

## God's 'Yes' and Ours

---

### 2 Corinthians 1:15-22

When we read this passage in 2 Corinthians 1, some words of Jesus we considered a few weeks back should have come to mind--when, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "*Do not swear at all...Let your word be 'Yes, Yes,' or 'No, No' "*" (Mt 5:34-37; James 5:12). But even if they didn't come to your mind, they may here be an echo of Jesus' own teaching that Paul had learned. Here, Paul is affirming the truth and certainty about Jesus for our lives and faith: "*For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we have proclaimed among you...was not 'Yes and No,' but in him it is always 'Yes.' For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.' "*" (vss. 19-20). The older RSV put vs. 20 this way: "*For all the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ]. "*"

Now, to speak of Jesus in this way, as the "YES" of God, what are we saying? Paul means by this first that the gospel message he proclaims Jesus as the YES to all the promises God made in the Bible. For over a thousand years, Israel had lived on those promises, trusting that God who had called Israel to be his people would lead them forward, and accomplish in the end what he had planned and purposed. Paul's ministry--as for all the apostles--is based that God has done exactly that--that Jesus is the crown and culmination of Israel's long story, the answer to all Israel's hopes and prayers, the fulfillment of all the promises--AND not only for Israel, but the whole world. In Jesus, God finally and fully said Yes, and said it so loudly through Jesus' resurrection that it was now echoing around the world. To grasp why the person of Jesus Christ--his life, death, and resurrection--are the YES of God to all his promises, we need to back and

consider the larger Story of which Jesus is the center.

In order to get that big picture, we must go back to the very beginning in Genesis 1: *“Then God said, ‘let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them reign over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and over every all the wild animals of the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image...God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and reign over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing...”* (1:26-28).

Let humanity reign over all that God has made! If you want to know what the promises of God are about, then you have to ask what humanity is about and supposed to be. And when you read the creation stories in Genesis 1 & 2, the big picture is that Al-mighty God has made humanity to reign over all the creation--yet with qualification. Humanity is to reign as God reigns. The sublime picture in Genesis 2 is a garden, a fruitful and richly varied landscape with humans commanded to tend it, cultivate it, make it fruitful, and (while they're at it) give names to the animals, a form of rule by definition. Human reign is to be good, benign, responsible, creative, and productive--like God.

The Creation was not made static. It was designed to grow and become more. Like a newborn baby, we may rejoice that he or she is *“just the most perfect thing I've ever seen!”* But we do not want or expect the baby to remain just as it is. It's meant to develop, to grow up, and become more. So also with the Creation. The Creator God had/ has a future in mind for it, and humanity--a unique creature full of mystery, promise, and possibility--was/is to take God's creation project forward in all sorts of ways and expanding the garden to rest of all creation. God put humanity, a unique creature made

both “of the earth” and “in the image of God,” in charge. Thus, humanity is to rule like God, to act like God toward the world and everyone in it--and reflect the world in its good and right development back to God. We might think of it like a Chief Operating Officer reporting back to the owner of the company in accordance with the owner’s wishes. To employ another, one the Bible uses, humanity is meant to be a priest. We are to act toward God for and as part of creation, and act toward Creation like God. This twin human vocation--both a ruler and priest for God--hasn’t changed. It still belongs to us. Now when we speak of Jesus Christ and salvation, this is what the New Testament is talking about. This original goal for human existence in the world is still the goal of human existence now through Jesus Christ. We who live in the shadow and aftermath of Genesis 3, the human rebellion against God and his project, fail to see this is still our vocation. We do see how this original vocation has been abused--human bullying of individuals and people--tyrannical behavior which defaces human life, animal life, and the earth’s life; human greed and misuse of creation’s human and natural resources corporate and personal gratification. We do see the ways in which humanity scorns the God of the garden, the garden world, and others made in God’s image. By sin and rebellion, humanity is out of step with God’s plan and intentions. And it is ugly, destructive, and out of control.

But that said, the abuse and misuse of human authority, didn’t and doesn’t abolish Creation’s proper use and God’s original intention for us. Psalm 8 still proclaims: *“O Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth! ...What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you should care for him? ...You have made him reign over all the works of your hands...You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen,*

*the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea...*” (Ps 8:1, 4, 6-8).

Ruler and priest is still our twin vocation, our responsibility and calling.

The psalm, from King David’s time, is a celebration of God, humanity, and God’s intention for humanity. As ancient, pagan kings would place statues of themselves in far-flung cities to remind subject peoples who was ruling them, God placed his own image, human beings, into his world so that the world can rightly see who its ruler is. And experience it. Maybe God should have just run it all himself. But if he had, where would humanity be? No, God made us--humans --to do this. The Gospel message is that the rightful ruler has sent his own Son to both do the job again and rightly, and call us to the renewed vocation of doing it with him. Thus, when the eternal Son of God became a human being, He like us, entered into this human vocation. This is what the Incarnation means--God be-came Man--and was sent to fulfill that role, and to call us to himself and to share in that reign with him that was intended for us from the beginning. He wasn’t born to die to take us to heaven. He died and was raised, to restore us--to save us--to our original position as God’s people in a renewed and restored New Creation. The early Christians believed, on the authority of Jesus himself, exactly this--that the original vision for creation, and for humanity had begun its renewal and restoration through the risen-reigning Jesus. Jesus--as the God/Man--came and inaugurated God’s Reign given first to humanity--“*let them reign...*” In Jesus, God restarted the project--the head of a New Humanity for the New Creation.

If you ask the question, what would it look like if God entered into this world started running things? The answer: Read the Gospels! Jesus--the man who preached the kingdom of God--is what God’s reign looks like as it begins the great renewal and

restoration! Ordering things rightly--humanity especially--as they should be. Healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out evil, raising up the downcast and putting down the un-justly privileged. It's what Mary sang before Jesus was born: *"My soul magnifies the Lord... for the mighty One has done great things... his mercy is for those who fear him... He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud...He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things..."* (Lk 1:46ff).

Doesn't that sound like Jesus? Do not these words anticipate the Beatitudes? Jesus himself, as the truly obedient Human, acted rightly as God's Human, displaying God's flowing generosity and grace, bringing abundance and riches from creation--like multiplying bread and making wine, bringing justice to the downtrodden and rolling back evil in all its forms--illness, sins, injustice, even death. Here was the beginning of the new creation-makeover, the restart of things. Here were the effects when the rightful king-ship over the world was unleashed. Here was seen the justice and joy of the Creator God anew in his creation. Jesus--the perfect image of God in human form--unleashed it.

The early Christians also, though, realized something that we often don't. They held out the breathtaking vision that this role of Jesus, this vocation he was fulfilling, he shares with us, with his followers. It's what Jesus is getting at when he said to the disciples: *"You are those who have stood with me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel,"* (Lk 22:30). Notice the connection between God's Reign, given to Jesus, and from Jesus to the disciples, and

coming judgment of the world, that is putting all things right in the world in the “*Day of Christ,*” (1 Cor 1:4-9).

So, if we ask: what place, and what role, are human beings to have in God’s kingdom to come?--(as in “*thy kingdom come...on earth*“). We need only look at the close of the New Testament. It speaks in the language of the original creation. If we think our goal is heaven, we’re not listening to Jesus and the NT. That’s not the way Jesus, Paul, and the rest of the NT speak--though it’s been so pounded into our heads so much and many hymns and gospels songs confuse this or are just plain wrong in this, it’s hard to think otherwise. Many of us know the noble statement from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.1*: “*What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.*” That is true, but it’s not true enough. It doesn’t spell it out as the NT gives it. It’s not the explicit main thing, part of it, but not the thing itself.

No, the great vision that the NT sets before us is greater, larger, and more wonderful. It is this matter of Jesus restoring Creation and us to our original intention and purpose, and fulfilling the promises of God. At the end of the Bible, we read of God, Christ, and humanity in God’s New World: “*The throne of God, and of the Lamb, will be [there, in the new city]; and his servants will worship him. They will see his face...There will be no more night...God the Lord will shine his light upon them, and they will reign for ever and ever,*” (Rev 22:3-5). Ruling and priesting/worship are the twin vocations of God’s People in the New Creation, just as they were “*in the beginning.*” So basic is this theme, it’s repeated several times in Revelation: “*To him who loved us and freed us from our sins by his own blood, and made us a kingdom (reigning!), priests to our God and Father...*” (1:5-6); “[*to*] the one who conquers--to that one, I [the Lord

*Jesus] will grant the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I conquered and sat down with my father on his throne,” (3:21). The saints sing of the Lamb of God, “You are worthy...for you bought for God, with your blood, people from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you made them rulers and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth,” (5:9-10; also 20:4,6). They make clear that the imbalance in much of the church’s message for many years--over a thousand years really--that forgiveness is “for heaven’s sake” is not what forgiveness is really and ultimately about. The gospel of forgiveness is about reconciliation with our God and ourselves--“eternal life”--and restoration to God’s purpose in this world now and the New Creation to come. A friend recently expressed it this way: “*Eternal life is not going to heaven when you die. It is union with Jesus now, by which we become conduits of God’s kingdom coming to earth.*”-- (Jacob Wright).*

What I have said may sound somewhat strange. The center of salvation is still our reconciliation to God through Christ’s Cross, but it’s the true and full purpose of that that has largely been missing in much of the church’s message. For what we are talking about is hearing and acting anew upon the message about Jesus and of Jesus--the Gospel--God’s Story unleashed in the world and all God’s promises fulfilled. It is a creative and trans-forming Story, where God’s love, reconciliation, sacred beauty, justice for all, and renew-al of all creation *begins to take shape among us and in the world*. We are to reign in our lives like God to others. We are to do the priestly work of reflecting God’s grace to others as well as acting rightly and gladly as God’s creature--God’s “image”--back to him.

For the Story that is Jesus Christ is Lord is the Story that changes everything

down to the roots of all creation--no exaggeration! In one sense it is a New Story--new in the sense we all must learn it--but in another, it is the old Story, the original Story, retold through Jesus and given to us to tell and live out and so fulfill our original and new calling. Paul says in Romans 5:17, "*Surely will those who receive the abundance of [his] grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through... Jesus Christ.*" To live out--as ruler and priest, our twin vocation--is to act and image him in and for whom we were made, in and for whom we have been redeemed by his Son's cross, and in and for whom we are now being renewed and empowered by the Spirit (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). God was in Christ revealing who He is, and reconciling us back to God, becoming our brokenness for us to lead us back to wholeness and union with God, and to again be his grace-filled, Spirit led, reconciling agents to all the world.

When Paul first preached and taught the Corinthians, they didn't know this story. They had to learn it. So do we. Because I am virtually sure this is not truly or excitedly how we understand the Bible as a whole or even the meaning of the Gospel and what Jesus really came to do to fulfill the promises of God. A few weeks back, I closed a sermon with a story. It was the story about the lion cub that was orphaned in the jungle and grew up learning to live, think, and act like a sheep. But one day--to his initial uncertainty and yet odd sense of rightness--a great lion appeared before him and slowly but surely taught him who he was and what he was meant to be about. And when these things began to come together, he let out--as he had never done before--an enormous ROOOOOOOOAR! Really, all of us have to learn the true Story of which we are meant to be a part, so as to be about God's agenda for us in the world. We need to really learn what the promises of God are truly about, and how Jesus is God's Yes to us in fulfilling



them, so that God's will may be fulfilled in us. And when we do, perhaps, we will understand the ROAR welling up in us is our YES back to God. Again--Paul in Romans--- "*Surely will those who receive the abundance of [his] grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through... Jesus Christ,*" (5:17). Amen.