

The Faith of Abraham

Hebrews 6:13-20

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 18, 2022

Well, I could tell just by listening to you guys talk to each other, that you're really excited to see one another. And I would encourage you to take that enthusiasm into our care groups. They are starting up next week. And there they are designed to take the big church and make it smaller. And we want this to be a home for you and that can really only happen as you spend time together in a more intimate setting. That is what those groups are all about. I would ask you to be a part of one of those, we try to put the list together based on the church directory. But if your name was not in the list, let one of us know. And we'll put you right in there. And with that said, I want to jump right into our sermon for today.

Please open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews. This is a book that we've been studying for several months now as a church and today we find ourselves in Hebrews chapter six. So that's our passage for this morning. I want to read it to you while we study it together. Hebrews six says,

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits. For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and lose to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. 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. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you." And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as a confirmation is an end of every dispute. 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, 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. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope, both sure and steadfast and one which 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.

We'll stop the reading there, because that's where the passage ends. But as you read that you can tell some of this material is hard to follow, especially what it says here at the end about Abraham and in order to explain this, the way this passage comes together, is that after talking about Jesus' high priesthood in chapter five, the author goes on a little bit of a digression. You could look at chapter five, verse 11, all the way through the end of chapter six as one long parenthesis in his thought, because starting in chapter five, verse 11, it says, "Concerning him, we have much to say, and it's hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing." In other words, I would like to tell you more about Jesus and his high priesthood, but you're not ready yet. You guys are too immature. It's not a very encouraging thing to say. But he's trying to shepherd them. Later on he is going to call him childish over this. Then he will call them infants who need someone to put a bib around their neck hold their head back while someone feeds them with a bottle of milk. It's kind of a funny illustration here. Which leads into say this in chapter six verse four, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift and have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance."

That is strong language, but what that means is that for those who are dull, like these Hebrews are behaving, a time may come when they fall away from the faith. Because the author has given them a warning here, and that is that if you are dull to the things of God, and you don't repent, then you are childish in verse 12, and you don't repent, then you act like a baby in verse 13, who needs someone to say googoo gaga all through your life, and you don't repent. There may come a day when you will apostatize, not because you lose your salvation, but because you never had it. Which would have terrified the audience. And if you can imagine, if you were just sitting in their shoes, it would have frightened you to death. So in order to calm them down, he says this in verse nine: "But beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you." In other words, let me be clear, for a moment, I don't think this is talking about you guys. I don't believe you have fallen away, even though you are making some mistakes, and even though you are childish, and even though you are acting like a bunch of kids, you are the real thing. Which was a turning point, this is where the whole thing shifts gears, because he's been pretty hard on them so far. But now like any shepherd would do, he puts that on hold for a moment in order to put his arm around them and say, but I know you'll be fine. Because from verse nine, all the way down to verse 11, he gives them one reason after another, why he thinks they are saved. This is all put in a positive light here.

And then he says these words in verse 13, which seem to come out of nowhere. He says, "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself saying, 'Surely I will bless you.'" Now, what is that about? Well, he says this to give them more encouragement, and to tell them that if you read all this, and you feel discouraged, because you think you don't look like the real thing, there is something else you can do. And that is that you can follow the example of Abraham because he was saved by faith. And so are you. Does that encourage you? The father of the Jews obtained the promise by waiting on it and trusting in God and putting his hope in Him. And it's no different in the Christian life. Even if you look at this whole discussion of works, you have to remember you are saved by grace and not by works. Amen. You don't earn it. You don't work for it. You don't do a bunch of good deeds first, in order to get it first, you are saved by trusting in Christ. That's all. I hope that wipes away some of your tears this morning. I hope that picks you up off the floor. That's the intention of the author.

I talked to people last Sunday who told me that after studying this passage, they still struggle with it because they see all this stuff about works. And they feel like they don't measure up. They read all these things in Hebrews six about our love, and our diligence, and our patience in verse 12. And they feel like they fall short. And I had to remind them, yes, you do fall short, because we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But that's where

your faith comes in. Salvation is a gift. It's not something you earn, it is a present. It's not a payment. It only comes by the mercy of God. I talked to some other ones who told me that when they read this passage, they wonder, well, what do I do when I fail in these areas? I mean, how do I keep going? And the answer is the same. You keep going by faith. God doesn't want you to work your way back into his presence. God wants you to rest in Jesus Christ and the works will follow. There's an order here, and that is that your faith comes first, your works come second; your faith is the root, your works are the fruit, but it all goes back to trusting in Him. That's how the Christian life works. And we are going to get into the details of all this passage when we go through it.

If you look down at the end of the chapter, in order to tell you more about this, verse 19 says, "This hope we have as an anchor for the soul." And that's a beautiful picture here, because it comes from the world of sailing, and the anchor refers to a large metal object you would throw overboard from a ship in order to hold it in place so that the ship wouldn't go anywhere in the midst of a storm. It symbolized stability, security, comfort, peace. He was assigned to every sailor so that no matter what happened to your boat, it wasn't going to move because it was tied to something greater. And the author says it's the same way with us as believers, your hope is tied to Jesus Christ. Now, you have something to hold you safe through the storm. So when the winds and waves and troubles of this life crash in, and when the world and the flesh and the devil come attacking you, you are not going to move. Your eyes are fixed straight on Him. In fact, I read somewhere this week that most sailors at this time couldn't swim, so that really highlights the impact of this. Because this anchor was literally a life-or-death situation for sailors; without them they would perish. Without Christ, it is the same way. Jesus Himself said in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish." Jesus didn't say God loved the world, so that whoever works for Him shall not perish. Whoever Labor's whoever toils, whoever sweats, no, you are saved by believing. That is what delivers you from death.

The apostle Paul says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." There he doesn't say our peace with God is found in trying and trying and trying to do something. And our justification comes when we do and do and do more, it comes from the cross. That's all. Which doesn't take away from the importance of works, because as we saw last week, works are very important in the Christian life. It doesn't take away from the need for you to grow and change and make progress. Because that's how you can tell you're a Christian. That is why they are so essential. But the idea is that none of that matters if you don't have this. I heard it said before that another illustration of faith and works are like two sides of a train track. So if you take one of them off, the track gets lopsided, and the train crashes. And that may be true. But I think this is an illustration that needs to be changed to be more clear, and say that faith is like the train track, and your works are what rests on top of it. Because without your faith, your train is not going to go anywhere. And without your work, you can't even see the train is there at all. Which is important because so many people act like this. When they sin, they don't have any faith in Christ and so they go everywhere. In dealing with it. Some of them turn to drugs, some turn to therapy, some turned to shrinks, some turn to specialists that charge them \$300 an hour to give them help. Some go to cults, some go to false religion, some people run to legalism where they work themselves to death and come to the very end of it and go to hell. They are like a train that is going off the rails. And the way to deal with that is to put your faith back in the proper place. It needs to rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. So that yes, you sin. Yes, you fail, yes, you still mess up. But when you do, you run straight into His arms. That's what the example of Abraham teaches us.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning with four lessons we learned from the faith of Abraham. So if you're taking notes, this is what we're looking at this morning. But in Hebrews six, starting in verse 13, we're

going to look at four lessons we learned from the faith of Abraham, and just like it was last week, please understand brothers and sisters, this is all intended to be an encouragement to you. This passage is not intended to beat you up or make you feel discouraged, because this is not about you and your performance. It's just about God and His mercy. And I want you to see that.

The first of these lessons is that you can trust God's promises. In salvation, you can trust God's promises, which means He is reliable. You can believe God would do what He said He would do. And if you look in verse 13, it says this, "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.' And so having patiently waited, Abraham obtained the promise."

Now, if you notice, verse 13 starts with the word "for" and that points you back to the previous passage where it says way up in verse 10, "For God is not unjust, so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name." I just showed you how that was given as a blessing to these Jews to remind them that they are saved because after the stern warning he gave them earlier about falling away, he wanted to let them know he's not talking about them. They are not falling away because they are working for the Lord. And after writing that, he gives them an exhortation in verse 11 to say, "and we desire that each one of you show the same diligence, so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience, inherit the promise. For when God made the promise to Abraham..." In other words, this is one of the people you should imitate. Now, this is one of the ones who have inherited the promise that you need to copy and that is Abraham, the man of faith. He succeeded in an area where these Jews were struggling. If you put the whole chapter together, on the one hand, the Jews were doing a very good job of working for the Lord. But on the other hand, they were dull in their faith. They were very lazy in that department. They were like the kind of Christian who serves his neighbor every weekend, which is wonderful, and it's a blessing. But if you ask him to quote five Bible verses to you, you can't do it. So he sets forth the example of Abraham as a way to help them grow.

And when the passage says, "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater He swore by Himself saying, 'I will surely bless you.'" That's referring to one of the strongest promises God made to this man back in the book of Genesis. I won't ask you to turn there. But if you remember the story, Genesis 21, says that after waiting for a son for a long time, the Lord gave one to Abraham. And after He did that, the next chapter, Genesis 22, says, "Now it came about after these things, God tested Abraham and told him to take his son Isaac, and offer him as a burnt offering" ... remember that story? Some people believe the Lord chose the location on the mountain because that was where the future temple would be built. So Isaac would be sacrificed on the mountain that the Old Testament sacrifices would be offered, that may be true, I don't know if we know that. But whatever the case, the next verse tells us that Abraham did it. He rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey. In other words, he didn't hesitate. He didn't put it off, he obeyed right away. And as he went up the mountain he came to the place the Lord told him about, and he built an altar, arranged the wood bound up Isaac's hands, and was about to slay them when the Lord stopped Him. And when he stopped him, God said these words that are recorded right here in the book of Hebrews, "'By Myself, I have sworn,' declares the Lord, 'because you have done this thing and not withheld your son, I will greatly bless you.'" Now, I don't know about you, but if I had a son, and the Lord told me to kill him, I would have a hard time with that. And if I was promised to have a family, and then the Lord gave me a son, and he told me to kill him, I would have even a harder time with it. And yet Abraham obeyed immediately. Isaac was his most treasured possession. He was the one thing on

earth he loved more than anything else. Yes, his actions show that he loved God more than that, because he trusted Him. Abraham knew that the Lord told him He would bless him, so He would bless him. He didn't understand the details. He didn't know how it would work. And the Lord said He would give him a family. So he believed God would give him a family. It didn't make sense to him. But he did it anyway. And verse one, verse 13 says, "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since he could swear by no one greater, he swore by Himself." That may sound strange, but it is alluding to the fact that the ancient people took things like promises seriously, because they didn't have written documents to copy them down on. So it was all done by word of mouth. And oftentimes, when you were concluding a promise, a man would say something like this, he would say, "I swear by the heavens and earth," because that was the greatest thing you could think of. "I swear by the gods by Baal," or someone like that, because it was the highest form of promise he could make. And the verse says here that the Lord did the same thing when He made the oath Abraham, except He swore by Himself because there was nothing greater to swear by.

According to some scholars, God repeated that promise on five occasions to help Abraham remember it. He did it in Genesis 12, Genesis 15, Genesis 17, Chapter 18 And Genesis 22. Because you can imagine that Abraham would have been wondering all that time, is God really going to give me a son? Did I really hear him correctly? Maybe I forgot. And so the Lord appeared to him to say, "No, you heard me right, Abraham, I'm going to do it." And to sum it all up, verse 15, says this, it says, "And so having patiently waited, he obtained the promise." And that's really an understatement because one of the most fascinating things about Abraham's story is how old he was when all this happened. Genesis 12 says Abraham was 75 years old when the Lord called him, and he was 99, when he was circumcised, and he was 100 when Isaac was born, which means that he was playing with his son at an age when most people play with their great grandsons. And what did he do in between all that time? He waited. And what did he do day in and day out while he was waiting for the Lord to fulfill His Word? He was patient because he trusted Him.

And the lesson the author is saying here in all this is that you need to do the same thing today. Because you have a promise of God too. You are told, if you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved. You are told if you run to the cross, your sins will be forgiven. You are told if you call out on His name, He will change your life. And you have to believe it, too. There is no other way to go to heaven. In fact, you have a lot of promises. I did some research on this recently, and found there are more than 5000 promises in the Bible. If you boil it all down, it comes to 75 promises per book, more than you could even remember, every time you read the Bible, it's almost like there is a promise on every page. And they talk about everything from your joy, to your hope to your salvation, and the victory you have in Christ, which is wonderful. It's amazing. But none of it does you any good if you don't believe it. Just like Abraham, it doesn't help if you don't have faith.

And just tying this verse back into the previous ones right above this in Hebrews, what this looks like is when you read a text, like Hebrews six, verse four, you need to understand that it doesn't mean that every time you sin, you fall away. And it's not telling you that every time you mess up, you go straight to hell as a Christian, because that's not the promise here. Hebrews six verse four is not even a promise at all, it's just a warning. The promise is that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive them, amen! The promise is that God made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us. So you need to take that to heart. And some of you need to not be so worried about this passage. I would also add, when you read this chapter, you need to realize it doesn't mean that when you sin, it's impossible to renew you. Now, God never said that either. He didn't say if you mess up once it's over for you. Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to me, and the one who comes to Me, I will never cast out."

That means if you come to God in faith, you will be saved. He won't cast you out. But it all goes back to the question, will you take God at His Word and believe? I don't know if you thought about this. But this is a problem today, because we just feel like we can't believe anybody anymore. I mean, people are so unreliable nowadays. Sociologists refer to it as the psychosis of distrust, or the credibility gap, because you go to buy a car, and what do you do? You question the sales man, don't you? You don't believe that guy. Because you think he's trying to lie to you, or you go to buy a house and it's even worse, because they're so expensive, so you ask him question after question after question and pepper him with word after word after word, because you don't think that anything he's telling you is legitimate. You go to the bank and do the same thing. Go to your workplace, do the same thing. Go to the doctor and ask those guys a billion questions. And the problem is that if you are not careful, you can take that same attitude into the church and do the same thing with God. God is not a man for you to distrust Him. God is not like us where He changes his mind. The book of Numbers talks about that. I mean, if there's anything you can believe it's the word of God. This is what Abraham understood perfectly. At the end of the day, Abraham's view on life was very simple. God said it and he would do it. The Lord promised it, and it would happen. And that's all that you need to know. Maybe not tomorrow, maybe not the next day, maybe not the day after, but it would come to pass.

The story is told all the time that John Patton, the famous missionary to the cannibals in the South Pacific, was translating the Bible and he couldn't find a proper word for faith. So one day he was talking to one of the natives and he was leaning back in his chair and he asked him, "What am I doing right now?" And the native man said, "You are leaning," and gave the word in his language. And he said, "That's it. That's the word for faith." When a man is trusting God, he doesn't hold himself up on his own power, he leans everything back on Him. That's what Abraham did here in this chapter and it brings you to another lesson you learn from Abraham's faith, and that is that you can trust God's character. The first one is that you can trust God's promises. But secondly, you can trust in God's character, which means that not only is God's word reliable, but so is His reputation. Other people have trusted Him before and found Him true and you can do the same. And if you read on in the passage, starting back in verse 13, it says, "For when God made the promise to Abraham, since he could swear by no one greater, he swore by Himself saying, 'I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.' And so having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. 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, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we have taken refuge." Now, as you can tell, just by reading this, the passage doesn't get easier to understand, because some of the wording here is difficult. But it helps to keep in mind the context. And the context is that the author has given this to remind the Jews that you are saved by faith and not by works, you are saved by the promise. Abraham was an example of this, he did not get a son by earning it. And Abraham did not get a family by working for it. Instead, he did it by trusting in the Lord.

As the author explains in verse 16, says, "For Men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute." Now, the idea here is that in the ancient world, when there is a dispute over something, one of the ways to settle it was by taking an oath. And not only by taking it but often by offering some type of symbolic gesture. Like I just said, they didn't write things down a lot back then. But they would do something dramatic to ratify their covenant, because they would take an animal out of their barns and slaughter it and kill it and cut it in half, and spread it on two sides of a walkway. So they could pass through the body parts of the animal and say, "May the same thing happen to me if I do not fulfill this vow. Now, I don't know about you, but I think that would make things a lot more simple when you go to the car dealership, amen?"

Or maybe when you go buy a house, may you take my life and cut me in half if I don't keep it. And the interesting thing about that action is that the Bible says the Lord did the same thing with Abraham at one point. Genesis 15 tells us right after God made one of these promises to Him, the Lord told Abraham to take a three year old heifer, and a three year old goat, and a three year old lamb and a turtle dove and a pigeon, and do that to them. He had to cut them in pieces, lay them on opposite sides of each other. And as Abraham was preparing to walk through them, the amazing part of the story is that he fell asleep. Abraham knew what he was doing when he was arranging those dead animal parts. He'd seen people do it before, he'd probably done it himself on other covenants. So he's ready to go through them and he falls asleep. And while he's out of it, the Lord appears to him in a dream and the Lord passes through the broken animal pieces in the form of a pod and a blazing torch in order to show Abraham that this covenant is about Me. It's not about you. And His promises are about Yahweh and His Word and His power and His faithfulness, not the faithfulness of men. Because that's what ends the dispute here. The dispute is ended because God said he would do it and He would do it. And that's the end of the story, Abraham.

Verse 17, says that He did this to show the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of his purpose. And that gives you another reason why God gave an oath to Abraham, and that was so the heirs of the promise, or the Jews could see it in the future. Because the people of Israel can look back now and see that God promised Abraham a family and He delivered on it. In fact, when Abraham died, there was one son of the promise, Isaac. Do you know how many Jews there are today? About 14 million. Does God keep his promises? You bet He does. And they can look back and see it. Verse 18, says as well, "So that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we have taken refuge." And to be honest, this gets a little hard to interpret because commentators have gone back and forth as to what those unchangeable things are. Some have said that this refers to God's promise and His oath because God gave Abraham a promise, and then ratified it with an oath, like we talked about where he walked through the pieces of animals. Some have taken this to mean that the unchangeable things are His promise and His power, because nothing can stand in the way of God. There's other ways to interpret this. But when you put it all together in verse 18 it says these two unchangeable things are given. So we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. In other words, this was all done as a way to encourage you. You can see the word encouraged in the past which God did all these good things through Abraham. So if you're feeling discouraged by your sins, and frustrated by your failures, you can look back to his example and find refuge in God. Because just like it was with Abraham, your salvation is not about you anyway, it's about Him. And just like it was with the Father of the Jews, your hope of heaven will not be obtained by you earning it, it will be by you trusting in Him. Because you have a God who keeps His word, He keeps His promise, and He passes through the rows of slaughtered animals, so you have no reason to be afraid.

This means if you wake up today, and you struggle with something, you can survive it knowing that it's not about you. And then if you wake up tomorrow, and you struggle with something, lust, or anger or pride, you can survive it as well, knowing it's not about you, your hope is in the Lord. It's not about your power to save yourself, it's about His power to keep you that was something in the Old Testament, it's something in the new. If you wake up on Monday, you go to the office, you are bombarded with the same lust and sensations, you will be okay because your God is always the same. No matter what the situation is. That's how you win in the battle with sin. You do it by looking to the Lord. You don't find it in looking at your own sins and failures and shortcomings. And looking at your works and deeds and goodness, there's no hope in that you find your power in Christ alone.

I don't know if you picked up on this when you read the passage here, but the word "unchangeable" is repeated twice here in verse 17. And in verse 18, that word is rendered "immutable" in some of your translations, "unwavering" in others. Because the idea here is that this is what God is like, He doesn't waver or change. When life gets difficult, He is always the same. That would have had to be an encouragement to Abraham, you can imagine some of you have had children recently. And you know, it's hard enough to wait nine months for a child and it's stressful, makes you anxious, worried. Abraham waited 25 years. And the only thing that kept him going was God's faithfulness. He had nothing else to lean on. He was watching his wife get older, he was watching himself get older. His only hope was in the Lord and it's the same way for you.

And that brings us to another lesson that we learned from Abraham's faith. And that is that you can trust God's anchor. We are just taking these out of the text here, but this means that as a New Testament Christian, not only do you trust in Yahweh, but you can trust in Jesus. Because if you notice, as you look through the text here, the author makes a shift from talking about Abraham to talking about us. When he says that "we" in verse 18, "We who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us." And the reason that verse needs to stand out there is because the pronoun shifts from them and verse 15, to us. It goes from the third person plural, to the first person plural, to make it personal. Now he's talking to the audience here. And not only that, but he also takes it from the Jewish context to the Christian one. When he calls Jesus the anchor of the soul here in verse 19, he says, "This hope we have as an anchor for the soul," which is one of several illustrations the author gives you for Jesus in the book of Hebrews. Because if you just want to write these down, in chapter one verse six, He calls Jesus the "firstborn." Christ is the one who comes before all others. Then in chapter two, verse 10, he calls Him the "author of salvation," or the one who wrote it out for us, Jesus spelled out our salvation from start to finish. Then later on in chapter two, verse 17, He calls Christ, our "faithful high priest." Then in chapter three, verse one, He is our "apostle." Then in chapter three, verse three, He is the "builder of the house." In chapter three, verse nine, He is the one who gives "our Sabbath rest." And now skipping farther down, the author gives you one more when he calls Him our "anchor."

The Greek word *agkyra* refers to an object sailors would throw over a ship whenever it encountered trouble because the anchor would go down to the bottom and stay there and it would never move to remind him that the ship wouldn't move. Everything is going to be fine, as long as you have an anchor. To look at this verse in his total context, he actually says this in verse 19, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope, both sure and steadfast, and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us." Now, I want to talk about all this verse in just a moment. But this is where the author changes the image a second time to go from an anchor to a veil. And the veil was what separated the people in Israel from the presence of God and the temple. The significance to this and the reason we need to talk about it all together, is that the temple wasn't laid out like a normal building. When you walk into the temple in Jerusalem and had four courtyards that brought you closer and closer to the presence of God as you went, our church isn't like that. When you go into the church, you walk in here, sit down, and you understand that if your heart's right with God, you are in His presence. But it wasn't like that in the Old Testament system. Because first they had the court of Gentiles where non-Jews could go to worship, people like you and me. That was the farthest you could get from God, because that's what they thought the Gentiles were, they were always at a distance. And then further in as you went into the temple, you will come to the court of women, where Jewish women could go and pray to the Lord and worship Him, because they were closer to God than the Gentiles were. Then you have the court of men where Jewish men could go. Then farther in you had the court of priests where the clergy gathered. And inside the court of priests, you had another room called the Holy of Holies, where no one could go except the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement, and

that's where God's presence was. And the one object that separated the Holy of Holies, from the rest of the people was called the curtain or the veil. That's what he's referring to here in verse 19. According to one source, it was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and it's so heavy, it took 300 priests to hang it. It was made out of some very thick cloth. And yet the verse says here, Jesus entered into that place and stayed there. When our Lord died and resurrected, and ascended into heaven, He walked into the presence of God, and just like an anchor does, He remained there permanently. The author here says, this is the promise God has for you now. And that is a you can come into the presence of God too, if you put your faith in Him. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you can go past the court of Gentiles, past the court of women, past the court of men, past the court of priests, past the veil and walk right into the Holy of Holies. It's quite a promise in verse 20, said, he entered as a forerunner for us, and that means He went there to pave a pathway for you to follow. That's what a forerunner does. In fact, even backing up a little bit here, this verse says that Jesus is a sure anchor, which means He is certain. We know He is reliable because He cannot stumble or falter or fail. And it says He is steadfast, which says the same thing again, because He is dependable and reliable, and He's been tried by other saints in the past and found trustworthy.

And if that's not enough, verse 19, calls him an anchor for your soul, not for your body, but for your inner man. Because, as one commentator said, "Some anchors go down into the water, your anchor goes up into heaven, and it takes your spirit with it." And friends, this really summarizes what the book of Hebrews is about or what Hebrews six is about. Because if you've ever worried about falling away from Christ, you need to understand what this says. It says you can't. Because He is your anchor. So that if you are in Christ, you stay in Christ. And if you are His child, you will be His child forever. There's no going back and forth on this. There's no being saved one day and losing it the next. Some of the sources tell you that at this time when Christians were persecuted, they would run to the tombs underground, because they knew that a lot of people wouldn't follow them down there. Later on, people did excavations, and they found that there's one symbol that that you see more than any other on those tombs today from the first century. And that is a symbol of an anchor. They knew that whatever happened up there, I'm going to be fine. You are the same way.

This promise also tells you if you have ever worried about coming to the place where you sin to the point that you can't be renewed anymore, that can't happen either. Because salvation is a settled thing. Your anchor here gives you peace and comfort and safety. It gives you rest and relief and assurance. It gives you joy and hope and calm and tranquility and stillness. But it all goes back to the idea of a complete and full salvation. There is a balance here and how you look at this passage. Because yes, you need to work. And yes, you need to strive. And yes, you need to labor to put away your sin and never slack off on that. But at the same time, you do it understanding that your soul is safe and His everlasting arms can never be taken away from that. Because whatever happens to you in this world, it doesn't change the anchor. And whatever takes place on the surface of the ocean, it doesn't impact what's going on beneath. At the bottom, your soul is fine, because Jesus is holding on to it.

Several years ago, I got to observe a counseling session with a biblical counselor who was trying to help a lady who was depressed and wrestling with this issue of her salvation. And so the counselor asked her, "Well, do you believe in Jesus?" And she said, "Yes." And he said, "Do you think He saved you?" And she said, "Yes." So he quoted Hebrews 13, verse eight, which says, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever." And he said, "Do you know what that means? It means you'll be fine, because Jesus is still in the saving business. And so you don't need to worry about that." I would give the same word to you this morning. And it brings you to one more lesson we learned from Abraham's faith here, I just to review these other ones. The first one is that you can trust in God's promise. Secondly, you can trust God's character. Third, you can trust His anchor, which is such a blessing

because so many things in this life change on us, they do go back and forth. You are here one day, and another way different. But Jesus isn't like that. He is always the same.

And it brings you to one more lesson we learned from this passage. And that is that you can trust in Christ, the new high priest. A fourth lesson we learned from Abraham's faith. And this just ties them all off together is that you can trust in Christ, the new high priest, which means you can trust in the one who stands in the gap between God and man for you. And if you read in verse 19, he says it this way, "This hope we have as an anchor for the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast, and one which 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." And this last point is important because it brings you full circle to what started this whole discussion. If you look back in chapter four, verse 14, this is how the author began this whole section of Hebrews, when he says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession." I just showed you how before, the author uses that verse to go into a lengthy discussion of Jesus' priesthood in chapter five, before putting it on hold to address some other matters. And now he comes back to it. And from this point, all the way from here at the end of chapter six, all the way to the end of chapter nine, he's going to go into great lengths to explain Jesus' ministry to us as a priest, and we'll get into that later next week. But for now, the word *priest* it comes from a Hebrew word that means to stand. A priest refers to someone who stands in the gap between God and man for you, He puts himself right in between the two parties. We've talked about this before. But the idea is that you can't come to God on your own, you're way too sinful for that. So you need someone to do it for you. And that was what this guy did. And he did it by making sacrifices. The old covenant made it very clear that when you sinned against God, there was only one way to deal with that. And that was with the blood of an offering. And yet, if you notice here, it doesn't say anything about the sacrifice. Because in Christ, the sacrifice and the priest are one. And Jesus is the offeror and the offering. The old covenant system was very detailed with the way they would kill an animal and offer him up. Because what they would do is when you came to bring your animal to the priest, he would have you put your hand on the head to symbolize this is my fault that this is happening, I'm responsible for what's going to happen to this animal. And then he would kill it right in front of you, letting the blood drain into a bowl, then he would sprinkle the blood on the altar before skinning it, cutting it up and spreading the pieces out on top of the altar and then burning it. That was all done as a way to show this is how much God hates your sin. The new covenant tells us Christ did all that at one time on the cross. And in doing so he became your great high priest.

It's hard to overstate the importance of what he's saying here because the author writing this to Jews. And they knew what the priesthood was all about. I mean, they saw priests all the time. Some accounts say that there were somewhere around 30,000 priests at this time and they were all served as a reminder to know that the presence of God is off limits. Now, the veil did that for you in the temple, and did the priesthood, because you had to go through them to get to God, you had to make a sacrifice with their help. And what the author of the book of Hebrews is telling you now is that Jesus has come to do away with that. He has come to show you that you can come into the presence of God anytime you want through Him. This verse says that He has entered within the veil having become a high priest forever. And the meaning there is that the former priest only served for a limited amount of time. Numbers eight verse 24, says the priests could not start serving until they turned 25. And they had to stop when they were 50. So they had a window there to serve. The high priest could serve longer than that, because he could serve for life. But even so, he still died. And the author here says that Jesus is different, because He never dies, He is your priest forever. It also tells you that He was a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. And the significance of that is that Melchizedek was a different type of priest than Aaron was

because he was a priest and a king. He was a servant and a ruler to show that with Jesus, there's nothing that can keep him from saving you. He is the Lord of heaven and earth, He has all power rule and dominion. And therefore He is better.

And just to be honest, this whole discussion of Christ's priesthood is hard for us to think about at times, because we are Gentiles. And some of this is really deep because you are talking about what Christ does in heaven. Anytime you talk about His priesthood, you are discussing what He is doing now at the Father's right hand, and you have to be humble about that. But one way to learn about it is to go to other parts of the Bible to study it. And one of those passages is John chapter 17. That passage is referred to as Jesus' high priestly prayer. And I want to read some of it to you, because it's the longest prayer recorded by Him in the Bible. And the reason it's helpful is because it gives you a glimpse of what He is doing right now with His priesthood. This is how the Lord is serving currently. This is Him praying on earth. Now He is praying in heaven. And I'm going to skip around a little bit in the prayer. But it says,

Jesus spoke these things, and lifting up His eyes to heaven. He said, "Father, the hour has come, glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was.

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours, and You gave them to Me.

And now skipping down a little bit in the prayer, He says,

While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

Now, the reason I wanted to read that to you and get your mind thinking along these lines, is because this is what Jesus did as a High Priest. It says He kept the disciples in His name. In other words, He guarded them and shielded them and protected them from the enemy. And the significance to that is that that is what He is still doing right now. The Lord did it then and He is doing it today. He is keeping us safe in His everlasting arms, which means when you are a Christian, and you sin, He keeps you. You repent, but He protects you. When you are a Christian, and you struggle, He guards you and oversees your soul. That's how you are saved. You are not saved by just picking yourself up by your bootstraps, you are saved by Him. Which is so important, because I know some of you have probably read all of this material and it has been frustrating for you, because you feel like you don't measure up because of your sin. And I understand that I get where you're coming from. But what I want you to understand on the back end here is that even so, if you're in Christ, He is looking out for you. And even though you have sinned, He is still keeping you protected before the presence of God. That's what He does. That's why he ascended into heaven. He did it to plead for you there.

Next week, we're going to talk about this some more when we get into the issue of Melchizedek. And we're gonna see how his priesthood relates to Christ. But for now, I just want to ask you not to let this chapter be a stumbling

block for you, you need to let it be a blessing. Because the lesson here is that Jesus is there morning, noon and night for you. He is there 24 hours a day, seven days a week in Heaven, to show you that you don't fight the battle alone. In Him, you have an advocate, you have a mediator, you have a powerful ally, that nothing in this world can even touch. In fact, when I was reflecting on this passage for today, I was reminded of something Robert Murray McShane once said when he told a friend that if I could hear Christ praying for me, in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Because one prayer from Him, and it would put them all to flight. And that's what you have in this passage. It reminds you that you have a Saviour who is praying for you, and you don't have to fear anything. You don't have to fear your sin. You don't have to fear temptation. You don't have to fear the enemy, the lust, all that stuff. Jesus is stronger than all. Will you believe that today?

Going back to Abraham, Christ can only help you if you put your faith in Him. Let me pray that you would do that this morning and be blessed by what we studied here. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We thank you that in our salvation, you left nothing undone. You chose us from before the time began. But not only that, you're acting even now to keep us in our everlasting faith. Father, we thank you for this. This is such a blessing to see all of this to know that the ends of all of it are covered. There is not a man, woman or child in this room who doesn't fail you, all of us sin. Our weaknesses are many more than we can even count. And yet You have given us Jesus Christ to be our priest and we worship you for that. We rejoice in that. And Father I do pray for those who have studied and been with us through this whole discussion of Hebrews six. I know it is a hard thing to talk about. And for some of them it has beaten them down but I pray it will point their eyes to Christ. He is the one who saves us from these things. For those who don't know Christ, Lord, I pray you would draw them to Him and remind them that without salvation, without Him, all they have is their sin. There is no coming into the presence of God for Salvation; they're going to come into the presence of God and hell and be judged and damned and condemned. So Lord, would you turn their thoughts to Jesus? Father, thank you for giving us such a Saviour. May we go out now and live for Him and live with hope in Him and joy and peace. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.