

**“Hope, the Christian’s Anchor”**  
**Hebrews 6:9-20**  
**July 25, 2021**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Today’s passage emphasizes something that appears in our church’s vision statement. We are trusting God to make of us “a community of the coming kingdom, bringing hope to a broken world.” Our broken world is in desperate need of hope. Consider the difference hope made in the life of Jacob. He fell in love with Rachel but had no money to marry her. So he negotiated with her father, Laban, to serve him seven years in return for her hand in marriage. We are told that the seven years of hard labor “seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her” (Gen. 29:20). It was hope that made the difference, the confident expectation that there was a happy ending after his labor, the realization that there was meaning in that labor. Without such hope, life is dominated by fear and despair. Our author wants his readers to be filled with hope, and God wants the same for us.

**I. Hope and Perseverance**

The verses just before this morning’s passage contain a serious warning against apostasy. It is possible for someone to profess faith in Christ while not actually possessing such faith. It is a real danger, and the author is concerned for his readers, lest they continue drifting toward such apostasy. We learn in verse 9, however, that he doesn’t think his readers have yet fallen off the cliff into apostasy. In their case, he says, he is **“sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.”** In the next verses, he gets specific about the things that belong to salvation, and he says something similar to James, who taught that faith without works is dead. Our author also mentions works. These are not works that earn our salvation, because the Bible is crystal clear in teaching that our salvation is by the grace of God and received by faith and not works. But it is also clear in saying that works are a fruit of genuine faith.

What works should we expect to see as a fruit of faith? He mentions two: love and hope. The love he mentions is love for God that results in **“serving the saints”** (v. 10). Isn’t it good of God to say this? He asks us here to express our love for him by acts of service, not to God but to his people. This yields a far more robust and vigorous service to people than would otherwise be the case.

The second work is the one that becomes his major focus in this section—hope. **“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end”** (v. 11). What is hope? It is a confidence that our future is both good and secure, because of our trust that God

will bring it about. So hope is not wishful thinking. It is not simply a desire one might have for something in the future. That is the common American usage of the word “hope,” but that is not what the Bible means. When we say, “I hope this pandemic ends soon,” we are expressing a desire for the future. But when the Bible uses the word “hope” it is expressing a confidence about the future. Our author uses the words “full assurance” (v. 11) to describe this confidence. Since we don’t know the future and have little control over it, how can we ever be confident about something happening in the future? There is only one way, and that is through believing the promises of God, which we will consider more fully in our third point.

Our author says that he desires his readers to have this hope. The word translated “desire” is a strong word that has the idea of an intense longing. He wants his readers to be filled with hope all the days of their lives. The hope he wants for them will lead to perseverance. Though the word “perseverance” is not used here, its idea is communicated first negatively and then positively. It is stated negatively when he says, **“so that you may not be sluggish.”** How does hope deliver us from sluggishness? It does so by assuring us of a good future, which gives us a reason and motivation for work. Have you ever noticed how a goal for something desirable in the future can motivate you to work hard? Fitness gyms fill up every winter and spring as people anticipate summer beach trips. The past 18 months have been difficult for most pastors I talk to and hear about. Here’s what keeps me from throwing in the towel and taking an early retirement. I have hope that God is doing something, a hope based on his promise that the pruning of his vine, his church, brings forth fruit. Hope delivers us from just giving up and taking it easy.

The positive description of the perseverance that comes from hope is that hope leads us to be **“imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”** (v. 12). Perseverance is a fruit that belongs to salvation. Those who possess true faith and don’t merely profess it will persevere. They won’t give up when hardship comes. Jesus told a parable about this. In the parable of the soils, one of the soils was described as rocky. It was a thin veneer of soil over a layer of rock. In other words, it was shallow soil. Seeds sown there would germinate quickly. But since the soil was shallow, those plants did not have deep roots, and they would be scorched when the sun would beat down on them. Jesus interpreted the parable like this. **“As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away”** (Matt. 13:20-21).

## II. Hope and Patience

The author has urged his readers to imitate **“those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”** In other words, they are to imitate those who persevere through their hope. He now gives us an example of someone who has done so, someone we ought to imitate—Abraham. He waited patiently for God to fulfill his promise, **“Surely I will bless you and multiply you”** (v. 14). Abraham endured hardship patiently because he had hope in God’s promises. He believed God would honor his word and fulfill his promises.

Let’s think some about this idea of the kind of patience hope gives to us. Patience assumes something negative. That is, we are waiting for the end of something negative, something that we would like to see removed from our lives. Abraham had his share of such unwanted difficulties. He was called to leave his homeland in Ur and go to a place God would call him to go. But God didn’t tell him where that would be. He did promise him that he would be the father of a multitude, which was quite a statement in light of the fact that he and Sarah, his wife, had already been trying for years to have a baby. But Abraham went. After a time spent in Haran, he made it to the land God would give him. But here’s the thing—he never owned any of it except a burial plot he purchased. Furthermore, he endured significant trials in the land. There were famines, land disputes, and threats from powerful rulers. And through it all, Sarah remained barren. And then, when Abraham made it to the century mark of one-hundred years of age, Sarah got pregnant. How old was she? Abraham had married a younger woman, by ten years. Sarah was 90 when she conceived her son, Isaac. But that wasn’t the end of Abraham’s trials. The quote of God’s promise in verse 14, **“Surely I will bless you and multiply you,”** came when Isaac was a teenager and God told Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice. The God who had promised this son and miraculously given him now asks Abraham to give him up. Even in this, Abraham followed God’s word and was prepared to do so, trusting that somehow God would work out the future to fulfill his promise to make Abraham the father of a multitude, even if it took raising Isaac from the dead.

It is important to remember that Abraham at times failed to hold on to God’s promises by faith. His hope burned low at times. There was the time that he lied about Sarah, saying that she was his sister instead of his wife, because he was afraid of the king of that region. There were other times when he left the land because of famine, failing to trust God to provide for him. There was the time when he took matters into his own hands and sought to provide his own heir through Sarah’s servant, Hagar. Don’t we often have our own Hagar schemes, in which we trust ourselves instead of God’s promise? In spite of his many failures, Abraham ultimately persevered in hope.

### **III. Hope and Promises**

The foundation of Christian hope is the promise of God. As was mentioned earlier, we know nothing of the future. There is no basis for us to have any

confidence in the future apart from God's promises. Our author leads us on a little meditation on that verse from Genesis 22:17: **"Surely I will bless you and multiply you"** (v. 14). He says that this is a case of God swearing an oath. He recognizes how odd it is to think of God doing so. Normally, it is humans who swear oaths when they want to establish the utter truthfulness of what they are saying. They swear an oath by calling on God's name to confirm their truthfulness. In effect, a human oath says, "May God judge me if I am not telling the truth in what I'm saying." Humans swear oaths because our words are notoriously unreliable. But that is not the case with God. Further, human oaths call on someone higher, namely God, to confirm the truthfulness of what they are saying. But there is no one God can call on like that for the simple reason that there is no being in the universe higher than God.

When God says to Abraham, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you," he is swearing an oath. It is the word "surely" that communicates that. One version tries to capture the sense of that by translating it "I vow that I will bless you abundantly" (RSV). In this promise to Abraham, he says that God is guaranteeing its fulfillment by two unchangeable things (v. 18). The two unchangeable things are his word of promise and his oath. The fact that you and I are here is a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. God told him that he would be the father of a multitude, as abundant as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. The apostle Paul, in Galatians 3, says that we are the children of Abraham by faith. We are part of the fulfillment of this promise.

Why should God swear an oath? He doesn't do it to bolster the reliability of his word, as if God's word is inherently suspect. Rather, according to verse 17, he does it for our needs. **"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."** He did it because of a need within us and not a need within God. We need to trust the promise of God. God is saying to us, "Listen, you can trust every promise I make." We say, "Yes, we know that." And God replies, "No, listen to me. It's going to be okay; everything I have promised to you I will surely fulfill."

Someone has said that God is the most obligated being in the universe because of his many promises. When God makes a promise, he is utterly bound to keep it. A Canadian schoolteacher named Everett R. Storms once undertook the task of counting every promise made by God in the Bible. Over one and half years, he read the Bible 27 times, counting every time God made a promise. His final conclusion? God makes 7,487 promises in his word. God would not be God, and the universe would explode into nothingness, if a single one of these failed to be fulfilled.

The application of the reliability of God's promises is to have hope, that **"we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us"** (v. 18). Christians are those who flee for refuge to Jesus

and to God's word of promise. And then we read in the next verse that this hope is **“a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain.”** What does an anchor do? It secures a ship from drifting with the current, holding it fast where it needs to be. An anchor is not seen, and that is the case with our anchor too. We are told here that our hope, which is our anchor, has entered the inner place behind the curtain. That is a description of the holy of holies in the earthly tabernacle. That is an Old Testament picture of the throne room of God. So our anchor doesn't descend down, but up, all the way to the throne room of heaven.

One of the applications of this is the fact that there is no ultimate security outside of God's promises to us. All that we might look to for security on this earth will turn out to be unreliable. Maybe it's your health, your gifts, your job or your family. All are good gifts from God, but all can be lost. Wasn't that Job's experience? Think of all that we have lost over the past 18 months during this pandemic. Over 11,000 lives have been lost in our state. Sadly, friendships too have been lost due to differing opinions about how best to respond to the coronavirus. Jobs have been lost, travel plans interrupted and church members reshuffled, with some opting out of church completely. We are truly in a threatening storm. But we have an anchor. Not a single one of God's promises will ever be lost or fail to be fulfilled.

## **CONCLUSION:**

What practical difference would it make in your life to have this “full assurance of hope” that we read of in verse 11? It would release you from fear and despair and give meaning to your life. It would give you a reason to get up in the morning. That's not my promise; that's God promise to you. Doesn't he say that this hope comes “that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”? (v. 12). God promises that you will make it, no matter how bleak things may look presently. He will fulfill his promise. Just keep holding on to the one who is holding on to you. Your anchor is in heaven, where nothing can move him. Therefore, nothing can move you from his hand of protection and security.