

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Yes & Amen

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Hey, this is Mark Batterson, pastor of National Community Church, welcome to our podcast and thanks for being a part of our extended family. We're in a series called 'Yes and Amen'. And we're casting vision for where God is taking us as a church. If you'd like to be a shareholder in that vision checkout <https://theaterchurch.com/vision> Enjoy the message.

Welcome to National Community Church; all seven of our campuses. Little shout out to our extended family online. This weekend we kick off a new series titled 'Yes & Amen'. It's actually taken from a text of scripture; Second Corinthians chapter one, verse 20, I want to invite you to turn there, it's only one verse. And so we're going to look at it in a couple of translations.

The New Living translation says, ²⁰ *For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding "Yes!"*

Now, estimates vary from 3,573 to 5,467 promises, but who's counting? Right? Honestly, it's really not about the number because all of those promises are yes in Christ. But the verse does not end there. You've got to flip this coin. It says, *"through Christ, our "Amen" (which means "Yes") ascends to God for his glory."*

Now that parenthetical statement is pretty important. God had said yes in Christ, but that's not enough. We have got to add are amen and that's what we're going to talk about during this series. A few months ago, Dick Foth mentioned that one of his favorite books was a book by E. Stanley Jones titled The Divine Yes. And he said it was one of his five favorites, I figured I better read it then. And so I picked it up and it was actually a book about this very verse. And E. Stanley Jones says something that's so simple, but it's really good. You might want to write this down. He said, Christianity is saying 'yes' to God's 'yes'. Now, I kinda liked that there's a simplicity to it. And I want you to hang on to that little truth.

Now let me add one more translation to the mix, the New International Version says, 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."*

On July 1st, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill into law called the Pacific Railway Act. Now, that bill pledged federal financing for the first transcontinental railroad. The Central Pacific began laying tracks from Sacramento, California, east and then the Union Pacific began laying tracks from Omaha, Nebraska, west and they met in the middle at Promontory Summit in the Utah territory. Now two trains traveling in opposite directions, the Central Pacific number 60, and the Union Pacific number 119, literally came face to face, grill to grill and I want to show you a picture because I want you to take a mental picture of this moment. On May 10, 1869, the last spike, it was a ceremonial spike made of 17 karat gold, it was driven into the track by Leland Stanford. It was the last tie, it was the last link that connected these two railroads from

sea to shining sea. That spike was inscribed with these words; "May God continue the unity of our country as this railroad unites the two great oceans of the world." When you think of yes and amen, I want you to picture these two trains.

Now, I'm going to call one of them 'so far, so God'; I'm going to call the other one 'the best is yet to come'. Sometimes you just got to wear the message. Over the next four weeks we're going to lay some tracks and I want to cast vision for our next chapter as the church. I want to talk about where we're headed and how we're going to get there and listen we're attempting to do something we had never done. Okay. We have turned a crack house into Ebenezer's coffeehouse. We have turned an abandoned apartment building into the DC Dream Center. We have never turned 127 year old car barn into a prototype campus that we own and operate. And you know what, what got us here isn't going to get us where we need to go and so it's a new day. Phase one, it will be a prototype campus. It'll include a thousand seat event venue. It'll have about 5,000 square feet of lobby space, some space and place for us to connect in fellowship with each other.

Phase two will be about 20,000 square feet of kids' ministry space. And we'll give you a sneak peek next weekend, but let me just say this, that kid's theater in phase two is going to be larger than the Miracle Theater. We'll have about a dozen classrooms. We'll have an indoor playground that our neighbors are going to love and we're going to leverage that space as a child development center Monday to Friday. Now, you can read a little bit more about that in this fantastic mini mag Next and I think it's towards the end. But a 2015 study found that there are 7,610 childcare spots for 22,000 children under the age of three in DC. Now you can do the math. There's a gap. And guess what? We're going to fill that gap. We're going to meet a real need in real time and I just happened to think that the church ought to solve the city's problems for it and so what a wonderful opportunity. This is one of the mayor's top initiatives. I may even talk a little bit about affordable housing next week, but I believe that we are not just trying to build a church. We are trying to bless a city to the third generation. And listen, when you do that, you can't keep people outside of your doors.

Now, phase three will be a mixed use marketplace, a co-working space. Why would you do that? Well, Jesus didn't just hang out in the synagogue, hung out at wells, wells were natural gathering places in ancient culture. We have a core value that the church belongs in the middle of the marketplace. And so listen, we'll conscientiously create hundreds of jobs, we'll incubate some entrepreneurs and we'll create a place where church and community can cross paths. And so next week I'm going to cast a little bit more of that vision, but let me leave it there for now.

Let me go back to these two trains traveling in opposite directions. Again, one is called 'so far, so God' the other is 'the best is yet to come'. And these two trains meet at a place called the promises of God. Let me unpack this passage just a little bit. This week I was in Springfield, Missouri, speaking at Evangel University. I had a connecting flight through Chicago and those flights took about five hours, but they took me back about 25 years because I did half of my Undergrad at Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. And so it was like this flash flood of emotions and moments and memories and I'm going to share just one of them. When we were in college, Lora and I attended this little church called West Grand Assembly of God. It had seven pews and about 12 people on a good Sunday. And I still remember going door to door with a flyer that said, experience the excitement. It was false advertising. But I am eternally grateful

to the pastor of that church, Bob Smiley, who let a college kid preach his first sermon from behind the pulpit. Now, I wasn't very good, probably why there were 12 people, but that's where I cut my teeth preaching. Now, I knew that that church closed after we graduated but I had no idea that the building was still there. Sure enough it is and it's even smaller than I remembered and so, I took a little picture and I want to show it to you. It's a long ways from West Grand Assembly of God in Springfield, Missouri to National Community Church. Can I tell you how Lora and I got here? We got here on the train called 'so far so God'. It's the faithfulness of God. Can I tell you how you got here on the same train, 'so far so God'.

Let me talk about that train; now it travels from the past into the present. It is Psalm 23:6 *"surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"*. Its Philippians 1:6, *"he who began a good work will carry it to completion"*. It is Jeremiah 1:12 *"God is watching over his word to perform it."* and it is first Samuel 7:2 *"hither to the Lord has helped us"*. Listen, praise God for this train called 'so far so God', but there's another train and we're going to switch tracks. Now this train travels in the opposite direction and it's called 'the best is yet to come'. And so here's what we've got, we've got the faithfulness of God pursuing us from the past and we've got the sovereignty of God bearing down on us from the future and that's where you and I live our lives.

Now this is theology 201 but God is coming at you from two directions, from the past and the future and that's hard for us to comprehend because we exist in these four dimensions of space time where the arrow of time moves in one direction. But guess what? God does not exist within the four space time dimensions that he created that's why with the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day, stick with me.

When Jesus was on the cross, he said it is finished. Now, its three words in English, but its one word in Greek. It's this root word *telo* and it's where we get our English word telescope. There is a branch of theology, a branch of philosophy called teleology. And it's this idea that events are not just explained by past cause but by future purpose. Now, this word *telo* means to finish, to complete, to perfect. It's the last piece in the jigsaw puzzle.

Let me do a quick lesson in Greek grammar. The verb here is the perfect passive voice. Now, the perfect tense describes a completed action, it's something that has occurred in the past and it produced the result that exists in the present. Now, the emphasis of the perfect tense is present effect, not past action. Now, the passive voice signifies that the subject is being acted upon and the implied agent is God, and that's why this verb tense is referred to as the divine passive. And you can see this theological thread woven through the text of scripture. Ephesians 1:4 *"even before, before he made the world God loved us and chose us in Christ."* That makes no sense in four dimensions of space time, right? It's Psalm 139:16, *"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."* This is Ephesians 2:10, *"We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works prepared for us in advance."* Now you can even see it in the Lord's Prayer. *"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Listen, heaven is a dimension of reality that exists outside of these space time dimensions that we know and we talk a lot about going to heaven, I think we have it backwards. Listen, the Lord's Prayer is about heaven invading earth. This is about eternity invading time. This is about God's eternal plans and purposes, making a difference in our present tense circumstances.

Let me make it personal, my earliest memory was an asthma attack, I woke up in the middle of the night, my Dad rushed me to the emergency room, a shot of epinephrine in my, my shoulder opened my lungs back up and that routine was repeated a more nights than I can count. For the next 40 years there were not 40 days that I did not have to take a puff of that inhaler, didn't go anywhere without it. Played basketball with it in my sock, slept with it under my pillow and then something happened on July 2nd, 2016, God's, yes met my amen because this week I will celebrate a thousand days inhaler free. Now listen, I prayed hundreds of times that God would heal me and I cannot explain to you why God would answer that prayer on this particular day that is past my pay grade. And I know that there are people who do not experience healing here. Lora and I have a dear friend who is days from death barring a miracle. And I'll tell you what, we are praying for a miracle, but I also know this that our ultimate healing is in a place that the Bible calls heaven. Now, Revelation 21:4 says this, *"there will be no more curse, no crying, no sorrow, no sickness, no pain, no death for the old order of things has passed away. Behold, I am making all things new."* This is toleo, this is divine passive, this is God's eternal plans and purposes invading our reality. And in every once in awhile we experience something called a miracle. It's one of these moments where heaven invades earth and we get a glimpse of God's glory.

A few weeks ago I preached on Psalm 139 but I skipped over one of my favorite verses. Verse five says, *"you go before me and follow behind me"*. The King James says, *"you hem me in behind and before"*. Now, Lora and I, we love to give our kids a hug at the same time. Now it's basically Lora and I hugging each other with one of our children in between us, now we called this a Summer sandwich, Josiah sandwich, a Parker sandwich. We basically trapped him so they cannot escape, we love it, even if they do not. This is a Psalm sandwich. This is where so far so God meets the best is yet to come. A W Tozer said it this way, God is above but he's not pushed up. God is beneath, but he's not pressed down. He's outside, but he's not excluded. He's inside, but he's not confined. God is above all things presiding beneath all things, sustaining outside, all things, embracing an inside, all things filling.

Let me put this in scientific terms. Shortest possible time, 5.4 times 10 to the negative 44th power. Any shorter quantum mechanics cannot tell the difference between now and then. The shortest possible distance, 6.4 times 10 to the negative 34th power, it's called planck length. Any shorter and you can't tell the difference between here and there. Can I suggest that God is 5.4 times 10 to the negative 44th power before and after. And that God is 6.4 times 10 to the negative 34th power ahead and behind. This is the transcendence of God. This is the imminence of God. He is bigger than big. He is closer than close.

Now, let me double back to this yes and amen. I want to widen the aperture just a little bit, there will not be a quiz at the end of this message. I just want to say that. In 1996 NCC was meeting in a DC public school, average attendance about 25 people. August was brutal, half of our core group were GW students and they were on summer break and then are Hill staffers were on August recess and there was this one Sunday where 13 people showed up and listen, I'm pretty sure we counted Father, Son and Holy Spirit in that attendance, okay. By the way, West Grand Assembly of God will prepare you well to church plant.

I think there were two turning points that changed our trajectory as a church in August of '96; I think one was writing a \$50 check to missions. We were not self supporting, but we decided to

stand on a promise of God, *"give and it will be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over to be poured into your lap for with the measure you use, it will be measured unto you."* We have a core conviction that God will bless us in proportion to how we give to missions and how we care for the poor in our city. You know what? God has honored that step of faith.

I think the second moment was an August morning, I'm reading the book of Joshua and I get to verse three of chapter one, It says, *"I will give you every where you set your foot just as I promised Moses."* I felt this prompting to pray a perimeter all the way around Capitol Hill. Now, I knew I was going to write a book called the Circle Maker, thought it would be a great story. No, no, no, no, no, no. had no earthly idea. You know what? It was hot and humid it would been easier to just do devos in my home office, but I felt like I needed to obey that prompting. And so 4.7 mile prayer walk and not much happened at first. Now, I want you to know I was not praying for property, was praying for people, more than 13 people. I was praying that God's kingdom would come, that God's will would be done on Capitol Hill as it was in heaven. At that point, we had no idea, multi-site wasn't even a word. Let me say this before I go any further; church is not a building, it's people. You can't go to church because you are the church. We do not have seven campuses, we had thousands of campuses, we are wherever you go. It's why we pronounce this benediction at the end where we say, when you leave this place, you do not lead the presence of God, you take the presence of God with you wherever you go, you are the church. That said, promise land, land wasn't praying for property, but God has blessings for us in categories that we cannot comprehend. If you had told me 23 years ago that we would own half a dozen properties on that prayer circle, I would have called you crazy. We never thought we would own anything, but here we are. The northwest corner of that prayer circle is a crack house that we turned into Ebenezers coffeehouse. The southeast corner is this Navy Yard Car Barn where we are constructing our prototype campus. Here's the amazing thing, we got that contract 18 years to the day from the day that I prayed that circle. Coincidence, I think not. You can't make this stuff up. We purchased that property in 2014 I think God gave it to us in 1996 so here's the \$64,000 question. Why would God give us a city block? I'll talk more about this next week but here's what I know for sure. God's vision for this church is bigger than ours and God wants us to be a bigger blessing to the communities around our campuses. Now, we tend to think right here, right now, God is thinking nations and generations. We think that what God does for us is just for us. It's never just for us. It's always for the third and fourth generation and so we could maintain the status quo, it would be a lot easier, but it won't get us where God wants us to go. And so we're going to do something we've never done before. We're going to dream big, we're gonna pray hard, we're think long, we're going to do it together.

I want to ask you to do two things this week; one, would you take 30 minutes and read through this mini mag Next? Can I tell you what this is? This is so far so God and the best is yet to come. This is us writing down what God has done, where God is taking us. And I want you to just spend a little bit of time in this magazine and then inside you will find a pledge card. Now, I'm going to come back to that in a couple of weeks, but let me say this, would you begin praying about the part that God wants you to play? This is going to take all hands on deck. I want you to know Lora and I are going to lead the way. Listen, God is stretching our faith. We want to make some sacrifices that we feel. You know why? Because we want to do something that's gonna make an eternal difference. And so, inside you'll find that pledge card, the front of it, the spot to

write a name and an amount, probably should mention it's a two year a pledge. And that gives us a little bit of a runway, right, to maybe dream a little bit bigger about what God wants us to do. And then if you flip that over, let me just, say a couple of things. One, yes, there is a financial goal, but can I say this? I think the top priority right here is that all of us grow in the grace of giving. Wouldn't that be wonderful? And so I think the hope and prayer is for a hundred percent participation that you would feel like a shareholder in this vision. Listen to me, this is how we add our amen to this vision.

Now, you'll notice the goal is a 5 million for phase two and so you might be asking yourself what about phase one? I'm so glad you asked. Can I share some good news? We have had some leaders, ministry leaders, financial leaders who wanted to get in on this before we even got into this series and so 256 gifts and pledges, and phase one is fully funded. I think we could probably praise God for that. That means we're going to do phase one debt free. Come on, we can do phase two debt free, but all of us are going to have to step up and step into, we're going to have to add our amen to this vision. That means that your pledges at this point would go towards phase two, which is this kid's ministry space and I don't know, but that seems like to me like compound interest to the third and fourth generation. This may be one of the greatest investments we ever make as a church. Can I get an amen right there?

Let me close with this. At its peak, Roman Empire encompassed almost 2 million square miles; there were 50,000 miles of Roman roads. The census numbered about 90 million citizens that meant they were about 20% of the world's population. Now, I want you to juxtapose that with this. In Jerusalem, there were 120 Jews who were called Christians that's smaller than all of our campuses. They were huddled in an upper room that I'm guessing measured a few hundred square feet. Now, if you were placing bets on the Roman Empire versus this thing called Christianity, you are going to bet the farm on the Roman Empire seven days a week and you're going to do it twice on Sunday. Am I right? And here we are 2000 years later, Roman Empire is long gone. You can't even name six Caesar's unless you majored in history and salad does not count, neither does 'Little', love their crazy bread, not a Caesar. How do you explain 2 billion people who claim to follow Christ? I think its two things. Listen, I think it's a tomb that is empty and I think it's a people that are filled with the spirit of God. These 120 people in that upper room, there's no way they saw this coming on the day of Pentecost. Now, I wonder if they could kind of hear the train whistle blowing, but heaven invaded earth, Spirit invaded flesh and three hours later you've got a church of 3000 people. How do you explain that?

The same Jesus who walked out of the Tomb said this, *I will build my church*. He did not say, I will build your church. He did not say, you will build my church. He said, *I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it*. You are not here by accident. You are here by divine appointment, and we are here for such a time as this.

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of preaching at the 50th anniversary of a church in Richmond, Virginia called West End Assembly of God. Now, that church is older than I am. It was planted in March of 1969 by Dr Bob Roden, who is one of my mentors. Now listen, everybody needs somebody who believes in them more than they believe in themselves. When Lora and I moved from Chicago to DC, we were fresh off a failed church plant, my confidence was shaken. It was Bob Roden who gave us the green light to give it another shot. So I stepped

into the pulpit at that anniversary celebration, and I have this distinct feeling that I'm at an intersection. We were looking back at 50 years of God's faithfulness and we were looking forward to a future that is as bright as the promises of God, and here I am in the middle of this intersection on that night. Now, I think there were two cross streets so far, so God and the best is yet to come. Listen, God's faithfulness is pursuing us from the past. God's sovereignty is bearing down on us from the future, and that's where I think we find ourselves as a church. Lora and I have had the joy and privilege of pastoring this church for 23 years, and I want to tell you, it has been so far so God. God has done some amazing miracles, but the way you steward miracles is you believe God for even bigger and better miracles. What got us here is not going to get us where God wants us to go next, but I have no doubt that the best is yet to come. We have God sized vision. I'll spell it out next week. It's going to stretch our faith, going to require some sacrifices, but God's kingdom is going to come. God's will is going to be done. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine according to his power that's at work within us, to him be glory in the church and throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.