

6/7/26

Hope – a Sure and Steadfast Anchor

*Hebrews 6:13-20*

Pastor Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

When you live in a place like Cape Cod, you know that you can smell the ocean before you see it. Even here — less than half a mile away — the air carries it. Salt. Motion. Depth. There's something about being near the water that makes us breathe differently. People come to Cape Cod, in the summer, for this very reason. The horizon opens us up. The light on the water quiets something in us. But anyone who has lived near the ocean knows something else, too.

The same water that glitters in the morning can turn by afternoon. The tide that seems gentle can pull stronger than it looks. The weather shifts. The wind rises. Beneath that shining surface are currents we can't see and depths we may not realize. The ocean is beautiful, but it's not tame.

Maybe that's why the writer of Hebrews reaches for a maritime image when speaking about hope. Not a feather. Not a cloud. Not a warm feeling. **An anchor.** Hebrews says, "***We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.***" That's an image people who live near water understand. An anchor isn't decorative. It doesn't eliminate wind or waves. It doesn't calm the storm. It does something quieter, stronger, than that. It holds. And, most of the time, you never see it doing its work.

Today, as we gather within earshot of the Atlantic, I want to think with you about that kind of hope — not fragile optimism, not a denial of hard realities, but the kind of hope sturdy enough for shifting tides. Because the sea is beautiful. And life, like the sea, is not tame. Hebrews' concern is not primarily whether Christ followers are holding tightly to God. **The concern is whether they remember how tightly God is holding on to them.** Listen to *Hebrews 6:13-20*.

"When God made a promise to **Abraham**, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, **he swore by himself**, saying, *'I will surely bless you and multiply you.'* And thus **Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise.** Human beings, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute. In the same way, **when God desired to show even more clearly** to the heirs of the promise **the unchangeable character of his purpose**, he guaranteed it by an oath, so that through **two unchangeable**

**things**, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have **taken refuge** might be **strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope** that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, **where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered**, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

This is one of the most encouraging paragraphs in the New Testament because **it reminds us that our confidence rests not on our reliability, but on God's.** The passage begins with Abraham. *“When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, **he swore by himself.**”*

For the original audience of Hebrews, Abraham represented what it looked like to trust God over a lifetime. Yet, the writer focuses on a key aspect of Abraham's story. **Waiting.** God promised Abraham descendants. God promised blessing. God promised a future that seemed impossible. Then, Abraham waited. Years passed. Then, more years passed. There were moments when the promise must have seemed increasingly unlikely. Abraham grew older. His wife Sarah grew older. Their circumstances appeared to move further away from the fulfillment of God's Word, rather than closer to it.

Yet, verse 15 summarizes Abraham's life with remarkable simplicity: *“And thus Abraham, having **patiently endured, obtained the promise.**”* That phrase *“patiently endured”* deserves our attention. Most of us admire faith when it looks dramatic. We admire courageous decisions, bold obedience, extraordinary sacrifices. But much of genuine faith looks less dramatic than that. **Much of faith is simply continuing to trust God while waiting.** Waiting for answers. Waiting for healing. Waiting for guidance. Waiting for reconciliation. Waiting for God to do what God has promised. Anyone can trust God for a moment. The challenge is trusting God through the years. That's what Abraham and Sarah did. Yet, Abraham isn't the main point of the passage. He's an illustration of something larger.

**The emphasis isn't on Abraham's faithfulness, but on God's.** The writer wants us to notice that God not only made **a promise** to Abraham, but reinforced that promise with **an oath**. Human beings swear oaths because our words are not always trusted. An oath serves as a guarantee. It settles disputes. It provides assurance. But God could swear by no one greater than Himself because there is no greater authority. There is no higher court. So, God swore by Himself. I enjoy the 1977 movie, “Oh God”, in

which George Burns plays God. In a courtroom scene, toward the climax of the film, he's being sworn in as a witness by the Court Clerk, who says, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" And he replies, "**So help me, Me.**" The judge says, "So help you, You?" And George Burns says, "If it pleases the court, and even if it doesn't please the court, I'm God, Your Honor." Like George Burns in the movie, God – in speaking to Abraham – had no one higher to swear by than himself.

The remarkable thing is that God didn't need to do that. God's Word alone would've been sufficient. When God speaks, certainty is already present. So, why add an oath? Verse 17 gives the answer: "**When God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath.**" Notice the tenderness in that statement – God desired to show. God wanted the people to know, to be reassured, and to have confidence.

God understands our weakness, and our tendency toward fear and uncertainty. God understands how easily we lose heart. So, God accommodates us by giving not only a promise, but an oath. The writer then speaks of "*two unchangeable things*" – God's promise and God's oath. Either one would have been enough. Yet, God gives both. Why? "**So that we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged.**" That phrase is easy to overlook. **Strongly encouraged.** Not mildly reassured. Not slightly comforted. Strongly encouraged.

The purpose of this passage is not merely theological instruction. The purpose is encouragement. The writer is trying to strengthen weary Christ followers, to give courage to people who feel like giving up, to remind them that their confidence rests on something far more stable than their circumstances.

That brings us to the great theme of the passage: **hope**. In everyday conversation, hope often refers to or reflects uncertainty. "I hope it doesn't rain." "I hope things work out." "I hope everything gets better." In those statements, hope is little more than a wish. It expresses desire, but not certainty. Biblical hope is something different. **Biblical hope is confidence grounded in God's character.** It's the certainty that, because God is faithful, God's promises will be fulfilled. Christian hope is not optimism. Optimism depends on circumstances.

Hope depends on God. Optimism says things will probably improve. Hope says God remains faithful, whether circumstances improve immediately or not. That

distinction matters because life eventually teaches all of us the limitations of optimism. There are situations that cannot be fixed quickly. There are heartbreaking losses that cannot be undone. There are questions that remain unanswered. There are seasons when circumstances provide little basis for optimism. What sustains believers in those moments is not optimism. It's hope. Hope anchored in the unchanging character of God.

That's why the writer reaches for one of the most memorable images in the Bible – one that shaped the creation of one of the organ covers in our sanctuary 25 years ago.

***“We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.”***

An anchor isn't designed for calm weather. Anchors exist because storms exist. No sailor lowers an anchor because he or she expects smooth sailing forever. Anchors are needed precisely because conditions change. The writer of Hebrews is realistic. No one can promise calm seas. No one can promise an easy life. Hebrews doesn't suggest that faith removes suffering. The storms are real. The waves are real. The wind is real. The question is whether there's something strong enough to hold us when they come. The answer is yes. We have an anchor.

**What makes the image especially powerful is that anchors usually do their work invisibly.** No one stands on a dock, admiring an anchor resting beneath the water. Most of the time you never see it. Yet, while it remains hidden, it's holding everything in place. Perhaps, that's often also true of hope. We don't always notice hope when life is calm. We become aware of hope when the storm arrives. Suddenly, we discover that, beneath the surface, there is something holding us steady that we didn't fully appreciate before.

Then, Hebrews introduces an astonishing twist. Normally, anchors go down. **This anchor goes up.** Verse 19 tells us that this hope enters *“the inner shrine behind the curtain.”* The image shifts from the sea to the temple. The inner shrine refers to the Holy of Holies, the place that represented the very presence of God. Under the old covenant, a curtain separated that holy place from the people. Access was restricted. Distance remained. But now, the anchor passes beyond the curtain, itself. The point is profound.

Our hope isn't anchored in this world. It's anchored in heaven. Our security isn't tied to our health, to our finances, to our success, to political power or stability. It's not even tied to the strength of our own faith. Our hope is anchored in the very presence of

God. Think about what that means. There are days when everything around us feels unstable. Our emotions fluctuate. Our circumstances change. Our confidence rises and falls. But the anchor never moves. The reason the anchor holds is because God holds.

Finally, the writer arrives at the climax of his argument. **The anchor is secure because Jesus is there.** Verse 20 says that Jesus has entered God's presence as a forerunner, on our behalf. That word "forerunner" is unique and important. A forerunner is someone who goes ahead, so that others may follow. Jesus has not merely visited the Father's presence. He has entered it on our behalf. He has gone where we are going. He has opened the way. He has secured our welcome. He has taken our humanity into the presence of God, and remains there, as our great High Priest. This means that Christian hope is not merely confidence that heaven exists. It's confidence that Christ is already there.

Our future is not an uncertain destination. Our future is where Jesus already is. And because He is there, we know we will arrive. That's the deepest ground of Christian assurance. Not our perseverance, but Christ's. Not our faithfulness, but Christ's. Not our grip on Jesus, but his grip on us.

The writer began with weary believers, and ends with a triumphant vision of Christ. Because ultimately, the answer to discouragement is not found by looking at ourselves. It's found by looking at Christ. The storms may continue. The waves may still rise. The sea may remain untamed. Hebrews never promises otherwise. What it promises is something better. A sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. An anchor secured by God's unchanging promise. An anchor secured by God's unchanging character. An anchor secured by Jesus Christ, Himself. And because that anchor holds, we can keep going. Not because we're strong. But because God is faithful.

**Blessing:** "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (*Romans 15:13*).

### Questions for Discussion or Reflection

- 1. The writer of Hebrews is speaking to people who are tired, discouraged, and tempted to give up.** What are some of the circumstances that can leave Christians feeling spiritually weary, today? Why is it important that Hebrews' answer is not "try harder", but "look at what is holding on to you"?
- 2. Abraham had to wait a long time for God's promise to be fulfilled.** What do we learn from Abraham's example about trusting God during seasons of waiting? What promises of God are hardest to hold on to when answers seem delayed?
- 3. The passage emphasizes that God's promise and oath are unchangeable.** Why do you think God goes to such lengths to reassure His people? How does God's unchanging character provide confidence when our feelings and circumstances change?
- 4. "We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul."** What storms or pressures most threaten to pull people away from faith? In practical terms, how has Christian hope helped you — or someone you know — remain steady during difficult times?
- 5. The anchor, in Hebrews 6, goes upward into God's presence, rather than downward into the sea.** What does it mean that our security is anchored in heaven, rather than in our circumstances, success, health, or even the strength of our own faith?
- 6. Jesus is described as our "forerunner", who has gone before us into the Father's presence.** How does knowing that Christ has already gone where we are going shape the way we face uncertainty, suffering, or even death? How does this truth give assurance and perseverance?