

AN ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL

Hebrews 6:13-20

Well, good morning Summit! So good to be with you again this morning. My name is Ben, I'm one of the pastors here. Pastor Mike in Moses Lake.... so you've got me in front of you for the next 45 minutes or so. So let's get down to it. This is a beautiful and rich passage that we're in this morning. I'm hoping I can do some measure of justice and help your eyes to turn to the beauty and worth and magnificence of Jesus this morning.

We're in the middle of a series in the book of Hebrews. And Hebrews is this letter written to Jewish Christians who were struggling in their faith. They had come to Christ, some of them had even been Christians for a while, but life as a Christian was a lot different than they expected. I mean, you think you're following Jesus, the high and exalted King of all of creation, life should be a little easier with him around, shouldn't it. But it didn't turn out that way. Suddenly, these believers found themselves facing hardship, difficulty, persecution. The culture around them didn't just tolerate them as religious interlopers, they hated them. Later on in Hebrews we even see that some of these believers had their own property forcefully taken. And so in the midst of all of these hardship, a lot of these believers are just drifting in their faith. Jesus isn't everything to them, and some of them are even thinking about going back to the way they used to live.

And Summit, we're studying Hebrews because in a lot of ways, we're just like them. It's pretty easy to have a little Jesus in your life when things are going well. When everything around you is comfortable, maybe even when being a Christian is an advantage in society and culture you're in.

But when you start getting pressed in.... on the one side by the basic realities of living in a sin sick world. Where there is pain, and broken relationships, where work is hard and sin is seductively attractive, where there is sickness and death. And on the other side by the reality in 2015 that there is an increasing antagonism toward Christianity and toward Christians. Where in the northwest especially, being a believer can mean you are relegated to the margins of society, and where the Christian message is hated. When you start to be pressed in by this two side vice, in the midst of THAT.... when it's easy to drift, easy to take make Jesus just a peripheral part of your life where he's there when you need him but gets out of the way when you don't, when maybe even it's tempting to think about going back to the way things were before, to the way you used to live, in the midst of THAT... we need to hear the message of Hebrews.... we need to hear the warnings: don't drift, don't neglect this salvation, endure, persevere... And we need to hear the encouragement that Jesus is better than anything else we could have.

The last couple of weeks if you were here, we heard these two really stern warnings. Grow up! and make sure that this your Christianity isn't just an external experience, but an internal reality. Grow up, mature in your faith.... and don't just be surrounded by Christian

culture, but be transformed by the person of Jesus... because actually, if either one of these things isn't happening - you're in great danger.

And I want you to think for a moment, because all of us know people who have walked right into that danger, who have known in some way the truth of Jesus but have walked away from him... and now want nothing to do with him, or who are still going to church but are just languishing in every area of their life.

There is great danger there, and the entire chapter of Hebrews 6 is written to pull them back, to pull us back from that edge, from danger, from merely drifting, and to pull us back to safety.

And so the question you have to ask yourself after these warnings the last two weeks, after the cautions of not growing and not _____, is how do you not be that person? Instead of drifting, or even shipwrecking your faith, how do you hold fast? How do you remain faithful? How do you not just sing but really live those words of that song 10,000 reasons - that "On that day that your strength is fading, the end draws near and your time has come, that still your soul would sing Jesus' praise unending? How do you become a person who endures?

Well, this passage this morning really answers that question. And its answer is really simple. For you to remain steadfast, for you to not drift, for you to not shipwreck your faith, for you to endure, what you need is an anchor for your soul. And for us to see what that anchor is, the author points us way back, so grab your Bible's and turn with me to Genesis chapter 12. And we're going to take a look at the life of Abraham.

We can't understand what is being said in Heb. 6, what this anchor for our souls really is, unless we understand Gen. 12-22. So we need to get this this morning.

Abraham is mentioned ten times by name in the book of Hebrews. And his name is mentioned so often because his life is a demonstration of something the Hebrews needed desperately. Throughout Hebrews it's called different things: faith, trust, hope... but it all refers to the same thing - a confident expectation that there is nothing that can, and there is nothing that will, stop God from keeping his promises to his people. OK... Let's see this in the life of Abraham. Gen. 12.

You know the story. This is not that long after God has created the world. God makes everything that is, and he assigns a man and a woman, Adam and Eve to be the stewards of his creation, to care for and advance God's creation as his servants under his kingship. And they totally blow it, right, they sin, and so their sinful offspring begin to fill the earth. And there comes a point in the days of Noah where things are so bad that God determines that he is going to destroy the earth and make a new creation, starting over with Noah and his family. But that doesn't change the reality and presence of sin in the world. Man still builds a gigantic tower trying to prove themselves, in their arrogance trying to be their own God, and God has to judge them again by dispersing them into different languages and peoples and cultures.

But it's not long after the tower of Babel that God finds a man named Abram. Now Abram is an idol worshipper. He's a pagan. He's far from God. If there was ever a story that showed us God's sovereign grace in single-handedly rescuing underserving sinners, it's this

one. I mean, there is nothing attractive in Abram that draws God's grace to him. God simply unilaterally chooses to bless him.

And God says to him, Gen. 12:1, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Now to us this doesn't seem like a huge deal right? It's high school graduation time and there are going to be tons of 18 year olds heading off to college hundreds of miles from their parents houses and they can't wait! In our culture, it isn't a big deal to leave your kindred and your father's house and head off, but in Abram's day that was like suicide. Life outside the homestead was a dark and dangerous place, with bandits, warlords, no laws, no courts, no facebook. And Abram isn't a young man anymore. He's 75 years old. It's time to settle down and start thinking about his retirement years. And God says to him, "I want you to leave the safety of your numbers, I want you to leave the wealth of your family, I want you to leave all you know, and go where I tell you. I'm just going to point the direction and then you stop when I tell you to stop."

Then God reveals something to him of his purpose in all of this. v. 2 - "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 will be blessed." God shows Abram this huge, gigantic, incredible purpose that he has for his creation, all through Abram, he makes a covenant with him saying, "I'm going to bless the entire earth through your offspring." And look at Abrams response, and this is astounding, v. 4: "So Abram went." So Abram went. Do you get how astounding this is? Abram, at 75 years old, with a grand total of zero offspring, is going to head off from everything he's known, everything that's comfortable, to follow a voice and a God he's never known before, out of trust and hope.

Now turn over to Genesis chapter 15. The word of the Lord comes to Abram again, but Abram says to God, v. 2: "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

Abram is down the road a ways, and he takes stock of where his life is in the purpose of God that was shown to him, and he does the math and he says, things aren't exactly adding up here God. So God answers him, v. 4: "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 then God does this amazing thing. To reinforce his purpose and plan for Abram, he makes a covenant with him. And this is pretty strange stuff for us, but it wasn't an uncommon way for treaties or covenants to be made in the Ancient Near-Eastern world. God gets Abram to cut these animals in half and lay them out on two sides facing each other, with a path down the middle. And what the two parties making the covenant were to do was to walk down the middle of this path together, and that action without words said, "may it be done to me just like these animals if I don't fulfill my part of the covenant."

Only something unexpected happens here. Instead of Abram and God walking together through the midst of these cut up, bloody animals, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch pass

between the pieces. Yahweh God, the covenant maker and covenant keeper, walks through by himself. God is making it clear that he is taking on himself the full responsibility of meeting the covenant demands. God is saying to Abram, "I will keep my word."

Well finally, 25 years later, Isaac is at last born. It's been 25 years of waiting. And that waiting was not without stumbling in faith, but yet was full of patience. And finally the purposes God had revealed so long ago are beginning to unfold. Which is why it is so unbelievable that God makes of Abraham the most shocking demand you can imagine. Gen. 22 and verse 2: "He said to Abraham, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, (and just in case that's not clear, God emphasizes what he's asking) your only son 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 will tell you.'"

And even though hearing God's voice and obeying had become the habit of Abraham's life over the past 25 years, you *could* understand if at this point he pretended he didn't hear that one. Sacrificing Isaac meant sacrificing his future, the very future that God had revealed was his purpose! Yet incredibly, as the first rays of sunlight came over the hills the next morning, Abraham saddles his donkey, prepares everything for the sacrifice, calls Isaac to come along, and begins his journey.

And as they arrive at the place God has shown them, you can imagine the shaking arms of Abraham as he lays the wood for the sacrifice on Isaac's back. And you can see his trembling hands as he carries the knife and the fire. And you can hear the emotion in his voice as he answers Isaac's fearful question, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering." "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."

How could he do this? How could he be so determined in his obedience that he would actually do what God asked? Well, there's a bit of a hint in verse 5 - "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.'" Do you see that? We will go over and worship, and we will return to you. He was sure that he'd return with Isaac in tow. Hebrews 11 gives us more insight as it says that Abraham "considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead." God had shown Abraham his purpose and he trusted God to keep it.

And as Abraham raises the knife to slaughter his own son, the angel of the Lord calls from heaven. You can imagine how quickly that knife would have come down.... "Here I am!" "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." Then Abraham lifts his eyes and he sees a ram, caught by its horns in a thicket, and he takes the ram and offers it to God instead of his son.

This is one of the most moving scenes in all of Scripture. And in our minds, the scene ends, and the curtain closes, and we're grabbing the box of Kleenex, but do you know what God says to Abraham following this?

v. 15 - "And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn declares the Lord, because you have done this I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars o heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore."

In 25 years, from Genesis 12-22, over and over and over God had made these promises to Abraham. "I've got a plan. I'm going to bless you. Through your offspring the entire world is going to be blessed." But now here he reinforces his promises by swearing an oath. He wants Abraham to know, beyond any shadow of any doubt, that he is utterly trustworthy and there is nothing that can or will stop him from keeping his promises.

Now, with all that background, let's turn back to Hebrews Ch. 6. Remember, the author has given these two stern warnings, then he says this to these believers in verse 11 - I've already seen your diligence in loving each other, but now I "desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end," in other words, when the end draws near I want your soul singing Jesus' praises, I want you to endure. v. 12, "so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

He's saying, I want you to have a true, enduring, persevering faith... and the fleshed out example of what I want to see in you, is in Abraham. You see persevered in faith and inherited the promise. I want you to do that.

But the question we have to come back to is, "how can we?" How do you become a person who endures, a person who doesn't just float, who doesn't just drift as a Christian, but is rooted and grounded in Christ? You need an anchor for your soul.

And that anchor is a sure and steadfast hope in the trustworthiness of God, a certainty of God's faithfulness and his goodness.

And this passage gives us two strong encouragements on which to build our hope. Let me give them to you and then we'll unpack them from these verses. Our hope is built on two things: God's promises and God's priest. Our hope is built when we consider God's promises and when we're confronted by God's priest.

1. Our hope is built when we consider God's promises.

Let's read this together. Look at v. 13 - (read vv. 13-15) - This is the story we just went over. God made his promises to Abraham. He came back to Abraham over and over again to promise him that he was going to do what he said, and then finally he reinforces it with an oath. "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."

v. 16 - "For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation." This seems obvious right? When people swear, they swear by something greater than themselves, not by things less than themselves. And oaths are used to end the argument, since because of our depravity what comes out of peoples mouths can't always be trusted. So in a court of law, when a person takes the witness stand, they swear an oath on the Bible. Little kids will be in an argument and they'll say something like, "I swear by my pet rabbit Lucy." And what they're saying is, if I'm not telling the truth you can do what you want with my favorite pet. Boys II Men had that old song right, "I swear, by the moon and the stars in the sky..." And these oaths are made because humans need some type of extra confirmation that they're telling the truth.

And the most common oath in ancient Israel was to say, "as the Lord lives." People swore by the greatest thing they could think of - by God - knowing that a.) God will witness the oath. and b.) God will punish the person making the oath if they're lying or don't keep their word. So then an oath confirmed what was said and put an end to any argument.

So then we move from this human picture in v. 16 to what God did v. 17 - "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."

Until this week, verse 18 always threw me off. "Two unchangeable things, I only see one - they're talking about the oath God made." But the author says that out of God's desire to make his promise overwhelmingly clear, he confirmed it with an oath. So these are the two unchangeable things - God's promise and God's oath.

Now let me ask you a question. What is greater than God for him to swear by? You can imagine God - I swear by the heavens and the... no wait, I created those... ok." Does God need to swear by an oath to emphasize the truth of his promise? No! Jesus says in John 17 of his father, "Your. Word. Is. Truth!" God has absolutely no need to make an oath, because unlike us the very word that comes out of his mouth isn't judged as right or wrong by some measure of truth external to God. But his Word *in itself*, as he speaks it, becomes the perfect measurement of truth by which everything else is judged. Let me say that again. God doesn't need to make any oath because his word becomes the cosmic definition of truth.

God always keeps his word. In fact, God's speaking and God's doing are inseparable. When God speaks it is as good as done. And so brothers and sisters, this is why it is so remarkable that God stoops to do what man does. He swears by an oath, not to bind himself in any greater way to act on what he's already said, but so that he can strengthen the weak hope of his friend.

No, the even more amazing thing is that God didn't do this just for Abraham, but for us. Look again at v. 17 - "So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise..." Who are the heirs of the promise? It's you and me! Do realize that the whole story of Abraham is not just some tidbit of Bible trivia, but it's a part of your story! If you are a Christian, this promised confirmed by oath was made for you!

God promised to make a nation, a people from Abraham's seed, and Galatians 3 tells us that Jesus is that seed. And if you have trusted in Jesus and are his by faith, you have been caught up in the cosmic redemptive purposes of God. God's promise and oath to Abraham is the beginning of your spiritual story. And with the same clarity that God confirmed the certainty of his purpose to Abraham, he wants to confirm the certainty of his promise to you this morning. That as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it - your only hope in life and death might be that you are not your own but belong to Jesus.

God's promise and oath to Abraham are for us, so that, v. 18, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

We who have fled for refuge. This is an interesting phrase. In the Old Testament there was a provision in the law that within Israel there would be cities of refuge. These were places that if one person killed another person accidentally, they could run to a city of refuge and be protected so that anyone avenging the death of that person could calm their *thirst for blood*. Christian, the same word is used here. You have fled from judgment in the shelter of Jesus Christ. He is our city of refuge. He is our hope.

The reality for most of you is that your hold on that hope isn't always as firm as it should be. There are many times that you look at your life and wonder what God is doing. That you question his goodness and his faithfulness. That you fall into despair. This is why God has given us his promises - the certainty that he will do everything he has promised - "that we might have strong encouragement to hold fast."

I've been reading *The Pilgrims Progress* with my second daughter and we came a couple of weeks ago to my favorite part of the book. Christian and his companion Hopeful are traveling on the way to the Celestial City, but they veer off the main trail and are captured by Giant Despair and thrown into the dungeon of Doubting Castle. And as Christian wallows under the thumb of Giant Despair, seeing a future ahead of him locked in this dark and putrid dungeon, considering even taking his own life, he suddenly puts his hand to his breast pocket and remembers what's been there all along. A key called Promise. And with that key he unlocks the dungeon door and every other door in Doubting Castle and along with Hopeful escapes.

How do you become a person who endures? Who doesn't end up locked in Doubting Castle under the watchful eye of Giant Despair. How do you keep from drifting and persevere in your faith? You need an anchor for your soul - hope in the faithfulness of God, built up as you consider his promises.

2. Our hope is built when we're confronted by *God's* priest.

And I won't spend too much time on this, since this is the thought the author develops for the next four chapters, but let me wrap up with a few moments here.

Think about an anchor for a moment. Tim Keller has a great illustration of this. He says that there are two things that really make an anchor work. And they're simple things. First it has to be attached to you. It has to be connected to you. You can't break the tie between you and the anchor. And secondly, the anchor needs to go into a realm where you can't go. If you're in a boat it doesn't help much for the anchor to just go into the water. You're already in the water. The water moves. There are currents there. The water changes. The water is the problem. The anchor has to go to a place you can't get to. It has to go all the way to the bottom where there is ground that is stable. Now if the anchor is attached to us, and goes into that place we can't get, a place with stability and permanence, then the stability of those solid rocks is actually transferred across the anchor chain to us.

And this is what the author is saying in verses 19-20. You see, Jesus has gone ahead of us into the only place of stability and permanence - *God's* place, the inner place. In this world things are constantly drifting, constantly changing. I mean, what are you putting your hope in,

what are you trying to get your anchor down into? What are you looking to to give stability and permanence to your life?

Some of you are putting your hope in stuff. Maybe it's getting enough money to get that new house or the new car. Maybe it's just the security of not having to be on the edge financially every month. If you had that you'd have stability, right? Now intellectually you get that these things can't anchor you, but the functional anchor for your soul, the hope for your future, is rooted in these things.

Some of you are looking for your career to anchor you. Your hope is in career advancement, getting that next promotion and the jump in status that comes from it.

Maybe for others of you it's your family or your relationships or your health. Or maybe it's getting a Republican president next year right? If there's a last great hope it's government. For some of you, the only faithful thing to hope in is yourself since no one else really cares about you.

But dropping anchor in these things will never hold will it? Because these are water. These things are in the same unstable and volatile realm we're in. What we need is an anchor that has gone where we can't.

"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..."

God stooped down by becoming one of us...

Made atonement - ascended to the right hand of God - interceding for us, our high priest. Day of atonement the priest would go in behind the curtain once a year and come back out. But Jesus stayed and opened a way for us - the forerunner, the one who has gone before. I go to prepare a place for you and I will bring you there.

Could possibly put illustration/summary of Heb. 6 here. Charis/Eden and hand holding.

Do you have this hope? Because this will anchor you and allow you to be a person who endures. Consider the certainty of God's promises and encounter the faithfulness of God's priest. Hope isn't just a feeling. It's not based on the whims and changes of our emotion. It is caught up with a person. It is found in JC. And this is what we sing:

My hope is built...

Recently, my two youngest daughters have been flexing their independence and refusing to hold my hand when we are in a parking lot. And even though I've had talks with them about it, and practiced it with them at home, there are moments when we are in a parking lot where they just let go of my hand and begin running on their own. It would not be loving of me in those situations to gently encourage them to come back to me.