

## **A Study of the Book of Hebrews**

### ***Jesus is Better***

#### **Sermon # 12**

#### **“An Anchor For the Soul”**

#### **Hebrews 6:9-20**

*“A little over a month before he died, the famous atheist Jean-Paul Sartre (SAHR truh) declared that he so strongly resisted feelings of despair that he would say to himself, “I know I shall die in hope.” Then in profound sadness, he would add, “But hope needs a foundation.” [Our Daily Bread, April 17, 1995]*

The whole letter to the Hebrews offers encouragement to believers on the Christian journey, knowing that difficulties await at every bend. If you ever find yourself struggling to keep pressing on as a believer or assaulted by doubts or tempted to throw in the towel and give up as a follower of Christ. Or if you just have become sluggish in responding to the trials that come in life, then this section of the letter to the Hebrews is for you! The same help and hope offered to original readers is yours as well. All of us, at some time or another, will find ourselves needing a stabilizing anchor for our souls.

*“I heard of a picture of an old burned-out mountain shack. All that remained was the chimney...the charred debris of what had been that family’s sole possession. In front of this destroyed home stood an old grandfather*

*-looking man dressed only in his under-clothes with a small boy clutching a pair of patched overalls. It was evident that the child was crying. Beneath the picture were the words which the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy. They were simple words, yet they presented a profound theology and philosophy of life. Those words were Hush child, God ain’t dead!*

*That vivid picture of that burned-out mountain shack, that old man, the weeping child, and those words God ain’t dead. Instead of it being a reminder of the despair of life, it has come to be a reminder of hope! We all need reminders that there is hope in this world. In the midst of all of life’s troubles and failures, we need mental pictures to remind us that all is not lost as long as God is alive and in control of His world.” [James DeLoach, associate pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Houston, quoted in When God Was Taken Captive, W. Aldrich, Multnomah, 1989, p. 24.]*

After the previous words of warning in chapter six now come words of encouragement. He begins in verse nine by saying,

*“But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. (10) For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which*

*you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. (11) And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, (12) that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."*

He encouraged them to not give up, to move on to maturity and to not become sluggish in their faith. He now reminds them of the value of faithfulness by holding out the example of Abraham in both patience and in service (v. 15). He reminds them that God gives his promise of a blessing and had sworn an oath to support his word. A promise made by a God who cannot lie was designed to give comfort and encouragement to these struggling believers.

One of the greatest dangers facing Christians is to lose sight of the basis of our hope. When we become so burdened with the stormy blasts of life that we forget our hope, then we face the slippery slope of sluggish-ness, doubt, and even worse, the possibility of hardening our hearts against the gospel. So, to remedy this danger, our writer reminds us of the promise of God. These morning I want to share with you the Three-Fold Encouragement Available To Christians.

First, We Have The Profound Comfort of the Person of God. (vv. 13-16)

Abraham is a favorite character of this writer as well as other New Testament authors. Here the writer of Hebrews brings to mind the scene of how the Lord encouraged Abraham to continue on in faith. You will recall that Abraham was called out of paganism to follow after the Lord. And he did just that, believing the promise of the Lord that He would bless him and make of him a great nation and that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). When he struggled with God's fulfillment of the promise, the Lord gave him assurance and Abraham "*believed in the Lord*" and that faith was accounted to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6).

It was a long time before Isaac, the son of promise, was born to Abraham. I am sure that the gap between the promise and its fulfillment was in the writer's mind as he wrote exhorting the Christian's to remember the example of Abraham. If things appear slow with God, it does not mean that He has forgotten or that He will not perform.

And then God told him to do the hardest thing imaginable, to offer his son as a sacrifice upon Mount Moriah. Isaac was the immediate fulfillment of the promise, yet Abraham believed that God could raise him from the dead to continue to fulfill His promise to him (Gen. 22). It was *after* this testing of his faith that the Lord confirmed through an oath that he would fulfill the promise given to him recorded in Hebrews 6:13, "*For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, (14) saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you."* (15) *And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."*

The writer of Hebrews is reminding these struggling Christians that Abraham, who was living with much less light of revelation than themselves, continued on in faithfulness because God is faithful to

accomplish what he has promised. And we too are to be encouraged in looking at these believers, who struggled as we do, yet persevered by the help of the Lord.

We Have The Profound Comfort Of the Person of God and ...

Second, We Have The Profound Comfort Of The Promise of God. (vv. 16-18)

Verse sixteen says, *“For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. (17) Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, (18) that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.”*

Why did God make an oath to Abraham? It was certainly not due to any unreliability on God’s part. Rather the oath was due to the sinfulness of man. Philip Hughes rightly comments, *“That God should bind himself by an oath is a reflection not on the divine credibility but on the perversion of the human situation”* [Hebrews, 229]. Abraham already had God’s promise; that in itself should have been good enough. But we see that Abraham did not ask God to swear to him; God chose to do it as an encouragement to Abraham.

The strength of an oath is found in the character of the one offering it as well as the value placed upon the oath. If a habitual criminal makes an oath then you probably will discount his reliability. But if he makes an oath on a Bible or swears by something he holds valuable, then you might have more cause to believe him. For he would be saying, if I were lying, then the Bible upon which I swear is a lie. Or if I am lying then my deceased mother upon whom I swear is a liar. *“The degree that you value and esteem the basis of your oath, to that degree your word can be trusted”* [John Piper, [www.soundofgrace.com/piper96/11-10-96.htm](http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper96/11-10-96.htm)].

By what would God swear? One swears by something greater, something of more value than himself in order to give credibility to his oath. *“When a witness takes an oath in court, he is confronted with the words, ‘so help me God.’ We call on the greater to witness for the lesser. None is greater than God, so he swore by himself.”* [Warren Wiersbe. *“Be Confident”* (Wheaton, ILL: Victor Books, 1982) p. 68] God could go no higher than himself. Nothing can even come remotely close to exceeding the value and precious-ness of his own word.

In verse eighteen God’s purpose is given as an encouragement *“to lay hold (or take hold) of the hope set before”* you! *“More abundantly”* is a superlative adverb which means *“even more”* - that is used to make the point more emphatic. Yes, the Lord worked on Abraham’s behalf and gave him great encouragement to put his hope in the divine promise and continue pressing on.

But even more so, God has resolved to give you greater encouragement so that you might give up.

But the promise made is only as valuable as the one who makes it. So we are meant to be encouraged! For it is God who makes the promise and *"it is impossible for God to lie."* Here is the bottom line: you can have complete confidence in the sufficiency of Christ and the gospel, for the God who has promised to save you and to bring you home to heaven cannot lie.

We Have The Profound Comfort Of The Promise of God and...

Third, We Have The Profound Comfort Of The Presence of God. (vv. 19-20)

*"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, (20) where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*

He gives three descriptions of this anchor of hope.

First, it is *"sure."* The word implies that it is outwardly safe. There is nothing that can topple the believer's hope. Paul had this same idea in mind when he penned the words found in Romans 8:38-39. *"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* It is as if the Apostle Paul picked out every imaginable external opponent and declared that none of them could succeed to separate us from the intensity and security of Christ's love. We are safe with the anchor of hope.

We also find the anchor of the soul is *"steadfast,"* this points to the inward stability of this anchor of hope, that it is firm within itself. In other words, there is no weakness in hope as the anchor of the soul. We do not have to concern ourselves with hope going bankrupt or encountering a scandal of some sort. It is thoroughly established and firm.

The third description of hope as the soul's anchor demonstrates the place where the anchor rests. An anchor grabs onto the floor of the ocean and holds the vessel securely. But the shifting sands of this world offer nothing to secure us for eternity. So our anchor does not go down to the ocean below, but upward into the glories of heaven. For our anchor of hope is *"one which enters the veil."* The scene is that of the high priest who could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year and that with the sacrifice for the sins of Israel. He trembled as he entered knowing that he was in the presence of the Lord and that he dare not fail to carry out his duties. But once the duty was done, he immediately turned and walked out through the veil. But that is not the case with our anchor of hope! It is firmly anchored in heaven, on one end, and firmly attached to the believer's soul on the other. An anchor does not do any good if it is solidly hooked onto the ocean floor but not tied to the boat! Our *"anchor of the soul"* is fixed securely in our lives through the work of Christ. And the pull of the other end is *"within the veil"* eternal secure in the presence of the Lord.

Jesus is there as the one who went before us as our *"forerunner"* (v.20). The term as it is used here is one that describes the scouts who went ahead of the troops. Just as the forerunner was one who was

ahead of the troops, going before them, Christ, our *prodromos*, has gone on ahead. And here is what he wants you to understand: *we will be where Christ is, within the veil; for He has gone before us to prepare a place that we might be with Him forever.* In fact he left us a message recorded in (John 14:2-3), *“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”*

## Conclusion

“The great scientist Michael Faraday was also a great Christian. When he lay dying, some journalist questioned him as to his speculations about a life after death. “Speculations!” he said, “I know nothing of speculations. I’m resting on the certainties. I know that my redeemer liveth and because he lives, I shall also.” [Paul Van Tan. Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations. (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Pub, 1979) # 1039]

*“The director of a medical clinic told of a terminally ill young man who came in for his usual treatment. A new doctor who was on duty said to him casually and cruelly, “You know, don’t you, that you won’t live out the year?”*

*As the young man left, he stopped by the director’s desk and wept. “That man took away my hope,” he blurted out. “I guess he did,” replied the director. “Maybe it’s time to find a new one.”*

*Writing about this situation Lewis Smedes wrote, “Is there a hope when hope is taken away? Is there hope when the situation is hopeless? That question leads us to Christian hope, for in the Bible, hope is no longer a passion for the possible. It becomes a passion for the promise.” [Our Daily Bread, December 19, 1996]*