

An Anchored Hope
Hebrews 6:16-18
Part Two

All of us here have many earthly hopes. If you are a young person you might be hoping that you might do well on a particular test. Or you might be hoping that you might be able to pass your driving test or perhaps you might be able to get a job. If you are a young adult you might be hoping just to find just the right person to marry. Or perhaps it may that you are hoping to establish yourself in a good career. Or perhaps if you are a newly married couple you may be hoping that one day you might be blessed with children. All of us in this room have earthly hopes.

But let me ask you something about those hopes. Are any of them certain? No, our earthly hopes are uncertain. This does not mean that we cannot or should not have earthly hopes but it does mean that we better earn not to hold on to these hopes too tightly.

But just because are earthly hopes may be very uncertain and should not be held on to too tightly, that does not mean that every hope is uncertain. There is a hope that is very certain and that we need to hold on to very tightly.

And this thought brings us back to our passage. We are presently studying the Book of Hebrews. This book was written by an unknown author to a group of struggling Hebrew Christians living in Rome, who under a great persecution were considering leaving the Christian faith in order to return to Judaism. The author in response to this struggle wrote this particular book in order to strengthen their faith so that they, in having their faith strengthened, might be able to persevere.

In seeking to accomplish this goal, he sought to focus his reader's attention on the superiority of Christ. So, what have we seen so far in our ongoing study of this epistle and therefore in our ongoing study of Christ's superiority?

We have seen that Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets. We have seen that Christ is superior to the angels. We have seen that Christ is superior to Moses. And now we are seeing that Christ's priesthood is

superior to all other priesthoods (Hebrews 4:14-10:18). This section began in **Hebrews 4:14** and will continue all the way down through **Hebrews 10:18**.

So how did the author begin this section? The author began this section by focusing his readers attention on Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry in **Hebrews 4:14-16**. After this the author pointed out to his readers that Christ's appointment to His heavenly high priestly ministry was according to the order Melchizedek. He did this in **Hebrews 5:1-10**. So then what did the author do?

The author, after having introduced the Son's divine appointment according to the order of Melchizedek, then took a strategic detour in order to warn his readers in Hebrews 5:11-6:20. And this is the section we are presently in. We are in this warning section.

So how did the author begin this warning section? The author began this warning section with an exhortation (Hebrews 5:11-6:3). This exhortation can be found in **Hebrews 5:11-6:3**. And what was his exhortation? It was to **"pursue maturity."** And why did he give them this exhortation? He gave them this exhortation because they, in having become **"dull of hearing,"** had spiritually regressed to the point that they were having difficulty distinguishing between good and evil, which obviously left them extremely vulnerable. And what was the cure for their present spiritual condition?

Pursuing maturity was the cure. Or in other words, if they wanted to be cured of their problem they needed to be far more energetic toward pursuing the truths of God's Word and seeking to apply those truths to their lives.

So if they failed to heed this exhortation and continued to be as lethargic as they were toward the word of God, could there have been dire consequences for them? Absolutely! And this led us to the next part of our text.

After the author exhorted his readers he then presented a harsh warning (Hebrews 6:4-8). He presented this harsh warning in **Hebrews 6:4-8**. And how did this harsh warning begin? It began in **Hebrews 6:4-6** with an assertion, that it is impossible to renew to **repentance** those who fall away after they had enjoyed certain spiritual blessings.

This assertion was obviously a warning. But to whom among this congregation was this warning being directed? Was it being directed toward those within the congregation who had truly exercised genuine living saving faith or was it being directed to those within the congregation who, though professing faith and blessed in various ways by their attachment to that congregation, had never truly exercised genuine living saving faith and therefore when tested might fall away?

And what was our conclusion? Our conclusion was that this warning was being directed toward those within the congregation, who though professing and blessed in various ways by their attachment to that congregation, had never truly exercised true genuine saving faith. They were like Judas. Judas had attached himself to Christ and to Christ's disciples. He had been blessed in various ways because of that attachment but even in spite of all that he enjoyed in the way of blessings he had never truly exercised genuine living saving faith or in other words he never had become a true disciple of Christ. And what was the proof of that? He fell away.

So after this harsh warning in **Hebrews 6:4-8** then what did the author do? After the author's harsh warning he then softened it in Hebrews 6:9-12. He initially softened it by addressing them as "**beloved**" and then he further softened it by telling them that even in spite of their present struggles that he was convinced of "**better things**" concerning them or in other words he was convinced that they, rather than falling away when tested, would continue to persevere until that day when their earthly life ended and they entered into their promised eternal rest.

And why was he so confident of this? He was confident of this because he saw their ongoing ministry to one another in the midst of all that they were suffering to be actual evidence of their genuine faith and love toward God.

This was the conviction of the author but that was not enough for him. He also wanted it to be the conviction of his readers as well. So, what did the author do next?

After the author had softened his harsh warning he emphasized God's trustworthiness and thus certainty of their future hope (Hebrews 6:13-20). He did this in order that that they might be as convinced as he was, that if they continued to persevere, as he believed they would persevere, they

would in fact experience the eternal rest that they in Christ had been promised.

So how did the author go about emphasizing God's trustworthiness and thus the certainty of that promised eternal rest? The author began with the example of Abraham (Hebrews 6:13-15).

Let me now read for you **Hebrews 6:13-15** and see if this is not so. **“For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, (14) saying, ‘I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.’ (15) And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.”** So, based on these verses, did the author as he began to emphasize God's trustworthiness and the certainty of their future hope begin by highlighting the example of Abraham? Yes! Absolutely!

God had promised Abraham on multiple occasions either directly or indirectly that He would bless him and multiply him and that his descendants would be so vast in number it would be as difficult for him to count his future descendants as it would for him to count the stars in the heavens. This is what God promised Abraham. This promise was just one of several promises made to Abraham by God in what has become commonly known as the Abrahamic Covenant which can be found in **Genesis 12:1-3**.

So did Abraham see the fulfillment of what God had promised in respect to his descendants? Yes! What did the author say in **verse 15**? **“And so, having patiently waited, he [Abraham] obtained the promise.”** The author was able to say that Abraham had obtained what was promised because Abraham with his eyes of faith was obviously able to see, in the extraordinary birth of Isaac, the fulfillment of what God had promised him.

So, what was the author's point? Based on the example of Abraham, God is trustworthy and His word is trustworthy. So after the author used the example of Abraham to make this particular point, what did the author do next in order to continue to advance that point?

The author focused on oaths (Hebrews 6:16-18). And this brings us to our text this morning. So now let me read for you **Hebrews 6:16-18**. **“For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. (17) In the same way God,**

desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, (18) so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.” So did the author in these verses, in a continuing attempt to highlight the trustworthiness of God and His word, transition from the example of Abraham to focusing on oaths? Yes, he did. So how did this author go about doing this?

The author began by explaining human oaths (Hebrews 6:16). So, what did the author explain?

The first thing that he explained about human oaths was that **“For men swear by one greater than themselves.”** This certainly was something that these readers would have known, for in biblical times oath taking was quite common.

And who typically in biblical times was this greater person upon whom people would swear? God! In fact, in **Deuteronomy 6:13** we discover that swearing in God’s name was actually prescribed. And because it was prescribed it should not be surprising to us that when people in biblical times were taking oaths that it would be common for them to swear in the name of God.

So now let me ask you this question. How would people in biblical times have viewed an individual who, having sworn in God’s name, was later discovered to have lied? They would have viewed him as in violation of the third commandment or in other words they would have viewed him as in violation of the command, **“Thou shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.”**

So how big a deal was this if a person chose to violate this third commandment? It was an extremely big deal. For if a person was discovered to have lied after he or she had sworn in God’s name, what was punishment? The punishment according to **Leviticus 24:16** was death.

Lying under oath while swearing in God’s name was an extremely big deal. And because of this, oaths were used in order to serve two different purposes, both of which this author spelled out for his readers in the last half of **verse 16.**

So now let us now go back to **verse 16** and continue to read and what does it say? **“For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them** [or in other words with those men and women who are swearing in this way] **an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.”** If a person was willing to swear by God’s name knowing the severe consequences that could result either by the hand of man or by the hand of God it certainly could have been used and certainly was used as a powerful tool, both to confirm what had been spoken, as well as to put an end to a particular dispute. And both of these purposes were very much in play in biblical times when oaths were given in the name of God.

Can we still use oaths to confirm something as well as to end disputes? Yes! Absolutely! But we had better be careful, for taking God’s name in vain has been in the past and continues to be in the present a very serious thing and therefore it should not be entered into lightly.

So, what did the author do next? The author then explained how God’s oath to Abraham had in the same way as human oaths confirmed to “heirs of the promise” the unchangeableness of God’s purpose toward them (Hebrews 6:17).

So let me now read for you **Hebrews 6:17** and see if this is not so. **“In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath.”** So based on this verse did this author, after he had explained human oaths to his readers, then go on to explain to these same readers how God had also in the same way used God’s oath to Abraham to confirm to **“the heirs of the promise”** the unchangeableness of God’s purpose toward them? Yes! He did.

So who are these “heirs of the promise”? “The heirs of the promise” in this context are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, who through faith in Christ belong to Christ and thus share in the blessings promised and subsequently confirmed by God with an oath to Abraham (Galatians 3:29 cf. Genesis 12:3).

So how do we know this to be true, that the **“heirs of the promise”** are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, who through faith in Christ belong to Christ and thus share in the blessings promised?

Let me read for you **Galatians 3:29**. “**And if you** [speaking to Galatian Christians] **belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.**”

So who are the heirs of the promise? They are spiritual descendants of Abraham, who have through faith in Christ come to belong to Christ.

So, what was this specific blessing that was promised to them by God through Abraham and was confirmed for them by God through His oath? It was the blessing of salvation made possible through faith in Christ.

Let me read for you **Galatians 3:7-8** and see if this is not so. “**Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. (8) The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you.’**”

God gave a promise to Abraham that in him or in other words through his descendant, which we know to be the Lord Jesus Christ, all the nations of the world would be blessed? Blessed with what? Blessed with justification or in other words salvation. This is the promise that has been given to us through Abraham if we have in fact exercised faith in Christ and become an “**heir of the promise.**”

So if we have become the “**heirs of the promise**” or in other words **the “heirs of the promise of salvation”** and we understand that God swore an oath to Abraham so that we as the “heirs of the promise, the promise of salvation” might become even more sure concerning the unchangeableness of His purpose toward us in respect to our salvation. Then what?

Let me read for you **Hebrews 6:18** and what does it say? “**So that by two unchangeable things** [or in other words God’s promise and God’s oath] **in which it is impossible for God to lie** [which certainly taught in the Scriptures], **we who have taken refuge** [or in other words we who have taken refuge from sin and the consequences of sin through faith in Christ as the spiritual seed of Abraham] **would have strong** [What?] **encouragement** [through the promise and the oath] **to take hold of the hope set before us.**”

So, what is this hope that the heirs of the promise are to take hold of? The hope set before “the heirs of the promise” that they are to take hold as the spiritual descendants of Abraham is the certain hope of heaven made possible through faith in Christ. This is the certain hope that the heirs of the promise are to take hold of. It is the certain hope of heaven.

Or in other words, if we have in fact become an heir of the promise through faith in Christ, it is the certain hope that one day we will be entering into the heavenly sanctuary where Christ is now ministering according to **Hebrews 6:20**. It is the certain hope that one day we will be entering the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God according to **Hebrews 11:10**. It is the certain hope that one day we will be entering into that lasting city that we are now seeking according to **Hebrews 13:14**.

We are not simply to touch this certain hope or to periodically visit this certain hope; we are to take hold of it and never let it go. We are to take hold of it today. We are to take hold of it tomorrow. We are to continuously take hold of it.

When we get up in the morning let us thank God for our certain hope. When we go through the day and are reminded of the uncertainty of earthly hopes let us again take that time to thank God for our certain hope. If we begin to daydream of earthly things let us ask for grace to daydream about the glorious day when we, in God’s time, will finally enter the heaven and into eternal fellowship with Him who loved and gave Himself for us.

If we do this what will happen? We will discover that our affection for the things of this world will diminish while our affection for the things above will increase.

All of us here have many earthly hopes. But all of our earthly hopes are very uncertain. But if we are genuine born again believers there is a certain hope that has been set before us that is, based on the trustworthiness of God and His word, is the hope of heaven.

So in light of this, may God give us the grace as the heirs of promise to take hold of the hope that is set before us.