

New Year's Day Service

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[0 : 00] For those of you who were here on Sunday morning, you may recall that I was showing the children some of the Christmas presents that I got this year, or well, last year now.

And you also may recall that as I showed them some of the presents that I'd received, I showed them one present that appeared very unpromising. And, well, I brought it back again today. It's not very difficult to bring. It was just a little scrap of paper. Some of you will be familiar with a scrap of paper, and some of you won't be. And surely enough, it doesn't really appear very promising as a Christmas present.

But, again, for those of you who were here, you remember this. But the point that I made was that on this bit of paper, there was a promise. And that's what made the bit of paper valuable, the promise that was written on it.

And the promise was and is of one spa day at Ardo House Hotel. And so, evidently, the bit of paper proved more valuable than it first appeared because of the promise it contained.

[1 : 10] But something that I also said to the children on Sunday was that promises need to be claimed, or they remain little more than a worthless scrap of paper.

And I shared with the children a couple of promises that we find in the Bible that we need to claim for ourselves. And it's one of those promises that I want to focus our attention on briefly this morning as we begin 2019.

And it's an intriguing promise found in the psalm that we read in Psalm 81. In Psalm 81 and in verse 10, we read as follows, I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of Egypt.

And then we have the promise that God directs to His people, Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. This is a promise.

It's an intriguing promise that is directed to God's people. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

[2 : 14] So, depending on how you understand the promise, it sounds almost too good to be true. And, well, you know what they say about promises that sound too good to be true.

They probably are too good to be true. As the closing date for PPI claims comes ever closer, I think it's in the course of this year, if I'm not mistaken, there seems to be a multiplication of the commercials on radio, encouraging you to make your PPI claims, and assuring you of thousands of pounds that you could secure if only you would do that.

I wonder if this promise is a bit like one of those promises you hear on the radio. It does sound very promising. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

It sounds almost like a blank check from God, offering to give you whatever you please. I don't know what that would be. You know, if you did have a blank check from God, what would you ask for?

What would you write on it? Thankfully, God doesn't do blank checks. He's far too wise and He loves us far too much to place something as dangerous as a blank check in our hands.

[3 : 35] But this is a wonderful and generous promise that God makes to you, and one that I want you to encourage, to claim as you begin this new year.

Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. Now, like any promise, we need to have a clear idea of what the promise is.

And so that's what we want to do this morning. We want to examine, we want to study this promise, we want to understand just what the promise is, different aspects of it that will allow us to respond to it as is fitting and as will be good for us.

So there's a few things we want to discover about the promise. We need to know who is making the promise. We need to know who the promise is for, who is the promise directed to.

We need to know if there's anything we need to do in order to claim what is being offered. And clearly there is, but we need to think about, well, what does that actually mean?

[4 : 38] And then we need to think a little bit about, well, what is being offered? What is God promising us in this promise that He makes? So let's think about the promise as we explore it from these different perspectives or angles.

First of all, who is making the promise? Now this is very important to establish in order, first of all, to test the trustworthiness of the promise.

Again, if I go back to my wee scrap of paper that I have here at the front, if I had been handed, say, for example, in the course of last week, I'd been walking down Union Street doing some Christmas shopping, it's unlikely that I would have been doing that, but nonetheless, just go with me on this. I'd be walking down Union Street doing some Christmas shopping, and somebody hands me a flyer, and on the flyer it says, one free spa day at Ardo House Hotel. Would I have said, wow, this is amazing.

What a stroke of luck that I've actually been given something as valuable as this for free. This is amazing. And I get on my phone, and I phone my wife and tell her, you won't believe what's happened.

[5 : 44] We've got a free spa day at Ardo House Hotel. Would I have done that? No, I'd have said, there must be a catch. I said, it can't actually be free. I'd have said, no, this simply can't be true, and probably I'd have chucked it in the bin, because I don't trust the one who's making the promise.

I don't know who they are, and I have every reason to believe that it's not all that it appears. The promise isn't trustworthy. There must be a catch.

Now, as it happens, my wee scrap of paper was a gift from my sons, and I trust them. Well, most of the time I do. And I do in the case of this little bit of paper.

It's very important to be clear on who is making you a promise. Well, who is making this promise? And I know you know the answer, but it's important for us to just focus clearly on it.

Who is making the promise? Well, the verse gives us the answer in very explicit and eloquent terms, because the verse begins with these words, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, open wide your mouth, and I will fill it.

[6 : 52] So explicitly and clearly, without any doubt whatsoever, the one making the promise identifies himself. I am the Lord your God. I am Yahweh your God.

The promise maker is the living and true God. The one who does not and cannot lie. The one who is absolutely trustworthy.

The one who has never left unkept a single promise. The one who has proved himself time and time and time again, in every age, in every nation, in every circumstance.

The one who has proved ever dependable and trustworthy in my life. And I'm sure it is a testimony of many of you also. Even in our verse, God knows his own track record, because he identifies himself not only with his name, but also with what he has done.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. It's as if God is saying to those who are listening to him and about to hear the promise, it's as if he is saying, you know me and you can trust me.

[8 : 04] Delivering on promises is what I do. I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. It's important that the promise maker be trustworthy.

But it's also important that the promise maker has the capacity to deliver. There may be a promise made by somebody that's sincere enough and genuine enough, and in general terms, the character of the one making the promise is trustworthy.

And yet there could be a problem with their capacity to deliver. Again, if we think about my little scrap of paper here, and I think, well, my sons have made this promise to me, and I trust them. But then I think, well, hang on a minute. Do they actually have the capacity to deliver? What if they were all penniless? And I thought, well, it's nice of them. It's a sincere aspiration on their part, but when it comes to the crunch, will they be able to pay the bill?

Will they actually be able to make that booking? Because the booking hasn't been made yet, which is a slight concern. But anyway, that's beside the point. You know, do they have the capacity to deliver?

[9 : 17] Now, thankfully, though none of them are very wealthy, they all have some pennies coming in. And a win bonus for Fr. Martin against Wick on Saturday, that should help, at least to pay part of

the spa day at Ardo House Hotel, and the others, no doubt, will be able to chip in as well.

So I'm confident that they do have the capacity to deliver. But what about the promise maker in our verse? Does he have the capacity to deliver on this promise?

Well, again, that may seem almost a foolish question. Our God has a boundless capacity to deliver on his promises. And his capacity to deliver has to do with perhaps two things.

His wealth, let's call it that, but also his wisdom. We think of the wealth of the one who is making the promise here in our text this morning. You know, when I was growing up, I remember people would quote the verse from Psalm 50 and verse 10 speaking about God's wealth or, you know, his capacity to deliver his ownership over all, the cattle on a thousand hills are his.

Now, remember, I used to think, well, I wasn't that impressed to be honest. I thought, well, yeah, a thousand hills and the cattle on a thousand hills, that's quite a lot. But in my foolishness, I guess, I thought, well, you know, I could think of something more amazing than that.

[10 : 40] I didn't really capture the poetry involved and how these, this is an expression that is to illustrate that God owns all things. And of course, he does.

His wealth is without limit. If we think of the universe that he has created, it all belongs to him. I don't know if you've been following on the news yesterday and today, and if you're interested in this, you may have been following this for a lot longer, but yesterday and today, especially, there's been a lot of talk about this NASA probe, New Horizons, that is reaching the outer reaches of our solar system.

And I think in the past few hours, pictures have been taken of Ultima Thule. I think that's how it's pronounced, which as far as I can tell, is just a big chunk of ice out in the outer reaches of the solar system.

And in the course of today, the pictures will eventually make their way back to NASA headquarters. And they're all very excited about what they might discover, any secrets as to the origins of the universe from this data.

And the scale of it all is difficult to get our heads around. Apparently, this probe is now about four billion miles from Earth. The very fact that commands can be sent and data sent over that distance is itself a remarkable testimony to human ingenuity.

[12 : 04] Four billion miles. And yet, that's just our solar system. And our solar system is just a small part of our galaxy, the Milky Way.

And the Milky Way, of course, is just one galaxy of, they reckon, 100 to 200 billion galaxies in the observable universe.

So that isn't even counting, that which goes beyond our capacity to observe or to calculate. All of it created by our God.

All of it owned by our God. So his capacity to deliver on his promises surely is beyond any doubt as regards his wealth, as regards the resources that he holds at his disposal.

But it's not just a question of wealth, it's also a question of wisdom. If I'm going to open my mouth wide, I want to be sure that the one filling it knows what he's doing. And our God is altogether wise.

[13 : 05] He will fill us with that which is good for us. His wisdom will be deployed in ensuring that his fulfilling of the promise will be marked by deep and profound wisdom.

So who is the promise maker? I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of Egypt. And who is the promise for?

Who is God speaking to? Well again, in this verse we have the answer very clearly before us. I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of Egypt. So God is not speaking to all indiscriminately.

He describes himself as your God. I am the Lord your God. the God of his own covenant people.

The God of his own redeemed people. The God of those people that he brought out of Egypt.

And so it's a clearly identified group of people, body of people that he is speaking to. Indeed in the language that is employed by God here in this psalm there is I think a deliberate echo or repetition of the language that we find in Exodus at the beginning of the Ten Commandments.

[14 : 22] In Exodus chapter 20 at the beginning of that chapter what do we read? And God spoke all these words. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt out of the land of slavery.

And then he goes on to enumerate the Ten Commandments for his people. So the promise is made to those who are already part of God's redeemed people.

Now what does that mean for us this morning? Well simply this that the promise is for God's people. It is a promise for those who by faith in Jesus Christ have been brought into the family of God.

If we are to enjoy the paternal blessing of God we need to be part of the family. We need to be sons and daughters. We need to be as children. And the beginning of the year is as good a year or as good a time as any to reflect on that and to ask ourselves that question.

Is that true of me? Am I part of God's family? Am I trusting in Jesus as my Savior? I think we're all familiar with the language of John in chapter 1 where this is made so explicit.

[15:33] In John chapter 1 in verse 12 we read Yet to all who received him to those who believed in his name that is in the name of Jesus he gave the right to become children of God.

We become children of God by faith in Jesus Christ and this promise is for those who have become children of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

And so if you do one thing today ensure that this is true of you that you are beginning this year trusting in Jesus as your own Savior.

And if you are then this promise is for you. But we have another angle from which we can look at this promise and that is what we have to do. How do we claim the promise?

Well back to my wee scrap of paper. I need to do something with this. I need to remind my son the one who's kind of coordinating this to make the booking and once that has happened on the appointed day I'll jump in the car with Martha we'll head towards Garth D we'll blissfully ignore as on the left and Sainsbury's on the right that will be a delight to not actually have to go into one of those places.

[16:44] Head to the bridge over the D and at the roundabout take a right and head towards Ardo House and in we go and we enjoy the day.

We need to do something. We need to claim the promise in that way. It's not difficult but we need to do it. What about the promise God makes to us in our verse this morning?

Open wide your mouth. It's simple enough. God does not present you with a long list of prior conditions or complex religious duties to perform in order to be blessed.

You just have to open your mouth. You have to believe that God wants to bless you and you have to receive the blessing that He is offering you. You need to recognize your great need of God's blessing of being filled by God and open your mouth.

I wonder why don't we do it? Is it a lack of trust? Is it a fear of losing control of our lives? A reluctance to surrender our lives to Him and to His control? Reminds me a little bit of a small child who wants to be boss at the dinner table and decide what he or she will or will not eat.

[17:51] And when mom or dad try to put the teaspoon in the child's mouth, he closes his mouth tight with a capacity and a power that's quite impressive.

refusing to lose control and to open your mouth does involve exercising trust in the one who is going to fill it.

But just think a little bit more about what is involved in opening our mouth as the promise indicates we need to do. It's of course a picture. It's not literal.

It's a picture of the believer asking God for something. Asking in as much as we are able in accordance with his will and believing he will answer our prayer. It is asking God to grant us God pleasing or the God pleasing desires of our heart.

And we ask as we pray. We ask for forgiveness. We ask for peace in the storm. We ask for wisdom. We ask for patience. We ask for love. We ask to be filled by his spirit.

[18:55] We ask for the salvation of our loved ones. We ask for our congregation to grow in love for Jesus and in service to others. We ask for the transformation of our city and nation.

We ask for peace where there is war and justice where there is oppression. We ask for the safety of refugees crossing the English Channel maybe even as we are gathered here this morning. We open our mouth and we open it wide.

And in the measure of our faith it will be filled. How wide will you open your mouth in this year that has been dawned? Well let's draw things to a close with one final point concerning what we are being offered and really in a sense some of that has already been suggested certainly implicitly.

What are we being offered? In the case of my wee scrap of paper it's quite explicit. One spa day at the Ardo House Hotel. What about God's promise to us this morning?

Well it's just a few words. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. God doesn't place any caveats or direct us to the small print.

[20:05] He simply says I will fill it. He will fill you with grace and pardon with love and tenderness with direction and purpose gratitude and joy and peace.

He will fill us with all that is pleasing to him and good for us. If we ask for forgiveness he will forgive us. If we ask for wisdom he will give us wisdom. If we ask to be used by him in his service he will use us.

If we ask him to bless our congregation and the cause of Christ in our city he will do so. He will answer and he will fill in accordance with his good and perfect will. We just have to open our mouths and he will take care of filling them.

He will not always give us what we want or what we ask for but he will always give us what is best for us. There will perhaps even be times when he fills our mouth with what appears to be bitter medicine but we can be sure that it will be given in love and for our good.

And so the call and the invitation to you and to all of us is to open our mouths. It's a simple thing and yet sometimes we fail to do the simple things.

[21 : 18] Let me just make a, I don't know if it's called a confession or not but I'll call it a confession. In a drawer at home I have a gift card and it's a very pleasant gift card and it's very pleasant very nice envelope and it is a gift card that allows me to have afternoon tea at the Marcliffe and it's for two afternoon tea for two at the Marcliffe.

Now so far so good. The problem is that the card has been sitting in the drawer for years and like I mean years. It's a lovely gift but it's been left unopened, unused.

It doesn't actually have a time limit on it. Often these things do but it doesn't so who knows. This year maybe will be the year. But I mention that because it's a bit like that or can be like that when we hear the promises of God and we simply refuse to open our mouths.

let me just close by drawing your attention to how the people responded when God first delivered this promise in the historic context that the psalm is relating to and we have the answer to that in the verses that follow because what is said immediately after the promise is delivered or at least a record of the promise having been made is recorded.

In verse 11 we read but, it's always a worrying word to begin a verse, but my people would not listen to me. Israel would not submit to me.

[22 : 52] So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices. You would have imagined that with such a promise they would have opened their mouths gladly but they did not.

They would not listen to God. It's a very solemn reality that is being recorded for us. A people refusing to listen to the gracious and loving voice of God.

Well friends, this morning as we begin 2019, let us listen to God and let us open our mouths wide and enjoy all that He chooses to fill our mouths with.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you are the God who is altogether wise and altogether generous. We thank you that you have the capacity to deliver on every promise that you make.

We thank you for this promise that we can claim for ourselves this morning and the beginning of this year and help us to do so. Help us, each of us, in our own particular circumstances to know what it is, to open our mouths wide and to experience and delight in our mouths being filled by a wise and generous and good God.

[24 : 04] And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.