

Sermon 18: Hebrews 6:13-20: How to Live a Life of Hope

OUTLINE

Abraham: a pattern for hope
God: the encouragement to hope
Jesus: our anchor of hope

INTRODUCTION

God has wired us as human beings to be creatures of hope. Prov. 13:12 says 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick.' In 2025 there were about 740 000 suicides, that is 1 every 43 seconds. It is 'guesstimated' that there are 20 attempts that fail or are intercepted for every 1 suicide, that makes 15 ½ million people who are so hopeless that they cannot face being alive. Hope is a very important part of what makes us tick as human beings. Hope is exactly what the gospel gives us. Hope is not merely a positive and optimistic disposition. Hope in the Bible is always something future but certain, it is not a maybe it is a definitely, just a not-yet. Our hope as believers is multilayered. In the short term it is the certainty of God's purposes overruling in our lives working all things together for good though they are filled with instability and pain; in the medium term it is death and the transporting of our glorified spirits to the presence of Christ. And in the long term it is the certainty of the resurrection of our bodies, the judging and doing away with all our enemies and the creation of New Heavens and Earth where we will be forever. Having hope enables you to endure the present difficulties because you know they are temporary and will give way to better things. That is why John Calvin said, 'Hope is the foundation of patience.'¹ The Puritans would say that 'Hope is the mother of perseverance, and perseverance the daughter of hope.' Our hope gives us great joy and our joy gives us fuel to be busy pleasing the Lord, as Thomas Brooks said, 'A man full of hope will be full of action.' The author of Hebrews understands this. We have just had a difficult few verses that could be very discouraging to this congregation as the warnings about the unforgivable sin have been issued. Last week we saw how the author sought to assure this church. This was to help them push on, v10-11, 'And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' In v11 he mentioned imitating good models of those who endured with faith while hoping in their inheritance. This next section deals with motivating these believers with hope. We have three points, Abraham a pattern of hope v13-15; God the encouragement to hope v16-18; Jesus the anchor of hope v19-20.

Abraham a pattern for hope

V13-15, 'For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." ¹⁵ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.' The author wants to be a good teacher and give examples to imitate, and he selects Abraham. Hebrews along with Romans and Galatians has the most to say about Abraham. Abraham's life is recorded for us in Gen. 11:27-

1 John Blanchard, [*The Complete Gathered Gold: A Treasury of Quotations for Christians*](#) (Webster, New York; Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 316.

25:18; and he lived for 175 years. The Abrahamic Covenant is vital for the establishing of our salvation for from Abraham, the Seed of Christ has come and we are saved through faith in Christ and inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant as we become children of Abraham by faith. Abraham's own personal faith is the pattern for our own faith for justification, Rom. 4:1-12; and his life of faithful obedience is often used as a model of faithful living, James 2:21-23; Heb. 11:8-12, etc. Here the author seeks to show how Abraham was a good model for faithfulness while patiently waiting for the promise to be fulfilled. Let's remind ourselves of the details of what the author is describing.

God, you will remember called Abraham away from his family and homeland to the land God would give him, Gen 12:1, God gave him a threefold promise of land, becoming a great people, and being a blessing to the nations, v2-3. These three elements we know are typologically fulfilled in the land of Israel, nation of Israel, and the blessing of the law and being a witness to the surrounding nations. However, there are greater realities being promised, the land points to the new creation; a great nation is made up of believers from Jews and Gentiles; and the blessing to the nation is the blessing of salvation in Christ with the grand reversal of all of the effects of the fall. Abraham was 75 years old when the promise was given and his wife Sarai was barren, 11:30. Abraham's faith begins with the odds stacked against him yet he answers the call of God to go only God knows where. Abraham might have thought that this promise would be realized through his nephew Lot, but after Lot departs to Sodom God reissues the promise indicating that it would be through his offspring that the promise would be realized 13:14-18. The years rolled on, the event of Lot having to be rescued happens, and God comes again to Abraham giving assurances that He is Abraham's God, 15:1. This leads Abraham to voice some fears and doubts v2, 'But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" God tells him that his very own son will be his heir to realize this promise, v4; and God cuts a one sided covenant with Abraham to ratify these promises. And still there is no child, so Sarai hatches a plan and Abraham goes along with it to have a child through Hagar, 16:1-3. She conceives Ishmael, and all think that this must be how God will fulfil the promises to Abraham. But then in Gen. 17 God reissues the promises and establishes the covenant of circumcision as a sign and seal of the promise. As part of this promise God changes first Abraham's from Abram exalted father to Abraham father of a multitude v5. Then God also changes Sarah's name from Sarai to Sarah, and at this point the penny drops and Abraham laughs to himself because he is 99 going on 100 and she is 90. Abraham says may Ishmael live before you and God reveals that a son from Abraham and Sarah who will be named Isaac will be the one through whom the promises will be realized, v21. God fulfils His promise and Isaac is born 21:1-7. This brings us now to relevant part of the story that is quoted in Heb. 6:14; Genesis 22 and the sacrificing of Isaac.

We know the story well, Isaac who is old enough to carry a pile of wood up a mountain, probably 10 years old making Abraham 110. Is taken by Abraham at the command of God to the mountain that would one day be the place where the temple would be built; where the sacrifices would be killed. God has commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to Him. This would be the ultimate test to Abraham's faith; how could God make a great nation from him, in particular from Isaac if he was to sacrifice him? Heb. 11:17-19 reveals the faith that Abraham had, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his

only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."
¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.' Abraham believed that God would resurrect him from the dead. We see signs of this faith in Gen. 22:5 when Abraham tells the two servants with them that he and the boy will go up the mountain and that both will return. This was not Abraham lying but revealing his faith. We know how the story goes. Abraham binds his son, puts him on the altar and picks up the knife. We can only imagine how this scene played out. Did Abraham tie him up because he was unwilling, did he have to assure him that God would do a miracle and keep him alive, did Abraham shed tears as he had to do this most difficult of actions? As Abraham was about to do the deed, the Angel of the Lord stopped him. God provided a ram as a substitute and the boy was spared.

Before we comment on Abraham's faith let us first appreciate this picture of the gospel. When Isaac asked where the sacrifice was and Abraham said that God would provide the lamb. Abraham was likely speaking metaphorically of Isaac expecting a resurrection. But here we see that God literally provides a sacrifice, on the mount where the Passover Lambs were slaughtered, an unblemished male ram as a substitute. This is a clear picture of how God saves us. God provides a substitute to die instead of us, we deserve to die, but He provides. The drama and emotion of this scene as a Father has to sacrifice his son becomes a poignant backdrop for a very familiar verse, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.' Not only that consider Isaac as the child of promise in whom all the other promises of land, blessing and a great nation would be realized. Jesus is the promised Son of Abraham, the offspring of Abraham in whom all the promises of God are yes and amen. The blessing of salvation; the land of the new creation, and the great nation of peoples from every tribe, tongue and people; it is all realized in Christ.

But consider Abraham's faith. How long he waited, how hard it would have been to walk up that mountain to do the deed, how he would have had every opportunity to doubt that God would fulfil the promises to him. But Abraham believed that God keeps His promises, that death is no obstacle to Him, that He is to be feared and seemingly absurd and impossible things are not a hindrance to obeying the Lord. Abraham exercised a faith in God not what was possible or reasonable or logical when he first answered the call in 12:1-3; and now that the promise looked like it was unlikely to succeed with the death of the one through whom it would be realized, he endured still. This is the example we are being pointed to. Heb 6:13-14 is quoting Gen. 22:16-18, '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."

V15, 'And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.' How is your patient waiting going? Spurgeon highlights the difficulty of waiting, "'I dare say you will think it a very easy thing to stand still, but it is one of the postures which a Christian soldier learns not without years of teaching. I find that marching and quick marching are much easier to God's warriors than standing still. It is, perhaps, the first thing we learn in the drill of human armies, but it is one of the most difficult to learn under the Captain of our salvation.' To wait

while suffering is hard, but fixing our eyes on our hope enables us to be sorrowful and rejoice. To wait while it looks like God's cause is losing is hard, but fixing our eyes on the certainty of God's victory enables us to stand and endure and fight on. To wait for an answer to a prayer you have been praying for 20 years is hard, but remember Abraham waited 25 years until Isaac was born. He died never seeing the land that was promised but only greeted it from afar, but he is there now. Hope, the certainty of our hope is what enables us to endure.

God the encouragement to faith

V16-18, 'For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. 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, ¹⁸ 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.' Moving from the example of Abraham's faith, he now moves to the reason for Abraham's faith, the character of God, in particular the fact that God has made a promise, sworn by Himself and cannot lie. Now technically God only swore by Himself after Abraham has obeyed Him, in other words Abraham obeyed God with less assurances than this. The author notes that it was for our benefit, 'to the heirs of promise,' that is us that it is framed this way. But the underlying point is reinforced by this fact, God cannot lie. The author here reflecting on the only time God swears by Himself in Genesis, from 22:16 gives some background to the practice of oaths. Oaths were a common practice in the ancient world and taking an oath in God's name was a common practice in Israel. God commands the Israelites to swear in His name, Deut. 10:20. The 3rd commandment which forbids taking God's name in vain is speaking to the practice of making an oath in God's name and then breaking it. You would swear an oath to bind yourself to an agreement or to verify that you were telling the truth. You would ordinarily take an oath in God's name because you were saying that by your fear of God, you would keep a promise in His name, and if you did not, you welcomed Him to punish this taint on His honour.

Now technically there is no one higher than God that He can swear by. In fact God does not even have to make a promise, He is the God of truth who cannot lie, He does not need to promise for a thing to be certain. God makes promises because we are weak. God swears by Himself because we are so given to uncertainty. If God swore by the heavens we could still say to ourselves, but one day the heavens will fail and so one day these promises could come to an end. But we cannot because they are sworn by Himself. And God is happy to condescend to aid our faith in this way as the author notes, 'God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose.' God's promises are kind provisions to prop up our feeble faith. We have mentioned two unchangeable things which give us strong encouragement to hold fast to our hope. What are the two unchangeable things, the most common answer is firstly, the promise made to Abraham; and secondly, God swearing by Himself that He would fulfil the promise. Technically there are several unchangeable things. God's character does not change; His will does not change; His word does not change, and neither do His promises or sworn oaths. At our marriages we make promises, but we can change, we can fail them. We make promises to our children but we can break those too. God makes promises and they cannot fail because He does not change and He cannot lie. One of the ways we apply the third commandment is by imitating God in His truth telling, in

His promise keeping. Because God keeps His promises so should we who are made in His image.

Our hope, that is the future we are looking forward to is built on these promises. As Adoniram Judson put it, 'My future is as bright as the promises of God.' And the certainty of these promises coming to pass is what gives us strong encouragement and certainty. The promises cannot fail, because God cannot lie. Which promises? No one can snatch them out of my hands; on the last day I will raise them up; I will never leave you or forsake you; nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus; He works all things together for the good of those who love Him; my grace is sufficient for you; seek first the kingdom and all these things will be added, and we could go on and on. We do not lack for promises; for assurances; for comforts. We have all that we need to make sure that we have a strong hope in what will most certainly come to pass. The author uses the language of we who have fled for refuge. The picture here is of someone who has perhaps been a victim of war; who is fleeing a strong pursuer, who has come to God for protection. We have come to Christ for refuge from sin, satan and death. We have not come to someone who will betray us, sell us out to the enemy, or who can fail. He is not fickle but has sworn by Himself and we are now safe. He has taken us in as children; He has betrothed Himself to us as His bride; He has welcomed us as friends, and He has promised us life in Christ. There is no more sure place to be.

Jesus our anchor of hope

V19-20, 'We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.' Our author has given us plenty of reason to be sure of our hope but he cannot resist he has to load up our assurance with not only God's character but the sufficient work of Christ as well. Once again he uses nautical metaphors. In 2:1 he spoke about the dangers of drifting and paying heed to what we have heard about Christ to not drift. Here he talks about the anchor which stops that very drift. Before the cross became the most common symbol for Christianity the anchor and the fish were most common. Many a Christian tomb would have the picture of an anchor on it, it is because of this verse. Anchor were used by boats to stabilize themselves if they were being driven by a headwind. They would be used when in harbor to keep themselves from drifting onto the rocks. We have an anchor for the soul. The storms of life are raging but we are sure and steady. The author changes the picture. Where usually you would have an anchor going down into the ocean our anchor goes up into the heavens. The author uses the holy of holies from the OT tabernacle which symbolizes God's throne room, to speak of where our anchor has purchase. If an anchor was dragging over the sea floor through sand it would not help, but if it caught on a rock or coral it could stand. Our anchor is in something that cannot be moved. Something that cannot be shaken that is not part of this faltering age. Jesus has taken our anchor with Him into the heavens where he sits at the right hand of God. The author uses the word forerunner. One commentator writes, "'Forerunner' is yet another of the nautical terms used in Hebrews. The particular word here, *prodromos*, is one that appears nowhere else in Scripture, but has to do with a familiar scene in the ancient world. Louis Talbot explains: The Greek harbors were often cut off from the sea by sandbars, over which the larger ships dared not pass till the full tide came in. Therefore, a lighter vessel, a "forerunner," took the anchor and dropped it in the harbor. From that moment

the ship was safe from the storm, although it had to wait for the tide, before it could enter the harbor.... The entrance of the small vessel into the harbor, the forerunner carrying the ship's anchor, was the pledge that the ship would safely enter the harbor when the tide was full. And because Christ, our "forerunner," has entered heaven itself, having torn asunder everything that separates the redeemed sinner from the very presence of God, He Himself is the Pledge that we, too, shall one day enter the harbor of our souls and the very presence of God, in the New Jerusalem.'² As the forerunner He paves the way; secures our salvation and guarantees as the firstfruits that we will follow. He is also there as a priest, our representative; He is there having finished the work necessary to pay for our sins and secure our salvation; He is there ministering on our behalf applying the benefits that His death secured. We have hope, we are not hopeless, we have an immovable hope, we have a certain hope, we have an immeasurable hope. We have every reason to endure whatever difficulty we face and wait patiently.

² Richard D. Phillips, [Hebrews](#), ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 217.