

Sermon for March 25, 2018 – Palm Sunday

2 Corinthians 1:18-22 (EHV)

Theme: The Reason We Say “Amen”

- 1) Because God the Father fulfills all his promises in and through Christ.
- 2) Because God has given us the Holy Spirit as a down payment of our deliverance.

¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us (by me, Silas, and Timothy), was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him the “Yes” stands firm. ²⁰ In fact, as many promises as God has made, they have always been “Yes” in him. For that reason we also say “Amen” through him to the glory of God. ²¹ God is the one who makes both us and you to be strong in Christ. He anointed us. ²² He sealed us as his own and gave us the Spirit as the down payment in our hearts.

Amen. It’s an Aramaic word meaning “Truth.” It’s said at the end of almost every prayer, sermon, devotion, and, back in the days of the old hymnal, was sung after a lot of hymns. But do you understand what you are doing when you are saying this word? More often than not, I think we treat “amen” like the “send” button on our phones – something we need to do to get our message delivered to God.

But is that all the word is: a thoughtless expression like saying “over” on a walkie-talkie, meant to signal God that we are done talking and awaiting his reply? No, rather (as we will learn today) the word “Amen” is meant to be an expression of our faith in the LORD – our confidence that God will do everything we asked for in prayer in accordance to his good and gracious will.

With the apostle Paul as our guide, let us consider these truths under the theme: **The Reason We Say “Amen”**: 1) Because God the Father fulfills all his promises in and through Christ. 2) Because God has given us the Holy Spirit as a down payment of our deliverance.

Part One: Because God the Father fulfills all his promises in and through Christ.

Our sermon text is taken from Paul’s 2nd letter to the congregation he founded in Corinth. It was written in response to some people, who were trying to use Paul’s change in plans to visit them as an excuse to call into question the trustworthiness of Paul’s preaching.

Paul would have none of that. He writes: *As surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” ¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us (by me, Silas, and Timothy), was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him the “Yes” stands firm. ²⁰ In fact, as many promises as God has made, they have always been “Yes” in him.*

In other words, we never have to wonder whether or not God will keep his promises. ¹⁹ *God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?*ⁱ Yes, as the Scriptures and history prove time after time, God always does what he says. No outside force can prevent him from accomplishing what he promises either. In him the “Yes” stands firm, as seen by the events of Palm Sunday.

How so? Because God promised a Savior – a divine king - who would conquer our unconquerable enemies of sin, death and the devil. And that is exactly the person we celebrate today. He, to whom heaven and earth belong, coming into Jerusalem all gentle and humble riding on a donkey in fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. He came to win our salvation by offering himself up in our place on the cross in payment for our sins. He came to reconcile us to God – so that, through faith in him, we might inherit eternal life.

Yes, the events both on and surrounding Palm Sunday prove God’s love for us and his faithfulness to his promises - as the Scriptures say: *Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?*ⁱⁱ

And because the LORD is so faithful and loving towards us in Christ – keeping all his promises – the Apostle Paul writes: *For that reason we also say “Amen” through him to the glory of God.*

Do you understand what Paul is saying here? He is saying that our “Amen” is our confession of faith in the LORD – the expression of our conviction that the LORD will do everything he promised us in Christ.

Now, let’s apply this to the Lord’s prayer. Our “amen” at the end of that prayer is not meant for God as much as it is meant for us. When we give our “amen,” we are saying that God will most certainly do what we ask in this prayer. He will hallow his name, spread and strengthen his kingdom of grace, and make sure to accomplish his good and gracious will to defeat every evil plan and purpose of the devil. He will make sure that we have our daily bread, forgive our sins, lead us safely through all temptation, and deliver us through every evil that threatens our body or soul. Yes, our “amen” is our confession of confidence that our merciful Father in heaven will do everything we ask for in the Lord’s prayer for Christ’s sake.

But do we live as if we truly believe it? For example, how often don’t we worry and fret over our finances – wondering how we are going to make ends meet? How often don’t we live in fear over all the evil that is around us – wondering if the crime and terror we hear about on the news will ever strike close to home? How often don’t we wonder if God might not be punishing us for some past sin because of what we are experiencing in the present?

“But pastor,” someone might say, “isn’t it right for us to worry? Doesn’t experience teach us that Christians face all sorts of evils on this earth – just like everyone else? I mean look at what happened to poor Lazarus – a believer in such hunger that he longed to eat scraps that fell from the rich mans table. Did he get his daily bread? Or what about Job, who lost everything in one day – even though he was righteous. Did God deliver him from evil? If God allows such things to happen in the lives of believers, isn’t it right for us to be a little apprehensive of whether or not God will keep his promises?”

No, it isn't right. Even though it may not have seemed as if God was keeping all his promises to Lazarus – especially that of daily bread - the LORD gave Lazarus everything he needed (little though it was) to accomplish the Lord's will for Lazarus' life. And when God's foredetermined purposes were accomplished, the LORD graciously fulfilled his promise and brought Lazarus into Abraham's arms in heaven. And, as the apostle Paul once said, to be in heaven with Christ is far better than being here, on this evil earth.

And the evil that Job experienced? God used all of that for both Job's good and the strengthening of our faith. Yes, what Job experienced was painful. But the LORD, in his time, did deliver him safely through – just as he has done for many Christians on this earth – blessing him with much more than before.

The LORD is faithful to his promises – even when it may not seem like it to us. He never promised us a trouble-free life in this sin cursed world. Truth be told, he said that we can expect opposition, betrayal, hate and all kinds of other troubles for being his disciples. Read the Gospels carefully, and you will see that Jesus compares a believer's life to that of a person, carrying his cross (you know, that instrument of extreme torture and death) after him. But Jesus also bids us to take heart, for he has walked that road before us. He has overcome the world. He has paid for our sins in full. He has reconciled us to God. Heaven is our home. And when he finally delivers us there, we will find that all our troubles on this earth are not even worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us on that day.ⁱⁱⁱ

But this is not something we can figure out on our own. It is all a matter of faith. As we said before, our earthly experiences might seem like they are contradicting God's promises. We need God's help to truly mean the “amen” we say at the end of the LORD's Prayer, and he gives us this help in the form of the Holy Spirit, as Paul says in our sermon text:

Part Two: Because God has given us the Holy Spirit as a down payment of our deliverance.

²¹ God is the one who makes both us and you to be strong in Christ. He anointed us. ²² He sealed us as his own and gave us the Spirit as the down payment in our hearts.

Our faith – our ability to say “amen” to all of God's promises and truly believe them – comes not from ourselves. It's all God's doing – the work of the Holy Spirit inside of us. You see, when we were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the LORD did something special. He anointed and sealed us as his own by giving us the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit enables us to say our “amen” to all of God's promises in two different ways. First of all, he opens our eyes to see, our minds to understand and our hearts to believe the LORD's promises in Scripture. Using the law, he shatters the self-righteous pride lurking in our hearts that tries to separate us from God. Using the Gospel, he keeps us from falling into despair – ever pointing us to the love God expresses to us in Christ. Through the means of grace, the Holy Spirit is constantly directing our eyes to Jesus, that we might know him aright. Through the eyes of faith, we understand that Jesus is the all-powerful God – working in and directing all history to

accomplish his will: the salvation of his chosen people. This is why we know that Jesus will keep his promises and answer our prayers.

On top of this, the mere fact that we have the Holy Spirit himself guarantees that he will keep his promises – regardless of the difficulties and evils we face on this earth. Just as a person may give a hefty down payment to show that he is serious in wanting to buy a house, so the Holy Spirit is the LORD’s down payment that he is serious about delivering us home to heaven. He is the guarantee of our adoption into God’s family – the great reason we can absolutely trust that God will give us everything we ask for in Christ.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, do you now see the importance of the little word “amen?” It isn’t meant to just be “something we say” at the end of prayer. No, it is our great confession of faith – the expression of our conviction that God will do everything we ask for in the LORD’s prayer. And why can we have this conviction? Because God our heavenly Father has commanded us to pray these petitions – promising to do what we ask for Christ’s sake; because God the Son has reconciled us to the Father by paying for all our sins; because God the Holy Spirit has been given as a guarantee of our adoption into God’s family by faith. These are the reasons why we say: Amen.

ⁱ Numbers 23:19 NIV84

ⁱⁱ Romans 8:32 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:17