Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Listen to a person pray in Chinese or Amharic or Portuguese or Maori, or pretty much every language in the world, and there will probably be one word of their prayer that you will understand: “Amen.” It may be pronounced slightly differently, but it will usually be recognizable. And the reason for this is because Jesus taught us to finish our prayers with the word “Amen.” “Amen” is a OT Hebrew word. And Greek, which is the language of the NT, did not have the word “Amen,” it was imported directly from Hebrew. And pretty much every language there is has done the same thing – just imported the word “Amen.”

I want to show you an example of this in **1 Corinthians 14** (p960). Let’s turn there together. The situation that Paul was addressing was tongue speaking in worship. He also describes it as praying in the Spirit. And the problem was that those hearing it could not understand what was being said. Look at v9: “*So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said?”* But look at how he makes the same point in v16:“*Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying*?” So Paul is telling us that “outsiders,” or visitors from elsewhere, expected to be able to say “Amen” to what they heard in worship. So just a couple of decades after Jesus taught His disciples the words of the Lord’s Prayer, the final word of that prayer, “Amen,” was already a universal word of prayer and worship. And it still is today, as we have observed.

So what does this little word “Amen” mean? What are we saying when we speak it? How is “Amen” used in the Bible? Why should it end our prayers and why should we speak it in worship? This is what we want to think about this afternoon as we look at the **meaning** of “Amen” and the **practice** of “Amen” as our two main headings.

1. So let’s begin with the **meaning** of “Amen.”
   1. The Hebrew word is directly related – in fact, almost identical – to the Hebrew word for "believe" (aman), or "faithful." Its basic meaning is "sure" or "truly."
      1. Several times in **John’s Gospel**, Jesus literally says, “*Amen, Amen, I say to you*…” which in our English versions is rendered as “*Truly, truly, I say to you*…” So Jesus was emphasizing the truthfulness of what He was saying with the double “Amen.”
      2. Hebrew dictionaries tell us that “Amen” means: “*To confirm, support, uphold; to be established, be faithful, be true; to be certain, i.e. to believe*.” So when the believer says “Amen,” he or she is expressing agreement and belief that what has been said is true and certain and established and reliable.
      3. Turn back to **Deut. 27** (p. 168). Moses was speaking to the people of Israel. He told them that the Levites were going to read out the list of covenant curses that would come on the people if they disobeyed the law of God. And you will see this list of curses in vv15-26. And after each curse, we read, “*And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’*” So the people had to say, we agree with this curse; we understand that it truly will happen if we disobey God. Wouldn’t that have been a very solemn ceremony!
      4. But there is a positive side to this also. Skip ahead to **Nehemiah 8:5** (p. 403). And while you are turning there let me tell you about a similar passage in **1 Chronicles 16**. There King David instructed Asaph and his brothers to lead the whole congregation of Israel in a service of thanksgiving. And at the end of the thanksgiving song, we read, “*Then all the people said, "Amen!" and praised the LORD*.” So the whole congregation added their agreement to the song of thanksgiving! And here in Nehemiah 8:5, Ezra opened the book of the law “*in the sight of the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands*.” The people were saying, It is true, God deserves our praise. We agree with your blessing, Ezra. What you have said is trustworthy and reliable. All that you have said about God’s greatness we echo with our “Amen.”
      5. Now, we will return to this point when we come to the practice of the Amen, but I hope you can already see that **there is a proper place in worship for the spoken “Amen” of the congregation**! Boys and girls, have you ever been in a cave and heard an echo? “Stanley is cool!” Well, it is a good and proper thing for there to be an “Amen” echo in worship! Amen…Amen.. We will come back to this.
   2. But there is more that needs to be said first about the meaning of “Amen.”
      1. Please turn now to **Revelation 3:14** (p. 1030). This verse is part of one of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. We read, “*And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation*.” So who is being talked about there, do you think? It is the Lord Jesus. And he is given the name “Amen.”
      2. And this should not surprise us because Jesus described Himself in **John 14:6** as “*the truth*.” The word of the Lord Jesus is 100% faithful and reliable and true. Everything He has said about Himself and about the Father and about us and about this world and about salvation is total truth. So He truly is our eternal “Amen.” When we say “Amen” we are confessing that Jesus Christ is the truth.
      3. And this point is made also in **2 Cor. 1:20**. Let’s turn there next (p. 964). “*For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him [Jesus]. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory*.”
         1. There are so many promises of God in the OT about a coming Messiah and salvation – The seed of Eve, the seed of Abraham, and Immanuel born to a virgin are just some. Well, Jesus Christ is God’s “Amen” to those promises. They are fulfilled and secured by His blood on the cross of Calvary. So because God says “Amen” to us through Christ on the cross, we are to respond with “Amen” to God, through Christ, in worship and in prayer. We are to declare that Jesus Christ is the faithful and true witness, and our Saviour and Lord, which is what we do when we say “Amen.”
      4. But let’s turn lastly, in connection with the meaning of “Amen,” to **John 16:23b** (p.903). “*Truly, truly, I say to you,* (or literally, “Amen, Amen, I say to you…) *whatever you ask of the Father in my name, He will give it to you*.”
         1. And this promise is why the catechism says, “It is even more sure that God listens to my prayer, than that I really desire what I pray for.” Wow! Do you always truly mean and absolutely desire everything that you pray for? I don’t. Sometimes when other people are praying I am thinking about the next part I will fit on my car or last night’s rugby game. Sometimes my own prayers are just a bunch of words rolling off my tongue, because I am not truly concentrating on what I am saying. Is it the same with you? But if we trust in Christ for our salvation, and we are praying because God commands us to pray, and we pray in Jesus’ name and say “Amen,” “it is even more sure that God listens to my prayer, than that I really desire what I pray for.” What a gracious God we serve!
2. Well, we will say more about this shortly, but adding all we have said up, “Amen” means it is true, we agree, it is certain, we believe it; and this is so because Jesus Christ is the truth and the Yes to all God’s promises; and God hears our “Amens” and answers our prayers . But let’s move on to think about the **practice** of “Amen,” our second and final point.
   1. And we begin with the point we made earlier, in connection with 1 Cor. 14 and Deut. 27 and Nehemiah 8:6, which is that **it is entirely fitting and appropriate that we say “Amen” during our worship services**. And this is not about worship traditions or different personality types. This is about God’s will for gathered worship, which we have seen is an age-old biblical pattern, and is captured in a word that crosses all cultures – “Amen.” We ought to be saying “Amen.”
      1. And so, there are times when I will say, “And all God’s people said…” And you respond with an “Amen.”
      2. The word **Doxology** literally means ‘glory word.’ And the last song of our services is a doxology – a glory word that praises and honours God. And we usually add a final congregational Amen to our doxology.
      3. And while we want to be careful that we don’t fall into the trap of shouting out our “Amens” in order to be noticed by others, at the end of the opening greeting of the service (grace and peace to you…), at the end of prayers, at the end of Bible readings, or when truth is declared in the sermon, it is entirely appropriate for you to say “Amen.” You don’t have to wait for me to say, “And all God’s people said…” You have the warrant of Scripture to say “Amen” during worship.
      4. But this is about more than just a congregational Amen at the end of prayers or doxologies. If you are talking to a group of people, it is very natural for them to nod and say things like umhm, yup, yeah, I agree. In fact, if they sat there and did not move or blink or make a sound, you would start to worry that they were not listening or you would suspect that they did not agree with what you were saying. Well, I am going to use the word **whisper** because this is not about drawing attention to yourself or distracting the person leading in prayer, but whether it be congregational prayers or diaconal prayers or prayer time around the family dinner table, you will find it very helpful to whisper umhm, or Yes Lord, or Amen during prayer! Doing this helps you to avoid mentally drifting off in prayer and instead to pray along with whomever is leading in prayer, and it supports the person leading in prayer. It is a way to express your longing that God would do what he or she is asking God to do.
      5. So it is entirely fitting and appropriate that we say “Amens” during worship and prayer.
   2. But there is another implication for worship that arises from the passage in 1 Cor. 14 that we looked at. Paul was rebuking the Corinthians because what they were saying in worship **could not be understood by outsiders**. And it follows from this that we too should want those who come to our worship services to be able to understand what is said and say “Amen.”
      1. And this is why, in an English speaking country, our official, regular worship services are in English. Most people in NZ speak English, so we have our services in English.
      2. And if we have people for whom English is a second language (ESL) and very difficult for them to understand, then we have a duty to help them understand. And so, for example, I send my written sermon to those who have English as a second language so that they can read along as they hear the sermon preached and look at the sermon through the week to help with understanding. And if you didn’t know this and you would like to receive the written sermons, then please let me know and I will add you to the email list.
      3. And some of our churches offer Language Assisted Bible Study classes to help ESL people learn English. In Dovedale, Rev. Hoyt would meet with ESL people on Saturday and work through that Sunday’s sermons so they could better understand. And in the North Shore congregation, Pastor Daniel’s sermons are translated into Korean, because they have a lot of Koreans who have little English. These are the sorts of things we do to help ESL people add their “Amen.”
      4. But it needs to be said also that this principle is broken by the many churches around Auckland that have their official, regular services in a language other than English. Can you see that? It is simply not possible for the vast majority of people in NZ to walk into a church service that is in Chinese or Tongan or Dutch and understand what is said and say “Amen.” For the sake of the gospel and our witness to the world, our official, regular worship services should be in the language understood by most people.
   3. Well, our final point in relation to the practice of the “Amen” is about **prayer**. Earlier in the sermon we looked at **John 16:23b**, which is where Jesus said, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, He will give it to you*.” So is it the case that so long as we pray in Jesus’ name and end with “Amen,” God will give us whatever we ask of Him? Have you gotten from God everything you have asked for in prayer with an “Amen”? I am sure you have not. So what did Jesus mean then?
      1. Well, we have a very helpful answer to this question in **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**. Let’s turn there together (p. 970). Here we read about a prayer of the Apostle Paul.
         1. He says, “*To keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated*.” You see, Paul spoke to the Lord Jesus in visions. And to keep Him from getting too elated or self-important, he was given what was probably some sort of physical affliction.
         2. And Paul continues, “*Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.*”So three times, in the name of Jesus, and with an “Amen,’ Paul prayed for this thorn in the flesh to be taken away. And Paul would have prayed this believing that he could serve God better without this thorn in the flesh.
         3. But Paul was *not* given what he asked for. We read, “*But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*” And what this response reveals is that Paul’s prayer was answered in an even higher and more wonderful manner than he had imagined. For Paul was *better* equipped for his work as an Apostle through having this weakness and being given grace sufficient for it, than if he had had the weakness removed.
         4. Do you see how **liberating** it is to understand this? You are to come to God and ask Him for things.
            1. Ask Him to help you grow in patience or self-control, for example, and you can be sure that He will give you what you ask, because it is His will for you to grow in patience and self-control. It says so in here (The Bible)!
            2. And even though you cannot know if something like you or your loved one being healed is in accord with His will, because that is not in here, you can be certain that “it is even more sure that God listens to [your] prayer, than that [you] really desire what [you] pray for.” And though your knowledge is limited, and your desires ebb and flow, and you are full of imperfections, God is faithful and He has promised to work all things for the good of those who love Him.
            3. So believer, when you turn to God in prayer and add your “Amen,” you cannot lose!

Well, one quick observation as we close. Do you know what **the final word of the Bible** is? It is “Amen.” The Bible ends with the promise of the Lord Jesus that He shall return soon. Then we read an “Amen.” And then we call on the Lord Jesus to come and we read, “*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen*.” And this is a powerful statement from God that the whole Book is absolutely true and trustworthy.

So in view of all we have learned today, may it be that there is new meaning to our “Amens” and lots more “Amens.” Amen.