

Kington Baptist Church

MESSAGE BOARD – 81

The Tower of Babel: an ancient monument with a modern twist.

Then they said, 'Come, we'll build ourselves a city, and a tower that will reach into heaven, and we'll make a name for ourselves; otherwise we'll be scattered far and wide over the face of the whole earth.'

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which men had built. And the Lord said, 'Look, they are one people, with one language; this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they intend to do will be impossible for them. Let us go down, and confuse their language'. So the Lord scattered them far and wide from there over the face of all the earth; and they ceased to build the city. (Genesis 11.4-8)

Many folk have recently spoken of the benefits they've found from getting into the country, into gardens, woods and fields.

This ought to be no surprise; the origins of this benefit go back to the Old Testament, to the 11th chapter of Genesis. It's the contrast between the city and the country. The first city was built by Cain, in direct opposition to God, whose intention for mankind was very different. After Cain's effort we read of the Tower of Babel. From even those very early times, the city was considered the ideal place for trade, pleasure and security – the blue-print of 'civilisation'. God had a different plan; his command was that people spread out, into the vastness and openness of the country; keeping close to the soil, the streams, mountains and trees. God was saying, 'Go where you'll have time for me'. But people built cities, and pushed God out of their minds!

Slowly the idea of the city developed into what we know as 'nationalism'; and nationalism came to be called 'sovereignty' – a narrow, claustrophobic, inward looking virus. It adopted mottos like 'my country first'; 'my country right or wrong'. Give a moment's thought and you'll see how utterly at odds this view of things is to the Church of Jesus Christ! Remember how on the day of Pentecost people from many nations were brought into the Church. We read that the redeemed in heaven are from every tribe and tongue and nation, standing around the throne of God and the Lamb. But fallen humanity segregates, discriminates and divides. Their outlook is distrust of the 'other' person. And cities now, as at the beginning, are arranged to promote trade, pleasure and security – to exalt man, and ignore God. And, just as at the Tower of Babel, while people boast of their ability and invincibility, they are full of fear – *'let us build'* ('we can do it, there's nothing we can't do') *'lest we are scattered'* ('because we're afraid')!

And the underlying motive is all-too obvious: love of money. The city wasn't necessary for life, but necessary for wealth. Money from trade – *money* brings the opportunity for *pleasure*. But money and pleasure breed fear; fear of loss, and so need for *security*. The cost of security is met by trade – and so the city slides down the giddy helter-skelter of 'civilisation': the lust for money brings the burden of trade; to compensate, the thirst for pleasure; money and pleasure need protection. The money from trade pays for pleasure and security to protect trade, wealth and pleasure! And God? He's become irrelevant! This is the world we know – pioneered by Cain, who murdered his brother, and reaching a climax with the Tower of Babel.

What's God's response? Does he turn away? Does he leave the world to its foolishness, its sin and despair? That's not what he does. He 'comes down'. He 'scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts'. And he does this in grace – to bring us to an end of ourselves, so we see our folly, our need for something above and beyond this dead-end way of living. God made us for himself – not this roundabout of 'wealth, health and pleasure'.

It is not by chance that, at the very moment we've asserted our 'sovereign independence' (a fiction in the modern word), we're also facing the greatest upheaval of a life-time. This independence is not merely political and economic. It is a far deeper, more malignant independence – independence of God! The gods we've chosen are trade, pleasure, sport, and science.

The problems we face have a purpose, a God-intended purpose: to 'lead to repentance'. *You must understand that in the last days mockers will come 'What's happened to the promise of his coming? Everything goes on just as it did from the beginning!' ... But the Lord has not given up on the promise of his coming, but he is patient with us, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.* (2 Peter 3.3, 9)

Have you wondered what it would look like for a nation to repent, for a nation to return to God, or to come to faith? But *nations* cannot repent or come to faith; individuals repent, individuals believe. A nation repents when individuals repent; when individuals, within a nation, choose God.

The warning we are given is that this is exactly what will *not* happen: '*they did not repent or give God glory*'. (Revelation 19) We live in a society that refuses to give God glory. But that is why there is still hope. It is God's purpose to be glorified in the world through the victory of Christ. This is the divine force and power behind the gospel – and God *will* accomplish his purpose: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* (John 3.16-17)

We pray '*Thy Kingdom come...*'; we pray to see 'wonders of grace' in our desperately needy world!