

PROMISES!

There is a popular worship song we sing, and the words of the chorus go like this:

*“Faithful you are, Faithful forever you will be,
All your promises are Yes and Amen, All your promises are Yes and Amen.”*

When we sing those last two lines I have noticed that the volume goes up! We all love the promises of God. The words of this song are taken from something the Apostle Paul wrote in the book of Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 1:20

“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”

All the promises that God made to his people in the Old Testament are fulfilled through the Lord Jesus Christ, and when we surrender our lives to Jesus those promises belong to us. I would like us to look at what Paul wrote, not only about the promises of God, but also the promises we make. Let’s read:

2 Corinthians 1:16-22

This is part of the second letter Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth. Corinth is a city on the edge of the Mediterranean in Greece. The city is still there! Previously Paul had spent a year and a half in Corinth and established a church there, but after he left they faced some serious issues. So Paul wrote his first letter to them, and as a result most repented. However there were some who accused Paul of being unqualified to speak and they didn’t like what he said. So Paul says he is planning to visit them again. This would be his third visit and he reiterated that he didn’t say this lightly. He would keep his word. “I don’t make promises like the people in the world”, Paul said, “When I say ‘yes’, I mean ‘yes.’”

Let’s pause for a moment! In this passage we find the wonderful words, that all God’s promises are ‘Yes’ in Christ, but Paul is actually speaking about his own words, his own promises.

1. OUR PROMISES

There is a saying I often heard when I was young, and it is this: **“A man’s word is his bond.”**

This saying can be traced back to the writings of Shakespeare and first appeared as an English Proverb in 1670. It simply means that an honest man’s words can be trusted and that he would do what he said.

But long before that proverb was written, Jesus said the same thing.

Matthew 5:37

“Simply let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ ‘no’, anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

Of course this is what Paul is referring to in his letter to the Corinthians when he says that he doesn’t make his plans like a worldly man, who say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ in the same breath.

Let’s ask ourselves – do we do what we say we will? Do we mean what we say? Sometimes we think, ‘well I didn’t actually make a promise.’ But what Jesus is saying is that whatever we say, we should do. Our words should be true, reliable and sincere.

E.g. Children and very quick to remind you of what you have said. If you say you will give them a treat when you get home, if they behave themselves, they will remind you as soon as the car turns into the driveway.

'You promised!' It's really sad that many children grow up to find that their parents don't always keep their word, and then they in turn don't think it is important to keep their word.

E.g. In some cultures it is more important to please people and make them happy, even if it means not telling the truth. People will say what they think you would like to hear, and they may have no intention of doing what they say. I discovered that over the years as I have lived in different countries and cultures. And that is sadly true in New Zealand today too.

What about ourselves as believers? We also want to please others.
It's so easy to say we will do something isn't it?

- 'Oh yes I will be there.'
- 'Sure I can help you.'
- 'I'll pray for you.'

However as believers we are to please the Lord. The Bible says there is neither Jew or Greek or Gentile, we are all one in Christ. It makes no difference what culture we come from, we now belong to Christ, and our culture is Kingdom Culture.

It is important to keep our word because we belong to him – and we are called to be like him. Jesus said we were to always act like our Father in heaven. God is utterly faithful, he keeps his promises. This is why we sing that chorus with great enthusiasm, 'All your promises are 'yes' and 'amen'. We can rely on what God has said. And because of this our words should be reliable.

This is what Paul goes on to say in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 1:18

"But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not 'yes' and 'no'."

Paul is saying that he doesn't simply say things like people in the world do, he meant what he said, because that is what God is like.

Guidelines to help us:

I'm sure most of us, perhaps all of us, haven't kept our word at times. Sometimes we forget what we even said! Other times we were just trying to be nice. Over the years I have thought about this a lot and I would like to share some thoughts that have helped me. And I am still learning!

1. Be Slow to Speak

James 1:19

"Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak."

So often we get it the other way around! We are so quick to speak and so slow to listen, or maybe we don't listen at all! And as a result we say things we regret, and we make promises we can't keep.

2. Be quick to Apologize

What do we do if we can't do what we said we would? Many people think it doesn't matter:

- 'Well after all we are human.'
- 'The other person won't remember anyway, so it doesn't matter.'
- 'Everyone forgets.'

God's standard for us is high. In fact Jesus said that we should make sure our 'yes' is 'yes' and our 'no' is 'no', because anything else is of the evil one. So if we are not speaking truth, then we are allowing the enemy to use us. I believe we should apologize when we fail to keep our word, even when it is our own children. There have been times when William and I apologized to our children for what we said, or what we

didn't do. When we humble ourselves to apologize to them, then we are setting them an example of what to do when we are in the wrong.

3. **Be Ready to Change**

I've discovered that most people find it hard to say 'sorry', but then there are others who may say 'sorry, sorry' quickly, but they keep on doing the same thing. God wants us to change – he wants to change us, so that our 'yes' is 'yes' and our 'no' is 'no', so that our words are reliable, and people know we will be trustworthy, because we belong to a God who is reliable.

Let's ask God to help us: to listen well, to remember what we have said, to keep our word, even when we don't really feel like it.

E.g. Some years ago I was waiting at Auckland Airport to fly somewhere and I met a Maori lady from Northland. We had a good chat and I shared with her about God's love and promises. I said I would send her some literature when I got home again. Well when I got home from that trip, I put her address in my 'basket' of things to do and it slipped to the bottom. I forgot about it. Then one day I discovered it and wondered if there was any point sending her the literature now. She probably wouldn't even remember, or so I thought. But I knew God would not have forgotten my words, so I wrote apologizing for taking so long and sending her what I had promised. Within a short time I received a lovely reply. God had sent someone else to help her. I realized I had missed an opportunity – but I am glad I still kept my word.

Today as we think about God's wonderful promises to us – I believe he is also wanting to challenge us, to make sure our words are reliable and trustworthy.

But let's go back to 2 Corinthians 1 again. Paul has been saying that he doesn't speak lightly, he will do what he says he will. And then he uses this opportunity to remind the believers in Corinth of God's promises. Let's look at what he says.

2. GIVING OUR AMEN TO GOD'S PROMISES

2 Corinthians 1:20

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."

Did you notice what it says in the last line of that verse? It says 'the 'amen' is spoken by us'. What does that mean? Let's look at the little word 'amen'.

Meaning of 'amen'

E.g. My niece's daughter just started attending a Christian school. She came home and asked her mother a strange question. 'Is Jesus' surname 'amen'? Surprised my niece asked why she thought that. 'Well they always say 'In the name of Jesus amen'.

The word amen is found in the Old Testament many times. In Deuteronomy 27 when the laws were read out loud the people would say 'amen'. This word has been carried down to the New Testament. Jesus often used this word. It's usually translated as 'verily, verily' or as 'I tell you the truth', but it is the same word, 'amen'. We find it at the end of some of Paul's prayers.

The very last words of the New Testament in Revelation 22 are:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."

So what does the 'amen' mean in 2 Corinthians 1 when Paul says we are to say the 'amen' to God's promises? It means we are agreeing with them, affirming them and adding strength to them.

Salvation

How do we receive the gift of salvation?

Romans 10:9

"If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

We are agreeing with the truth. We are speaking it out. In a sense we are saying the 'amen'.

Healing

One day a father brought his son to Jesus. This boy was possessed by a spirit, and it had caused him to suffer terribly. The disciples had not been able to help him, so Jesus told the father to bring the boy to him. Immediately the boy manifested evil spirits and convulsed. The father said, 'If you can do anything, please take pity.' Jesus said to him, 'Everything is possible for him who believes.' He said, 'I do believe.' The father said something else, but we will look at that soon.

The father said the 'amen' to God's promises. He confessed he believed. And the boy was healed and set free.

I find that story so encouraging. I would like to share several principles about receiving God's promises from this story.

1. ACKNOWLEDGE OUR NEED

It's so easy to depend on our own strength and abilities, or to depend on others to help us. And certainly God uses others, but if we want God's help we need to ask, we need to reach out to him. And that is what this father in the story did. He was desperate. Perhaps he had gone to others – to the physicians of that day or the religious leaders – we don't know. Now he was coming to Jesus.

I sense that there are some here today who are burdened, not by their own needs, but the need of a family member, perhaps a son or daughter. Just like that father, you can cry out to Jesus on their behalf. He pled with Jesus, **"If you can do anything – take pity on us."**

This father had a bad experience. He had come to the disciples and they had not been able to help him. Perhaps you have asked for prayer too, many times, and not seen an answer. Don't give up.

Jesus responded to this father, "If you can?" He could see the man was uncertain and so he replies, "Everything is possible for him who believes." All of God's promises are 'yes'.

2. RECEIVE THE PROMISE

So the father cries out, 'I believe'. He was saying 'amen' to the promise.

Amen is an affirmation of faith. A number of times when Jesus healed people he told them that their faith had healed them. But sometimes the answer doesn't come immediately and we have to keep holding on in faith. This is what it says in:

Hebrews 10:35-36

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

3. GUARD OUR CONFESSION

The father in the story declared that he believed, but then he went on to say something else. He said, **“Help me overcome my unbelief.”**

This man was honest. I like that! He acknowledged that even though he was taking hold of the promise, he still struggled. We don't have to pretend that we are men and women of great faith, we don't have to pretend we are healed if we aren't. We have to be real. After all God knows anyway!

But we do need to be careful we don't negate God's promises.

- 'Oh well it probably won't happen anyway.'
- 'Sure others see the answers, but I usually don't.'
- 'I prayed before but nothing happened.'

This father struggled, but he didn't cancel his confession, his 'amen'. When we are holding onto a promise, waiting for an answer – guard your confession.

CONCLUSION

What is your need to day? Is there a family member or friend you are burdened for?

- Ask God to give you a word, a promise for your situation that you can hold on to.
- Remember God's words are utterly reliable, his promises trustworthy.
- Say the 'amen' to that promise and guard your confession.
- And remember too it is important that you keep your word.
- But even if you have failed, God never does.
- He can and will do what he says.
- It may not always be when we want him to, or how we want him to, but we can trust him.

**“For not matter how many promises God has made they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.
And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”**