

## Heb. 6:13-20 The Promise of God

Today's sermon is about the promise of God. In fact, if we could sum up this letter to the Hebrews it would be this: God has promised and God has fulfilled his promise in Christ. And as a pastor, he is very practical. He desires that the word of God, particularly hope in the promise of God give strong encouragement, so they may hold fast, keep going, continue trusting, keep relying, until the end. Look at vv. 11-12: **"We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end . . . so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."** Here, he urges them to imitate the faith of those who had gone before. In the same way, these words from God are for us. I hope and pray they will be effective today as we consider them. With this in mind, I have 3 truths about the promise of God: 1) The nature of God's promise; 2) The fulfillment of God's promise; and 3) The result of God's promise.

1. The Nature of God's promise. Here we see the example of God's promise to Abraham. And, the author's point is that the promise of God is SURE. We must have no doubt that God will bring about ALL his promises. Why? Because God does not change! He cannot lie! Look at vv. 13-18: "Look at vv. 13-14: **"For 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."** Here we see God making a promise and then, to confirm this promise, he guarantees his promise with an oath.

This is very interesting. God cannot lie. He always tells the truth. He always does what He says. He cannot do otherwise. And it isn't that he merely chooses not to lie. He cannot. It is against his nature! He is immutable! Can a leopard change its spots? Or my favorite from this week, *"Does a dog go on a brick wall?"* Can I stop the aging process on my body? Can I stop the tides in the ocean? No! . . . .

Now, we sometimes make promises. And when we do, we often try to convince those with whom we are promising that we will surely do it by giving an oath. We say things like, *"I swear on my mother's grave that I will pay you back."* Have you ever heard that one? Or, *"I swear on a stack of Bibles that I am telling you the truth."* This is why, historically, when we go to court as a witness, we *"swear we are telling the truth"* and we give an oath by putting our hand on the Bible. You see, what we do in these cases is to promise something . . . . and then confirm our promise swearing upon something that we have great value, such as the Bible, or our mother's grave.

In the same kind of way, God enters the courtroom of heaven and earth and when he promises and makes an oath, he is saying, ***"I AM! I am supreme! I am all glorious! I am holy! I am the maker and sustainer of heaven and earth! No one can value my worth! Therefore, I swear upon myself."*** Brothers and sisters, there is nothing, no one, in both heaven and earth who has

more value than God. He is holy! He is righteous! He is good! He is all powerful, all knowing, all encompassing! He is life! He is everlasting light! And He cannot change! There are NONE like Him! He is the LORD!

Can you imagine doubting such a God . . . who makes a promise? This is why God says to Israel of Isaiah's time as they doubted his promise: "**Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem?**" (Is. 50:2). In ALL of Israel's rebellion and idolatry through the years, why does God not completely cast them away? He does not because He has promised to keep them and bless them and save both them and the nations? Why? Because He has promised. Is. 48:9: "**For MY name's sake I defer my anger; for the sake of MY praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off.**"

Listen to these words from Is. 46:8-11, God says: "**Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.**"

With this in mind, we must ask, "Why does the author remind his readers?" Look at v. 18 again: "**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 . . .**" God himself does not need to make an oath. But, he does it for us! And this is the nature of God's promise. It is unchangeable! It is sure! (We will apply this at the end.)

2. The Fulfillment of God's promise. Now, let's turn our attention to the specifics of the promise and its fulfillment. Here, the author uses Abraham as an example. Look at v. 13: "**For when God made a promise to Abraham . . .**" So what was the promise? Look at v. 14: "**Surely I will bless you and multiply you.**" Here we see that God will "bless" and God will "multiply." This is just a summary of the promise of God to Abraham. Let's think back for a moment. On at least 3 occasions we see God make a promise to Abraham (12:1-3; 18:17-18; 22:17-18) and this promise is often affirmed (15:5; 17:1-8). And in essence, they are the same. When God first called Abraham (Abram) he says, "**Go to a land I will show you and I will make you a great nation. I will make your name great, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed** (Gen 12). Here we see land, offspring, and universal blessing. There are many who focus ONLY on these promises, land, offspring, and universal blessing. But, here, we must see that Abraham and the promises of Abraham are only a type, to which they point to something greater. YES, they are blessings, but they only extend to the earth, this life. But, in Christ, the blessings of God go beyond these blessings to their ultimate fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth.

Abraham was around 70 years old when he received God's call and God's promise. And he left his land and headed to Canaan where he waited patiently. For more than 20 years both Abraham and Sarah continued to age, to the point where Sarah could no longer have children. She's too old! Now, if God's promise included children and they were too old, what do you think they thought about God's promise to make their descendants more numerous than the stars? (If you

can't physically have children, then God has broken his promise, right?) So, Abraham tries to take things into his own hands and a son from Sarah's midwife is born (Ishmael). But, Ishmael is NOT the son of the promise! And then, when Abraham and Sarah are old almost 100 years old, and after 25 years of waiting for God's promise to even begin to be fulfilled, they have a miraculous child, Isaac! Now, look back at v. 15 again: "**And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.**" Now, there are many commentators who believe that this "promise" in Hebrews, refers to Isaac. After all, he waited "patiently" for 25 years and God fulfilled his promise in giving Isaac. And 25 years is a long time to wait.

Now . . . this is certainly true! Isaac was key to God fulfilling his promise. And Abraham did receive this PART of God's promise. But, I do not think the author of Hebrews limits God's promise to Isaac only. You see, our author is quoting Gen. 22:17, which was given AFTER the birth of Isaac. You see, there was so much more to the promise given to Abraham. Still, there was land, and countless descendants that would cover the earth, and universal blessings. Look at Heb. 11:13: Speaking about all the OT saints, he says "**These (including Abraham) all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.**"

Let me ask some questions: "*Was God's promise fulfilled in Abraham's time? Was it fulfilled in Christ two thousand years ago? Will it be fulfilled in the future?*" Yes, Yes, and Yes. I believe God fulfills his promises in installments. With Abraham it was Isaac, some land, some descendants, some blessings. And as we continue, Israel gets all the land, their descendants become very numerous. Today, what is happening? We are called the "sons of Abraham." We are the "seed of Abraham." We have the same faith in the same God who makes the same promises. And in Christ, we see the true Son of Promise. Since Jesus' birth and life and death and resurrection and ascension to the Father, what is happening to the fulfillment of this promise now? The gospel is going to the Nations! This is why we go!

But, we still wait for a city whose builder and maker is God. We still wait with fallen creation even as it groans for redemption. We still wait for new bodies that will be given at the return of Christ. These words were for those Hebrew Christians as they were being persecuted. These words are for us today, as we go through the same trials and temptations and even persecutions in this age. And let me ask, "*How did Abraham wait for the promise that he did not receive?*" He waited with steadfast patience. After the birth of Isaac, there was another 75 years of waiting. This is our example as we wait for the promise of God to be completely fulfilled! And if everything was fulfilled in Christ's first coming, then why would he urge them and us to continue to wait with patience (and many other exhortations). Look back at 4:9-10: "**So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.**" Now, let me try and bring this together with great application in truth #3.

3. The Result of God's promise. For us, what is the result? With these truths before us, how do we live in this world. We live with HOPE that waits patiently for complete fulfillment. Look again at the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of v 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.**" After rebuking them sharply and telling them to move on to maturity

and then giving them the warning of apostasy, as a good pastor, he reminds them of this great promise. Go back to v. 11: **“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of . . . hope until the end . . .”** And also v. 18: **“we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us . . .”** Look at v. 19. We have a **“hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain . . .”**

Just as Abraham waited patiently for the promise, we must do the same. This promise is for Christians! It is not for the world. It is for **“those who have fled for refuge . . .”** This is what I did more than 30 years ago when I trusted Christ. I was dead in my trespasses and sins, without hope, standing under the wrath and displeasure of God. My faith was in the things of this world. My hope had no foundation. And this is the case of all those outside of Christ. Now, look at vv. 19-20: **“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.”**

Here, we see the picture of an anchor. What does an anchor do? It secures a ship so that it doesn't move. It can't drift ashore or run aground and be destroyed. An anchor lies unseen at the bottom of the sea. In the same way, our hope lies anchored in the highest of heaven, “where Jesus has gone on our behalf.” Brothers and sisters we can dislodge an earthly anchor if we have the right tools, etc. But, we cannot dislodge Christ from heaven. And that is where our hope lies. It is secure! No one can remove him from there. God has fulfilled his promise in Christ. Now, we can certainly say that Christ is our anchor. But this text says that “hope” is our anchor. And our anchor is fastened secure in Christ, who sits in heaven!

So what does this mean for us today? Let me end with some comments about hope.

Let's think for a moment about hope, compared to faith and love. In 1 Cor. 13:13 Paul says, **“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”** The reason love remains is because one day there will be no need for faith and hope. We will see him as he is. Faith and hope are for today! These are precious gifts to us from God. Faith looks to God. The object of our faith is the ONE who makes the promise. Abraham “BELIEVED” God. This is faith. But, hope is fixed on God's promise to save, and in fact all of his promises to us in this world. Do you see the difference? Faith says, **“I know whom I have believed I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me”** (2 Tim. 1:12). But, hope is fixed upon God's promises. Hope looks through the Bible and sees ALL God's promises, and in the midst of life's difficulties, says, “I can go on. I will wait with patience. God cannot lie. He does not change. He will fulfill ALL of what He has said.” Hope sustains us under the difficulties and discouragements in this life.

In 1 Thess. 5:8-11 we read: **“since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”** This is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is saying. When the sharp blows of this world come your way, when sickness or weakness, or discouragement or doubt, etc. comes at you in waves, you have the helmet of hope that protects you. Hope values the things promised and looks forward to the day of realization,

no matter how long it takes. The OT saints all died. Many Christians of the new covenant have gone before. We are still here. But, we have a hope that is anchored in heaven where Christ sits.

There are many today that pretend to have a hope who have no faith. Others make a profession of faith who yet have no real hope. But real faith and real hope are inseparable. A.W. Pink says, "*A spiritual faith eyes the Promiser, and is assured that He cannot lie. A spiritual hope embraces the promises, esteems them above all silver and gold and confidently anticipates their fulfillment.*" Brothers and sisters, if this is the case in your life, you will have great comfort and joy that will take you all the way to heaven.

So today, Christian, take great comfort in this: Your hope has gone beyond the veil, it is fixed in heaven. Your assurance and confidence is founded upon the unchanging nature of God, who fulfills all his promises. And you can go through this life with PATIENCE. Can there anything more stable for the soul than this truth today.