



## Seize The Promise

Hebrews 6:13-20

Grace Church | 11.6.22

### Why Trust God?

One of the pioneer traits of a digital and globalized age is that we find it increasingly difficult to develop communities where trust is high. When seemingly limitless knowledge lies at the edge of our fingertips, skepticism is a natural result. When personal experience and personal truth are commodities, facts become much more subjective. One terrifying example of this is the rise of revisionist history and conspiracy theories. There are still people today who not only grossly misrepresent the suffering inflicted on Jewish people during the holocaust, for example, but outright deny that it even really existed. I even know at least one person who personally believes the world is flat. But I know plenty more who, for real reasons, have left jobs, churches, schools, and communities because they felt they were no longer able to trust anything their leaders said or did to be genuine. Perhaps that is you, or perhaps you know the feeling of a parent, a mentor, or a leader promising something to you, and letting you down.

One reason it may be difficult to trust—whether in facts, people, or institutions—is because we are all very adept at breaking our word. We’ve been hurt too many times. But I wonder if another reason for our lack of trust starts a little higher up. Perhaps we are so prone to assume the worst because we have trouble trusting in the one who works all things. The audience of Hebrews wondered if God could be trusted in the face of future persecution. Likewise, our skepticism of the goodness of God can stem from a lack of faith that he can still be good when pain or suffering comes, or when those we want to trust break their word. We would be far less anxious if we learned, as Psalm 146 says: “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation”, and instead first learned to put our ultimate trust in our Triune God.

Do you trust God is good? Do you believe he is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do? Last week Luke helped us to see that the charge in chapter 6 to grow up into Christian maturity was not about learning to eat solid food on our own, but about trusting God in faith. If we want to be mature, discerning Christians, who can tell what is good and what is evil, who can sniff out truth from conspiracy, then we need trust. That trust, as we see in **verses 11-13**, is a patient hope in God’s promises. Faith, the author of Hebrews will go on to say in chapter **11**, is the assurance of things we hope for. If we want to be mature Christians and persevere to the end, we need faith, and if we are going to have faith, and faith is all about trusting God patiently, even when it is hard.



This is why the author of Hebrews here in **verse 13** launches into a story about Abraham—he is the one who had to wait for years and years until he saw the first sign that God’s promise to him was coming true. That takes faith—patient hope in the promises of God—a faith which the apostle Paul tells us justified Abraham before God apart from works, which we see in **verse 15**. Abraham for us is an example, one who, like, **verse 12** tells us, we are to “imitate”, since he patiently trusted and so inherited his promise.

The problem for us, however, is that in order to imitate Abraham and learn to trust God, we need help. Abraham needed help too, and we aren’t greater than him. We need evidence to support our faith, grounding to bolster our faith, and encouragement to continue in our faith. In other words, in order to learn to be people who trust God, we must first ask: “why should we trust God”?

The answer to that question is the point of our text for today – Hebrews 6:13-20. If the first part of chapter 6 called us to trust God, the second part helps us to answer the question: “*why* trust God”? And this is a question you *need* the answer to. Because if you cannot trust God, you cannot trust that there is any real meaning in the world. If God is a liar, let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. But if you can trust God to keep his promises to you, a promise for rest and future glory in Jesus, everything about you can change. Your whole demeanor can move from anxiety to patience, from fear to trust, and from uncertainty to surety.

**Verse 18** actually sets the need for us well: we need *strong*, weighty encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. If we are going to enter into God’s rest and trust our great priest, we need fuel to keep going. So let’s hear three reasons to trust God’s promises from this text: 1) God doesn’t change. 2) God has sworn an oath. 3) God has anchored us to Heaven.

## God doesn’t change.

I’d actually like to begin in **verse 17**, where we see the underlying ground reason for why we should patiently trust God. The simple reason we should trust God is because he is God—described here as the one possessing “unchangeable character of purpose”.

God’s nature does not change, therefore his purposes—his will, his decisions, his decrees, his plans—do not change. The character, or nature, of God’s plans is that they never change. God is never wishy-washy, never goes back on his word, and always does exactly what he says he will do. God never changes his mind. **Verse 18** gets at this idea when it says that it is “impossible” for God to lie. Lying in this context is not simply a misrepresentation of the truth, but a going back on a promise, saying “I will do this” and then not doing it. Not only does God *not* lie, but he *cannot* lie. See the certainty there—it is impossible for God to go back on his word.

The reason for this impossibility is because for God to change his will would imply that he has some sort of potential. Either he is getting better, meaning he was lacking something before; or he



is getting worse, meaning he is digressing into a place of corruption. Either way, potentiality in God means that he is no longer perfect. Were God to undergo change, he would be less than the God of perfection.<sup>1</sup> The theological term for this aspect of God's nature is immutability.

This does not mean God is static, cold, and inactive. Since we are beings of potential, we always feel like we need to be moving and changing in order to be interesting. But God's immutability makes him more dynamic, not less. As one author puts it:

“God is not immutable because he is inert and static like a rock, but for just the opposite reason. He is so dynamic, so active, that no change can make him more active. He is act, pure and simple.”<sup>2</sup>

Understanding this is key to developing a robust trust in the promises of God. What are the promises of Abraham? They are nothing less than the gospel of Jesus Christ. The image in **verse 13** comes from Genesis 22, when God tests Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice Issac, the son of the promise. Can you imagine the position he is put in: to obey God is to forfeit his promise, since he would be destroying the very Son God promised to use to build a great nation and bless the earth. But if he disobeyed God, he would also forfeit his promise, showing that he is not faithful enough to be the patriarch of God's people. But he follows through, and the miraculous happens:

And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. 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.” 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 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. **Genesis 22:15-17**

As God provides a ram in place of Issac for the sacrifice, he shows that through patient faith and obedience come the blessings, like in **verse 15**. But Abraham's blessing of offspring is the same blessing we inherit in Christ. We, like Hebrews 2:16 said, are “offspring of Abraham”. The promise that we are waiting patiently for is that God would lead us, like Abraham, to a promised land of rest, and that through his church the whole world would be blessed and disciples multiplied like the sand on the seashore. The promises of God you are hoping for are nothing less than to be with God forever in the eternal rest of the new heavens and earth, justified before God and at peace with God.

---

<sup>1</sup> “All that which is changed arrives to something which it was not before, or ceaseth in part to be what it was before. What is omnipotent cannot be made worse; for to be made worse, is in part to be corrupted. If he be made better, he was not almighty before; something of power was wanting to him.” Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Change?*



But none of these promises can be sure if God is a God who changes his mind. He has promised to be faithful to you in Christ, and he will do it. If God and his will can change, then his “surely” is not so sure. If God can change, then he is open to conspiracy, to potential, and to mistrust. But friends, it is impossible. In a world of almost constant change, where no one always seems to be who they say who they are, the Father can *always* be trusted, since:

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? **Numbers 23:19**

The most important attribute of a person is their character. That is what always comes through in the end. We should learn to trust character more than charisma. So is it not perfect that God’s purposes are described in **verse 17** as having unchangeable *character*? At the core of all God’s promises is one thing that will never change: they are of trustworthy character. The first reason you can trust God is because God is God, and it is impossible for God to go back on his promises.

## God has sworn an oath.

In **Genesis 22**, God is doing something unique. He has already promised Abraham that he would bless the nations. But now he moves beyond promise to oath. He says: “I have *sworn*”.

We all know that swearing an oath is more serious than simply promising to do something. The reason is that an oath carries with it an outside weight. A promise is personal, but an oath is external. This is why it is traditional to swear “on” something—that the Hebrew audience would have seen on a daily basis. In order to invoke serious certainty and bring about trust, they called on the authority of natural wonders, swearing by the moon or stars, or on some leader or ruler. Unless you are a political leader swearing on the Bible, we often don’t take oaths in this way. But we do look for ways to make our promises more serious. If a Hebrew swore by Yahweh, however, the conversation was over. That was a serious thing—since they knew that to invoke God’s name in vain was a serious break of his law that would result in condemnation. This is what the author means by **verse 18**.

Oaths may seem taboo to you, but we do this all the time. There is nothing inherently wrong about taking an oath, as long as the seriousness of the oath matches the situation. In Matthew 5, Jesus tells us “let our yes be yes and our no be no”, and not to swear by heaven, earth, or Jerusalem. But what Jesus is teaching against is not that oaths are wrong, but rather that we should not make oaths we cannot keep, or do not intend to keep. Doing so makes us liars. Yet, we do make oaths, especially in the church. Today several of our brothers and sisters will take an oath at baptism, acknowledging their belief in the gospel. When a new pastor is installed, we similarly charge them with oaths.



In many ways it is noble to take such noble oaths—but we all know we fail to reach them. God is true, though every man a liar, so he doesn't *need* to take an oath. He himself is the immutable truth—there is no need for him to swear by something greater than himself because there is nothing greater than himself.

And yet, what happens is that God condescends to our level and takes up an oath. He does, **verse 17**, to show “more convincingly” just how immutable his purposes are. Notice the superlative there. What is more convincing than convincing? It's enough that we have God's promise, but God gives us *double* assurance by also giving us his oath. There are the two “unchangeable things” in **verse 18**. Both of them together, his promise and his oath, serve as our strong encouragement to hold fast to our hope.

So again, not only does God say: “I promise to bring you into my rest”, he swears it. But since there is nothing greater than himself, he swears by himself. One author says that “truth has sworn by itself that its truth shall truly be fulfilled”.<sup>3</sup> God takes the ultimate vow by putting his own reputation on the line. By swearing by himself, God is saying that if he fails to live up to his promises, he ceases to be God. The surety is so strong here. If God goes back on his promise, God himself is condemned. God can no sooner go back on his word than the whole world descend into darkness and chaos. Were God to be found a liar, everything you know to be true would suddenly become a false shadow.

But again, as the author says, such nonsense is impossible. How can God be condemned, who is the judge of all things? How can truth itself be found to be a liar? No friends—you can trust God, if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

My hope for you is that this truth can be a place of refuge, like **verse 18** says. To be a refugee is to be searching for a place to call home. For all those in Christ, the promises of God are that home, the home without threat of war, political instability, or eviction. Flee to God for help, because he has sworn by himself, the highest authority in the universe, that you can trust him.

## God has anchored us to Heaven.

Here is where it gets really good. The imagery in **verse 19** is strong. The picture is that this double assurance of God, his unchanging promise and unchanging oath, is like an anchor—coming back to the nautical language from chapter 2 where we were warned not to drift away. In a stormy sea, a sure and steady anchor was vital for life or death. A good anchor kept you rooted to the sea floor instead of headed chaotically towards the rocks or adrift at sea. The hope of God's unchanging promise and oath is an anchor for the *soul*, meaning that part of you that is deepest.

The difference between a nautical anchor and what is pictured here is that while one side of this anchor is attached to the “soul”, the other doesn't go downward to the sea, but rather upward

---

<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews*



towards heaven. It's a hope that, **verse 19**, "enters into the inner place behind the curtain." The curtain was that "thickly woven piece of tapestry hung between the inner and outer chambers of the tabernacle".<sup>4</sup> It was so thick that you could not see through it, and only the high priest could go behind it once a year on the day of atonement. To enter into the inner place behind the curtain, then, is to go through the veil and into the very presence of God. So if one end of this anchor is attached firmly to the soul of the faithful, where is the other end? In the very throne room of God.

How did it get there? How was the great gap bridged behind the veil? Of course we find the answer in **verse 20**. Jesus did it. Because of his unique role as high priest for eternity, he was able to go on ahead of us, a forerunner, for our sake, and fasten the anchor of his beloved church in the heaven of heavens, the presence of the Triune God. By becoming man, Jesus Christ dove the depths of the sea that is this insecure and sinful world with a singular mission. To anchor the souls of all who trust in him to God forever. Jesus endured uncertainty, mistrust, and the fear of man, so that you never have to mistrust God again.

Why can you trust God? Because no matter the storm, no matter the wind, and no matter how far your soul goes off course, if you are in Christ you will always be anchored to the promise of God. You will not fail to see God's oath fulfilled—because you have a hope that is sure and steadfast. This hope is not subjective, like when we say: "I hope to travel the world someday". It's an *objective* hope, a reality that we know is coming. And the reason we know it is coming is because Jesus Christ is not only the one who anchors us, but he himself is the anchor of our souls. He is the embodiment of God's unchanging nature, the fulfillment of God's unchanging promises, and the evidence of God's unchanging oath.

When Abraham hoped with patience, he brought his only Son to be sacrificed. When we hope with patience, we believe that God has already brought his only son to be sacrificed, and as **verse 17** says, this sacrifice, like the Ram on Mount Moriah, is the guarantee of God's oath. To look and see the suffering lamb of God on the cross is to truly know God's oath is fulfilled. You can trust God because you can trust Jesus, your sacrifice, your priest and your anchor, to never let you go.

So we are left with one massive takeaway in **verse 18**: hold fast to the hope set before us. Literally "hold fast" means something like "seize". You have heard the phrase "seize the day"—*carpe diem*—as a battle cry for hope in the present. The battle cry for the Christian is deeper, because it holds to hope in the future. It is *carpe promissionem*, "seize the promise"! For those with faith in Christ—there is nothing holding you back. God is who he says he is, and he swears by it. You are anchored to heaven. Why trust God? Let's instead ask, "why doubt him"? Seize the promise by seizing Christ, the Son of promise, and you will find no answer.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

