

THE PROMISES OF GOD AND THE ANCHOR OF HOPE (Hebrews 6:13-20)

Let me take you back to 1999. I was the pastor of the FBC of Stillwater. I had been there less than year. During January and February of that year, I preached a series of five sermons, mostly from the Psalms. The titles for the messages were:

Hope for the **Troubled** Heart
Hope for the **Fearful** Heart
Hope for the **Guilty** Heart
Hope for the **Lonely** Heart
Hope for the **Angry** Heart

Trouble, Fear, Guilt, Loneliness, and Anger are emotions that stalk the human heart. They rob us of peace, calm, and the assurance that God is in control.

It was during that sermon series that I saw one particular movie for the first time. The movie had been released in 1994 and garnered a slew of Academy Award nominations the next year. In January of 1999 it was televised for the first time on network TV. I had not yet seen the movie; so, I taped it on my VCR. I watched it the very next night. Since then, I have seen it numerous times on TV. Maybe you have seen it, too. The name of the movie is *The Shawshank Redemption*.

The movie opens with a young banker by the name of Andy Dufresne being wrongly convicted of murdering his wife and the man with whom she was having an affair. Andy was sentenced to two consecutive life terms. He was sent to the notorious Shawshank Prison, a maximum-security prison for violent offenders.

In time, Andy becomes friends with an inmate known as Red, brilliantly played by Morgan Freeman. Red was also convicted of homicide, but by the time Andy met him, Red had been in prison for about 20 years.

At some point, Andy shares his dream of what he wants to do if and when he ever gets out of prison. Red cautions him by saying, "Hope is a dangerous thing." It seems as though Red has lost his hope.

Toward the end of the movie, Red is finally paroled. By this time, he has spent better than 40 years behind bars. Prison life is all he can remember. He is fearful that he won't be able to make it in society as a free man.

Red finds a note left for him by Andy. The note reads, "Hope is a good thing, maybe the best thing, and no good thing can ever die." The movie celebrates the importance of hope.

That is the dominant thought of today's text. The passage we are going to look at this morning is Hebrews 6:13-20. A couple of years before I became your pastor, I preached on this passage. In that message, I focused on the end of v. 18 which encourages us to hold on to hope. This time, as I studied the passage, I am more drawn to the beginning of v. 19. That verse tells me that God uses hope as a tool to hold on to us. Hope is the anchor that keeps us secure even when we are surrounded by stormy seas.

You and I live in a world filled with trouble, fear, guilt, loneliness, and anger. We are constantly running from those things looking for refuge, and God, through His word, is telling us to employ hope. If we lose hope, our lives will be set adrift. We will be buffeted by the strong waves of trouble, fear, guilt, loneliness, and anger. Hope is our anchor.

Paul Powell, a well-known preacher, one generation before mine, said that when difficulty and trouble find us, we can choose one of four ways to deal with it. He said some **grope** their way through; they lose all sense of direction.

Others **mope** their way through; they complain and throw a pity-party saying, “Woe is me.”

A third option some choose is they **dope** their way through, they turn to a bottle or pills or a drug of some kind.

Then, there are those few who choose a better course of action. They **hope** their way through; that’s what we are to do.

We must ask and answer the question, “In what are we to place our hope?” You might answer, “In God, of course.” That is true, but I believe our text is more specific. Specifically, we are to fix our hope on the promises of God. When we set our hope on the promises of God, we are told that hope serves as an anchor for our souls. The purpose of an anchor is to hold. From our text, we are going to learn why the anchor holds, for whom it holds, and where it holds.

As an Anchor, Hope Holds Due to the Nature of God

You and I are able to place our hope in the promises of God because of what we know about the nature or the character of our God. To properly understand our passage, we need to know how oaths worked in the ancient world.

You and I live in a world of written contracts. Other than taking an oath of office after being elected, or upon entering the military, or getting married, or being sworn in as a witness in a court of law, we rarely encounter situations where we are required to take an oath. Instead, we sign a contract. When I was the administrator of a Christian school, our teachers were required to sign a contract each year. It stipulated the terms of employment and what they would be paid that year. When you buy a house, you have to sign a contract. If you have to finance a car when you buy it, you are required to sign a contract.

In the ancient world, instead of signing contracts, people commonly took an oath. As a guarantee of the promises they made, they pledged they would do this or that, and that pledge or oath usually invoked the name of someone greater than themselves. That is why in the few oaths that we make today, we say, “So help me God.” There is no one greater than God.

One of the Ten Commandments cautions us, “Do not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.” We usually take that to mean we shouldn’t use God’s name in curse word. While we shouldn’t, that is not the focus of that command. What that command is saying is, “If you use God’s name when taking an oath or making a pledge, don’t fail to deliver on your promise. That would be to misuse the name of God.”

We are told that when God made a promise to Abraham, He swore by Himself because there is no one greater than God by whom He could swear (v. 13). What a signed contract is for us, an oath was to people in the ancient world. As it says in v. 16, an oath was “final for confirmation.” Look at vv. 17-18. The two unchangeable things the author of Hebrews has in mind is God’s promise and God’s oath. God’s promises never change because God never changes His mind. God never says, “Oops. I didn’t mean that. Let Me take that back.”

We say that it is a woman’s prerogative to change her mind. That may be a woman’s prerogative, but it is not God’s. God never has a need to change His mind because God never acts on insufficient information. He never encounters unforeseen circumstances or events. We say that hindsight is 20/20. Well, God’s foresight is 20/20, and because it is, He never goes back on a promise. His promises are unchangeable.

Likewise, His oath is unchangeable.

Our oaths, however, are routinely broken. As a nation, we have a history of breaking our contracts and treaties. You can ask the Native Americans about that.

Each year over the last six to seven years in the U.S., there were approximately 60 to 61 million marriages. While, there is an average of one wedding every 16 seconds in our country, there is an average of one divorce every 42 seconds. In the time it takes to watch your typical romantic comedy (2 hours), there will be 172 divorces.

We are really bad at keeping our oaths, but God is really good at keeping His. That has every thing to do with the nature and character of our God. According to v. 18, “it is impossible for God to lie.” It is not that it is difficult for God to lie. It is not that God rarely lies. God never lies because He can’t lie. To lie would go against God’s very nature. Our God is a God of truth; so, when He speaks, He speaks truthfully, and accurately, and honestly.

Because that is the case, that should inspire us to learn and investigate what He has said and promised. We read in 2 Peter 1:4 that God “has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature.” We become more and more like God the more we know and live by the promises of God.

Here are just a few of the promises of God in the NT. Let me give you a baker’s dozen. We are promised:

- **Rest.** “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28–30).
- **Abundant life.** “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).
- **Eternal life.** “But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).
- **Eternal security.** “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28).
- **Jesus will return.** “. . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a

place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:2–3).

- **The receipt of power.** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (Acts 1:8).
- **All things will work together for our good.** “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28).
- **Comfort in our trials.** “Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).
- **New life in Christ.** “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old had passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- **Every spiritual blessing.** “Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3).
- **God will finish the work He started in us.** “And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).
- **Peace when we pray.** “. . . In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7).
- **His rich supply for our needs.** “And my god will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Because of God’s nature, when we read those promises, we can embrace them with hope, and that hope serves as an anchor to hold us up no matter how difficult things become. Our text first tells us why the anchor of hope holds. It holds because of the nature of God.

Next, it addresses for whom the anchor of hope holds.

As an Anchor, Hope Holds Us, the People of God

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but God’s promises are not for everybody. They are specifically for the people of God. Just moments ago, I gave you 13 promises that are found in the NT, and that is just a sampling of much larger group of promises. Each of those promises, however, are limited in their application. In other words, they don’t apply to everybody. They are meant for those, and only those, who have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Let’s look back at our text. Verse 17 mentions “the heirs of the promise.” Typically, who is an heir? I need to redo my will, but when I pass, the assets of my vast estate will not go to strangers, to people off the street, to those I did not know. Once my will is

probated, my stuff, my treasures will go to my wife, my children, my family, to those with whom I have a relationship.

With God it is a little bit different because even though God has heirs, God will not die. The riches of God will not go through probate because God will never pass away. Since it is not possible to inherit all the treasures of God upon His death, we will inherit what He has for us upon our death. Even more will come to us when this earth passes away making way for the new heavens and the new earth.

Notice also the words that are found in the middle of v. 18. The author mentions “we who have fled for refuge.” God’s promises are meant for those who have fled to Him for refuge. When your life gets stormy and you are looking for safety from those storms, where do you go? Those who go to God for safety are the ones for whom His promises are meant. If you are looking for your money to save you or if you are looking for your experience and wisdom to deliver you, you are looking in the wrong direction, and you forfeit the promises.

In v. 19, the author of Hebrews uses the pronoun *we*. In v. 20 he speaks of what Jesus did on *our behalf*. The author is writing to the believing community, to Jews who had put their faith in Jesus. God’s promises are meant for believers.

Deep underneath the ancient city of Rome are a series of tunnels. They are known as the catacombs. In the second and third centuries A.D., Christians used the catacombs to bury their dead. Even today, the catacombs are a much-visited site by tourists who travel to Rome. If you were to make that trek, you would discover that centuries ago our Christian brothers and sisters painted the symbols of their faith on their tombs.

Three common symbols appear: the dove, the fish, and the anchor. The dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The letters of the Greek word for *fish*, *ichthus*, stand for the words *Jesus, Christ, God, Son, Savior*. The anchor tells us that when we as Christians are going through difficult, insecure times, it is our hope that anchors our souls.

Anchors are meant to keep a boat from drifting. If you will look back at Hebrews 2:1, you see that the author has already warned his readers about the problem of drifting. A boat that drifts may head toward the rocks or into turbulent waters or at least in an undesirable direction.

Are you in danger of drifting? Have you quit rowing? Have you dropped your sail? Have you decided to take it easy and just go with the flow? Is the current of our culture taking you to a place of spiritual danger or away from where God wants you to travel?

God has given us His promises, and when we trust those promises, we have an anchor that will hold us steady and keep us from going in the wrong direction.

We have seen why the anchor holds. It all has to do with the nature of God. We’ve seen for whom it holds. It holds us, the people of God. We come know to where the anchor holds.

As an Anchor, Hope Holds in the Dwelling of God

Look again at vv. 19-20. The author of Hebrews uses imagery from the Temple. In the Temple, the place behind the curtain was the Holy of Holies. It was where the High Priest

went once year to offer atonement for the people. We have seen already that Jesus is our High Priest. We also saw that Jesus did double-duty. In addition to being our High Priest, as the Lamb of God, He was also the sacrifice for our sin. He has gone into heaven on our behalf.

A physical anchor goes downward to the bottom of the sea. But we have a spiritual anchor, and it goes upward into the very presence of God, into His throne room.

The problem that many of us face is that we are attempting to bring stability to our lives through a substitute anchor. For some it might be money. They think money will bring them security. Others look for security in stuff, possessions, things they can touch and hold. Some look to other people. They think meaning and happiness will be found in a relationship with another person.

Years ago, I heard the following song from a well-known Christian singer.

I have journeyed
Through the long, dark night
Out on the open sea
By faith alone
Sight unknown
And yet His eyes were watching me

The anchor holds
Though the ship is battered
The anchor holds
Though the sails are torn
I have fallen on my knees
As I faced the raging seas
The anchor holds
In spite of the storm

I've had visions
I've had dreams
I've even held them in my hand
But I never knew
They would slip right through
Like they were only grains of sand

The anchor holds
Though the ship is battered
The anchor holds
Though the sails are torn
I have fallen on my knees
As I faced the raging seas
The anchor holds
In spite of the storm

I have been young
But I am older now
And there has been beauty
These eyes have seen
But it was in the night
Through the storms of my life
Oh, that's where God proved
His love to me

The anchor holds
Though the ship's been battered
The anchor holds
Though the sails are torn
I have fallen on my knees
As I faced the raging seas
The anchor holds
In spite of the storm

I close with 1 Peter 3:15. Peter instructs us, "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."

Has anyone noticed that you live your life with hope? If they asked you about it, could you tell them why you have hope?