

## ***HOPE FOR OUR DIVIDED WORLD***

Over in the book of Genesis, in one of the early chapters--chapter 10—there is a curious verse. I don't know if it has ever caught your attention, but I want to use it to begin our lesson this morning. It is found in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis, which is mostly a genealogical listing of the sons of Noah—Ham, Shem and Japheth. Not a lot is given with regard to Japheth's line, but verses 6-20 tell us about the sons of Ham. These included sons named Cush and Egypt and Put and Canaan.

Beginning then in verse 21, we read about the descendants of Shem, who is called the father of all the children of Eber, from which the word *Hebrew* was derived. Well actually, Shem had sons named Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. Eber turns out to be Shem's great grandson, and it is that bloodline from which Abraham will come at least six generations later. Eber was born to Arpachshad's son Shelah, and Shelah has two sons named Peleg and Joktan. It is in telling about those two sons that we find the curious verse I mentioned at the beginning. Look at **10:25**: *"To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan."*

I draw your attention to those words, *"for in his days—the days of Peleg—the earth was divided."*

Among the authors and scholars that I consulted, there doesn't seem to really be a clear explanation for what Moses meant by that. Some take it to refer to the division that occurred following the tower of Babel incident related in chapter 11. Some suggest that it could be a reference to the time when what is called the tectonic plates actually broke and pulled apart, forming the earth into continents and islands. Some think it simply refers to a spreading out of the descendants of the Noah.

Whatever it means, it is obvious that almost from the earliest times of the inhabitation of this earth by men, we have been a divided world.

- We are divided geographically.
- We are divided linguistically. One reputable listing tells us that there are more than 6900 different languages spoken throughout the world.
- We are divided racially and ethnically. Children sing the little song, "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight." It is estimated that that there are at least 5000 different ethnic groups covering the globe.
- We are divided politically, not just between the democrats and republicans of this nation, but between numerous political and socio-economic philosophies that drive nations around the globe.
- We are divided economically, an ages old affliction, between the haves and the have nots.

Well, there are probably many other ways that our world is divided, but one of the most tragic ways in which division exists upon this planet is the division brought about because of sin. I think I shared in last week's bulletin article that there is an estimated seven billion people on earth at this time. All of those seven billion people are in one of two groups. I know that is true because that is what Jesus taught in Matthew 7:13, 14. All men are either lost or saved. All of those who have reached an accountable age have passed through either the wide or the narrow gate. They are traveling down a wide or narrow way. They are headed for one of two destinations, one a place of eternal punishment, the other a place of eternal blessing.

Part of the reason why the world is thus so divided is because Satan has seen to it that sinful men have raised up many, many false religions.

- In our world today, it is estimated that there are about 2.3 billion people who consider themselves to be Christians.
- The next largest religious group is the Muslims with an estimated 1.4 billion adherents.
- There are about a billion Hindus, half a billion Buddhists.
- There are about .84 billion people who adhere to some kind of religion or other, Jews, Zoroastrianism, Shinto, and some others.
- About that same number of people identify themselves as non-religious, with less than 2 percent of the world's population claiming to be atheists.

Even among those who claim the Christian religion, there is an unbelievable amount of division.

- The largest group is the Roman Catholic, with about 1.2 billion people.
- There are about 800 million members of the so-called protestant churches.
- Of that number, about 10 percent are members of approximately 40 different types of Baptist denominations,
- followed by Lutherans whose members from 36 different denominations comprise about 6 percent of the Protestants.
- Add to that all of the so-called Anglican churches, Reformed and Presbyterian churches, Pentecostal, and Eastern Orthodox churches.
- I suspect that we could easily use up our remaining time this morning just reading the names of the hundreds and thousands of differing churches, all of who claim affiliation with Christianity and advocate that their way is the truest way to God.

The earth is truly divided, perhaps hopelessly so. Is there any hope? Do Christians have any hope to offer a divided world that is often pulling itself apart?

Well, a couple of quick observations about that before I get into the main part of my lesson:

**First of all, much of the division is by design.** It comes as a result of God's providence and power. For example, there in [Genesis, chapter 11](#), you have the story of what happened at Babel. It was God who confounded the tongues of those who had attempted to build that tower. **Psalms 22:28** says, "*For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.*" In **Psalms 47:7-8** we read: "*For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! 8)*

*God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.* I certainly do not claim to understand why God does all that He does, or why He permits everything that comes to pass, but I am confident of this, He is working all of that together for His divine purpose. Check it out and see if that isn't what Romans 8:28 is saying?

**Secondly, since much of the division is by God's design, or at least His permission, it should be understood that much of the division that exists in the world is permanent, and cannot be resolved.** They are features of the landscape with which we must live, and work with. They cannot be eliminated completely.

**But a third quick observation, while divisions of all kinds exist, each one of us can determine we are going to be a part of the solution, and not a part of the problem.** What do I mean by that? I mean that each one of us can so live our lives, especially in relationship to others that we try to mitigate the differences. We do that by a simple application of what is often referred to as the "golden rule." In **Luke 6:31**, Jesus taught: "*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*" I don't know of any rule or principle that is more humane and just and positive and productive than that. What a different world we would be living in if that was the standard by which everyone lived their life!

Beyond that, however, what hope is there for a world that seems to be hopelessly divided? That is the question I want us to consider for the remainder of our time this morning.

- What hope does our world have?
- What hope does it have of resolving many of the differences that cause people to be separated and at odds with one another?
- What hope is there for solving all of the religious division that exists in the world today?
- Is there any hope?

There is, and that hope is found in none other than Him whom we worship and by whom we are called. In **Colossians 1:27**, Paul says that Christ is our hope. He is our only hope. By and through and in Christ all men can truly become the brothers God intended for them to be. By and through and in Christ all distinctions can be done away with. Paul will write to the Galatians (3:28), reminding them that, "*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***"

Distinctions begin to disappear when people gather at the cross!

Some might question that because those who align themselves with Christianity seem to be as hopelessly divided as the rest of the world. Well, that is because not all who call themselves followers of Christ are actually following Christ. Maybe some of us are not really following Christ. Some people not following Christ, they are just going the same way for a time. It might look like they are following Christ, they might even think they are following Christ, but they might really just be going the same way for a time.

Do you know how you can tell whether or not you are following Christ, or if you are just going the same way as He is for time? You will know whether you are following Christ when you reach that point where He wants you to go one way, and you choose to go another. If he turns to the right and you turn to the left, then in all likelihood, you haven't been following Him, you have simply been going in the same direction that he was.

That is one reason why the so-called Christian world is so divided. People have not really been taking Christ's Lordship seriously. They claim He is their savior, but they reject Him as their Lord. They say they do; they call him "Lord," but their actions deny His Lordship. In **Luke 6:46**, Jesus asked, "*Why do you call me Lord, and not do what I say?*" In another place—**John 14:15**—Jesus said, "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*" But what if we do not keep His commandments? What if we know to do good and do it not? What is that? James 4:17 says it is sin, doesn't it?

Christ came to bring, not only peace between men and God, but also between each other. He came to bring unity and oneness of heart and mind between men. And that unity and oneness can be found if people come to Christ and take His commandments seriously. **John 10:16** says that there "*shall be one flock and one shepherd.*" There are not many flocks and many shepherds as many people want you to believe. There are not many ways. There is but one way, and all who get into and on to that one way will be traveling together, and be united in every way, bound together by love.

Well, how does one get into and on to that one way? That's the purpose of the gospel isn't it! Jesus came to make a way for all men—it doesn't matter who they are, where they live, what their color is, what their culture teaches. Those things don't matter. They may be obstacles that have to be worked with, but Christ came to make a way for all men to be forgiven of their sins and be saved. And do you know what, part of our work as Christians is to be taking the gospel into all the world, and to every creature. And when people hear and believe and obey the gospel, they are not only forgiven of their sins and give the gift of the Holy Spirit, they are also added to that one flock that has one shepherd.

Jesus prayed for unity among those who want to be a part of that one flock. In **John 17:20-23**, Jesus uses the word "one" three times. Listen to Jesus praying for that oneness:

*"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all be **one**, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22) The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be **one** even as we are one, 23) I in them and you in me, that they may become **perfectly one**, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."*

The one hope that exists for our divided world—divided in so many ways—is Christ. And the one hope that the world has for learning about Christ is for Christ's church, which is His body, to continue what Jesus began two thousand years ago, seeking and saving the lost.

I hope many of you read and gave some serious consideration to the bulletin article I wrote last in last week's bulletin. The question was, "*How can we reach seven billion people with the gospel?*" That is a lot of people. It seems like an impossible task, and yet with God, nothing is impossible. In fact, reaching seven billion people is very doable.

Suppose you take an entire year to reach and teach just one soul. And suppose you help him or her become a Christ, and as Jesus commanded you in Matthew 28:20, you teach them to observe everything Jesus commanded. That would mean that at the end of that year, there would be at least two—if no one else was trying to do the same thing—two Christians now trying to share the gospel with the lost and dying world. Then suppose that those two, yourself and that one you brought to Christ, spent the entire next year to reaching and teaching just one soul each. That means that at the end of the second year, there would then be four Christians. And if each one kept doing that, at the end of the third year, there would be eight Christians. Fourth year, sixteen, etc. Take a wild guess at how long, in that manner, it would take to reach all seven billion people? How long would it take? A hundred years? Five hundred? Actually it would take only a little over thirty years. Sometime in the middle of the 33<sup>rd</sup> year, there would be over seven billion Christians!

Is that likely going to happen? Probably not, but the point is, the Lord has not given us an impossible mission. Someone might say, "Yes, but a lot of those people are not going to obey the gospel and stay faithful." I am sure that is right, but suppose a full fifty-percent failed to become and remain faithful, that would mean each one of us would need to reach and teach just two people in a year. Is that doable? I think so, and that's the hope that our divided world has, that each one of us will take our calling seriously and not just work out our own salvation, but work for the salvation of others as well.

That's the lesson for this morning, and I'm counting on you to take it to heart. If there is anyone here this morning who knows their life is not in a right relationship with God, we certainly want to extend to you Christ's invitation, availing yourself of God's mercy and grace. If you are not a Christian, and wish to become one, we urge you to come, repenting of your sins, and being baptized, calling on His name. If you are a Christian that is concerned about your soul's eternal future and your walk with God, we urge you to also come and let that be known. If you wish to come for any reason, please come while we stand and sing!