

Hope: a Sure and Steadfast Anchor of the Soul (Heb. 6.11-20)

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Pastor Ostella

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<sup>11</sup> And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup> so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. <sup>13</sup> For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." <sup>15</sup> And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup> For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. <sup>17</sup> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6.11-20).

### Introduction

Our passage for this morning (Heb. 6.11-20) continues the exhortation to go on to maturity. Now the emphasis is on hope. The author presses this home to the readers as a pastoral desire that he has for them (in 6.11, he discusses the *assurance* of hope). Then, he connects hope with faith and patience; this is the *result* of hope (in 6.12). Finally, he discusses the *ground* of hope (in 6.13-18). At the end of this section (6.19-20), there are some concluding remarks. The concluding remarks also look ahead to a return to the delayed discussion about Christ as a high priest like Melchizedek (5.11 to 6.20 is preparatory). Thus, these three points (assurance of hope, result of hope, and the ground of hope) develop our theme for this message, which is "Hope: a Sure and Steadfast Anchor of the Soul."

### 1A. The assurance of hope

We begin with the assurance of hope that pastors desire for their flocks (**we desire each one of you...to have ...hope**, 6.11).

What do you think that every pastor (like every educator) desires from his students? Of course, answers may vary on this point, but it seems that at the top of the list we have to put an earnest, eager, and diligent listening. All pastors want the people of God to engage in a hearty learning process. Certainly, we may want to fill out this point more fully by stressing the fact that learning is for living and living is for the glory of God. Then, we have a God-centered perspective, as we ought: the pastor's students are disciples of Christ who learn for God's glory.

However, the author of Hebrews does not go in this direction. His goal is to bring benefit to the readers for he desires that they **have...hope**. As the saying goes, "you've gotta have hope, miles and miles and miles of hope." Hope is something we need because God works out His purposes in weekly cycles of history; thus, we live with a future in front of us, and hope is how we fix our hearts on it properly. Therefore, the writer wants his readers to understand hope, but in what may be a surprising way. As a question to stir our thoughts we may ask, "What is the surprise here, what is the surprising point about hope that the pastor-teacher stresses? The odd notion here is that hope is something to pursue. We are to work hard in the pursuit of hope: **show the same earnestness to have...hope** (6.11). A paraphrase of Hebrews 6.11 will help us dig into this point. He says, "We desire that each of you demonstrate (show forth) the same work regarding hope that you demonstrated in your serving-work for the saints." We have to include 6.10 to get the sense of the word "same" in 6.11. That serving-work for the saints was a demonstration of "due diligence." Thus, he tells them (and us) to exercise the same diligence in striving after hope.

Now it is not simply hope that you are to seek with diligence; it is hope qualified in two ways: **we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end**. 1) On one hand, you are to work at the development of a fully confident hope. You could have a wishful, wishy-washy kind of hope. You could have a hope that is sincere, but that wavers in

weakness. What do you think is the wishy-washy opposite of a fully confident hope? Here is a hint: what do you think is the opposite of confident hope *as you look to the future (think the Sermon on the Mount)*? The answer is worry. Hope for the future and worry about the future are like oil and water; they do not mix; they do not go together. Thus, you are to do due diligence to cultivate the full assurance of hope that leaves worry about the future behind you in the dust.

2) On the other hand, you are to work at the development of a fully confident hope **until the end**. You are to work hard at this task with a sense of process in a movement forward into the future all the way across the future to the end of your journey. In this light you will see the future as a process that opens the door of time for progress (Do you need more time? It is in front of you as God's gift.)

Interestingly, this expression of desire on the part of the pastor leads to an exhortation that is as powerful as it is indirect. In other words, there is a constraint of love in these words. The pastor desires the blessing of God's people, but it is a blessing that comes by hard work. Therefore, the pastor's desire pulls all who read (all who have ears to hear) to the duty of a diligent pursuit of hope, of confident, fully confident hope, by cords of tender love. An exhortation comes to the readers (then and now) in the indirect expression of pastoral desire for their spiritual good. The pastor's heart is exposed; he carries a burden of prayerful concern and tender longing for your progress, benefit, and advantage (cf. Heb. 13.7, 17). This indirectness enforces the duty by pulling at the heart with ropes of loving concern. Thus, the assurance of hope turns out to be an exhortation to the task of cultivating a fully confident hope.

## 2A. The result of hope

Next, we turn to the result of hope that the pastor seeks for his readers. In verse 12, we have what hope will effect when it is diligently pursued: **12 so that you may not be sluggish**. Intuitively, we know that hope motivates action; it puts a spring in one's step. In this light, the author wants you to have confident hope so that you will not be lazy, passive, and inactive. If you are diligent in the pursuit of hope in such a way that you grow in it as part of your growth in Christian graces in general, then you will not be lazy. Granted this looks like an impossible circle: we must pursue hope to counter laziness, but how will we pursue anything if we are lazy? To answer, consider how it is to take up the discipline of healthy exercise: we have to put forth effort, but when we do so at the beginning, we feel very sluggish. However, by putting forth the effort, we lose the sluggishness and have more energy. Thus, what we have here is not a circle but a rising spiral: industry leads to hope and hope leads to industry in a spiral where both grow.

In this light, we can make sense of the rest of the verse: **so that you may ...be ... imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises**. If you pursue hope properly, then you will be active imitators of people who inherit the promises of God by faith and patience. This pastor to the church in view in the book of Hebrews points you back to the patriarchs and forward to the imitation of pastors today. We see that clearly when we hear him call for the imitation of your leaders in 13.7 tying this text (6.12) together with pastoral ordination of 6.1-2.

Consequently, the result of confident hope is threefold.

- 1) It gives a spring in your step and curbs the lethargy of laziness
- 2) Hope motivates active imitation of good examples of faith and patience
- 3) It lays hold of God's promises

If you grow in confident hope, then you are a recipient of an inheritance; you inherit the promises of God of the OT that have come to realization in Christ. Hope gives you energy in your walk. If you grow in a full assurance of hope, then you will not be sluggish but lively in your steps in life; you will imitate good past examples of faith and patience; thus the result of hope is faith-filled patient endurance under trial (patient, as a patient facing suffering).

Philip Hughes puts it like this, "Hope that is securely founded on the promise and power of God...is the dynamic impulse that drives us on toward the goal" (*Hebrews*, 228). Again, the

uplifting function of hope is something that we need in the struggles and challenges of life; it is something that God provides, but it is not something automatic. The results of hope depend on the cultivation of the assurance of hope, by doing the work that God requires of us to develop it.

Therefore, we need to consider the ground or basis of hope. The key to the development of confident assured hope is in the next section on the basis of hope. The author opens the door to this key at the end of 6.12 in his word about being: **imitators of those who ... inherit the promises**. He refers to the people of the OT who received the promises of God as an inheritance. Thus, Abraham comes into view in the next verses (and many more examples come into view later in Hebrews 11).

### 3A. The basis of hope that the pastor gives to his readers

To encourage us to the work of pursuing after and growing in confident hope, the pastor puts the basis of hope before his readers (then and now). This is the basis of trusting, patient, confident, promised oriented, inheritance-receiving hope. This is definitely not wishful thinking, lazy dreaming, or fanciful stabbing in the dark. It involves an active receiving or inheriting the promises of God. Thus, we must wonder what the basis or ground for this full hope might be.

In a word, the basis is God (**when God, v. 13**). In another word, the basis is Christ our forerunner. The basis is God's character that underlies His promise in Christ. It is His promise in Christ that rests on His character. Let's consider how God in Christ by promise is the foundation, ground, and basis of confident hope and all its results.

In 6.13-18, we have what God did and why He did it.

1) Consider what God did when He made covenant with Abraham

The time is immediately after the obedience of Abraham in offering his "only son" to God to his death. Then and there God said, **By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice"** (Gen. 22.16-18). What did God do in this promise-making? He swore by Himself.

It is important that we note what God promised: **in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed** (Gen. 22.18, cited in Heb. 6.14). You will recall that Abraham had to wait many years for the birth of his son (his offspring), the son of promise through whom the world would be blessed. Then, when the son was just a teenager, God tested Abraham by the command to sacrifice him on the altar. God had been working in Abraham's life in such a way that He prepared him for the severe test of obedience in giving up his son to death. Abraham therefore passed the cumulative testing process with its ups and downs. Thus, by waiting patiently, he obtained the promise of a son through his wife Sarah: **thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise** (Heb. 6.15). Through this son God promised the blessing of all families of the earth. Christ is the greater son of Abraham, the greater Isaac. In His coming and His redemptive accomplishments, God made Abraham a blessing to all nations of the earth.

2) Consider why God swore as with an oath in His promise to Abraham

He made covenant in this way for two reasons: a) to give us and all heirs of the promise a confirmation of His promise: (**<sup>16</sup> For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. <sup>17</sup> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath**, Heb. 6.16-17). In other words, He added an oath to the promise He had already made with Abraham as covenant renewal, reiteration, and guarantee (v. 17). Thus, God guaranteed the unchangeable character of His purpose with an oath. He did this for us to strengthen our faith by His guarantee.

b) The other reason is to give us hope

As we look at 6.18, we need to pick out the bottom line: **so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us**. What is the bottom line? The bottom line is that God acted in this way in oath

taking to give us hope: **so that... we ... might have ... hope**. God added His oath to His promise not because His word is unreliable, but because our faith is weak. He gave the double promise to give us strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

## Conclusion

### 1) A summary word

The summary word is about entering behind the curtain.

Giving some concluding remarks, the pastor speaks about entering into the heavenly sanctuary: <sup>19</sup> **We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,** <sup>20</sup> **where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek** (6.19-20). How can we understand the language here of hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain (19b)? This is in the context of a hope that we have set before us that is an anchor of the soul. What is this referring to?

The image seems to be that hope is personified; it is like a person who goes somewhere, in particular, it is like a person who goes beyond the curtain that separated people from direct access to God. With the image of an anchor, the combination suggests the picture of casting an anchor to keep a ship from drifting away from shore and safety. Hope then represents the people who have it. The hope they have (the confident, faith-full, patient, promise oriented, inheritance receiving hope) anchors them in Christ in the presence of God in the heavenly sanctuary.

We enter now. We enter now into God's presence in Christ our Sabbath king. By growing in our knowledge of Him and experiencing His presence more and more in our personal walk with Him, we enter eternal Sabbath rest now ahead of time. We do what the Israelites in the wilderness failed to do: we enter Canaan rest with God in His rest. We do so through fellowship with Christ our Sabbath king who entered the heavenly Canaan ahead of us by His resurrection and enthronement as king. Our priest is our king. He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

In this way, our expectation deepens and our anticipation grows...our hope increases and develops into confident, faith-filled, patient, and promise oriented hope. Therefore, we diligently pursue the assurance of hope firm to the end and hold it fast by fixing our hearts and building our lives on His work as our great Melchizedekian high priest. This moves us forward; we spring forward and move with pace to serve our king. We taste of the sweetness in the honeycomb, we long for more of the same in sweet fellowship with Him. We long for Him, we expect good things, and we do our work with hearts uplifted in anticipation of eternal Sabbath rest.

### 2) The larger context

The larger context comes into view because of the linchpin, "and" in 6.11. Therefore, this entire section (6.11-20) is the way to confidence and not fear in the face of the warning about apostasy. Furthermore, this entire section is further motivation to go on to maturity by heartily engaging the building process that inches steadily along by faith and patience through many trials as we journey as strangers and pilgrims on earth (cf. 2 Pet. 1.5-8). Here we go beyond repentance to the repentant life if we have the anchor of our souls fixed on Christ, our forerunner into the heavenly sanctuary.

The forerunner is there ahead of us but He is there having prepared the way for us: the heavenly sanctuary in the presence of God is **where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek** (6.20). He prepared the way by His sacrificial death and His glorious resurrection from the dead. He is therefore a priest after the order of Melchizedek. This means that He is a priest-king, a king who is priest. Thus, He is universal sovereign and Sabbath king.

Therefore, this hope that rests like an anchor in Christ holds us up with energy in our steps to go beyond repentance to the repentant life, beyond faith to the faith and faithfulness, beyond, baptism to the gospel it signifies, beyond the laying on of hands to heartfelt submission

to pastoral care, beyond resurrection to newness of life, and beyond judgment to proclaiming good news to all people everywhere (per the challenge of 5.11-6.2).

What shall we to these things

Because of who God is (immutably true; He cannot lie) and because of how He condescends to take us, as it were, by the hand to lead us to Him with assured hope and a spring in our step, then we ought to see more clearly how important and beneficial it is for us to take up the duty of diligence in striving after growth in hope, in the confidence of our hope. It is a cycle in which encouragement stirs up duty to pursue growth in assured hope. Assured hope gives motivation to the hard work of faith and patience as we travel the road of many trials to the glory of the heavenly Canaan.

**Let us fall down before the majesty of our God in humble acknowledgement of the weakness of our faith, hope, and love. May the Holy Spirit drive us to Christ as our hope; may He enable us to take firm hold on the hope set before us of eternal Sabbath rest by giving us a taste now of the honey in the honeycomb of the presence of God beyond the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf. To the triune God be all glory, now and forevermore, amen.**