

## **Fil-Am Community Church**

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Key Verse: 2 Cor 1:18-22)

### **“The Promise Fulfilled in Christmas”**

We have reached the end of our journey together as we went through each of the statements in The Apostles’ Creed. So, today is the last message in this 12-part series. I hope you’ve gained a better understanding of what we believe in as Christians and we’ve all grown somewhat during the past three months. Amen?

That means you agree. So, throughout this message you can expect me to say a lot of amens and I expect you to respond with a lot of amens, too. Amen?

The last statement in The Apostles’ Creed that we’re tackling today is Amen. If you look it up, in all versions of The Apostles’ Creed, or any creed for that matter, it is always punctuated by this short two-syllable word, Amen. In fact, we all end most of our prayers with Amen. There’s a reason for that.

You know, there are only four words common to all languages: Amen, Alleluia, OK, and Coca-Cola. The one I want to focus on, amen, is a word we all know and say regularly, regardless of what language we speak. It is the most universal of all words. It has been called the best known word in human speech. Listen to someone pray in English, German, Korean, French, Portuguese, Spanish, or Filipino and they’ll end their prayer with “Amen” or “Amen”. But what does it mean? Amen is a Hebrew word that means “So be it”. It is a declaration of affirmation. It expresses strong agreement. It appears 30 times in the Old Testament. But it is mostly untranslated in our Bibles. One reason is that the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint didn’t translate the Hebrew

word although there's actually a Greek word for it. This practice was carried on into the New Testament. And in the New Testament, Amen also means "Truly" or "Verily". So, when Jesus says "Truly, truly" or "Verily, verily", he is using the Hebrew word Amen in both cases.

Now, let's look at our passage this morning to know more about the importance and significance of this word. Let's read together:

*18 But 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 and Silas and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." 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.* 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 Cor. 1:18-20)

From this passage I'd like to talk about who God is, what he has done, and what he is doing for us. First thing you notice that the apostle Paul says is that

### I. God is Faithful

*"But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No."*

Actually in this passage, Paul is saying that the Corinthians should trust whatever message he gives to them. He is telling them "You can rely on what I'm telling you. You can trust every word I say." It looks like some doubted him because his plans were kind of confusing as you see in the verses before this where he talks about going to Corinth then to Macedonia then to Corinth again then to somewhere else. Guess they doubted whether he could actually accomplish that. Have you ever been doubted like that?

A man and his wife were sitting side by side in front of the TV when the woman asks her husband, “Do you love me?” The man replies with a smile, “Yes, I love you, darling.” A few moments later, the woman asks again, “Do you really love me?” The man responds, “Yes, I actually do”. Then, a few moments later again, she asks, “Seriously, do you love me?”

The man says a bit irritatingly, “Of course, I do.” Silence then once again, the woman says, “Do you really, really love me?” The man in exasperation, says, “I don’t know.” “See,” the woman suddenly jumps up. “I knew it. I don’t think you love me.” And begins to cry.

(Like if your wife asks, “Do you love me?” How do you respond? Some men would respond with, “I married you, didn’t I?” That’s undoubtedly true but not what a woman wants to hear.)

In Paul’s case, he didn’t want his readers to leave room for doubt so he compares his reliability to God’s reliability. And he proceeds to talk about the faithfulness of God.

What does faithful mean? Faithful, according to the dictionary, is constant, steadfast, reliable, loyal, unchanging, dependable, trustworthy. It would be hard for us to think of someone who is faithful all the time. If there is, that person must be perfect. And nobody’s perfect. Only God is that’s why there was no doubt in Paul’s mind that God is truly faithful. He says he is sure of that. He doesn’t doubt God’s faithfulness. Why? Because he has been through a lot in life and he has seen the hand of God working in every circumstance he was in. You see, since he became a Christian, he had become the number one target of his enemies, even by other Christians at first when they doubted his conversion to Christ. But in the same letter to the Corinthians, later on in chapter 4, he acknowledged that in the midst of all his sufferings, he was strengthened by a faithful God. He says, “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from*

*God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Cor. 4:7-9)*

Paul’s first-hand experience about God’s care and faithfulness to him was very real to him. But it wasn’t just experience that made him declare that God is faithful. He believed God is faithful because that’s what the Bible says. Of course, during his time, it was just the Old Testament they had and Paul, being knowledgeable of the Old Testament, knew how God was faithful to his people. In Romans 4:18, for example, he talks about Abraham’s faith in a faithful God which is a quote from Genesis 15:5, *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”* In 1 Corinthians 10:1, he references Exodus 13:21 and Exodus 14:22, *“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.”*

Friend, what I’m saying is that God is faithful because that is his character and it will not change. Our circumstances may change, our feelings may change, our minds may change, but God will never ever change his goodness to you. His love for you is not based on how you feel, or what you have done, or whether you’re faithful to him or not. As the Bible says, *“If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.”* (2 Tim. 2:13)

Which is a problem we have sometimes. When we do something wrong or things are not working out well, we tend to think that God is punishing us or has neglected us. He won’t. The Bible says he will never leave you nor forsake you. Amen?

It’s like when I was in Australia and I felt God was leading me to attend missionary training in Hawaii and I didn’t have enough money to go. I began to

doubt whether he was really calling me or if ever he was, whether he would provide me the money. And I believe the enemy played with my fears because these strange thoughts filled my mind, “God doesn’t love you. He doesn’t care for you”. You know, seeds of doubt being planted on my mind.

Then, one day, a friend of mine came to visit me. He was one of those who didn’t want me to go and actually discouraged me but that day, he said, “Rolly, as I was reading my Bible, I came to this verse and I believe God wants me to give this to you.” And he pointed to Romans 4:18 which I quoted earlier which says, ‘Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed’. And my friend said, “Just believe in his promise.” I did. And the money came just in time.

Which brings us to the next point which is

## II. God is Faithful to All His Promises

Nowadays, wherever you go, you see people making promises. On TV, on the internet, on the papers, on department stores. When we’re not careful we can easily get fooled. Some of these promises are like this:

Duracell, Enfamil, Listerine, Splenda, Activia, Nutella, and lastly, Siri.

Now, what do all these have in common? They are all false advertising. In short, empty promises. They didn’t deliver. In fact, I think except for one or two, all of them were sued by consumers or rival companies and the manufacturer of these products had to pay big sums of money. We are just flooded with all these promises that are just empty.

The Bible is also full of promises – God’s promises. The difference is that God’s promises are true and reliable. As Psalm 145:13 says, "*The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.*" It is said that there are 365 promises in the Bible. One for each day of the year. If it is a leap year, you pray that nothing happens to you on that extra day. But, if you come to think of it, there must be more than 365 and so you are covered. In fact, when I googled it, I

saw some who claim that there are actually thousands. Whatever the number, we know that there must be lots and lots of promises God has made for our benefit. But the point here is that what's important is not the number of promises or how these promises benefit us but the one who makes the promise. Amen?

Paul says, *“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.”*

Paul is saying that whatever God has promised he will keep it. Consider it done. Why is that? Because of Jesus Christ. In effect, what he is saying is that if you are in Christ, if Jesus is your Lord and Savior, there is nothing that God will withhold from you. Amen? In Romans, Paul says, *“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”*

You see, one of the titles of Jesus is “Amen”. In Revelation 3:14, Jesus says, *“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness.”* Jesus bestows upon himself the title of Amen. Which he explains as being faithful and true. So, Amen also means Yes with an exclamation mark. It is the most positive thing you can think of. So, Jesus is the one who guarantees and fulfills the promises of God.

Anabel told me an amusing story about Eza last week. One afternoon, she came to her mom and with a puzzled look on her face, said, “Mommy, why do we always say, ‘in Jesus name, amen? Is Jesus’ name amen? But Jesus name is not amen, right? So why do we always say in Jesus’ name Amen?” I laughed at that and then I thought, maybe the kids need to be taught the titles of Jesus. So, I’ll recommend that our pre-school kids study the book of Revelations next time.

Anyway, folks, whatever God’s promise is to you, because of Jesus, you can take it to the bank. It’s like when I give you a check and I write the amount of

\$1,000 for you, and you go to the bank, you will suffer the most embarrassing experience in your life because after checking, the bank will turn you away. But, if it was Bill Gates who gave you a check for \$1,000,000, you can surely encash that check. The name of the owner of the check makes a big difference.

Let me give you some promises of God that you can take to the bank:

God's presence -- "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Heb. 13:5)

God's protection -- "I am your shield." (Gen. 15:1)

God's power -- "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isa. 41:10)

God's provision -- "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." (Psalm 81:10)

God's purposes -- "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer. 29:11)

God's rest -- "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28)

So, God's promises are not "Yes" and "No" like there's no sureness about it. It is "Yes" in Jesus with an exclamation point. They are 100% true! Amen? Which brings us to the third point:

### III. God's Greatest Promise was Fulfilled in Christmas

We all know that Christmas is just around the corner. Days before Christmas we make certain promises to our loved ones. We say "I promise to give you a gift this Christmas", "I promise to buy you a new pair of shoes". "I promise to kiss you under the mistletoe".

We also make promises to ourselves. "I will watch my diet." "I will resist the temptation to go on a shopping-spree." "I won't hide from my inaanaks, that's Tagalog for godchildren."

But have you ever thought of the greatest promise that was ever said? It is also the very first promise uttered by God. And this promise found its fulfillment in Christmas.

This promise is in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 3:15, *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

God made this promise right after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden when they obeyed the devil instead of God. God confronted the two of them and the devil himself and pronounced curses upon them. But God did promise to save mankind from sin.

So, in this verse, we see the first promise of God for salvation. And we’re given a clue here that the offspring will be born of a virgin. You see, God is speaking here only of the woman’s seed, not of the man’s or of both of them. In fact, the word offspring which is “seed” in other versions is in the masculine gender in Hebrew. That seed then came to being in her womb miraculously. Later, Isaiah prophesies more clearly, *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”* (Isaiah 7:14 ). That offspring or seed that was born on Christmas day is Jesus, the Messiah. We know that because the Bible tells us that an angel visited Mary, who was virgin, and told her that she would carry in her womb the son of God who she was to call Jesus. Jesus means “God saves”.

When Jesus was born, an angel came down and reported the good news of the arrival of the messiah to the shepherds who were out in the field. The angel said, *“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”* (Luke 2:11)

Now, the second part of the promise in Genesis talks about how Jesus will conquer the devil. It says “he will crush your head”. That means he will deliver a

fatal blow to the devil. Total defeat for the enemy. That is what happened when Jesus resurrected from the dead after the devil struck his heel, meaning, when Jesus Christ died on the cross. Which was just a temporary defeat.

Because death couldn't hold Jesus on the grave. He is powerful and able to defeat the enemy. And his victory enabled those who believe in him to defeat death as well.

That's why Paul could say to the Christians in Corinth, *"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."*

Those who are in Jesus, therefore, can stand firm and not be moved by the chaos and uncertainties all around them. We can stand firm because our Savior Jesus is firm. He is faithful and true and we can always hang on to his promises. Someone said, "Leaning on God's promises will not break them".

Paul also says that we have the Holy Spirit in us and we are marked as going to heaven. In Ephesians, he repeats this thought when he says, "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance." (Ephesians 1:13b-14a)

So, that's another promise of God right there. If you are a Christian, you are heaven-bound. Your citizenship is in heaven. You are already guaranteed a place in there.

Folks, I hope that as Christmas nears, we will not forget that God's greatest promise of salvation was fulfilled on that one joyful night in Bethlehem. And we will be forever grateful that God sent his own Son Jesus to save us from our sins.