

Title: Soul-Anchor
Text: Hebrews 6.9-20
Theme: The certainty of God
Series: Hebrews #16
Prop Stmt: Uncertain of ourselves we are certain of God

Have you ever been in a bank and you read that sign that says: Your deposits are FDIC insured? That is, they are backed by the full faith and credit of the United States Government. It sounds so comforting, so reassuring – sort of. But what does it really mean? If it is backed by the full faith and credit of the US Government, does that mean that the United States Government has full faith? And if they have full faith, what is their faith in? Or does that mean that the deposit has faith in the government treasury (that is currently about 13 trillion dollars in debt). So then we wonder, if my bank goes bankrupt, how can a treasury that is essentially bankrupt back it up? The promise of security is only as good as the integrity of the one making the promise, no matter how emphatic the words are written.

This text is about oaths, promises and guarantees. At its heart it deals with the issue of, who do you really trust?

Read text:

Last week, our text addressed the issue of apostasy. Therefore, the question that everyone wants answered is, how do I know if I am a believer? How can I be certain that I will not fall away? We want security. We want assurance. But, we see the failures of others. We are affected by the unfaithfulness of other people whom we love and whom we counted on. Their inconsistency or falling away rattles our own cage. And we wonder about others. Will they fall? And we wonder about ourselves. Because this book challenges us to carefully consider our lives and examine the legitimacy of our faith, we are right to be concerned about our faithfulness. But, how we do examine our faith? What are we looking for?

It is easy to respond to warning passages with fear. Any Christian can find an excuse as to why he is not a Christian.¹ That fear can immobilize us because we see our lapses and weaknesses. We can become discouraged and assume that it is only a matter of time before we mess up and then by our “stinkin-thinkin” become our prophecy and fulfillment. Yes, we can respond with fear but we can also respond with a concern that drives resolve. So, how do you know if you are a genuine believer? I do not want to talk you into believing something that is not true, but neither do I want you to doubt that which is certain. This text does a great job of helping us sort through that issue. After the warning, the author’s tone decisively changes to that of encouragement (9). This encouragement is not a mere, “Little Engine That Could” speech designed to motivate these people on the basis of motivation. We hope in hope! What kind of a hope is that? Hope in hope is hopeless. But honestly, that is all that this world can offer. One playwright said, “Hope is the feeling you have that the feeling you have isn’t permanent.”

¹ Joel Bengtson (research assistant on this sermon) mentioned this as we discussed this text.

That's rather depressing isn't it? English poet, Lord Byron wrote, "But what is Hope? Nothing but the paint on the face of Existence; the least touch of truth rubs it off, and then we see what a hollow-cheeked harlot we have got hold of." That is pathetic. But, does he simply have the guts to say what no one else wants to admit? Life really stinks and the sooner you face it, the less your heart will get crushed. Is that it? The truth is, apart from God, it is true. But, we are not apart from God. And therefore, this text is very hopeful, but why? On what basis can we have hope? On what basis can we say that we are followers of Christ and therefore, tomorrow is always better than yesterday? This text gives us two reasons. The one focuses on why he thinks his readers were believers and the second on why we can and will persevere.

1. **Be Encouraged!** (Here is why I think you are a believer) – (9-12)

Notice, once again, that verses 4-6 were not expressed in the second person (you) but in the third person (those and who). But here in verse 9 the shift is clear – "your case beloved" meaning, that while the author of Hebrews writes of the reality of apostasy, he does not believe that this is the case with these people as a whole – but why? For one, he sees in them evidences of grace.

a. **The evidences of grace.** (10)

"your work and love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do."

Now, this work and love that the author of Hebrews speaks about is some pretty serious ministry that they were involved in. Look at 10.32-36. This church was marked by people who stood side by side with those in adversity and loved them more than they loved their own property and homes. Do you understand church, like these people understood church? That takes work and love to stand next to someone and to identify with someone when you know full well, that the abuse that they are receiving will be the abuse and rejection that you receive because you identify with them.

Anyone can go out and buy a jersey and a hat of a team that wins a championship. That takes no commitment whatsoever. But when a fellow believer is being mocked in school for his faith, are you willing to stand next to him and receive the same abuse? When a co-worker is shamed for her testimony in Christ, do you speak up, knowing that it will cost you a promotion, or do you pretend not to hear? God knows the reality of our spiritual conditions. And these times of decision reveal what we really believe. When you look back and see evidences of standing firm with the people of Christ, God sees that too. That is an evidence of grace. God is not unjust to overlook that. Another reason for encouragement is...

b. **The effect of loving leadership** (11)

This verse reminds us that our faithfulness matters. Here is a leader who in essence says, "I am not going to let you fall by the wayside." I want you to show the same tenacity, the

same focus, the same commitment, the same earnestness. He knew that faithfulness would grow their assurance.

This really is probably a good spot to stop for a second and address this issue of assurance and security. When a person truly comes to faith in Christ, they are secure – forever in Christ. The Scriptures are full of that promise. Security is looking at our salvation from God’s perspective. He knows fully and finally, those who are his. We don’t. So, there are times when we don’t feel secure. The feeling of security is what I mean by the assurance of our salvation. How can I have assurance? Assurance is the by-product of a persevering faith. Assurance is not the goal. Assurance is a benefit that we gain because we believe the gospel through the storms of life, realizing that the reason we believe the gospel is because we are His!

Look at Christ! Look at the gospel! Do you believe this? Ok, then, let’s go. Let’s act on it. Look back at what you did. That was important. Did you do that because you believed in Christ? Ok, Christ and his gospel have not changed, so let’s keep on believing, and let’s press on pilgrim.

It seems to me that these believers were experiencing a weariness with the pressure of being a believer in an unbelieving world. It gets old, always running with the wind in your face. How long, O Lord? And we are tempted to think that our little race does not matter. I just get tired. But, that brings us to verse 12, which is another reason why the author of Hebrews finds encouragement, and why he thinks these people are believers, and that is because of...

c. **The history of the people of God** (we are people who bank our souls on the promises of God)

We are part of a band of pilgrims who had to persevere and press on in spite of adversity and discouragement. Their stories are written down so that we can imitate them. Don’t you get lazy. That is not what we are. That is not our heritage and that it not our future. We are people of an enduring faith who bank on the promises of God. This verse (12) serves as a connection to the next big point, but it also gives us a hint as to what that point is. Notice the phrase, “who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

The original promises (in this case the ones given to Abraham) were not given to us. We inherited them because we are the people of a persevering faith, like the ones to whom they were given. And, if we inherited the promises, this means that the promises have not yet been fulfilled, otherwise the promise would not be handed down. So, the one to whom the promise was given, responded in faith, even though the promise was not completely fulfilled. This, not yet, fulfilled promise has been given to us. Our job is to hand it off to the next generation, unless of course it is fulfilled in our life. But if it isn’t, how do we hand off the promise? We hand it off the way we received it. We received the promise from a faithful life that did not experience its completion – yet – but one day will. Convinced of this, they lived with faith and patience and so can you!

Verses 9-12 cause us to look at our own lives. Are there evidences of grace in you? Do you love the people of God? Are you willing to give of yourself for the sake of the believers, the church, the gospel? Does the encouragement of your leaders resonate with you at all? Do you feel a kinship with them? Do you sense your mutual connection in Christ and realize the affect that your life has on the rest of the body? Does the history of the people of God matter at all to you? Do you carry in your hands the baton of faith and realize your responsibility to run your leg of the race strong? And yet, if it was all up to us, it would still be doubt wouldn't it? That is why this chapter ends by drawing our attention to God. While the author of Hebrews is very encouraging and very hopeful, the ultimate basis of hope is not in them, but in God.

2. **Be Faithful!** (Here is why God's Promises drive our perseverance) – (13-20)

Here is why we can and will persevere.

a. **God makes promises that He keeps.** (13-15)

These verses take us back to Genesis 22 to one of the most intense and incredible stories in the entire Bible. God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, but that there would be one nation, above the rest that God would choose as his own. When Abraham, in his old age, fathered Isaac, the promise of God was partially fulfilled. He had a son, but he did not have a nation. Later when Sara died, he purchased a plot for her grave, marking the down-payment of the land that was to be the country for his people. Abraham, saw the initial sprouts of the fulfillment but did not live to see it fulfilled. His life is marked by believing and waiting, even when it did not make sense. He did not believe perfectly, but he did believe perseveringly. This is clearly displayed in Genesis 22, when God tells him to offer his son of promise (Isaac) on an altar to God.

Abraham did not know at the time that this event was a prophecy. What kind of a God would ask a father to offer up his own son? Hold on to that question for a second. Abraham believed God. He swallowed hard, he did not have it all figured out, but he believed God and obeyed. Before he killed his son, God stopped him and said, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." That day, on Mt. Moriah, God confirmed his promise to Abraham. The life of Isaac was a fulfillment of God's promise. God promised and Abraham believed and God demonstrated that he keeps the promises that he makes. But what kind of a God would ask a father to offer up his own son? The kind of God who would stop him from doing it, but who would not stop his own son from being killed, in order to bring many sons to glory. The willingness of Abraham to offer his son to God was the basis for God establishing the people of God in the Old Testament, because, the willingness of the Son of God to die on the cross for us, is the basis of God establishing his people of God now and forever. He called Abraham to do, what he ultimately did. God makes promises that he keeps.

b. God bound himself with an oath. (16-18)

This event was so significant that God not only gave Abraham his word, he swore an oath. But how does God do that? When you swear an oath, you swear by something that is greater than yourself. So, how can God make an oath when there is nothing greater than himself? He swore by himself.

When you want to resolve a matter, you swear to it – don't you? And we have all sorts of expressions that attempt to convey how serious and sacred this vow really is. "I swear to you on my mother's grave, I swear to you on a stack of Bibles, cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye, until death do us part, I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God," and on they go. The promise of God cannot fail. The "two unchangeable things" are the promise and the oath. It is impossible for God to lie.

Today, we are the heirs of the promise. The promise that was made to Abraham is still being fulfilled. But now we see that God's promises are all fulfilled because of Christ. We have so much more evidence of God's commitment to his promises than even Abraham did. And he had to wait (in a sense) hundreds of years before the real promised one came. We don't. He already came. And he promised to return. And he promised to build a city for his people; a city that Abraham spent his days longing for, waiting for and looking for. When you come to faith in Christ, you become part of the people of faith. You become part of Abraham's line. So, if God was faithful to Abraham, who initially received the promise, and we have inherited the promise (because we are in his line – by faith), and God desired to show us "more convincingly" the absolute guarantee of this promise, by securing it with an oath, then this promise is worth believing!

Our hope is not in hope. Our hope is in the God who cannot lie. If your hope is not truly in him, then you have no hope. Your hope in him comes only through your hope in Christ. This confidence results in "strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us." (v.18) We who have fled for refuge is the description of those who trust in the promises of God that are all fulfilled in Christ. I say that on the basis of verses 19-20 which provides a fascinating and rich encouragement to be faithful. In these verses there are four phrases that initially seem to mix up some examples. They are: an anchor, the holy of holies, a forerunner and a high priest like Melchizedek.

Now, I believe that what the author of Hebrews does is pack into these two verses, the entire story of God's plan which assures us that we will make it home.

c. You will make it home. (19-20)

The anchor is our hope that has entered into the holy of holies, who is identified as Jesus, a forerunner (that is one who has gone on before us) who has become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, a subject he picks up in chapter 7. Hebrews is built on Exodus. We learned that the tabernacle in the Old Testament was not only the place where God dwelt with his people, but it was a picture of the universe, and that the

holy of holies was perfectly square, like the eternal city will be where God lives with his people forever. In order for God to live with his people, something has to be done about our sin. In the Old Testament, sacrifices were made for sin, the most important of which was the Day of Atonement sacrifice at which time the High Priest took a bowl of the blood of the sacrifice and went (once a year) into the throne room of God (Holy of Holies) and offered this sacrifice so that God could keep dwelling with his people. We know that this Day of Atonement holiday was a ritual that pre-figured Christ, who offered the perfect sacrifice for our sin so that there is no longer any need for more sacrifices. His sacrifice was so perfect that he secured a place for us in the holy of holies, which I take to be a reference not only to the throne room of God who accepted the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, but I believe that the “inner place behind the curtain” is also a symbol of the eternal city which is to come Rev. 21-22; the city whose builder and maker is God; the city that Abraham was looking for, that he never found. I say that based on the “forerunner” language ascribed to Christ (v.20), which speaks of one who has gone on before to prepare the way. The language of these two verses grabs our attention and makes us look into the future as a reason for our confidence. But, the anchor, the hope that enters into the inner place, did not make complete sense to me. But here is what I discovered.

In the ancient world, during the time of Christ, boat rudders had just been developed. It is believed that the Chinese invented them. But, before they were used it could be rather challenging to get your boat safely into the harbor when the wind was in your face. So, a number of the harbors built a large post on the land that was called an agkura. In Latin this was translated as anchoria and in English – anchor. Therefore, an anchor could mean the traditional anchor that is housed in the boat, or the secure post on the land. I believe that verse 19 is referring to the post on the land for this reason.

When a ship would come to a harbor, it would send out a small rowboat that would carry a rope, from the main ship to the agkura. The seaman would secure the rope to the agkura, which meant that the ship would now be anchored to the harbor. In spite of the wind that was in their face, all that the men on the ship would have to do is simply hold on to the rope and pull the ship toward the anchor. The effectiveness of their pulling and the certainty of their success were established by the immovability of the agkura (anchor).

Christ has gone ahead of us as our forerunner. He has entered into the holy of holies by virtue of his sacrifice and has secured our soul to the anchor of God. Since you are secure, pull! Since you will get home, press on pilgrim.

Conclusion:

- 1) Are you in the boat
- 2) Are you pulling? What do I mean by that? Are you living with hope and joy on the promises of God? Are you seeking to be faithful and involved in the lives of other believers? Are you more concerned about the gospel than your own comforts?

- 3) Do you know people who have become discouraged and have stopped pulling? Who are they? Will you encourage them this week to get back on deck and get back on the ropes. Let's bring this ship home, safe. The wind may be in our face, but we are anchored by Christ to the shore of the eternal city.