



The Anchor of the Soul

Series: Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul

Hebrews 6:13-20

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Coming Full Circle The text that we are looking at this morning is just beautiful and encouraging and a rich blessing to the believing and persevering soul. It's a tonic to the troubled soul and appeal for life to the lost soul. Right here in this text is the phrase from which we get the title of this sermon series -- "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul," and it is a text that brings us full circle from what the writer of Hebrews has been saying to his flock and to us, starting back in chapter 4 and verse 14. Look back there for just a moment and let your eyes fall on these words as I trace the writer's train of thought.

He calls us to hold fast to our confession of faith, to our hope and trust in Christ, because He is our Great High Priest, the one who has passed through the heavens, who has come from the Father, laying aside His rights to His glory, and become one of us. He has faced the temptations we have faced, has lived the life we couldn't live and has offered the sacrifice of His own blood in our place to make atonement for our sin, to win our forgiveness, to conquer the power of death and give us eternal life. He has then passed back through the heavens into the very throne room of God, to take His place at the Father's right hand and to stand as the guarantee of salvation for all who believe and hold fast to Him by faith to the end. And he guarantees our access to the throne of God where we receive mercy and find the grace that we need to live faithfully for and with Him.

Then the writer of Hebrews launches into a glorious explanation of how it is that Jesus is perfectly and uniquely qualified to be our Redeemer, our Great High Priest, a priest after the order of Melchizedek –how He is the only source of salvation for sinners who desperately need a Savior, the source of salvation for everyone who obeys Him and His call to repent and to believe the gospel.

But then we warns them, right? They were not holding fast to Christ as they should. That was the real source of their spiritual weakness. It's not the circumstances of their situation which was challenging; it's that they have become dull of hearing, unmoved by the Word of God, and immature, tossed to and fro by their emotions, and were regressing in the faith as a result. He warns them that there were some in the church who had outwardly professed faith in Christ, who outwardly appeared to be Christians, who may have had some kind of spiritual experiences, but were falling away from their profession of Christ, because they did not truly know and trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. He warned the false believers who were headed toward apostasy so that they might repent of their unbelief before it was too late and they were beyond repentance.

But most of them, he believed, were truly saved but they needed shaken out of their spiritual lethargy and laziness and to begin hearing the voice of God again and to return to a vibrant faith in which Christ was the center of their lives and the Lord whom they gladly and wholeheartedly served and worshipped, to find their hope in Him again. His goal is that they would renew their love for Christ and for His word. He had seen, and more importantly God had seen, in them the things that belong to salvation. He wants them to press on, not settling for their current sluggishness, so that their hope in Christ would be strong to the end. He wants them to lay hold of the promises and know the full assurance of their salvation, and the joy and the peace that are alone is found in active and persevering faith. And to that end, he commands them to imitate the example of those who though faith and patience, inherited the promises of God, who remained faithful to the end, and so received the promise of eternal life. He wants to give to them an example to encourage their souls and he does so by, first, placing before them the truth of...

Abraham and the Promises of God (13-14) Look again at verses 13-15, ***“For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.” (Hebrews 6:13–15, ESV)*** The author of Hebrews is saying in effect, “I want to give you a human example that you can sink your teeth into and that will drive you to faith and patience, to patient and believing endurance and the best one I can think of is Abraham.”

Well, what about Abraham? Let me just give you an overview of his life – and that's all it can be, an overview – and I encourage you to take some time this week to read the account of

his life in Genesis 12-25. It would definitely feed your soul, but let me just give you this overview – what this Hebrew flock would have known very well. And let me say one more thing. The exhortation from Abraham’s life is this: Hold fast to your confession of Jesus Christ, because the future salvation of everyone who holds fast to God, through grace-empowered faith in Christ is certain and sure, because God’s promise have never failed any that trusted in Him. Let me say that again: Hold fast to your confession of Jesus Christ, because the future salvation of everyone who holds fast to God, through grace-empowered faith in Christ is certain and sure, because God’s promises have never failed any that trusted in Him.

Ok, so what about Abraham? God appeared to Abraham when his name was still Abram and he was living in Ur of the Chaldees. He was an idolator, a worshipper of false gods, and until God spoke to him, he had no knowledge of the One True God. None at all. God came to Abraham and made a promise: **“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.””** (Genesis 12:1–3, ESV)

Now, you need to understand that this was not God saying to Abraham, “Pack up your stuff and move a few miles down the road.” This was God saying to Abraham, “Leave behind everything you know, everything that you have believed, separate from your family, and trust me and follow me and I will bless you – your name will be great, I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you and through you people from every nation will be blessed.” And he did it. It wasn’t easy, but he did it. God established the covenant with Abraham, made promises to Abraham that He ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the perfect example for us. As Paul tells us in Galatians 3:29, **“If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”** (Galatians 3:29, ESV)

So God made to Abraham these very great promises, promises that he did not deserve and that he could not bring to pass in his own power, but which he had to receive by faith. But this faith was not without its challenges. When God spoke to Abraham at this point, he was 75 years old and childless. His wife, Sarah, was barren and beyond any natural hope of giving him any children.

Some time later, after Abraham had rescued Lot from a sticky situation with some kings that had taken him captive – by the way, that’s where he met Melchizedek – Abraham, who was still childless, had a crisis of faith. He complained to God, **“O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”** And Abram said, **“Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.”** And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: **“This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.”** And he brought him outside and said, **“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.”** Then he said to him, **“So shall your offspring be.”** And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:2–6, ESV) Abram looked upon the future in faith; he trusted God and His promises, and by faith he was saved, counted as righteous, because he believed God.

That doesn’t mean he was perfect or never failed – he did. Genesis 16 describes one such failure when he doubted God’s promise and fathered an illegitimate child through his wife’s maidservant, Hagar. God came to him and told him that this son was not the son of promise, not the son of faith, not the son through whom all the nations would be blessed and He reaffirmed to Abraham that his own wife, the barren and aged Sarah would give to him a son.

Finally, when Sarah was 90 and Abraham was 100, God brought Sarah’s womb to life and Isaac, whose name means laughter, was born. God gave the child of promise through a barren womb to demonstrate that salvation is by God’s grace alone, by His saving power and not the power of men. But the fulfillment of this promise, the giving of Isaac, from whose line would come the Savior Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of the promise to bless all people through Abraham, led to an even greater test of Abraham’s faith.

In Genesis 22, comes the command. **“He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.””** (Genesis 22:2, ESV) God commanded Abraham to offer as a sacrifice to Him, this very son of promise. Imagine the shock. This is easily the most shocking command ever given to a human being. Abraham had made listening to the voice of God the dominant disposition of his life. If there were ever a time he would have been tempted to be “dull of hearing” it was right then. He is well over 100 years old; his son is

now a young man. Abraham would have to offer his precious son's life as an expression of absolute confidence in the word and the promise of God, the promise that God would fulfill all that He said he would do back in chapter 12. Abraham obeyed and his obedience required personal courage, firm trust in the character of God, and steadfastness of purpose. His faith was stretched beyond all measure.

At dawn's first light, without a word to Sarah, he saddled his donkey, called for two of his servants, split the wood for the fire and began the journey to Mt Moriah to do as God had said. How could he do this? We see the answer in Gen 22:4-5, ***“On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.””*** (Genesis 22:4–5, ESV) These are no throwaway words. Abraham was fully confident, despite what it may look like at the moment, that he and his son would return together. We know that from what the writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 11:19, ***“He (Abraham) considered that God was able even to raise him (Isaac) from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”*** (Hebrews 11:19, ESV) Such was the faith of Abraham.

Abraham acted on faith, not according to his emotions, not according to his own wisdom. The whole scene is overwhelming – the agonizing conversation between father and son as they climbed the mountain and Isaac realized that he was to be the sacrifice, the building of the altar, Isaac's willing surrender to his father and to God as he was bound and placed on the altar, the kisses and tears, the knife in Abraham's trembling hand raised to strike his son – all this shows only the very tip of the emotions in Abraham that were overcome by his faith. He raised his hand to slay his son, but the angel of the Lord appeared and stayed his hand and provided a ram in his place. ***And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”*** (cf. Genesis 22:13–14, ESV)

And then comes this final pronouncement from heaven to which our text in Hebrews refers. ***“By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be***

“blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Genesis 22:16–18, ESV) God promised blessing to Abraham and that through His offspring to bless people - all nations – not through Isaac Himself, but through Jesus Christ, who would come through Isaac’s line. And He means ultimate blessing for all who would believe the promise of God, forever and ever in eternity, forgiven, accepted, purified, glorified, capable of unspeakable joy, triumphant over all enemies, sin and guilt and shame and death and hell and Satan. Those are the promised blessings we are talking about. By persevering in the faith, despite massive obstacles and challenges, despite all sorts of excuses for doubt and unbelief, Abraham received God’s promises, not just of a son but also of a Savior. Jesus said in John 8:56, ***“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”*** (John 8:56, ESV) Let his example of persevering faith, that despite all odds, received the promises of God, spur you on to faithfulness.

Abraham’s life of faith was long and it was hard sometimes as he faced great doubts and obstacles. Sometimes Abraham showed great faith and other times he failed, but he persevered – that’s the point. He did not abandon his faith in God and neither should we, and by persevering he gained a firmer and firmer grip on God’s promises. Again and again he gained a growing assurance of God’s blessing and salvation, an increasing possession of all that God had promised him, even hearing God swear an oath to do all that he promised.

Now see that. Not only is the focus on Abraham’s patient and faithful endurance that we are to imitate, but it is also on the oath and the promises of God. It is not only that God promises to keep His word to Abraham and to you and to me and that the promises and future salvation of everyone who holds fast to God, through grace-empowered faith in Christ is certain and sure, because God’s promises have never failed any that trusted in Him – but God swears by himself that His promises to His people are true! Look at

God’s Oath and Our Encouragement (16-18) Look at this now, it is awesome. ***“For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.”*** (Hebrews 6:16–18, ESV) Now why do people swear by something greater than themselves? People will swear to God, or on a stack of Bibles, on their mother’s grave... whatever. But why? It’s because

by nature we are liars, right? I'm not saying that we never tell the truth – we do. But we don't always tell the truth, do we? No we don't and we get offended whenever anyone challenges the truthfulness of our words. So to a degree, but to a far greater degree in the ancient culture where people generally feared God or at least “the gods,” whenever anyone wanted to guarantee the truthfulness of what they were saying and end all discussion, they would swear on something or someone greater. That doesn't mean that they actually told the truth... like Jesus had to say in the Sermon on the Mount, **“Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.” (Matthew 5:37, ESV)** But you get the point.

So why would God take an oath? Why would he swear by Himself? God's word is truth. He is the author of truth and the essence of truth. He doesn't need to swear by Himself to prove that His word is true. And in choosing to make an oath, God could only choose to swear by Himself because there is no one and nothing higher to swear by. In fact, by swearing by anything lesser would actually make His words less not more true, right? So why does He do it? He does it for you and for me, as a condescension to our weakness. His oath, though completely unnecessary in light of His character, is given as a double assurance that He cannot and does not lie. God, the very essence of truth, swears by the truth that His truth shall truly be fulfilled.

God chooses to take an oath so that fallen but saved sinners would be encouraged that the future salvation of everyone who holds fast to God through grace-empowered faith in Christ is absolutely certain because God's purpose is unchangeable and He cannot lie. God did this, swore by Himself, in order to convince us of His love and His faithfulness so that ***we who have fled (to Him) for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.***

He swore to the truthfulness of His promises so that we – who have fled to Him for refuge in Jesus Christ and His atoning death and resurrection, who have abandoned our self-trust, our good name, our reputation, our imagined goodness, and have rested our eternal hopes upon Christ alone -- would be encouraged to hold fast to the hope of His eternal forgiveness, His promise of eternal life through faith in Christ, the power of Christ's blood to cleanse us and make us children of God, the truth that through faith in Christ we are children of God, the promise that for those who love God all things work together for good, the promise that if God is for us, no one can be against us, the promise that He who did not spare his own Son

but gave him up for us all will also with him graciously give us all things, and the promise that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (cf. Romans 8:28–39, ESV) He makes this oath, not for His sake, but for ours. And he does it so that we will be driven to see

The True Anchor of Our Soul (19-20) The writer of Hebrews says, ***“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*** (Hebrews 6:19–20, ESV) What a great image here. In the ancient world and even in our own, an anchor is a symbol of security and safety. The promise of the future salvation of all who hold fast to Christ through God-empowered, persevering faith is anchored fast to Christ who is our hope and our forerunner.

Let me explain this imagery, because it is beautiful and so encouraging. In the ancient world, harbors were often protected or separated from the sea by sandbars. Larger ships had to wait until high tide before they could enter the harbor. So a lighter vessel, known as the forerunner, would take the anchor over the sandbar and drop it in the harbor. From the moment the anchor was set, that ship was safe from the storm, held secure, although it had to wait for the tide to before it could enter the harbor. The entry of the forerunner, carrying the anchor, into the harbor was the pledge, the promise, the assurance that the ship would indeed safely enter the harbor when the tide was full and would not be pulled out to sea in the meantime. And because Christ, our forerunner, our Great High Priest has entered into ***the inner place behind the curtain***, into the very presence of God, into heaven itself, on our behalf, and has set the anchor of our hope with His own pierced hand, He Himself is the pledge that all who hold fast to Him and are held fast by His grace, will enter ourselves into the very presence of God, into heaven, because of Jesus’ finished work as the ultimate promise of God.

And listen, nothing can break the chain that holds us to this anchor, if we persevere, and nothing can dislodge this anchor. There is no work of man, no hostility from the world, no temptations of the devil that can break the chain forged by God or the anchor emplaced by Christ Himself. Yes, there will be storms of falsehood and worldly lies, storms of doubt, storms of difficult trials, storms still indwelling sin and failure, but we keep on rooting ourselves in the truth of God, feeding our faith, finding refuge in the shelter of God’s wings,

judging our sin and laying hold of repentance and forgiveness and grace to walk in righteousness, praying that our faith would not fail, because Christ cannot fail.

That is what he wants these Hebrew Christians to see. It's what we need to see. The future salvation of everyone who holds fast to God, through grace-empowered faith in Christ is certain and sure because it is anchored to Christ who cannot fail. Don't fail to persevere in this faith, but as Paul said, let it be your heart's cry, ***“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 3:12–14, ESV)

Where is your hope today? Have you and are you actively, right now, in this very moment trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation and for your life? Are you pressing on in the faith? Are you convinced that God's blessing and your salvation are certain and sure, because you are holding fast to God, through grace-empowered faith in Christ, and God's promises have never failed any that trusted in Him? Are you convinced that God's blessing and your salvation are absolutely certain because God's purpose toward you, as you are holding fast to God through grace-empowered faith in Christ, is unchangeable and He cannot lie? Are you convinced that God's blessing and your salvation are certain and sure because you are anchored to Christ through grace-empowered faith, and Jesus Christ cannot fail to save all who trust in Him alone? Maybe you are wrestling with this right now – learn from Abraham who did not abandon his faith in God and who by persevering gained a firmer and firmer grip on God's promises. Maybe your souls is resting securely in Christ – guard your heart, your mind, your affections and your will.

But if Christ is not your hope, if that is not evident in your life, then what is your hope? How will it hold up on the day of God's judgment? If you place all your hope in Christ, all of it, then yours will be a hope that nothing can break, a hope that will encourage and settle your soul, a hope that will be a sure and steadfast anchor now and for all eternity.

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