

Anchored in Hope through Christ
Hebrews 6:13-20

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February 28, 2021

In October 2015, a surveyor working in a dense forest in Maine found a collapsed tent. Inside the tent was a backpack, some clothes, and a sleeping bag. In the sleeping bag was a skull. These were the remains of 66 year-old Gerry Largay. She was a retired nurse from Tennessee who had decided to hike the Appalachian Trail. She had been missing since July 22, 2013. While she was hiking, she left the trail to use the bathroom. She probably walked no more than 80 paces off the trail which was her normal practice. Unable to find her way back to the trail, she began to wander in the woods. Without cell phone service, her husband George never received any of the text messages or calls she used to get help. She wandered in circles for 19 days until exposure and starvation ended her life.

Ironically, her final campsite was only ½ mile from the trail as the crow flies. If she had walked downhill, she would have reached an old railroad track which would have led her out of the woods. Experts say that circling happens when there are no prominent landmarks or spatial boundaries and where all the vistas look the same. Without a fixed reference point, we drift.

For over a year now, we have found ourselves wandering in a forest of distractions and difficulties. Covid-related problems have been like clouds blocking the sun. Routines have been interrupted. Conflicts over restrictions and health orders have created tensions between friends. Economic disruptions have fed a sense of uncertainty. In addition to this, political tensions have reached a boiling point for many people. I cannot remember a time when our nation was so divided. It feels like we are struggling to find our way out of a tangled forest.

How are you going to navigate this forest of distractions and difficulties? You need some fixed points of reference. This is true for you and me as individuals. It is also true for us together as a church. For the next few weeks, we are going to look at some fixed points of reference in God's Word that will help us regain a sense of direction.

The first reference point we will consider is foundational to all the others. The primary thing that will keep us from wandering and drifting is to be anchored in hope through Jesus Christ.

The author of Hebrews wrote his letter to people who were in danger of drifting. They were Jewish people who had come to confess Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Savior. But they were being persecuted. The personal pain and hardship of persecution included public abuse, imprisonment, and loss of property. This made them question whether they should turn back from following Jesus. The author of the letter emphasizes the supremacy of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises of God in the Old Covenant. There is no other Savior than Jesus. So, they need to endure their difficulties anchored in the certainty of God's promises fulfilled in Christ.

In Hebrews 6:13-20, after warning his audience of the dangers of turning away from Christ, the author encourages them to endure. His argument is built along these lines.

God's character secures the certainty of his promise. The certainty of God's promise strengthens us with hope. Our hope clings to Jesus Christ.

Anchor your life in the certainty of God's promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

I. God's character secures the certainty of his promise (vv. 13-18).

A. God secured his promise to Abraham.

1. This promise refers to Genesis 22:15-18.

And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ 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. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

2. God emphasized his promise with an oath.

- a. He swore by himself since there was no one greater to swear by.
- b. People swear by something greater than themselves to emphasize the seriousness of their statements. We do this by swearing on the Bible for instance. The oath is used to support the truthfulness and reliability of our words.
- c. What is God going to swear by? Who or what is greater than him that would lend support to his words? No one and nothing. Notice that God doesn't make the oath for his sake. He makes it for ours. He desired to demonstrate to the heirs of the promise his unchangeable character.

3. What aspects of God's character support and confirm his words?

- a. God is eternal. He is ever-present to fulfill his promises.
- b. God is omnipotent. He has the power to fulfill his promises.
- c. God is immutable. He does not change. (Mal. 3:6)
- d. Because of this, God is faithful. He can be trusted to keep his promises.

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? (Num. 23:19)

Who do we tend to trust the most? According to recent data, Americans trust nurses in terms of professionals, the US Postal Service in terms of brands, US military in terms of institutions. But it would be easy to find news stories in which all of these have betrayed the trust of someone and caused harm to them in some way.

Journalist David Brooks has suggested that America is in a kind of freefall of distrust. He calls this an "age of disappointment" and "explosive distrust." He makes the argument that we are at a breaking point due to the failures of institutions, businesses, leaders, and people close to us.

All of us have felt the sting of betrayal, disappointment, and unfulfilled promises. All of us have at some point been the source of those things for someone else. But God is not a man that he

should lie. He never walks out on his promise. He never lacks ability to keep his promise. He has a spotless track record of faithfulness.

So, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, God indicates the unchangeable nature of his purpose. What are those two things. I believe, in the context of our passage, they are God's promise and his oath.

You can trust God's promises because of who God is. Abraham waited and obtained God's promise because God's promises are underwritten by his character.

Notice second that...

II. The certainty of God's promise strengthens us with hope (vv. 17-19).

- A. The certainty of God's promise gives us strong encouragement to have hope.
 - 1. We who have fled for refuge refers to believers, those who have fled to Jesus Christ as our refuge. Like fugitives looking for sanctuary, we run to Jesus and find refuge from judgment.
 - 2. God's faithfulness to his promise is a strong motive for us to hold fast or seize the hope set before us.
 - a. One writer defines hope as "settled certainty and confident expectation based on God's promise." In other words, it is not hope in terms of wish but hope in terms of waiting expectantly for something you are certain you will receive based on God's promise to you.
 - b. This hope refers to our ultimate salvation and reception of all that God has promised to us in Jesus Christ. It is a relationship of promise and realization, announcement and fulfillment as one writer put it.
- B. This hope anchors our souls.
 - 1. The author uses a nautical word picture. Like a ship that has an anchor to keep it stable and prevent it from drifting or being driven by wind and waves, the Christian has an anchor that is sure and steady. That anchor is hope.
 - 2. And hope anchors your soul. The term soul can certainly be a synonym for life. Hope anchors your whole life. That is true. But your soul is the place where the battle for perseverance rages. If these people are being battered by persecution, their minds, emotions, and resolve are in danger of drifting from faith in Christ and hope in God's promise.

Archaeologists tell us that the anchor was a prominent Christian symbol up to the third century. The underground cemeteries in Rome (catacombs) contained numbers of inscriptions which included the symbol of the anchor. These graves with the anchor symbol often contained inscriptions saying things like peace, peace to you, or peace be with you. The use of the anchor on grave sites indicated that this person's life and eternal future were anchored in Christ.

Why is hope important? Look back at Hebrews 9:11-12.

Friends, hope is what anchors us and energizes us to endure the hardships of life until we inherit the promise. Without hope, we cannot long endure the troubles and turbulence of life.

Some feel that hope is just an illusion. Lord Byron wrote, “But what is hope? Nothing but the paint on the face of existence; the least touch of truth rubs it off...”

Is hope just a thin veneer of makeup on the face of your life? Or is hope like an anchor for you? When hard things slam against your life, does hope leave you angry and disappointed or anchored and durable?

That depends on where your hope lies.

The writer of Hebrews has shown us that God’s character secures the certainty of his promise. He went on to show us that the certainty of God’s promise strengthens us with hope. Now, notice...

III. Our hope clings to Jesus Christ (vv. 19-20).

A. Our hope rests in the atoning work of Jesus.

1. Our hope enters into the inner place behind the curtain. This refers to the holy of holies in the tabernacle/temple. It is the inner sanctuary where the presence of God dwelt and the symbol of his presence, the ark of the covenant was located.
2. This was the place where only the high priest would go once a year, on the Day of Atonement. He would take sacrificial blood to sprinkle on the ark of the covenant to atone for his sin and the sin of the people.
3. Jesus has gone into this holy sanctuary on our behalf. Hebrews 9:12 tells us that it was not with the blood of animal sacrifices but with his own blood that Jesus atoned for our sins. Jesus did not enter the earthly holy place but the holy place in heaven
4. This atoning work is part of his priestly role. He is a high priest forever on our behalf. After his death on the cross, he went into the very presence of God, having offered himself as the sacrifice that takes away our sins. There he now sits as our priest, interceding for us.
5. The fact that Jesus is called a forerunner on our behalf reminds us that we too will one day live in the very presence of God. Jesus has gone there first to atone for our sins and secure our standing with God. One day, he will bring us there live with him forever in God’s presence.

Can you feel the cumulative weight our passage today? God has made us promises in Jesus Christ that are secured by his unchangeable character. The certainty of those promises strengthens our souls with hope. The hope that we have clings to Jesus who gave his own life to confirm those promises and now represents us before God in heaven.

No wonder he chose the concept of an anchor to describe this hope! What could move it? Who could undo it? The promise of God guaranteed by the character of God and ratified by the death, resurrection, and intercession of the Son of God – could anything be more sure!

The question is not “Is there hope?” There is! The question you must ask is, “Is there hope in what I am trusting?” The question is, “What does my hope cling to?”

Conclusion

Hope is a powerful thing. We have all heard stories of how hope helped people do amazing things and endure horrific things. But hope is only as strong as the dependability of its object. In other words, if the thing that your hope clings to should ever fail, hope will fail with it.

Hope that clings to money will fail because money fails. Hope that clings to health will fail because health fails. Hope that clings to your husband or wife will fail, because they will fail. Hope that clings to pleasure will fail because pleasure fails. Hope that clings to religious merit will fail because human zeal will fail.

But hope that clings to Jesus is steadfast and sure. Why? Because Jesus never fails. Have you trusted in Jesus Christ? He died on the cross for your sins. He rose from the dead to conquer sin and death. He entered into heaven to be the advocate for all who trust in him. He will not fail.

Trust in Jesus and be anchored in hope.