

Anchored to Christ

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Text:Hebrews 6:13-20

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SCRIPTURE READING:

Our scripture reading this evening is from the Letter to the Hebrews chapter six. We're going to read their verse 13, through to the end of the chapter in verse 20. And you'll find the passage in the pew Bible, on page 1004. And it will be very helpful to you, I think, to have a copy of the Bible, either the pew Bible from the rack in front of you, or your own Bible, open before you as we think together about this word of the Lord. So let us hear God's word. Hebrews chapter six, verse 13, through verse 20, page 1004.

When God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by Himself, saying, "Surely, I will bless you, and multiply you". And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. 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. 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, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Now as we turn to God's Word together, let us turn to the Lord of the word and seek His blessing, as we give ourselves to its study.

OPENING PRAYER:

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you again tonight, that you are a speaking God, and that you have made us as your image, in order that we might be recipients of your revelation. That we might gasp in wonder, at the way in which you have made yourself known in the created order in the heavens and the earth. And that we might gasp with awe and faith, and joy as we hear your word in the pages of sacred scripture. We thank you with all our hearts for this book. For the ways in which you have used it down through the ages, to point your people to yourself. For all that it has meant for us, as your children, for the way in which it has been light to illuminate us in our spiritual darkness, the way in which it has come to encourage us in our discouragements, and at times in our great loneliness. The ways in which it has challenged us, and redirected us and recalibrated us, so that we might live according to your promises, and for your glory. And as we turn to it again at the beginning of this year, and as on this evening, we seek with joy to give ourselves afresh to you as your covenant people and your covenanted children, we pray that you would speak to us through your Word, and that you would make the book live to us through Your Holy Spirit. And we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

SERMON:

Of all the letters in the New Testament, what we know as the Letter to the Hebrews, is in many ways, the one that's most like a sermon. I've no doubt that some of the things the Apostle Paul says in his letters, he may have sneaked in here or there in one of his many sermons. But the Letter to the Hebrews, if indeed it is, a letter, describes itself, not so much as an epistle written by an apostle, as a word of exhortation, a word of encouragement written by a pastor. It has 13 chapters. And the author of those chapters regards that as a very brief word of encouragement as he tells us in chapter 13. So though this is a book that, in many ways is alien to many Christians, because it takes us into the world of the Old Testament; into the world of the high priesthood, and the temple, it is very helpful for us to understand its written by a christian pastor in order to bring challenge and encouragement to his people. If there is anything I think I've learned about the gospel ministry, and not least about preaching as a pastor is that there is nothing in life that stretches your emotions and affections quite so much.

Most of us are hard wired, either to be gentle, or to be rough. But if you're going to be a gospel pastor and preach God's word, you actually have to learn to be both. We would like balance in the Christian life to be like pastor will-ship quietly sitting there in a calm sea, readily anchored. But apparently that is not the gospel way with sinners. The gospel way with sinners, is to engage in radical surgery upon our lives, and then bring radical healing to our lives. And so balance in the Christian life; balance in the life of the church; balance in the ministry of the word that's brought to us by pastors like the anonymous author of Hebrews, doesn't take us down the center aisle, so much, as stretches us to the side aisles. And so there are times when the Word of God as our forefathers used to say, rips up our consciences. And there are times when the Word of God pours a healing balm into our souls. And by God's grace, often, those different times turn out to be the same time. But most of us are hardwired in one direction or another. As a preacher of the gospel, I'd far rather speak 1000 words of comfort than 10 words that would rip up your conscience. And perhaps as a hearer of the gospel, you would far rather hear 1000 words that brought you comfort than 10 words that ripped up your conscience. But faithfulness to the Gospel, and this is the challenge of it, and if one speaks freely about these things, (the reason why so many of us as gospel ministers actually fail abysmally) the challenge of the Gospel is that we do both. And the challenge of hearing the gospel is that we respond appropriately to both.

And actually there's probably no better illustration of this, than in the Letter to the Hebrews. The Letter to the Hebrews is punctuated by occasions when the author is ripping up the conscience of these Christians. Giving to them some of the most dire warnings outside of the teaching of Jesus. And then there are passages of the greatest and sweetest comfort, in which he points us to Christ and all the riches of God for us in Jesus Christ. That's why he calls his letter, a word of *paráklētos*. And even if you don't know any Greek, you probably would guess that's the word that's related to the title Jesus gives to the Holy Spirit. The paraclyte. And when he describes what the paraclyte does, it is precisely this, Jesus says, when He comes, He will rip up the consciences and He will convict man of sin and righteousness and judgment. And yet the same Lord Jesus, as he expounds the work of the paraclyte, tells us of the marvelous comfort and consolation he will bring to us as He shines his perfect light on the face of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Then the fascinating thing about Hebrews chapter six, which many of you I'm sure have studied in the past, is that this is one of the chapters in which he does both. The opening section, he is ripping up the conscience, he is saying to them, I want to speak to you about the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ and the problem is, you should have become able to teach this by now. But you're spiritual infants. You're able to take only milk, and not solid food. And so he warns them about the possibility of all kinds of great spiritual experiences that do

not mean you are a real Christian. And so when we come, for example, to the end of verse eight, and he's speaking about land that bears thorns and thistles that's worthless and near to being cursed and in the end is to be burned, we're reeling back and wondering if we can take any more. And then he comes in with the word of comfort and encouragement. He says, now that you are down where you need to be saying to the Lord, Lord, I'm weak and needy, and I too am in desperate need of you to hold on to me. Then that's the place where he can bring Christ in, isn't it? And say, "Now my friends, that you are ready for this, you're hungry for this, you see your need for this". Now, he says, you'll be able to appreciate and understand the riches of the gospel of God's grace. And this is what he does so marvelously, in these verses that follow and the significance of that for this evening as we recommit ourselves to the Lord and taking this covenant on our lips, is, as all of us who have done it before, this is a covenant calculated, to make you tremble.

What you commit yourself to in this covenant, as a Christian believer is just being a Christian. But just being a Christian means that for the sake of the Lord Jesus, as we will soon say, we are prepared to be laid aside for him or employed for him. Full for him, empty for him, and to His pleasure, we give our whole lives that he may dispose of them, as he will. And what makes us tremble is that some of us took this covenant last year or the year before. And we have found these words coming profoundly true in our lives. We have been laid aside for him. We thank God that we have learned from biblical teaching that for him, we may be laid aside, but it's very painful. Or we may have suffered loss for him. And so when we have yielded ourselves in this way, and we come to do it again, there is something in us that trembles and says, Lord, what will it be this year? In what ways might you imply me this year? I pray that you will but Lord, in what ways might you lay me aside for your own glory? In what ways might you fill me? I long that it may be so but I know there may be ways in which you will empty me down to the deep resources of my being and which I have been so much trusting. And Lord Jesus, I'm prepared for that. And you see if we are going to be able to take such a covenant, it follows, doesn't it, that we need such encouragement, as this writer is just about to give us in the second half of Hebrews chapter six.

And he does it I think in this way. He gives us three very remarkable encouragements to consecration. The first of them is this: he tells us about an immutable, that is an unchangeable and immutable, purpose. In verses 13 and 14 God made his great promise to Abraham. And he swore by Himself saying, "I will bless you and multiply you". He takes us back to the origin of God's great covenant that eventually came to fulfillment in Abraham's seed — our Lord Jesus Christ. And he says, God made that covenant with Abraham, it was a great covenant that he made with Abraham, surely I will bless you and multiply you. But if you run your eye further down to verse 17, you will notice how the author describes this as God's unchangeable, God's immutable, purpose. And he's really underlining for these believers who are actually going through very difficult times. But one of our great encouragements in the gospel is that God's purpose is unchangeable. His purpose to keep his promise of blessing to his people in Jesus Christ, is an immutable promise. That had, of course, an initial fulfillment in Isaac, eventually. And even more eventually, it had its fulfillment, in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We who are the heirs of the promise have seen this promise fulfilled. But the importance of knowing that God has an unchangeable purpose is this: that his purposes don't, in fact, move quickly. And Abraham discovered that, didn't he? It's actually, it's quite paradoxical, that in this passage the author speaks about Abraham's patients, because the one thing you and I think about Abraham is he didn't have patience. He wanted God to get on with it. And of course that's where this resolute commitment of God to fulfill His purposes is such a vital thing for us to grasp. Because neither in Abraham's case, nor in the case of the history of redemption, nor frankly, in your case, or in my case, does God seem to move fast enough in our lives very often.

That's why the word that the author uses here, I think there are two different words used in the New Testament for patients. The word that he uses here, in the case of human beings, conveys the idea of somebody who is able to put up with and see through the frustrations when their own will and desire isn't being fulfilled. Now, I suppose we're like the rest of the citizenship in the United States of America. Most of us are up there in the bracket of the most patient, people of all. I don't know how many people say to me when they've lost the plot. They say I'm usually a very patient person. I quietly grit my teeth, and say to myself, no, what you mean is, you're actually a very impatient person but you've never been tested far enough for you or the rest of us to discover how impatient you actually are. Now, isn't that true? We're all patient when we have no frustrations. But the very essence of patience, is that we're able to cope with bear the burden of, and see through frustrations. And here is one of the great paradoxes of God's ways with us. God is determined to be frustrating to you. Because unless he is frustrating to you, at the end of the day, you'll begin to confuse your will for your life with God's will for your life. You will think of yourself as a very patient person, as long as God does what God is supposed to do in your life. And what God was supposed to do in Abraham's life was give his wife a child. And it was very frustrating for Abraham that God wasn't doing what God was supposed to do. And so he took his eye off the ball. If I can use a sporting metaphor. American football you take your eye off the ball, and you fall out of the pulpit, that's what you do. You miss the touchdown. Because you were far more interested in getting the touchdown than catching the ball. My that's a matter for the Christian life, isn't it far more than Interested in getting the blessing than actually catching the ball that God is throwing into your life in his amazing providence.

So when God was promised blessing to his people, brings challenges into the lives of his people, what words these are to be laid aside for you, Lord, the sheer frustration of this. Why are you not working? Where are we to look in order to be drawn out of that frustration? Well we're to look to this, that God has pronounced his purpose, he has given His promise of blessing to Abraham, through his seed Jesus Christ, to us who are the heirs of that promise. And His purpose is absolutely immutable. It is unchangeable. And we can rest our souls on the immutable purpose of God. The fascinating thing is this, it's just, it's so marvelous. This man must have been something to have as a minister, I can tell you, that there you are, when he's only done nine verses, and you're reeling. And now he's saying, fix your gaze on God's immutable purpose, and you're fixing your gaze on God's immutable purpose. And then he slides alongside you says, I'm not finished yet. That's just the start. Because you notice how he focuses our gaze not only on God's immutable purpose, but on what we might call an absolutely impossible act. Now this is this is rather startling what he says here. He's taking us back to Abraham and one of the famous verses in the Abraham narrative is Genesis 18:14, isn't it? There is Sarah laughing because she's gonna have a baby. And she's, she's a century. And the word of the Lord is there is nothing impossible with God. Now, if you and I, as believers are certain of anything, we are certain of this, there is nothing impossible with God.

Well this author is here to tell you there are two things that are impossible with God. Two things that are impossible with God. And he makes it quite clear. He actually says it. That by two things, verse 18, "two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie". Now, this isn't, this isn't high, sophisticated theology that we have to try and work out. He is saying to us, as a pastor, you need to know that are two things that are absolutely impossible for God. He cannot lie in relationship to his word of promise, and he cannot lie in relationship to the oath of his covenant. You notice how he puts it, he says, "He has given His word of promise." Beloved, he can't lie. He can't go back on his promise. Now, of course, you and I can go back on our promises. And and we often do, don't we? We don't mean to do it, usually. But we do it. So, so concerned about you, I'll pray for you. And you know, three days later, somebody says, Thank you so much for praying for me and you're covering your face. And, and you're embarrassed because it slipped out of your mind. You're a fallible human being and you have a fallible memory. I was reminded by more than one person this morning, I took 10 years off my life in

one of the services today, and I said it was 2003. Well some of you are doing well, considering the age that you are. You see, we are very forgetful, and we stumble, and we fall. And so we do something.

You go to court, and they want to hear the truth. I don't know what they say in American courts, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And they don't fully trust you and so they say you got to swear an oath here. We want your word and then we want you to swear an oath. And you can do it on the Bible or do it probably today on all kinds of things. But we want you to swear an oath. We want a double security to your testimony. And here's the amazing thing that we find in the narrative of Abraham and this great promise of which we are the ultimate heirs in the blessings that have come to us largely here in this church as Gentiles in our glorious Savior, Jesus Christ. He says God's word is his bond, he never lies, he can't lie. He'll never go back on his promise. But he says, here's an amazing thing. God has given His promise. And then he has said, and I also am prepared to take an oath. Now, when you and I take an oath, they bring something that they think is bigger than us something they think will have authority over us. So in the good old days, they would bring the Bible, why? Because you wouldn't swear your oath with your hand on the Word of God and, and take it all back, would you? Because this is an expression of the authority of your Creator over your life. Here's the amazing thing, the author of Hebrews says, He was obviously thrilled to discover this. And it's a thrilling thing to discover that he'd noticed in Scripture. It's always interesting, isn't it, to notice in Scripture, something nobody has ever told you is in Scripture. And the author of Hebrews was like that, as he read his Bible or memorized his, his narrative of Abraham, it suddenly dawned on him. This is absolutely startling. The God who never lies, has said, even although I never lie, I'm going to take an oath, on top of this promise, and in that oath, I will give you a double reassurance, I will never go back on my promise of blessing. And then he answers the question, we're all asking or the question he expects we'll all be asking. You and I, we, we put our hands on our Bibles. We believe that this Bible has more authority than we do. We put our hands on Bible and we say, Well, I swear by Almighty God that this is the truth. But who has God got to swear by? What can he appeal to? He says, when we take oaths, we always appeal to some greater authority than ourselves. To whom can God appeal? And then he makes this astonishing statement. He says, God has sworn by his own existence, that he will never fail to keep his promise of blessing to his people. You see what that means. That means God says to us, I would rather cease to exist, than begin to fail my people, or to cease to bless them. And so the author of Hebrews has seen it there in the Genesis story, he swore by Himself.

You remember the, the dramatic way in which that was impressed on Abraham, in Genesis 15? When the, when the darkness came upon him, and God had said, now, you'll understand this in a minute Abraham or in a lifetime, perhaps, but I want you to take some animals want you to cut them in pieces. And I want you to create parallel lines of those animals. Just think about our, think about our sanctuary here, and the lights all going out. And I've been at the butchers, and I've got these pieces of animals, and I'm, I'm lining up the middle aisle here and, and the light goes out. And we're all sitting here wondering what does this mean? And then a light appears, and it moves down the center aisle, between the pieces of these dismembered animals. What's it saying? This is actually related to the fact that in the Old Testament, you usually don't make a covenant, you cut a covenant. And the symbolism of the light, God is light passing down through the center aisle, in the midst of the darkness between these dismembered pieces of animals that have been slain is really God symbolically saying, if I failed to keep my promise of blessing to you, let me be as these dismembered animals. In two things in which it is impossible for God to lie. Now, why does he go to these lengths?

Well, Look at what he says here in verse 17. This is, what a pastor this fellow was. So, he says, -- it's fantastic what this man saw in his Bible. And the even more fantastic thing is that it was there in his Bible. You know, sometimes we preach or say, you know, it's clear, in the text here.

It's actually not clear in the text at all here. But he's seen it clearly in the text so that "by two unchangeable things in which it's impossible for God to lie we who have fled for refuge to our Lord Jesus Christ, might have strong encouragement". He makes His promise. His promise is enough, isn't it? His promises enough for you. You don't need God to swear oaths as well. But because he desired, this is just absolutely amazing. Because "he desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise, the unchangeable character of his purpose, guaranteed it with an oath so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible to lie, for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast". For he's done it just for you. He didn't need to do it for himself. He didn't need to do it for the Trinity. He didn't need to do it for the angels. He didn't need to do it at all. But you see the offer is, he's seeing something and the narrative here, he is seeing the amazing covenant generosity, kindness, tenderness, commitment, love, care, compassion, of this Savior God. It as though he'll go the 100th mile to reassure us that his promise will never fail, his words will never fall to the ground, his absolute determination to bless you is as sure as his very existence, because he's staked his existence on it, and he wants you to know it. Dear, dear friend, if you are here tonight, and, and you have all kinds of doubts about the way in which God is really committed to you think about this, he's staked his very existence on blessing you if you're his. And in these two things in which it's impossible for God to lie, he has most marvelously committed himself to his dear children.

So there is an immutable purpose. And there is an impossible act. And it leads of course, in the third place to this immovable anchor of which he speaks. Here, he says, you notice how this comes in, He says, "So we who have fled for refuge to the Lord can have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. And we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. A hope". So it looks as though the anchor about which he's speaking is this, hope of the gospel, to which we hold fast. A hope that enters into the inner place. He's using the language of the Old Testament temple to describe the glories of God's heavenly presence. This anchor enters into the inner place behind the curtain. He's thinking of Jesus as the high priest where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. Now, what's he saying here? He is saying there is, there is this anchor, as it were, that has been thrown into the very heart of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And it's tied to our hearts too, so that, in a sense, Jesus will either sink or swim with us, but he will never allow the anchor to break. And the glorious thing he says is that we are not anchored on earth. We're anchored in heaven and we're not just anchored in heaven. We're anchored to one who has gone into the very presence of God and who appears there on our behalf. He is the forerunner And in a sense, he is not only steadying us in this world, he is hauling us in to the world that is to come.

And that's why he adds this bit that may be a bit odd to us, that he's gone there as a forerunner on our behalf. Umm, I hope you understand that Jesus did not come from heaven for his own sake. He didn't need to come from heaven for his own sake. And so he's not gone back to heaven. for his own sake. He came for our sakes, and our salvation, and he's gone back there for our sakes and our salvation. He's there in the inner presence of God, and we are anchored to him. And he's never gonna let that anchor in any way be destroyed. And he's there in heaven for us as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. And he goes on to explain what he means by "after the order of Melchizedek". Melchizedek is that fellow who appears in Genesis 14, out of nowhere, and he disappears into nowhere. And the author of Hebrews, who apparently loves the Abraham story, says that he, he doesn't seem to belong to anybody. He just, he just comes out of eternity and he goes into eternity. And that's just like the Lord Jesus. He has gone into heaven for us. And he is there forever, as the high priest to whom we are anchored. And that's why you remember at the end of this great book, the author says, and this "Jesus is the same yesterday, yesterday" when he walked the face of the earth; "today", as he is now in the presence of God, and "forever". He will never ever change and he will never fail to be our Savior.

That's why we often love to sing Chairty Bancroft's hymn:

*Before the throne of God above.
I have a strong and perfect plea
A great high priest whose name is love.
Whoever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on his hands,
My name is written on his heart.
I know that while in heaven He stands,
No tongue can bid me thence depart. "*

And then this,

*When Satan tempts me to despair,
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see him there.
Who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died,
My sinful soul is counted free.
For God the Justice is satisfied
To look on him and pardon me".*

That's why anchored to such a savior -- knowing that you have this anchor of the soul that is immovable. Knowing that there are two things that for God are impossible. And knowing that has purpose is unchangeable. You can throw yourself into that purpose. Do you know that marvelous part of George MacDonald's little fantasy story, the *Golden Key* when the hero in the piece comes to the old man of the earth, and he's looking for blessing. He's looking for the meaning of life. He's looking for security. And we're told by McDonald, the old man of the earth, stooped over the floor of the cave, and raised a huge stone from it and left leaning. It disclosed a great hole that went plumbed down. "This is the way", he said. And the hero responds, "But there are no stairs". And the old man of the sea says, "Yes, you must throw yourself in. There is no other way". And what Hebrews is saying, as we, as we throw ourselves into the future with Jesus Christ, is that the arms of God are strong and able, well able to sustain us because he has pledged his very existence to bless us. And that's why in His grace, we're able, individually and together to make fresh covenant with him, that he will do with us as He pleases.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Our Heavenly Father, we pray as you have given us your word, with the strong consolation of its truth, with the assurance that through faith, we are anchored to Jesus Christ. We pray that you would give to each of us a gracious sense that you desire, that we should be absolutely convinced of the security that you give us through faith in our beloved Savior, and that you will work everything together for good for those who love you, are called according to your purpose. Since you did not spare your own Son but have given him up on the cross for us all. We believe that you will also with him, freely give us all things. Lead us into such assurance and its joy and it's stability we pray, for Jesus Christ our Savior sake. Amen.