions of the Bible

Just over 2000 languages (where there is a likely need for translation) have no scripture and no work in progress.

**People need to hear and understand the vital message that the apostle Peter declared at Pentecost:**

**Acts 2:28-39** And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

**When we believe in Jesus, we find free and full forgiveness – an offer that is real even today.**

### **3. Worship**

**Revelation 7:9-12** <sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, <sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” <sup>11</sup> And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

We see John's vision of heaven as a multitude of saved people stand before the throne of God. People will be there worshipping God from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language – too many to count!

Earlier we asked whether God could take the confusion of languages and turn it around for his ultimate praise and glory. Here we see that the answer is yes – **nothing can stop the Lord Almighty**. The day is coming when people from every language will worship him.

- In **Genesis 11**, people of one language came together to make a name for themselves so **they** could get the glory
- In **Revelation 7**, people of every language come together to praise the name of God so **he** will get the glory.

How could just one language express every facet of the glory of God?

- Each language has its own unique vocabulary and expression in worship. It is only in this multilingual, international choir of believers from every language, and accompanied by the angels, that all the richness of vocabulary can be used in praising and worshipping the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

God is more glorified in saving people from every language than if Babel had never happened, for here he is bringing worship out of confusion so that this international crowd can cry out together:

'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'.

God wants us to look outwards to the world, and to join with our brothers and sisters saved from every nation – praying for them, and sharing, working and worshipping with them.

**From confusion to understanding to worship.**

There are still hundreds of millions of people who have as yet had little opportunity of hearing or understanding the good news, and hundreds of people groups who have hardly been touched by the Gospel.

**But God will accomplish his mission in this world and we have the privilege, the responsibility and the command to be part of it.**

Nothing can stop the Lord Almighty.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,<sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"