

“Getting to Yes”

2 Samuel 7:8-17 • 2 Corinthians 1:12-22

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What’s the most important or most impressive thing you’ve ever done? What is it in your life that you are most proud of? Did you get that big job or big promotion or degree you’d been working for? Did you invent something that has improved peoples’ lives? Did you successfully renew your driver’s license without hurting anyone? What is it that you are proud to tell people about yourself?

I don’t consider that I’ve lived a particularly impressive life so far, but I have managed to earn three college degrees, including a master’s and a doctorate, something my high school guidance counselor never saw coming. I’ve successfully flown an airplane solo and I’ve rebuilt a car’s engine. I’ve preached over 500 sermons in this church. And not only have I renewed my drivers’ license without hurting anyone, I’ve also taught two teenagers how to drive and taken them to get their licenses as well. Without hurting anyone.

Those of you who know me well know that I don’t really spend much time bragging about things I’ve done. Some people, however, are more than happy to tell you about all the great things they’ve done in life and how great they are at whatever they do, whether you ask them or not. Maybe it’s just because I’m getting older but I find that kind of bragging doesn’t impress me. The other day I was reading an announcement a church had put out about their new pastor. They mentioned that he had been a pastor of a number of churches all over the country. You could tell by the way they wrote the article that they felt lucky to have called someone with so much great experience. But this article was about two years old and the pastor had already moved on to another church in another part of the country.

It’s only human nature for us to be impressed by someone who has accomplished a lot or who has risen to the top of his or her field. As a result we often want others to see us that way, too. And so we engage in a little

boasting. We brag a little bit about our own accomplishments. Maybe even embellish them a bit so they sound more impressive.

The Apostle Paul begins this section of Second Corinthians with some boasting of his own. But it doesn’t take long to realize that this isn’t the usual boasting. The theme throughout 2 Corinthians—really through all of the New Testament—is that life in the Kingdom of God turns worldly wisdom upside down. Just like you and me, the people in Corinth valued strength, wealth, and human impressiveness. In God’s Kingdom, which was ushered in when God came here in person as Jesus of Nazareth, true strength comes through weakness, life comes through death, wealth comes through giving.

Instead, Paul boasts that he and his companions “behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God.” In other words, he’s boasting, bragging, about the very things the Corinthians were criticizing him for because they considered them to be weaknesses. Paul the pastor desperately wants the people in Corinth to finally see what it means to live in this new reality. He says that they partially understand what this means but that he hopes they will come to understand fully. He then turns the tables on them and says that when they finally get it, when they are all together in the presence of Jesus, *they* will boast about Paul! They will boast about the very things they criticize him for now.

We need to learn the same lesson today. Our culture is not really that different from ancient Corinth. In fact we may be worse. We have smartphones and television and social media to help us think in worldly ways. The things that matter most in God’s Kingdom are still honesty and simplicity and godly sincerity. Authentic Christianity focuses on the well-being of others. Genuine followers of Jesus love others sacrificially. We don’t try to put

ourselves ahead of others but instead work to build them up at our own expense. Instead of trying to get the credit we work to make sure others get the credit.

In verse 15 Paul says he was so sure that the Corinthians would grow to fully understand this that he wanted to come visit them again twice so they “might have a second experience of grace.” The word “grace” is the same word for gift or giving and so several scholars have suggested that the grace Paul wanted the Corinthians to experience was the opportunity to give money to Paul’s collection for the poor in Jerusalem. As we study this letter we will see that Paul is adamant that it’s a joy to give generously and sacrificially because in the process we learn to depend on God and not our own abilities and therefore experience God’s grace even more.

It turned out, however, that Paul was not able to visit Corinth on his way to Macedonia and back. He also didn’t want to have another visit that was painful to the Corinthians. So instead he sent them a letter. That letter didn’t survive. The Holy Spirit did not preserve it for us, which means it was not Scripture. So we don’t know exactly what it said but we know that Paul was correcting some ungodly behavior in the church. Because he didn’t visit, some of the Corinthians accused him of being dishonest. Paul says, “Was I vacillating when I wanted to visit you? Do I usually say yes when I don’t mean it?” His answer is emphatically, NO! He then tells them that his integrity is on the level of God’s own faithfulness.

This is where we get one of the great verses of the New Testament. Verse 20 says, “For 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.” Throughout the Old Testament God made a number of promises and here Paul reminds us that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of those promises. We heard one of those promises in our reading from 2 Samuel where God promises David that he will establish the throne of his kingdom

forever. Several years ago a professor at Westmont College, with the help of several of his classes, calculated the odds that one person could fulfill just eight of the hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah. The answer is that the probability is one in 10 to the 17 power. That’s 10 with 17 zeros. To illustrate he said that if you covered Texas with 10 to the 17 silver dollars they would be two feet deep. Now mark one of them with paint and mix them all up thoroughly. Blindfold a man and tell him he can go anywhere in the state he wants for as long as he wants but he has to pick up that one marked silver dollar. What are the odds he would pick up the right coin? The same odds that one person would fulfill just eight of the prophecies written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. Yet Jesus perfectly fulfills all of the hundreds of promises made by God.

So Paul says, “That is why it is through Jesus that we utter *our* Amen or Yes to God for his glory.” He says that when you finally understand who Jesus really is, and finally begin to understand what it means to live in the new reality that Jesus has created, when you finally say yes to the truth, your whole life changes. You see the world differently. You see other people the way God sees them. You no longer live by earthly wisdom that celebrates the most powerful or the wealthiest. You stop chasing after things that have no eternal value. Instead you behave in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity. You value truth and goodness. Then, with Paul, you can boast about weakness because you know you belong to God. As the end of this passage says, it is God who establishes our fellowship with each other in Christ. It is God who has anointed us, which means set us apart to help bring about his kingdom on earth. God has put his seal on us, marking us as his own. And God has given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee, literally a down payment, until we are with him fully forever. That’s something to boast about.

Amen.