

## 2 Corinthians 1:18-22

**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. 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.**

Dear children of God who trust and hope in God alone,

The figure skaters have finished their Olympic performance. They have trained for years, overcome injuries and setbacks and disappointments, turned their lives upside down in order to prepare for this moment. They have skated their routine. Now they await the scores from the Olympic judges. Will their efforts result in the lasting achievement of an Olympic medal? Or will there be disappointment? Only the judges know. The suspense is thick in the air.

That uncertainty is a powerful motivator, isn't it? If those skaters had known in advance whether or not they would win a medal in the Olympics—would they have practiced as hard as they did? If they knew that they would win—or knew that they would lose—would they have trained as hard as they did? Don't we sometimes use that same principle to motivate our children? "If you behave, then tonight we'll go out for ice cream." "Maybe." "We'll see." "That depends."

What if God treated like this? What if those were God's answers to our question, "Will I be saved and live eternally in glory?" "Maybe." "We'll see." "That depends." What if God held heaven out to us like a carrot on a stick, so that we would strain forward toward it like racing greyhounds chasing a mechanical rabbit, always wondering but never truly knowing if we would actually attain it? Or, worse yet—what if God kept changing his mind? What if God one day established one plan of salvation but later declared that he had changed the rules? What if Jesus had cried out on the cross, "It might be finished" or "I hope it is finished"?

Thankfully, Jesus didn't say that. And God didn't do that. And therefore, God doesn't want us to be left in suspense about this precious business of our eternal salvation. Paul wrote, **"Our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you ... was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes."** Our theme for today will use these thoughts from the Apostle Paul:

### **SERMON THEME: God's Answer Is "Yes"!**

- 1. Jesus makes it certain**
- 2. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee**

If God's answer is "Yes", we might want to know: what's the question? Think back to the days of Adam and Eve. When they realized that their perfect paradise was lost and that they would live out their days in pain and trouble, finally returning to dust, they must have wondered: "Is there any reason for me to go on living?" God's answer was YES—there was still hope for them and their descendants through the promised Savior.

Or think of Abraham, sent away from home and family to live in an unknown land. Think of the three men who refused to bow down to an idol and ended up in a fiery furnace. Think of Joseph, who refused to sleep with his master's wife and ended up in prison as a result. All of them must have wondered, "Is it really worth it for me to follow God's difficult paths rather than the path of least resistance?" God's answer was YES—it was worth it. Because God promised that he would be with them and bless them. Or think of yourself—when you know you've sinned, you've stumbled, you've done what was wrong and know that before God you have no excuse. You ask yourself, "Is there any hope for me?" God's answer is YES.

You see, Paul tells us, "**No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ.**" God's promise to watch over your life, God's promise to protect you from evil, God's promises that he hears your prayers, even God's greatest promises that he has forgiven your sins and will take you to eternal life with him in heaven—why are those promises true? They are true entirely, and only, because of Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. You see, sinners like you and I really have no right to claim any of God's promises for ourselves. What God's law promises to stubborn, greedy and godless sinners like us is an eternal destruction that we well deserve! But in Jesus Christ God has made you holy. He has atoned for your sins. Every act of hatred and every word of selfishness has been blotted out of God's book forever. You have been declared righteous. You have been declared to be God's child—and therefore, in Jesus Christ, you can count on him to keep all of his promises to you. They are all "YES" in Jesus.

Listen as God's Words reminds us of these promises. Are your sins forgiven? YES. "**The blood of Jesus his son purifies us from every sin.**" Does God hear and answer all your prayers? YES. "**My Father**", Jesus says, "**will give you whatever you ask in my name.**" Will God give you the earthly blessings you need most? YES. "**He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?**" YES. Will your earthly death be the gateway to eternal life in glory? YES. "**In my Father's house are many rooms...I will come back and take you to be with me, so that you also may be where I am.**" In Jesus Christ alone, the answer to all of God's promises is YES—and because his work of saving us is now complete, we know that God's answer will never, ever change.

## 2. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee

But there are some who doubt whether these promises of God are really true. You heard an example of this in our Gospel reading today. Jesus took a look at a paralyzed man, saw the faith in his heart and reassured him, "**Your sins are forgiven.**" And immediately the Pharisees refused to believe it. Why not? They didn't think Jesus had the power or authority to make those kinds of promises. "**Why**

**does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming!"** they muttered.

Jesus didn't want anyone, especially the paralyzed man, to doubt his sure promise of forgiveness. So he proved that he had the authority to forgive sins. He told the man to get up and walk—and immediately years of paralysis vanished. Jesus was so concerned that we believe his promises that he gave a guarantee—a miracle that proved that the forgiveness of sins he offered was real and true.

Jesus also offers you a “guarantee” that God’s answer to all his promises is really “YES”. It’s not quite the same kind of guarantee. Jesus doesn’t perform a visible miracle for us. He doesn’t promise to take away all our earthly troubles and sorrows as a proof of his forgiving love. Jesus doesn’t do any of those things. But he does offer us a guarantee. **“God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ...anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”** God’s guarantee is nothing less than himself—his own Holy Spirit that he has given you. He says that his Spirit is a **“deposit guaranteeing what is to come.”**

When a person purchases a home or some other major piece of property, even if he can't pay for the entire purchase at once, he is expected to make a “down payment.” The reason why this is expected is that it is a signal that the buyer will be able eventually to pay the full price. If someone can offer no down payment on a major purchase, this casts doubt on whether he will ever be able to pay for the property. The down payment is given so that the recipient can TRUST that he will get the full amount.

Now God isn't really obligated to give us any down payments. For one thing, he doesn't owe us anything. For another, he's already given us plenty of reasons to trust him—creating us and redeeming us, for example. Yet, God is so good and gracious—and God is so concerned that we TRUST his promises to us in Jesus Christ—that he has given us a “down payment” on our salvation

You see, you're not enjoying heaven just yet. But with the Holy Spirit in our hearts we have a taste of heaven already. Through the faith he has worked in your heart, you have the assurance that you are at peace with God. You have contentment and joy. You know that your life has meaning and purpose because God says it does. You can communicate with your heavenly Father in prayer and know that he hears you. When you were baptized, Paul says, **“God anointed you and put his seal of ownership on you.”** At the same time he gave you his Holy Spirit so that you could have this faith-relationship with God; and he keeps that faith strong through his Word. No, it's not the same as heaven. What we have now is just a taste. But the relationship with God that you enjoy today, the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart, is God's “down payment” to you—his way of telling you, **“MORE TO COME LATER—MUCH MORE!”**

In life, suspense and uncertainty can be exciting. But when it comes to your salvation, God doesn't want to keep you in suspense. He wants you to be sure. He wants you to have confidence and not doubt. Are you forgiven? Do you belong to God? Does God have a place prepared for you in glory? Thanks to Jesus Christ and his death on a cross, you can be certain that God's answer is YES! Amen