

SERMON
SERIES

AND WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE HIM, FOR WHOEVER WOULD DRAW NEAR TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS AND THAT HE REWARDS THOSE WHO SEEK HIM.

HEBREW'S



26

LET US DRAW NEAR IN *Faith*HEBREW'S
VERSE BY
VERSE STUDY**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 6:13-20**

To better understand the things that belong to salvation.

Read the Text:

"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. 16 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. 19 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." (Hebrews 6:13-20, ESV)

Study the Text:**The Oath of God**

Over the last several weeks, beginning with Hebrews 5:11, the author has spent considerable time addressing the human responsibility to live faithfully before the Lord. We have been warned of the dangers of becoming "dull of hearing," (Heb. 5:11). We have been reminded to stop bickering over the foundational doctrines of Christ (Heb. 6:1-3). We have been reminded of the wilderness generation's unbelief and their subsequent "falling away" to help explain why some fall away in the new covenant as well (Heb. 6:4-8). We have also been told to find encouragement in our past faithfulness (Heb. 6:9-12). If we are not careful, we might start to feel like the hope we have in Christ is up to us! Hebrews 6:13-20, however, returns to the eternal work of God in Christ as the "anchor of the soul," reminding us that ultimately we can rest in the finished, perfect work of Christ. The author uses an Old Testament example of oaths to highlight the assurance we have of God's promises in Christ, thereby setting up chapter 7. Below is a breakdown of some of the keywords and concepts in this passage.

AN EXAMPLE OF ASSURANCE

Verse 13 begins by reminding us of a time “when God made a promise to Abraham,” but which promise? There are several passages in Genesis where God promises Abraham a variety of blessings. However, a couple of details help us understand which promise is in mind. First, at the end of verse 13, it says: “He swore by himself.” This, coupled with a quotation from God to Abraham, indicates that Genesis 22:16 is in mind: “Surely, I will bless you and multiply you.” To understand why the author uses this example, we must first examine Genesis 22.

Genesis 22 is a fundamentally important chapter in the Bible for several reasons. It not only demonstrates God's faithfulness to His people but also prefigures the Father's sacrifice of the Son. Genesis 22 begins with God “testing” Abraham by asking him to take “your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen. 22:2). After being obedient to the point of nearly actually sacrificing Isaac, Abraham is told to “lay a hand” on the boy because it has been made evident of his faithfulness to obey God (Gen. 22:12). God further provided a ram as a substitutionary sacrifice (Gen. 22:13). God then says in verses 16 and 17: “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.” The Lord, swearing by himself, promises to bless and multiply. Hebrews 6 picks up on this story, reminding us that just as God swore “by himself” to Abraham to fulfill the promises He made to him, so too did God “swear by himself” to us in the new covenant. Moreover, that Abraham “having patiently waited, obtained the promise” (Heb. 6:15), so too are we to be patient knowing that the promises of God in Christ will come to us. And in order to further strengthen this idea, the concept of “oath-making” is brought into the discussion.

AN EXAMPLE IN EXTRA-BIBLICAL HISTORY

Oaths were a well-established practice in the ancient world, and New Testament scholar George Guthrie has provided two historical characteristics of oath-making that are pertinent to our text:

- (1) They require an appeal to one higher in status than the oath-giver.
- (2) Witnesses swear an oath given in court in order to bring about a ‘confirmation’ or to provide a legal guarantee of a testimony's truthfulness, thus strengthening the case being presented.¹

Essentially, to swear by an oath requires a person to swear by someone higher in status than the one who is making the pledge. This grounds their oath in an authority greater than themselves, thereby placing them under real consequences if they break their oath. Further, their oaths are to be done in a setting where witnesses are present, so again, if the oath is broken, there is just cause for retribution. In this case, there is no one higher than God, and thus God must “swear by himself.” Further, he does so in his own presence since ultimately God is the final judge in all things. God is, then, in a real sense, holding himself to his own authoritative standard. God's promise to Abraham is grounded in his immutable (unchanging) and powerful Being. Hebrews is making the case that the same is true for the promises God has made to us in Christ.

¹ George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary, eds. Terry C. Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 241-242.

TWO UNCHANGEABLE THINGS

One important question, however, is determining what the “two unchangeable things” are that are mentioned in 18. It is these “two unchangeable things” that provide “strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.” They are an “anchor for the soul.” But what are they?

Verse 20 implies the answer. Verse 20 revisits the priesthood of Jesus Christ as part of the order of Melchizedek, previously mentioned in Hebrews 5:1-10. This priesthood, along with Hebrews 5, additionally calls to mind Psalm 110. And in Psalm 110, there are two unchangeable truths that Hebrews 5 has already reported:

- (1) *Jesus has been appointed a priest by God the Father.*
- (2) *Jesus Christ’s priesthood is not part of the Levitical priesthood but of the order of Melchizedek.*

That is the encouragement intended to provide an anchor for the soul. This reality, that Jesus is the high priest able to “enter into the inner place behind the curtain” and make atonement for our sins, is a strong encouragement for us, especially in moments of great trouble.

What About Now?

After several passages that remind us of the importance of our own faithfulness and the dangers we face if we become “dull of hearing,” the Christian life might start to feel a little overwhelming. The author recognizes the potential for us, the readers, to walk away from this with the idea that our hope for the future is essentially up to us. Verses 13 through 20 counteract that potential reaction by reminding us that our hope is not contingent on us but on the eternal high priest, Jesus Christ, who has been appointed by God within a higher priesthood to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. While life may become increasingly difficult, we can hold fast to the “anchor of the soul,” Christ Jesus, who has made atonement for our sins and granted us eternal hope.

Study Questions**Day One**

1. Read Hebrews 6:13. To whom did God make a promise? By whom did he “swear?” Why is this significant?

2. Read Hebrews 6:14. What verse is quoted here? How is it being used in the context of Hebrews 6?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 6:15. What did Abraham have to do? What was the result of this?

2. Read Hebrews 6:16. What two aspects of oath-making are mentioned here (and in the notes)?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 6:17. How did God guarantee the promise of his unchangeable character?

2. Read Hebrews 6:18. What are the “two unchangeable things” mentioned in this verse?

Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 6:19. What is the function of the “unchangeable things” for believers in Christ?

2. Read Hebrews 6:20. Where has Jesus gone? In what capacity does He act?

Discuss the Text!

Session 15 Discussion: The Anchor

Hebrews 6 brings up an important reality concerning the promises of God. Sometimes, life is tumultuous, and we are stretched in ways we don't want to be. In these moments, we need an “anchor for the soul,” to help us stay grounded in our faith. Christ, the high priest who makes atonement for us, is that anchor. Talk as a group about how the promises of God in Christ, specifically for redemption and future resurrection, have served you as an anchor in times of great difficulty.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever been on a boat that stopped its engines, but didn't have an anchor? Did you notice the drift?
2. When life gets difficult, how does Jesus Christ as high priest help “anchor” you in your faith?
3. How does the priesthood of Christ push back against doubt, especially as it pertains to your salvation?
4. Do you ever need reminders of God's faithfulness in your life? How do you remind yourself?
5. Kid Talk: Show your kids a picture of an anchor and explain how it secures a boat in the water, preventing it from drifting. Now, talk to your kids about how God's promises serve as an “anchor for the soul,” preventing us from drifting spiritually.

Takeaways:

1. God has sworn that Jesus Christ is an appointed high priest in the order of Melchizedek.
2. God has made an oath in which He swore “by Himself” that this is true.
3. God's promises are trustworthy because they are grounded in His unchanged Being.