

SERMON NOTES & STUDY GUIDE • 1/22/17

MOVEMENT

Our sermon series, **MOVEMENT**, is an exploration of 2 Corinthians. The focus of the series is on the church. The church is not a building. The church is not even a conglomeration of people. The church is a movement, a group of people 'called out' (ekklesia) to meet and glorify God, and to represent His Kingdom to a broken world. The church doesn't sit still; it moves and grows. To be a Christian is to be on the move! Throughout this series we will explore what it means to be a part of this **Movement** of God.

PROMISE TO THE HOPELESS • 2 Corinthians 1:15-24 • Tim McConnell • January 22, 2017

We have a hard time keeping promises. It's too easy for us to break a promise. Things come up. Just look at all the ways we try to solidify our promise. I don't know when the handshake began. A long time ago. But don't you wonder who first decided that grabbing each other by the hand was a sure sign of a good promise? The ancient world had wax seals and solemn rites to make promises sure. We have electronic RSVP's and we click "Yes/No/Maybe" on our Facebook events. Big contracts used to involve lawyers and be signed in triplicate, but last year when we bought our house we didn't even sign anything. We typed our names and chose the font! But when a promise is serious, we need serious help to keep it. We need those supports and buttresses. When it comes to marriage, for example, we don't just say "I want to be your husband today." We need to say more than that, because how can I know my inclination will last more than a day? I might want to be a husband today, but how can I speak for the twenty-years-from-now me? Will I want to be a husband that day? So I make a promise. I covenant to be a husband, with God's help. When the President took the oath of office, he placed his hand on a Bible. It's not in the Constitution that this has to happen, but almost every President has done it—as if to say (without saying it) "Unless God helps me, I can't make this promise stick."

God's promises are not like that. When God makes a promise, the promise is as good as the event itself. God's Word is sure and certain, and He needs no help to keep His promises. As His worshippers, His disciples, we are those living under the promises of God made sure in Jesus Christ. But more than that, we are commissioned to carry the promises of God out into the world. We are sent into the world as those who know the promises of God are sure, and we are sent to meet and tell those who have little or no hope that there are promises—that there is a God in heaven whose promises are for good and blessing, and who has never, ever failed to keep a promise. And Christians, we are not a movement of liars. This is not a fantasy message we are bringing. This wonderful message has the added benefit of being actually true! We are not just passive recipients of the promises of God, but we are a movement, like a river, carrying these promises to the dry and weary lands, bringing promise to the hopeless.

Between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, Paul's reputation has been under siege in Corinth. Paul planted the church with the help of Priscilla and Aquila, Silas

and Timothy. But after they left, detractors came in raising all kinds of questions about Christianity, the message of the gospel that those leaders had told them, what they had said about Jesus, even about the personal character of Paul himself. As pastor Kent Hughes put it, they called the message and the messenger into question: "If Paul was for real, why was there so much suffering in his life? they asked. Also, why was his ministry so lackluster compared with the ministry of others? Why was his preaching so dull? And why did he change his travel plans if God was actually directing his life? Moreover, what lay behind his refusal to accept payment for his services, as most preachers did? Was he *really* collecting money for the poor? Why didn't Paul have letters of recommendation like the others? Why didn't he regale them with stories about God's power in his ministry? Was it because there were none?" (R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, p. 14). All these challenges rolled in. And we know because we see them all being answered through the letter we are now studying. But the effect was to erode confidence in Paul, and to erode confidence in the truth of Paul's message, to erode confidence in the promises of God made clear in Jesus Christ. Paul didn't let that happen.

Look again at our passage this morning. Paul is answering a particular charge. His travel plans didn't play out the way he had promised or hoped, and Paul is forced to defend the change in plans because this simple thing is being used to vilify him in the church. But what comes through clearly is this: Paul doesn't care as much about his reputation; what he cares about is that the people know who God is. Watch how he pivots to the real point, "Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both "Yes, yes" and "No, no"? But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." 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." (2 Corinthians 1:17-20) Paul's change of plans was really a small thing. But it becomes an occasion to make a big point. Human leaders will disappoint you. Have you ever experienced this? It might be shocking, but it's true. Even Christian leaders will disappoint you from time to time. Maybe you have been disappointed by a pastor or teacher. It happens. One day, if you stick around, you will be disappointed by me! I can

almost guarantee it! Don't let a moment's disappointment in a human leader become a lifetime of turning away from God. Paul did nothing wrong. The charges were unfair. Paul pivoted to God.

"For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:19-20) What on earth does that mean? Jesus is the ultimate Yes-man! No, it doesn't mean Jesus always says yes to whatever you say or ask or do. It means that Jesus is the ultimate, cosmic, universal affirmative—affirming God's love and blessing and intent to restore and reconcile you, your life, your whole world. Jesus is God's Yes to all that He made. Jesus is God's promise. And God's promise is sure. Jesus is the promise of God—Immanuel, I will be with you. I will be your God and you will be my people. Jesus. I will save my people from their sins. I will pour out my wrath no longer. I will redeem my children. I will seek and save the lost like a shepherd. I will restore human flourishing in my city. I will establish my Kingdom, and my Kingdom will have no end. Jesus. Jesus is God's Yes. Jesus is God's everlasting, eternal, unchangeable, undeniable, unwavering Yes.

And, let's not forget, Jesus is able to be the Yes of God because Jesus absorbed the No of God. God said No to injustice, no to hatred and sin, no to disobedience and rebellion and spiritual darkness. God pours out his wrath on unrighteousness. That's God's No. Jesus absorbed all of the No of God when He went to the cross on Calvary. The No was poured out on Jesus, so that we, who deserved the No, could get the Yes in Jesus' name. God says Yes to you now, because He said No to His own Son then. It's a lot to think about. This is one of those you go home and think about awhile. This is no throw-away sentence of Scripture before us this morning. It's actually very close to the heart of the whole deal. In Christ, "it has always been 'Yes.' For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ." And I'll say this too, although you will have to write this down in your journal and think about it, and argue against it; but let me say this before we leave this verse: Every true desire of your heart is met and satisfied in Jesus Christ. Every true longing drives us to Jesus. In Jesus Christ, it is always Yes.

So, Paul says, that's why we say "Amen." "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." (2 Corinthians 1:20) People, we get to say Amen. Amen means "so be it" or "let it be so" or "so it is certainly true." We get to say Amen in worship. Why? Because if we know God, we know His promises are sure. In every other arena of life we wonder. We wonder if our boss will follow through on the promise made. We wonder if our political leaders will do what they promised. We wait and see if even our friends will show up when and where they said we would meet. Even in our dearest, most precious relationship between a husband and a wife, there is a hint of uncertainty—"Will he keep his promise? Will I be able to keep mine?" But with God, in a world of shifting sands, constantly fluctuating loyalties, and promises blown by winds and weather and waves—with God, we find a certain and sure foundation, a rock, bedrock to build our lives and rest our souls on. So, we get to say Amen! It is certain! Amen! God is true. Amen! Spoken by us, to the glory of God. Amen is a good gift. Nothing resonates in our soul more than the surety of God.

God makes his promises known and certain to us by the work of his Holy Spirit. "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." (2 Corinthians 1:21-22) God does not leave us wondering. The same power that hovered over the waters at creation, that inspired and illumined the Scriptures, that called the church into being—the same power lifted Jesus' body up from the dead and emptied the tomb. That same power, the Holy Spirit, is a seal over us, a guarantee, a deposit. We are anointed and sealed in the promises of God by His Spirit. I sometimes talk of a marriage as two people holding a rope. If one drops, the rope falls. But with God, He's not relying on me to hold the rope. He put his own Spirit in me. His power holds the rope on both sides. I'm rescued and held by His grace and power, not my own. Praise God.

Finally, and I've worked myself out of time, but finally, I want us to capture the larger theme here. Paul didn't just say, "I have this faith. I have this message. This spiritual idea works for me." No. He said, "I am bringing you this message from God." This is a movement, a mission. People live in a world of broken promises. Don't you know someone whose heart is broken by a broken promise? We live in a hope-deficit world. Broken promises hurt, and they create hopeless hearts. I have friends who are foster parents to two girls, sisters. After months of progress, my friend said the girls started acting up, really disobeying and acting up and

crying. It was like the first week they came into their home all over again. They thought they had gone back to square one, after months of patient love and consistent care. He was discouraged. They went to ask the officer at the foster agency about it, and she said, "Oh. See, this is as long as they have ever been placed in a home. This is new territory for the girls. They've never been in a home longer than this—and deep inside they don't believe they will get to stay." It's a hope deficit. It's the water mark on their hope deficit.

Friends, outside those doors is a hope-deficit world. Right next to us in these seats are hope-deficit people, and in our own hearts sometimes. I think we stop trying, we stop moving, because to some degree we forget what lostness feels like. We forget what it is like to live life with a hope deficit. We get to say Amen. We get to rest in the seal and guarantee of the presence of God. We get to believe and understand that the universe is not a random concoction of shifting sands. There is a rock, a certainty, a God whose promises are sure, whose Spirit holds us steady, whose Son Jesus Christ claims us for eternal life. We get to say Amen. Your neighbor needs to say Amen too. Your children, your grandchildren need to say Amen too. Today, resolve, I will not rest on this rock alone. I will go bring promise to the hopeless. I will go, and find a way, to help the hope-deprived to say Amen.

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STUDY GUIDE "Promise to the Hopeless" 2 Corinthians 1:15-24

Start It

- Why are promises hard to keep? There are many ways we try to buttress our promises. From the simple handshake to the pinky swear to a contract signed in blood, it seems there are many ways we attempt to make a promise stick. It may reveal that we do not have full confidence that our word can be kept, or that we can trust the promise we receive from another. Not with God. God's promises are sure. In the Movement called Christianity, we are meant to convey the promises of God to others.

Study It

- Read 2 Corinthians 1:15-17. What is at issue here? Why would Paul's travel plans be the cause of such a contentious fight? Can you imagine what might really be at play in this discussion?
- Read 2 Corinthians 1:18-20. There are some bold statements being made in this passage. What bold claims do you hear? Can you think of other verses in Scripture to back up these claims?
- Where else in Scripture is the "Amen" a prominent part of worship? What does Amen mean in worship? What emotions does it produce in you, or is it so regularly said that it falls flat and is evacuated of impact?
- Read 2 Corinthians 1:21-24. What does God send to seal and guarantee His promise? How does that happen in the life of a believer?

Pray It

Almighty God, I know that without Your grace no promise I make is sure. But with You, all Your promises are Yes in Jesus Christ. Let my soul feel the certainty of its foundation in Your promises. Let my spirit feel Your Spirit within me sealing my fate and guaranteeing my destiny. Let my Amen resonate to Your glory in worship as I know it will be done. And move my heart to share the surety of Your sovereign grace with another. In Jesus' name. Amen! Amen! And Amen!

Live It

Consider a part of your life that seems wobbly and uncertain. Place it under the Amen of God's promises.