

(i) Scripture.

The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, 'What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation'.

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish'.

He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

So from that day on they made plans to put Him to death.

John 11. 47-53 (*English Standard Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

Ironies of the Passion.

1. 'The chief priests and the Pharisees ... said, "... If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11. 47-48).

'The authorities are thoroughly frustrated. No one can deny that the miracle Jesus has performed actually occurred: it was too public, and Lazarus was genuinely dead—so dead that the smell of decomposition was public and obnoxious (John 11. 39).

'So how can the Sanhedrin trim Jesus' rising authority or quell the messianic fervour that is likely to erupt when the report of the miracle circulates?

'Eventually, they fear, "everyone will believe in Him", the rebellion will become established, "and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation". There may be irony even in their mention of "our place": the peculiar expression could refer to the temple ... yet it is hard to deny that their real interest is not so much the temple as their place of privilege in society.

'There is a deeper irony. As the story unfolds, they take action against Jesus, and He is crucified. Yet this fails to preserve their "place". Within forty years, the Romans descend on Jerusalem and crush it. They destroy the temple. And the "place" of the authorities is wiped out'.

(D. A. Carson, 'For the Love of God', Volume 2, comment for 21 December.)

2. 'The next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down' (John 19. 31).

'Do you see the irony in this? The chief priests were so mindful of the law's obligations, they dogged Jesus to death for healing on the Sabbath (John 5. 16; cf. 7. 21-23). So mindful were they that they cleaned up after the murder they had committed to avoid ceremonial uncleanness on the Sabbath'.

(Mark Dever, 'Four Things Jesus Came to Do', accessed at <https://www.crossway.org/articles/4-things-jesus-came-to-do/>.)

The Son of God.

'Matthew and Mark first notice His Sonship of God at His baptism [Matthew 3. 17; Mark 1. 11]. Luke goes farther back, and notices it at His birth [Luke 1. 35]. But John goes back farther still, even to the immeasurable, unspeakable distance of eternity, and declares [traces] His Sonship 'in the bosom of the Father' [John 1. 18].

(J. G. Bellett, 'The Son of God', chapter 1, page 10.)

'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14. 9).

'In the humanity of Jesus, God sat ... for His portrait, and ... it was a perfect likeness'.

(P. Lawson, 'God Persists: A Short Survey of World History in the Light of Christian Faith', page 43.)

'There are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' (John 21. 25).

'So many are the Saviour's achievements that follow from His Incarnation, that to try to number them is like gazing at the open sea and trying to count the waves'.

(Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 328-373), 'On the Incarnation of the Word of God', paragraph 54.)

Jesus: prophet, priest and king.

1. 'It is clear that if God condescends to be so intimately allied with manhood, He intends to deliver man, and to bless him. Incarnation prophesies salvation ... When God stoops down to man, it must mean that man is to be lifted up to God ...

'He is anointed of the Highest that He may carry out the offices which He has undertaken: the Spirit of the Lord rested upon Him without measure. Our Lord is anointed in a threefold sense, as prophet, priest, and king. It has been well observed that ***this anointing, in its threefold power, never rested upon any other man.*** There have been kingly prophets, David to wit; there was one kingly priest, even Melchizedek; and there have also been priestly prophets, such as Samuel. Thus, it has come to pass that two of the offices have been united in one man, ***but the whole three— prophet, priest, and king—never met in one thrice anointed being until Jesus came'.***

(C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Great Birthday', a sermon preached on 24 December 1876 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.)

2. Note:

- (i) 'They glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" (Luke 7. 16).
- (ii) 'We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God' (Heb. 4. 14).
- (iii) 'Do not take an oath ... by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King' (Matt. 5. 34-35).

'Jesus Christ ... hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light' (2 Tim. 1. 10).

'So wrote the greatest Christian of them all just before he went out to meet his executioner'.

(A. W. Tozer, 'The Knowledge of the Holy', chapter 7.)

'By the grace of God I am what I am' (1 Cor. 15. 8): An anecdote of John Newton.

'Two or three years before the death of this eminent servant of Christ, when his sight was become so dim that he was no longer able to read, an aged friend and brother in the ministry, now living, called on him for breakfast. Family prayer over, the portion of scripture for the day was read to him: "By the grace of God, I am what I am".

'It was the pious man's custom on these occasions to make a short exposition of the passage. After the reading of this text, he paused for some moments and then uttered the following affecting soliloquy:

"I am not what I ought to be! Ah! how imperfect and deficient! I am not what I wish to be! I 'abhor what is evil', and I would 'cleave to what is good!' I am not what I hope to be! Soon, soon. I shall put off mortality: and with mortality all sin and imperfection!

"Yet, though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, I am not what I once was, a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle and acknowledge, By the grace of God, I am what I am! Let us pray!".

(Cited in 'The Christian Spectator', 1821, Volume III, page 186—emphases original.)

'Do not be anxious about tomorrow' (Matt. 6. 34).

If you are tempted to bite your nails about the many unpredictable newsflashes of the coming days, weeks and months, you will do well to remember the words of the psalmist: 'The righteous ... is not afraid of bad news'; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord' (Psa. 112. 7-8 ESV).

'Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have' (Heb. 13. 5)

'There are two ways to get enough. One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less'.

(Attributed to G. K. Chesterton.)

Ways not to find the will of God.

'The New Testament gives no ... particular instructions on how to go about finding God's will. There isn't a magic formula offered Christians that will open some mysterious door ... allowing us to get a glimpse of the mind of the Almighty.

'The Bible forbids pagan divination (Deut. 18. 10) and invokes severe penalties for those who resort to magic for determining the will of God in this way ...

'God is not a magic genie. The use of promise boxes, or flipping open your Bible and pointing your finger, or relying on the first thought to enter your mind after a prayer are unwarranted forms of Christian divination'.

(Bruce Waltke, 'Knowing the Will of God', page 17.)

Samson: the weakness of the strong man.

'Samson could rend the lion, but could not rule his lusts; he burst his bonds, but could not break his habits; he slew the Philistines, but never mortified his evil self'.

(John Toll, 'Historical—Notes on Judges Chapter 16', Basic Teaching, Number 23, page 45.

'To the angel of the church in Laodicea write, "These things says the Amen ...'" (Rev. 3. 14).

I think it true to say that 'the Amen' must rank as one of the most unusual personal titles or names of our Lord Jesus that we find in the New Testament. Unlike those features of our Lord with which He introduces Himself in most of the other letters in Revelation 2 and 3, this particular title is *not* lifted from the pen-portrait painted of Him in chapter 1 (the letter to Philadelphia being the only other exception). Nor, indeed, is it to be found anywhere else in the whole of scripture.

We are, of course, very familiar with the most common use of the word 'Amen' in the English Bible, where it expresses full agreement with something said by somebody else—ranging from the first of its almost 80 occurrences, back in the Law of Moses towards the *beginning* of the *Old Testament* (Num. 5. 22), through to its last appearances in the two closing verses of this, the *very last book* in the *New Testament*.^[1] In each of these cases, the word carries the meaning, 'Let it be so'.

But that is clearly not its meaning in Rev. 3. 14.

There are three points to note:

First, in Isaiah 65 verse 16 the expression 'the God of truth' is literally translated, 'the God of Amen'. That is, in the context, God Himself is linked with the Hebrew word 'Amen' (the root of which carries the meaning of that which is firm and certain ^[2]) because He (God) can always be relied on ... because He is always true, both to His declared judgements and to His promises and because He always keeps His word without fail. Not here, then, 'Let it be so', but 'It shall be so'.

Second, according to 2 Corinthians 1 verse 20, all of God's promises both (i) are 'Yes' *in* Christ, and (ii) receive their 'Amen' of confirmation *through* Him. That is, the Lord Jesus is the 'Yes' to the fulfilment of however many promises of God there are. Every one of God's promises is guaranteed *in* and *through* Him and rests secure in Him.

Third, the same word translated 'Amen' in the New Testament is rendered 'verily' (or 'truly') over 100 times there. With this sense, the word is found always and only in the Gospels, and there only on the lips of our Saviour Himself—as, for example, in the well-known duplicate 'verily, verily' (or 'truly, truly') which we read no less than twenty-five times in John's gospel. By using the word in this way, our Lord is stressing the truth and certainty of what He said and taught.

Drawing these three points together, I conclude that, when our Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as 'the Amen', He is emphasising to the church in Laodicea at the very outset that, no matter how unexpected (and, indeed, no matter how unwelcome and unpalatable) His message might prove to them:

- (i) His assessment of their spiritual condition was *utterly accurate* (Rev. 3. 15, 17);
- (ii) His *counsel* to them was *entirely trustworthy* (Rev. 3. 18-19); and
- (iii) the fulfilment of any *threat* or *promise* He made to them was *fully assured* (Rev. 3. 16, 20-21).

In a word that *He, 'the Amen', was His own guarantee and security.*

Notes

[1] The Hebrew word occurs 30 times in the Old Testament [translated as 'Amen' (28 times) and 'Truth' (twice in Isa. 65. 16)], and the Greek word occurs 152 times in the New Testament—translated variously as 'Amen' (51 times) and 'Verily' {or 'Truly'} (101 times).

[2] 'The basic root idea is firmness or certainty', J. B. Scott, '*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*', Volume 1, page 51.

(The above comprises an extract from notes of a message given some time ago on Rev. 3. 14-22.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Two questions asked about how to stop.

1. John and Mark are having a serious chat about married life. 'I'm having a lot of trouble with my Emily', says John.

'I'm sorry to hear that', Mark responds, 'Tell me about it'.

'Well', says John, 'I said something innocently to Emily last week which somehow upset her. At first, she started shouting at me. And when I tried to get her to explain what it was I had said that upset her, she withdrew into her shell and I got the silent treatment for the rest of the day. What is more worrying, this has happened quite a few times since then'.

Mark reached for some paper and a pencil.

'Whatever are you doing?' John asks.

'Now think carefully, John', says Mark ...

'Tell me exactly what you said to get your wife to stop talking to you—but say it slowly.
I need to get a note of this'.

2. Mrs Forbes was a wealthy widow and philanthropist who was a target of many people seeking charity.

Mrs Forbes was indeed very generous but, interestingly, she never answered the door for poverty-stricken people herself. Instead, she would have one of her servants answer the door and give a sizeable donation.

One day, a shabbily dressed man showed up at the door with the loud proclamation, 'I haven't eaten anything in two days!'

To the surprise of the servant who had opened the door, Mrs Forbes called out from her lounge and insisted on seeing the man.

'Whatever did Mrs Forbes want with you?', the servant asked as she later let the man out.

'I don't get it', the man replied, 'I'm rather confused...

... she wanted to know what my secret was'.