

SERIES: The Absolute Supremacy of Christ in Hebrews  
 SERMON: *An Anchor for the Soul*  
 SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 6:13-20  
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black  
 DATE: January 10, 2010

Many of you have made New Year's resolutions. How are you doing? It is now January 10<sup>th</sup>; so that's 10 days down 355 to go (you're 3% of the way there). My guess is that most of you have stuck with your goal so far, but I would also venture to say that some of you have already fallen off the wagon. It's not too late to get back on track. If the resolutions you have made are worth keeping I can assure you that you will face many obstacles in keeping them. I encourage you to maintain your resolve to accomplish your goal, especially if you were one of many people in this congregation who resolved to read through the Bible this year. Persevere in your resolution, whatever it is.

Perseverance in resolutions is one thing, but perseverance in faith is another. And that is what I want to talk about today. I want you to be encouraged this morning to persevere in your faith in Jesus.

I'm becoming increasingly convinced as we study Hebrews that the main weight of this letter is a call for Christians to persevere in their faith. We see a clear picture of this in chapter 6.

**6:11-12** *We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. <sup>12</sup>We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

Perseverance is the theme of this letter, but perseverance isn't easy. What's easy is getting off track. And when we get off track it's easy to become discouraged. The pressures of this world make it hard to persevere. The sinfulness of our hearts makes it hard to persevere. And so if we're going to persevere in our faith, we need strong encouragement.

Our time here on earth is like being in a boat that is constantly being pulled away from God. In order to persevere and to stay steady we need a strong anchor; something that can hold us to the end, as we *go on to maturity* (6:1).

When you're in a boat that is being buffeted by the wind and the waves you need an anchor. But that anchor must be attached to something solid. If your anchor is attached to a rock, for instance, the solidness of that rock will be transferred from the anchor to the boat; the solidness of the rock will stabilize the boat. We need an anchor that is attached to something solid if we're going to persevere, but often times our anchor is only in sand and as a result we find our boat slowly drifting. When we anchor ourselves to things that move we too will move; we will drift in our faith. I'd like to look at a few things that we tend to anchor ourselves to:<sup>1</sup>

1.) The material. We trust in the security of the house we live in, the neighborhood we live in. We trust in the security of our career or even just the significance of having a career. We trust in

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<sup>1</sup> These thoughts were influenced by Tim Keller's sermon, October 4, 1992.

the performance of our 401K. We trust in the comforts that money affords us. The reason I know we do this is because of the inordinate amount of time we spend on these things. Material things are like sand. In order to persevere in the faith we need a stronger anchor than the material.

2.) Each other. Healthy relationships are good and can be a source of encouragement. But even the most healthy relationships will disappoint us because we are dealing with fellow sinners and people let us down from time to time. And when people let us down we become discouraged. In order to persevere in the faith we need a stronger anchor than relationships with other people.

3.) Ourselves. When other people fail us we have a tendency to look to ourselves. But we too are like sand. We are inconsistent and sinful. If we put our trust in ourselves we will eventually become discouraged.

This may sound like a pagan notion, but a lot of us, if we are honest, would have to admit that many times in our lives we have put our assurance of salvation in ourselves. It is easy to think that if our faith is strong enough and our deeds are good enough that we will be okay.

I actually lived under this illusion for the first 9 or 10 years of my Christian life, until I reached a real crisis of faith. And that crisis of faith was brought about by Hebrews 6:4-6 which we studied last week.

**6:4-6** *It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.*

(If you missed last week's sermon on that passage I encourage you to listen to it online.) When I was introduced to this passage I was terrified because I had been living an immoral life. I was afraid that I had backslidden too far and that it would be impossible for me to be brought back to repentance. And a passage like this should be a strong warning for anyone who is living their life the way that I was, but verses 4-6 are only 3 verses in a chapter. We must read the rest of the chapter to see the context. The rest of the chapter shows us that our assurance of salvation can only come from God – who he is and what he has done – not from who we are or what we do.

I was focused on myself – even though I was focused on my sinfulness and unfaithfulness. Maybe you are focused on your virtue and your strong faith. Either way, when we make ourselves the focus we eventually become discouraged. I was so discouraged I didn't want to go on in the faith because I thought it was futile. I had lived such an up and down life for nine years and thought that nothing would ever be different. I was discouraged because I was putting my hope of eternity in my own character and my own works. That was not a strong enough anchor for me, and that is not a strong enough anchor for you.

We need a stronger anchor and a stronger encouragement. Our assurance should come from who God is and what he has done. If we keep our eyes fixed on Him we will have the encouragement we need to persevere in the faith. Let's read our passage for this morning.

**6:13-20** *When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup>saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." <sup>15</sup>And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.*

<sup>16</sup>*Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. <sup>17</sup>Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. <sup>18</sup>God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. <sup>19</sup>We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup>where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*

We're going to look at two things this morning: 1) who God is and 2) what he has done. It is my prayer that these two things will encourage you to persevere in the faith with full assurance. Let's look first at God's character.

### **God's character: God keeps his promises. (vv. 13-18)**

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The first thing this text does is give us an example of someone who found their encouragement to persevere in the character of God. In the last verse of the previous section the writer said...

**6:12** *We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

Who does the writer want us to imitate? Abraham. Abraham is a good example of perseverance. Abraham was not a superhero, by any means. He was an ordinary, sinful man, just like you and me. But his confidence wasn't in himself; his confidence was in God and the promise God had given him found in verse 14.

**6:14** *"I will surely bless you and give you many descendants."*

Abraham was 75 years old when God promised that he and his wife Sarah would have a son and not only a son, but many descendants. God promised Abraham that he would make him into a great nation. The promise seemed impossible with Abraham's age, but Abraham trusted God promise. But not only did God make a promise to Abraham, he also...

**6:17** *"confirmed it with an oath"*

Why would God confirm his promise with an oath? Oaths are given in court because people are not always trustworthy. But God is trustworthy. We see in verse 18 that...

**6:18** *"it is impossible for him to lie"*

God didn't need to do anything more than make a promise, but he chose to make an oath.

Why did he do this? This is made clear in verses 17-18:

**6:17-18** *Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. <sup>18</sup>God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.*

God wanted Abraham to be encouraged to persevere in his faith and so he made an oath. The oath was made for Abraham's sake, not because God was not trustworthy. God wanted Abraham to have assurance that what he promised to him hadn't changed a bit and would come to pass – he would bless him and give him many descendants. And so God not only gave Abraham a promise, he also made an oath on that promise. Those are the 2 unchangeable things mentioned in verse 18. Abraham needed that kind of strong encouragement and assurance to persevere in his faith.

But why did Abraham need encouragement? There are two events I will mention in the life of Abraham where he needed a reminder that God keeps his promises.<sup>2</sup>

First, when Abraham was 75 years old God promised him that he would give him a son, but 24 years later he still didn't have a son. Abraham was starting to doubt God's promises so God came to him and reminded him of the promise. The next year his wife, Sarah, gave birth to their son Isaac when Abraham was 100 years old!

Do you ever wonder if God's going to come through? God's made a lot of promises to us, but sometimes it just doesn't feel like he's present, like he's active, like he's fulfilling them. And so we become discouraged and we, like Abraham, need to be constantly reminded that God not only *makes* promises, but God *keeps* promises.

Second, after God had given Abraham a son he threw a major curve ball at Abraham. He asked him to take his son Isaac to Mt. Moriah and offer him up as a sacrifice. Abraham exercised great faith and obeyed God. This is the event our passage in Hebrews directly references so I would like to read it for you.

**Genesis 22:9-18** *When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.*

*But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."*

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<sup>2</sup> A third event can be found in Genesis 15.

*Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*

*The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."*

As you can see in this story, perseverance was not easy for Abraham and so God continued to reaffirm his promise to Abraham to encourage him. Perseverance is not easy for us either. When it seems like God is absent or when the things God requires of us seem too difficult it's easy to forget that God's promises can be trusted.

When life gets hard we have to remember this same promise given to Abraham. God promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his offspring. Jesus is the offspring being referenced and we are included in "all nations." This promise is as much for us as it was for Abraham.

Jesus is the one that blesses us eternally through his life and his death and his resurrection, as well as the fact that he is now interceding for us and will return again. Our hope for eternity is bound up only in Jesus. If we lose sight of that promise we will lose hope and grow weary. We have to keep our eyes fixed on eternity.

I can't think of a time in my life where I was drifting in my faith while my eyes were fixed on eternity. But I've drifted many times in my faith while I was focused on myself or other people or the material. We need to focus on who God is and what he has promised. We need this encouragement to persevere in faith.

Some of you may be saying to yourself, "I believe God keeps his promises. That's not the problem; the problem that is I don't keep my promises. What happens when I fail?"

Well there is more encouragement for us in this passage. Our assurance comes not only from God's character, but also from his work in Christ.

### **God's Work: Jesus secures our salvation (vv. 19-20)**

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One of the reasons Abraham was able to obey God and offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice was he believed in God's promise, and he believed God would somehow fulfill his promise even if it wasn't the way he had in mind.<sup>3</sup>

But there is more. Let's look at the passage right before God intervenes in which Abraham and Isaac are on their way up Mt. Moriah.

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<sup>3</sup> See Hebrews 11:19

**Genesis 22:6-8** *Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.*

Abraham understood something that had been made clear to him early on: God himself would bear the penalty for our unfaithfulness.

After God made his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 he confirmed the promise in Genesis 15 with a covenant. In the ancient world when two people made a covenant they would cut animals in two, lay them out, and then each party would walk in between the animals. Each party would in essence be saying, "If I break this covenant may I suffer the same fate as these animals." In Genesis 15 Abraham cut the animals in two, but only God passed between the animals. On the one hand God was saying if I don't fulfill my end of the promise then may this happen to me. But I don't think there was ever any question as to whether God would uphold his end of the covenant. The person in question was Abraham. But bear in mind Abraham didn't walk between the animals, only God went through the animals. That gesture was to show that God took on all responsibility for any failure in Abraham to fulfill the covenant.

And even though Abraham was a man of faith, he did fail from time to time. On more than one occasion Abraham put his trust in his own works and not the promises of God. Abraham was a sinful man. And you and I are sinful people. We all fail to live up to God's standards.

But God took the responsibility for us failing to keep our end of the covenant; he took the penalty for our sinfulness on himself. We deserved death; we deserved to be slaughtered for our transgression, but God took that death upon himself; he offered up his only son, Jesus, on the cross. God provided a lamb – he provided one for Abraham's sacrifice and he provided Jesus for us all. God became the sacrifice – God bore the penalty for our sin.

Maybe you are discouraged because you continue to fail in your attempt to be faithful to God. Maybe you're like I was – you don't have assurance of salvation because you're putting your hope of salvation in what you do. I urge you to stop being discouraged, stop focusing on yourself. There is no assurance in good works because none of us have any good works. Assurance comes from the good work that Jesus did on the cross, on your behalf. Don't put your faith in yourself. Put your faith in God's work on your behalf. That is the only anchor strong enough to carry us on.

**6:19-20** *We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,<sup>20</sup> where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek*

In the Old Testament when the high priest went behind the curtain in the temple he went into the very presence of God to offer up sacrifices for the people. Jesus is our *high priest forever* – he is

in the presence of God and has offered his life as a sacrifice for your sin. The sacrifice that he made for you is good enough to pay for all of your sin and secure your eternal life.

We all break our promises to God. There is no encouragement in focusing on ourselves and our failures. We need to acknowledge our sin, but instead of dwelling on our failures we need to dwell on our great high priest, Jesus Christ.

The text also says that Jesus “*went before us.*” The ESV uses the term “forerunner.” He has blazed the trail into the presence of God for us. If we put our faith in who he is and what he has done we too will follow in his trail and be in the very presence of God one day.

That is the anchor we need. That is the encouragement we need. This is the *hope* that we have! This word “*hope*” in v. 19 is objective, not just wishful thinking.

For example, if I were to say that I hope you don’t fall on the ice as you leave here today that would be wishful thinking because I have no control over whether or not you fall. However, when this verse says, “*we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure,*” it is not talking about wishful thinking. It speaks of the assurance we can have of eternal life if our faith is in Jesus Christ because Jesus does have control over whether we can someday go into the presence of God. As the song says, “Jesus commands my destiny.”

We can have assurance because our salvation is based on what God has done in Jesus Christ, not what we have done. We can have assurance because our salvation is wrapped up in who God is, not who we are. The hope this passage is speaking about is objective, not wishful thinking. This hope is a strong anchor because it is attached to the victorious work of Jesus.

Let me finish the story about my crisis of faith that I began earlier. I was discouraged because I was focused on myself and my failure to live consistently for God. I was discouraged because I wasn’t persevering in the faith. I had no assurance of salvation because I wasn’t bearing fruit in keeping with salvation. All of those things were real reasons to be worried. Hebrews 6 woke me up to the danger of my drifting as I hope it woke some of you up last week, if necessary. I thank God for that passage of Scripture.

It was good that I was convicted, but the way I was dealing with it was bad. I was having a pity party because of how bad I had screwed up. I was focused on myself and not Jesus. But one night in December of 1998 I couldn’t take it anymore. I woke up at 3:00 AM feeling like I needed to get up and spend some time in prayer. I don’t know if God spoke to me that night, but what I do know is that I came away from that time of prayer with the clear conviction to follow Jesus. The conviction to leave the intellectual debates behind and follow Jesus. To leave my guilt behind and put my trust in Jesus. To leave my faithlessness behind and go on to persevere in the faith. To quit wondering about it and just get on with it. And that’s what I did.

I needed to quit wrestling with doubt and trust the promises of God. I needed to quit questioning my salvation and start persevering in my salvation. I needed to get my eyes off of myself and onto Jesus. I understood that night that assurance and perseverance are linked. We can have assurance if we persevere.

**6:11** *We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.*

Perseverance leads to assurance, but let me go back to the beginning - perseverance isn't easy. We need encouragement to persevere, we need a strong anchor. And that's what this passage is doing this morning. We are encouraged by who God is, by what his word says - that his promises are sure. But most importantly we are encouraged by what he has done, his finished work.

Listen to this poem from John Bunyan:

*“Run, John, run, the law commands,  
But gives us neither feet nor hands,  
Far better news the gospel brings:  
It bids us fly, but gives us wings.”<sup>4</sup>*

I've reworded it for us this morning:

Persevere, church, persevere, the book of Hebrews commands,  
But gives us neither feet nor hands,  
Far better news the gospel brings:  
It bids us fly, but gives us wings.

We're commanded to persevere in the faith, but we can't do it on our own. We need to flee to Jesus to take hold of hope.

People have a tendency to want to know “what to do.” Well, I don't know what to say to that this morning. We have to flee to Jesus. We have to stop putting our hope in what we do and who we are and find our hope in who he is and what he's done. We have to get our eyes off of ourselves. I needed to get my eyes off of my doubt and my failure. What do you need to get your eyes off of? Anything we focus on other than Christ is like putting our anchor into sand, eventually we'll start to drift.

I've emphasized Bible reading a lot lately and I don't want you to get it wrong. I don't think it will earn you any points with God – but it will remind you that you don't need points, you need Jesus, your strong anchor for the soul. I want you to read your Bible because I want you to have daily access to the story of God and what he has done throughout history as he has worked out his plan of salvation. I want us to be immersed in the promises of God. I want us to be reminded of how amazing our God is. But I also want us to see how sinful we are in the eyes of a holy God. And as we see the vast chasm between who God is and who we are I pray that we would see how amazing God's grace is. I want us to see Jesus, the only hope for sinners like you and me. He's our only hope and I want us to flee to him.

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<sup>4</sup> Bullmore, April 2009.

Would you put your hope in his promises and your trust is what he has done? That is my prayer for you. Friends, be encouraged to persevere in the faith with full assurance because of God's character and God's work in Christ.

**Jude 1:25-25** *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—<sup>25</sup> to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.*

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