

2 Corinthians 1:20-22

²⁰For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Introduction:

There's no such thing as a "bad prayer" I heard someone say. I continued to listen, and that someone said, "As long as you're being honest." Indeed. God doesn't measure if you got the prayers down right and determine his answers based on that.

Yet, today, I want to share with you a manner of prayer that is important for us to consider, not so that we get the formula right. But because it will change our life.

Main Point: We pray to the Father on the merits of Jesus that He will move by His Spirit to fulfill His promises.

SOME GREEK FOR YOU

Promise = *epaggelia* = a summons, a promise

Almost every New Testament use of the word *promise (epaggelia)* points back to the Old Testament. This means we need to read the promises of God in the Old Testament. To sum up the promises of God in the Old Testament is to realize that every good thing is a promise of God. He promises health and abundance of all kinds.

In fact, in his letters to Romans and Galatians, Apostle Paul refers to the Abrahamic covenant. All the promises that God made to Abraham would be finally fulfilled in Christ. What does that mean? It means blessing of all kinds.

The promises of God is not only in regards to the promise of eternity with God one day. The promises of God deal with the circumstances of life on earth today.

Yes = *nai* = Yes, certainly, even so.

So the promises of God in Christ are not maybe, sometimes, almost, but *certainly yes*.

Amen = most assuredly, so let it be.

Therefore, in Jesus Christ, the promises of God are certainly yes, therefore let it most assuredly be so!

Why is this important for us?

It reveals further to us about the Gospel and what kind of mindset we should have in prayer, in life!

v. 20 ends: To God for his glory

Only when the promises of God are fulfilled by qualifications outside of ourselves, is God glorified. There is no glory given to God when it is accomplished by our works. You might hear the phrase: "Let's give glory to God! We need to glorify God with our lives!" But this is only possible, when we realize that *every single promise of God* is secured for us not by what we've done to acquire it, but solely through the qualifications and merits of Christ!

Brothers and sisters, what faith is there if we are trusting in our merits?

There's that hymn: Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior

Trusting only in Thy merit, would I seek Thy face?

Heal my wounded, broken spirit,

Save me by Thy grace

That's why when we pray, we need to firmly know and acknowledge in our hearts that we are not standing before God or even our challenging circumstance by any merit of ours. We stand upon the merits of Christ alone! I don't know how you feel about that. I know how I feel about that. Pardon my language, but that stinks a lot of times. Because I've learned along the way that I have to put my merits forward. I have to use my smarts, and my hard efforts to get to where I need to go. But when I realize the real hard truth of the matter I have no merits apart from Christ. Only then can heaven and earth be moved. How humbling it is when all you worked hard for does not carry meritorious value in moving God's heart. Yet, how comforting and how wonderful it is! Thank God, I don't have to prove something to Him. The trouble is when I buy into the lie that I have to.

The truth of the matter is, I have no power to truly influence anything in my life. I didn't when I interviewed with VOPC. I didn't when I interviewed to get ordained in the Methodist church. I didn't when I was applying to colleges and seminaries.

So much of my life stands far beyond any credentials or merits of mine. *"I am who I am because of grace."* I love how our previous bishop, Bishop Young Jin Cho would say that often.

I say that it stinks because everything inside of me cries out for acknowledgement and wanting to be awarded and rewarded for what I've done. And I love how Apostle Paul says, *"and put no confidence in the flesh—*

(confidence = to be persuaded – sharing similar root to FAITH)

Paul is telling us here that we have been persuaded to think "I am good, I got this!"

He's saying, "STOP being persuaded to think that you are good and capable"

⁴ *though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.*

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

⁵ *circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;*

⁶ *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;*

as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷ *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

⁸ *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish,

in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him,

not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,

but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

¹⁰ *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection"*

Walking this journey of faith has been a process of undoing a life of confidence in myself. For in God's equation he wants me to be free from the illusion that anything I am is of my doing. Scripture says, *"Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights."* I am who I am because of grace. Even my salvation. Apostle Paul teaches us that God has established me in Christ; that he also anointed me and put his seal on me, that I might have the Holy Spirit! Somewhere in there, so smoothly he includes the church. He writes that God establishes us with you in Christ!

So it's a tough challenge for me. Maybe it is the same for you. Maybe you were formed in a way to trust yourself and rely on what you can do. Maybe it wasn't, "Trust what God can do. Rely on what He can do through you." Nobody explained to me that God releases the greatest measure of His favor and grace to His Son. And that the only way I can live by that hand of God in my life is that I live through His Son. I thought that somehow, my holiness, my obedience, my good works can enable the Holy Spirit to do more in my life. That's the same thing as thinking that shouting will make God hear me more. Or that longer prayers will make God answer me faster or better.

But the way of faith is simply this:

Only the merits of Christ count towards releasing God's promises.

Only the merits of Christ count towards the Holy Spirit bringing forth His promises.

Example of Trinitarian Work

It is the Father who makes the promises.

It is the Son who acquires the promises

It is by the Spirit that His promises are brought forth to us.

How to pray Trinitarian prayers:

Father, I come to you in Jesus.

Father, I come to you on the merits of Christ alone.

That I have become Your son! (Your daughter)

I ask that You move by Your Spirit in my life.

As many of you know I have been on a challenging journey regarding my 3rd daughter: Elisha. As a special needs kid, she has a major speech delay. I remember just about a year ago, Pastor Isaiah and I were falling apart. Those who came to diagnose her told us that she was developmentally at the level of a 1 year old. She was placed on the autism spectrum by a school psychologist. My wife and I began to pray. It's different you know. As I told you how much it stinks that God's promises unfold not by my merits but Christ's alone. It's easy to find my mind gravitating: "God, but you know how hard I've been trying to live this life.... You know that from the moment I wake up to the moment I lay down, I live non-stop. I'm trying to be a good pastor, a good father, a good husband, a good person."

And in the peak of our difficulty, we also found out that we were expecting our 4th child. I remember that was one and only time when my wife told me that she was pregnant that I actually fell to the floor. I knew I wasn't in a good place.

Trinitarian prayers. It's not that I'm sharing with you all to pray a certain formula. I'm sharing with you a mindset by which we view God and view ourselves in light of Him.

Last year has been a very challenging one, especially because almost every waking moment of Elisha's day if we don't socially engage her, she begins to withdraw back into her own world again. So how do we balance marriage, family life, ministry, personal time, etc? And I knew I don't have what it takes to do anything to the fullest measure that I'd like or that's even expected and desired from me. So I knew that each day, I lived on the edge where anyone looking outside in, might wonder whether my world would cave in soon. But it didn't. Please don't get me wrong, there were many deeply deeply difficult and heart wrenching times. And we're still in it. But what I've learned in this thing I'm calling: "Trinitarian prayers" is the role God has, and the role I have. God is God, and I am not, and the Trinity reveals the fullness of that reality. The Father's heart is lavished most fully upon His Son, and the Spirit rejoices and releases the fullness of God's heart because of it. *My role is to see myself in the Son and live in the midst of that fullness.*

So I gave up. No, I didn't give up getting up each day and doing every bit of everything that I was doing. I've been giving up trusting that I have what it takes to hold it together. I've been giving up trusting that I have what it takes to build a love-rich marriage while 4 children call out for our attention in every step and every turn. I've been giving up trusting that I have the wisdom and ability to lead a growing church in every direction of God's desire. I've been giving that stuff up. Everything I want and need is found in God's promises. God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus alone. And those promises are applied to me by the Spirit because of Jesus. Then I'm going to keep seeing myself in Christ. And I'm going to stand on the merits of Christ alone. And I'm going to pray and ask God for His creative power to be at work in me so that when I engage my life in every aspect, it will truly be the wonder of God at work, and those promises of God that which at one point I was trying so hard to work for, will be released in marvelous ways beyond what I have ever hoped for.

I prayed, "*Father, here I am. What do I have except that I believe in Your Son. That I too have become Your Son. I don't have what it takes to get my daughter to talk... But by Your Spirit that You will enable her! In Jesus' name! Amen.*"

So, I have these little breakthroughs that I love sharing with you because you all are family, and you all are my brothers and sisters, and I know you all have been praying for Elisha. I have to say, we never worked on this with her. She's definitely saying more things now but she's really a mono syllable person. She never says anything that is more than one syllable. We never even worked on this one. I know the teachers at school aren't either. But I went to wake her up from her nap on Friday afternoon, and after I turned off the white noise, I

called out, "Elisha.." and she said, "Elisha.." That was the first time she ever said her name. I didn't believe what I heard. So I said it again, and then she said it again. All the way down the stairs, I kept having her repeat after me. I was so happy. My child could say her name. Not only is it her name, but we named her Elisha because that name means: "The Lord is my Salvation." So every time she says her name, she's uttering: "The LORD is my Salvation"

It's not what we do to save ourselves, but it is the Lord alone. Apostle Paul teaches us today that all the promises of God are certainly true and that certainty will be made real (Yes & Amen) in Christ alone. So, church, I want to encourage you to pray these Trinitarian prayers. Not as formula, but life changing to your perspective. It'll change your view of God's role and your role. Do you think that God would answer your prayers more because you've been good? That is not Gospel. God's promises are certain in Christ only and that is the way the Holy Spirit releases those promises to you. If you've been trying to earn God's promises, would you lay that down? If you ever thought God helps those who help themselves, would you know that the Bible never says that? Would you lay down every merit that you would imagine God would consider in answering your prayers? Instead, would you grab ahold of Christ and His merits? Would you approach God on that alone? Would you then experience the Holy Spirit's power and presence?