

# "Hope: Our Anchor"

Hebrews 6:9-20

Baxter Exum (#987)  
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## Introduction:

Most of us might agree that we are living in a time when it is very difficult to safely put our trust in anyone or anything. I know that when I was going to school, we learned that ministers were some of the worst credit risks, and so in response to that, we were encouraged to be different and to make a dedicated effort to avoid contributing to that problem. We can look to doctors, and certainly even doctors have taken a number of hits in the trust department. We read the news stories where doctors are sometimes pressured by the healthcare industry to prescribe or avoid certain treatments. Over the past few months, we have seen the decay of any last shred of trust that anyone might have had in the financial world. We have been reminded, once again, that it is not always safe to put our trust in corporate America, or even in a bank. We could cite many examples of trust being eroded away from those in the media. We would like to think that those on the television news are trustworthy, and yet we know from experience that they are not. Even the most famous of news anchors can get caught with a bogus document. And certainly we understand that the children who grow up in such an environment are not immune from being affected. This past week I was reading some statistics concerning teens growing up in this nation. According to the survey,

- 92% of all kids surveyed admitted lying to their parents.
- 78% admitted lying to a teacher.
- 70% said that they had cheated on a test, and half of them said that they had done so more than once.
- 25% of those surveyed said that they would lie to get a job.

And so we are reminded that in so many areas of life, trust does not exist. We live in a world of suspicion, and it is not about to get any better. Even our children know that they can hardly trust anybody. So in this world that is constantly shifting, in this untrustworthy world, where can we go? Is there an anchor?

This morning, I would like for us to study a request from one of our members on the Biblical concept of hope. We can look at the world around us, and just from a secular point of view, we see several basic definitions. One dictionary, for example, defines hope as, **"...the feeling that something desired may happen."** I am reminded of a little boy who was standing at the bottom of an escalator in a major department store. The little boy was just standing there staring at the railing going around and around. A salesperson saw the boy standing there and asked if he was lost, and the

little boy said, **"No, I am just waiting for my chewing gum to come back!"** There was a little boy who had **"hope"** in at least one sense of that word!

Another dictionary defines hope as, **"...the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best,"** almost like some kind of vague optimism. I am reminded of a condemned prisoner who struck up a deal with the king. He said, **"If you let me live, I will teach your horse to fly in one year's time."** And later, when asked about that bargain, the man explained, **"Well, anything can happen within a year. I could die, the king could die, or...that horse might actually learn to fly."** So there was a man who (as we might say) was **"grasping at straws."** His hope did not really have any basis.

Another dictionary defines hope as, **"...wishing for something with expectation of its fulfillment."** In a rather cruel experiment, scientists put some rats in a tank of water to see how long they would survive before drowning. The average time was only 17 minutes. Then the experiment was repeated, but this time the experimenters **"rescued"** the rats just before they drowned, they dried them off and returned them to their cages. A few days later, they repeated the experiment. Only this time, the average survival time for these rats increased from 17 minutes to 36 hours! The second time around, the rats had **"hope."** They had some reason to believe that the scientists would pull them out, because they had done so before.

Some of these little stories might give us some little clue about what hope really is, and yet they certainly do not fully explain the concept of hope as it is found in the Scriptures. This morning, then, I would like for us to look together at one of the most famous passages on the subject of hope—it is found in the book of **Hebrews—Hebrews 6:9-20**. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found starting on **page 1874**. In just a few moments, we are going to discover that our Christian hope is described as, **"...an anchor of the soul."** If you were here with us last week, you might remember that we studied the cross, and yet the cross itself was not widely used as a Christian symbol until around 500 AD. And so when you go into the catacombs, for example, around the city of Rome, the cross is not found in the oldest parts of those ancient tunnels. But one of the most commonly found symbols of the early Christian faith is that of the anchor. **»PPT»** This particular anchor can be found in the Catacombs of St. Sabastian, along the Appian Way, just outside the ancient city of Rome. The anchor, therefore, is one of the oldest symbols of the Christian faith. But today, we are living in the present. We know that anchors have always been (and will continue to be) important to anyone on a ship. **»PPT»** The anchor here comes from the USS Chicago, a heavy cruiser launched by the United States Navy in 1944. The ship was later re-commissioned as a guided missile cruiser in 1964, and was eventually recycled as scrap in 1991. The city of Chicago managed to reclaim the anchor from its namesake, and the anchor is now standing at the end of Navy Pier, just east of downtown Chicago. Our family is pictured here on a typically cold and windy day on Spring Break in April 2007.

With all of this in mind, we get to **Hebrews 6**, **»PPT»** and we find that the author of Hebrews has just finished one of the most severe warnings found anywhere in the entire New Testament. He warns about the danger of apostasy. He warns about the

danger of drifting, but then we come to **verse 9**, and he starts a passage where the word **"hope"** is found four times. And yes, hope does refer to some kind of anticipation of the future, but this morning I would like for us to deepen our understanding just a little bit. If you will, please look with me at **Hebrews 6:9-20**...

***<sup>9</sup> But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. <sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. <sup>11</sup> And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup> so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. <sup>13</sup> For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." <sup>15</sup> And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup> For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. <sup>17</sup> In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.***

As we look back over these twelve verses, I would like for us to consider several very basic lessons based on the word **"HOPE,"** as it is found here in **Hebrews 6**.

- I. **One of the first things we notice about hope comes in verses 9-12 as we discover that OUR HOPE WILL NEVER BE FULLY REALIZED UNTIL THE END. In other words, hope is not salvation in and of itself, but HOPE REQUIRES DILIGENCE. Hope requires that we hold on. »PPT»**

In **verse 11**, the author of the book of **Hebrews** says, ***"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end."*** And so we find that hope is not automatic. Hope is not some kind of miraculous gift. But we find that hope requires diligence. As I understand it, the word **"diligence"** goes back to the root word for hurrying or being quick about something, and so it is the idea that we are to apply ourselves to a situation—we are to focus, we are not to give up, but we are to be diligent to the point of getting the job done in the appropriate time.

Have we ever had the experience of getting all excited about some kind of home improvement project, and maybe we make these big plans, and maybe we even go out and get the materials, but once we get started, we realize that the project is bigger than we thought it was, and maybe it drags out over days, and weeks, and months, and then maybe after a while we just give up. Have you ever been there? Have we ever put off a project to the point where we don't really care anymore? I think it was sometime last summer that we went out and bought the paint and tape and scrapers and brushes for repainting the trim on our house—last summer! But stuff happens, things come up, and the excitement of painting is long gone! It is not a big project, the only part of our house that is not plastic is a little bit of trim around the garage door and around the front door—it should not be very difficult, but we have lost our **"diligence."** The urgency has faded. And here we are at the end of another summer, and starting tomorrow the weather will start getting cold again. We have lost our diligence, and the window of opportunity for painting is about close once again.

The writer of **Hebrews**, though, is telling us that our Christian hope requires diligence. Our Christian hope requires urgency. Our Christian hope requires that we stay awake, and hold on, and follow through. We cannot slack off. Diligence requires hard work over a long period of time. Diligence requires sticking with it until the end. So first of all, then, we understand that our hope is not fully realized until the end—that our hope requires diligence—that we are responsible for holding on to it.

## **II. As we look back to Hebrews 6, we also realize that OUR HOPE IS TIED TO THE PROMISES OF GOD, that OUR HOPE IS BASED ON THE WORD OF GOD. »PPT»**

Starting in **verse 13**, the writer of **Hebrews** refers to the promise that God made to Abraham, and down in **verse 18**, the reason for this whole argument is given, **"...so that by two unchangeable things...we...would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us."** What is the argument? What are those two unchangeable things? The argument (with an example from the life of Abraham) is that our hope is based on two things: the character and the promise of God.

We remember that God called Abraham out of the land of Ur, and God made a promise that He would make Abraham into a great nation, and that through his descendants the entire world would be blessed. But God did not just promise this—we find in the book of Genesis that God took an oath.

Probably all of us remember making various promises back when we were kids, **"Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye."** That makes no sense whatsoever! But it was a serious oath! Perhaps some of you have taken a **"pinkie promise."** I know that I have heard that term at my house a few times over the past few years, and it certainly sounds very serious—I mean, it would be a very bad thing to break a pinkie promise. Perhaps others have heard someone say,

**"I swear on my mother's grave."** And again, I do not really know what that means, but it sounds so serious.

But God came down to our level, and we find here in **Hebrews 6** that God confirmed the promise with an oath, and the oath was based on God's own character. Maybe we can imagine God coming down to our level and taking the witness stand in a courtroom, **"I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God—so help Me, Me."** God took an oath on Himself. God made a promise that He would bless Abraham with many descendants. He took an oath, and He made Himself the guarantee of that oath.

We know that when someone makes a promise, they may seal that promise in a number of different ways, depending on the culture. You might remember that when Boaz promised to take Ruth as his wife, he took off his sandal to prove that he would honor his word. When we make a promise these days, we will often sign on the dotted line. When we make an offer to purchase, we will often back it up with some kind of earnest money—a certain percentage of the purchase price, and then when we finally close on a house, it seems we do nothing but sign paper after paper—our signature is the sign that we will keep our word. When we get married, we seal that oath by exchanging rings. The ring we give is a sign of our commitment. And in any of these cases, if someone questions whether we will follow through, they only need to produce the contract, Ruth could have said, **"Remember the sandal!"** The seller has our down payment. Our spouse has a ring.

God, therefore, made a promise and He sealed it with an oath. And we know from reading the book of Genesis, that Abraham had hope. Abraham had faith in God, and Abraham held on to the promise. He was not always patient. Abraham was not perfect, but Abraham had hope that was based on the character and promise of God. And Abraham ultimately believed that God meant what He said. God's promise was that Abraham would have descendants; the promise was made when Abraham was 75 years old, and his wife, Sarah, was about 65. We might say that Abraham and Sarah had already converted their nursery into a study—they were done with the idea of children. And yet Abraham believed the promise, and his son Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90—25 years later! Abraham continued having hope that God would live up to His word. And several years later, even when God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Abraham continued to have hope, and Abraham took steps of obedience. Abraham had hope that God's word was true.

Abraham's hope was based on the word of God—God's word about His own character, and God's word that He would honor the oath. Certainly we find comfort in **verse 18**, in the fact that it is **"impossible for God to lie."** According to **verse 18**, this is an **"unchangeable"** truth. The word **"unchangeable"** was sometimes used in the ancient world with reference to a person's will. And so God's word is firm—just as a person's will cannot be changed after he dies—in the same way, God's word stays the same. As some translations say, it is **"immutable."** God does not back down from His word. God is not affected by a bad day, but His word is firm.

### III. As we look back at Hebrews 6, we discover a third basic truth about hope as we find that OUR HOPE HAS REAL CONSEQUENCES. »PPT»

In the middle of verse 18, Christians are described as "***we who have taken refuge.***" You might remember that in the Old Testament God designated certain cities as places you could flee for safety if you had accidentally killed a member of someone's family. If you could make it to the city of refuge, the family was not allowed to take revenge. With that understanding, it is interesting that Christians are described as those who have "***taken refuge.***" We have run away from sin, we have run for shelter, we have run for protection, and we have put our hope in God.

And then in verse 19, we have the picture of hope being described as an "***anchor of the soul.***" We have the picture of a ship being caught in some kind of storm and dropping anchor for safety. Our hope is, "***...both sure and steadfast.***" You guys know that I do not have a boat. I have done some canoeing and kayaking, but I have never personally used an anchor in a boat. This past Friday, though, I went down to the grand opening of the new Farm & Fleet in Verona, and while I was looking at something else, I noticed a display of anchors. They were maybe 20-30 pounds, and there were blades or scoops on the end—designed to catch on the bottom of a lake or river. There was a loop on top for attaching a rope or a cable. Just a smaller version of what we see behind us on the wall here. That is how the writer of Hebrews pictures our hope. Our hope is, "***...an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast.***" It digs in, and it will not move!

For those of us who do not use boats very often, we certainly appreciate anchors in other areas of life. I was stopped into a local thrift store a week or so ago, and there was a collapsible backpacking shovel that caught my eye. It was bright red and had several holes in it—apparently it was a climbing shovel. I read the directions and discovered that it was also designed to be an anchor in the snow. The instructions described how to connect a rope and bury it in the snow—I suppose, to survive some kind of avalanche, or something. Nevertheless, the shovel was an anchor. I know some of you have used the little blue Tapcon concrete anchors for mounting things on the floor or on a concrete wall—you drill a certain size hole in the concrete, and then you drive those anchors with a half-inch drill. The last time I checked, I think the shear-off weight was something around 600 pounds. We used those anchors to attach the new window wells to the side of this church building. We appreciate all kinds of anchors. But the point here is that our hope is like that. Our hope is an "***anchor of the soul.***" It is "***sure and steadfast.***" It will not move!

But it is interesting that our hope is not anchored at the bottom of the ocean, or in the side of a snow-covered hill, or even in a concrete wall, but our anchor "***enters within the veil.***" As I understand it, the "***veil***" here refers to the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the temple. The high priest could only go through that curtain very briefly one time every year, on the Day of Atonement, so that he could make a sacrifice for the sins of the people. You might remember, though, that when Jesus died on the cross, that veil was torn in two from top to bottom. As the writer of Hebrews says in verse 20, our anchor enters within the veil, "***...where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a***



**high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."** The temple is merely a shadow of heaven, so he has to be referring here to the throne room of God in heaven. Jesus entered heaven as our **"forerunner."** Jesus is the one who runs on ahead. Jesus is the **"trailblazer"** (**Hebrews 12:2**). The term refers to scouts in the military—those who would go on ahead—the guy with the machete, hacking a trail through the jungle. Jesus blazed the trail into the Most Holy Place in heaven.

I have read that ancient sailors had an interesting custom. When there was a sandbar across a harbor and they could not get across at low tide, one sailor would get in a little boat and would carry the ship's anchor over the sand bar and drop it in the harbor. And then, once the tide came in, the ship would pull itself into the harbor. That is what Jesus has done for us. He has taken our hope and has anchored it in heaven. Can we picture a giant ship with a huge anchor chain—but instead of going down into the sea, the giant chain goes directly up as far as we can see? That is the idea that we have here—our hope is anchored in heaven.

When we put \$5,000 down on a house, it changes our behavior—we have dropped anchor, so to speak. We stop looking at other houses, and we start making plans for the big move. When she says "Yes" and we give her that ring, it changes the way we live—we start making plans for the future, and hopefully we stop looking at other women. Being engaged to be married changes the way we live. And the same thing is true with our hope in the promise of God here in the book of **Hebrews**—once our hope is anchored in heaven, it changes the way we live.

We are no longer tossed here and there by the ups and downs of the economy. We look at disease and death in a different way. We no longer put our trust in politicians and great world leaders. Our world is different, because we are different from the world! And in a time when families and corporations are falling apart and lying to each other, the Bible says that our hope is both **"sure and steadfast."**

I learned something very interesting this week. I was looking into the word **"sure"** in **verse 19**, and I discovered that the word translated here as **"sure"** is the basis for our English word **"asphalt."** It comes from the Greek word for **"tripping,"** but it has the negative prefix in front of it, and so the word means, **"not tripping."** So I guess when we pave something with **"asphalt,"** we are making it smooth and secure so that nobody trips. That is the picture here! If we are diligent, if we believe in the promises of God, then our anchor in heaven is **"sure and steadfast."** Our anchor can prevent us from falling.

Our anchor changes the way we live:

- When we feel the pressure of the world to do what we know is wrong, we can have the strength to say "No," because our anchor is in heaven.
- When we feel the pressure of the world to wear what we know is immodest, we can have the strength to stand firm, because our anchor is in heaven—we answer to a higher power.
- When we feel the pressure of the world to get sucked into the office gossip, we can have the strength to back away, because our anchor is in heaven.

- When we feel the pressure of the world to forget the promise we made before God on our wedding day, we can have the strength to run like Joseph, because our anchor is in heaven.
- When we feel the pressure of the world to react in anger when someone cuts us off and takes our parking spot, we can resist the urge to lash out, because our anchor is in heaven.

### **Conclusion & Invitation:**

This morning, we have been reminded that hope literally involves some kind of eager anticipation of the future. We are looking forward to what is coming next. But it is so much deeper than that. We have learned from this little passage in the book of **Hebrews** that,

- Our hope is not fully realized until the end. That is, it takes **DILIGENCE** to see it realized.
- We have learned that our hope is based on the promises of God—our hope is **based on the word of God**.
- And finally, our hope has **real consequences**—our hope means something—our hope is anchored in heaven—it changes the way we live.

You know, I am not really sure who we can trust these days. I would not recommend trusting any politicians. I would not be surprised if some more banks let us down over the next few days. People will let us down, but there is a God in heaven who always keeps His word. I would encourage all of us to take hold of the kind of hope that serves as an anchor of the soul.

There was a time when we had no hope. In **Ephesians 2:12-13**, the Bible tells us to, ***"...remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."***

We come near to God by the blood of Christ through baptism—through our obedience to the gospel. The sacrifice has already been made. We accept it by taking hold of it. The Bible teaches that we are to turn away from sin, and we are then to allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you are ready to obey the gospel, you can let us know about your decision as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)