

Hebrews 6:13-20 “An Anchor for the Soul”^{**}

Main Idea: In Hebrews 6:13-20 we learn about the importance of living by God’s promise. We are called to promise-based living. There is no other way to please God, nor experience stability in our lives apart from living in light of God’s promise. Yet when we do so, we discover that we have an amazing *anchor for our soul*.

I. Consider what God did for Abraham (13-15).

- A. God made a promise (13a).
- B. God confirmed His promise with an oath (13b-14).
- C. God delivered what He promised (15).
 - 1. Abraham waited patiently on God.
 - 2. Abraham received abundantly from God.

II. Consider what God did for us (16-20).

- A. God made a promise (16-17a).
- B. God confirmed His promise with an oath (17b-18).
 - 1. He wants us to have certainty (17).
 - 2. He wants us to have courage (18).
 - a. We must make Him our refuge.
 - b. We must live in light of our future hope.
- C. God delivered and will deliver what He promised (19-20).
 - 1. We have an anchor for the soul (19a).
 - 2. We have access into God’s presence (19b).
 - 3. We have a forerunner (20a).
 - 4. We have a high priest (20b).

Make It Personal: How then should we live?

- 1. Refuse to live by your feelings.
- 2. Choose to live by what God has said in His Word.
- 3. Realize that those who are in Christ will soon be with Christ forever!

Dear Sir: My name is Charles Forrester, executor of the estate of the late Sir William Stanley Garthwright of Nigeria. Upon orders by Sir Garthwright given prior to his death last month after a prolonged illness, I am contacting you with notification that you have been named primary benefactor of his estate, and upon acknowledgement of your acceptance of this honor you will receive the sum of Ten Million US Dollars. If you are so inclined, please hit the reply button on this email, submit the necessary personal information, including bank information, and you will receive

notice within the week concerning the deposit of the above-mentioned money into your bank account. Sincerely,
Charles Forrester, LLD

Has anybody else received an email offer like that in the past month? How long did it take you to hit the delete key? Not long, I would presume. It's easy to be wary of promises when the source is suspect. When the credibility of the *person* making the promise is questionable so consequently is the credibility of the *promise*.

These days it's easy to be cynical when we hear a promise, for the reason just stated. When we have reason to question the credibility of the person making the promise, we naturally question the credibility of the promise itself. And the fact that the airwaves are filled with so many broken promises just adds to the skepticism.

For every ten couples that at the marriage altar make the promise "I do," about five of the couples *don't*, according to statistics. It's sobering to ponder the effect this reality is having on the institution of the family these days. And it's not just in families. It's in the workplace, where it's become commonplace for employers to make and then break promises to their employees, cutting them loose after twenty years of faithful service. Broken promises hit us from all sides, it seems, with coaches breaking promises to teams, athletes breaking promises to their fans, politicians breaking promises to constituents, and even preachers of the truth violating the trust of parishioners. Quite frankly, we're living in a day when we just don't know whose promises we can trust.

Which causes a verse like the following to grab our attention. We concluded our study in Hebrews last week pondering this admonition in Hebrews 6:12, "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." Notice the charge. We're supposed to *imitate* those who *through faith* inherit what *has been promised*.

That's interesting. It indicates that as Christians we are called to a *promise-based life*. Whose promise does the writer have in mind? God's promise. The Bible teaches that to go to heaven we must believe a promise made by God—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)." And here the book of Hebrews teaches that to live presently in a God-pleasing way we must embrace and live in light of God's *promise*. Specifically, the writer says to "imitate" people who have inherited what God has promised.

That raises some questions, doesn't it? What specific people are we supposed to imitate? What promise has God made that we're supposed to believe? What makes God's promises different from the broken promises of man, specifically, what makes God's promises *trustworthy*? We'll find the answers to these important questions in the passage before us.

Let me state the big idea, and then we'll explore the particulars. In Hebrews 6:13-20 we learn that there is no other way to please God, nor experience stability in our lives apart from *living in light of God's promise*. I'll repeat, we are called to *promise-based living*. When we do so, we discover that one of the wonderful, life-transforming benefits is that we experience an *anchor for our soul*. That's the big idea. Here are the particulars. Our text invites us to consider what God did for two parties, the first being an example of a person who lived a promise-based life and therefore is someone we ought to imitate...

I. Consider what God did for Abraham (13-15).

Verses 13-15 "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.' And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised."

In many ways it all started with Abraham. Two thousand years before Christ, God did three things in the life of a man named Abraham...

A. God made a promise (13a).

B. God confirmed His promise with an oath (13b-14).

C. God delivered what He promised (15).

What was the promise? Literally, our text reads, “Blessing indeed I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.” When did God say that? Actually, God made a series of promises to Abraham in Genesis, where you’ll find seven promise-texts (12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:4-5; 17:1-2; 18:10; and 22:15-18). The promises are summed up in the final promise-text, which is the one the writer of Hebrews cites here. He says that God told Abraham, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.”

It’s significant *when* God said that. The writer of Hebrews is quoting from Genesis 22:17. That’s the chapter that records the greatest test that Abraham ever faced in his life, when God told him to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, on an altar. That instruction made no logical sense to Abraham. He thought back to the childless years and the promise God first gave him.

Abram (as he was known at the time) and his wife Sarah were childless when God announced in Genesis 12:2, “I will make you into a great nation.” But how could he become a great nation when to this point he didn’t even have a son?

Later, after Abram left Ur and came to the land of Canaan, God announced in Genesis 12:7, “To your offspring I will give this land.” But there was no offspring, not yet. God elaborated on the promise once again in Genesis 13:16, “I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth.” But still there was no son. One night some time later God took Abraham outside and pointed his attention to the stars and declared in Genesis 15:5, “Count the stars...so shall your offspring be.” But still, no son.

When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, the LORD repeated His promise in Genesis 17, stating in Genesis 17:7-8, “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.” And finally the following year, when Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah ninety, God fulfilled His promise and gave the couple the son of promise, Isaac.

But when God gives us a good gift, He often tests us to make sure we love Him more than the gift. And so one day God told Abraham to take his son, Isaac, go to Moriah, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. The instructions surely made no sense to Abraham. Isaac was the son of promise through which God was going to give him descendants as numerous as the stars. But how could that happen if he killed Isaac? As William Lane surmises, “When he was commanded to sacrifice Isaac it must have seemed that he was turning his back upon his entire future.”^[1]

Yet Abraham, because he believed God, obeyed God. He raised the knife, but God intervened. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” God said in Genesis 22:12. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” As Paul put it in Romans 4:18, “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed...”^[2]

And then, as Genesis 22:17 indicates, God not only repeated the promise that is recorded in our text in Hebrews 6, but He confirmed the promise with an oath, declaring, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.”

Hebrews says that when making this promise God *swore by Himself*. Which raises two questions, first, why did God swear? And two, why did He swear by Himself? The text answers the second question explicitly, stating that He swore by Himself since there was no one greater to swear by. Let that sink in. There is no one greater than God, and specifically than Abraham’s God. The God of Abraham who blessed Abraham with a son and ultimately with a descendant named Jesus, is in a class all by Himself.

Now the first question. Why did God take an oath, swearing by Himself, in the first place? I remember when I was a child. Kids love to make brash claims to impress their buddies. I remember Brett who claimed he built a

spaceship to send his monkey to the moon (or some far-fetched claim). And whenever one of the guys made an outlandish claim that raised the eyebrows of his friends, he would quickly state, "It's true! I swear on a stack of Bibles!" The fact that you were willing to take an oath was in essence saying, "I may have pulled your leg before, but this time I'm telling the truth!"

But God is truth. That's His nature. He cannot lie. He doesn't pull your leg when He speaks. So why would God take an oath? It's not for His sake, but ours. As Philip Hughes explains, "That God should bind himself by an oath is a reflection not on the divine credibility but on the perversion of the human situation. God's oath...is a condescension to human frailty."^[3]

The fact is, human beings don't always follow through with what they say. I remember telling Sherry, "Honey, I'll get up with the baby tonight so you can sleep." When I gave that promise my intentions were good, yet still I didn't hear the crying and slept through the night. It's because we're prone to make hollow promises that we add, "Oh, I swear I will this time." That's the kind of thing Jesus later forbid when He said, "Do not swear. Let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no' (Matt. 5:36)."

See God's grace in this. To Abraham God made a promise. Then He confirmed His promise with an oath. And in due time He delivered what He promised.

How did Abraham respond to God's promise? Verse 15 says...

1. *Abraham waited patiently on God.* How long? Abraham waited on God for twenty-five years before his son Isaac was born, long after Sarah humanly speaking should have born a child. And Abraham's grandchildren weren't born for another sixty years (Gen. 25:26), just fifteen years before he died at the age of 175 (Gen. 25:7).^[4] Indeed, Abraham had to be patient to see the fulfillment of God's promise.

Do you like to wait? I know of few people who do. Yet while it's not natural, it is essential to promise-based living, and thankfully, God gives it to His people as a fruit of His Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). By the way, don't equate waiting with passivity. While Abraham was waiting on God he was busy living for God in obedience to God, all the while anticipating that God would do what He promised to do. So Abraham waited patiently on God. Consequently...

2. *Abraham received abundantly from God.* Verse 15 concludes, "Abraham received what was promised."

Now remember the point of this. The writer is giving his readers a role model to imitate. He told them in verse 12 to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. He gave them Abraham as exhibit "a". Now it's time to get personal. Let's...

II. Consider what God did for us (16-20).

Keep in mind the pattern. With Abraham God made a promise, then confirmed His promise with an oath, and at just the right time delivered what He promised. That's the same way God works with us, as we'll see in verses 16-20.

Beloved, we're called to promise-based living. In the Bible God has given us promise after promise, and He expects us to believe them and live by them. Let me give you a sampling to whet your appetite for further study...

**The promise of salvation*—1 John 5:12 "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

**The promise of victory in temptation*—1 Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

**The promise of wisdom*—James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all

without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

*The *promise of forgiveness*—1 John 1:9

*The *promise of answered prayer*—1 John 5:14-15

*The *promise of power* for witnessing—Acts 1:8

*The *promise of conviction*—John 16:8-11

*The *promise of illumination*—John 16:13

*The *promise of sufficiency*—2 Peter 1:3

*The *promise of hardship*—2 Timothy 3:12

*The *promise that Christ will build His church*—Matthew 16:18

*The *promise that Christ will return*—Revelation 22:20

Indeed, the Bible is full of promises! Now how does promise-based living work? Hebrews 6 lays out the pattern for us. As with Abraham, so for us, first of all...

A. God made a promise (16-17a). Verse 16—“Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.” Again, as I mentioned moments ago, that’s why we use oaths. To establish the veracity of our point, we swear by an authority greater than ourselves. For instance, in a court of law, “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” When the person says, “I do,” it confirms the validity of the statements that will be uttered in that courtroom. That’s the purpose of an oath.[\[5\]](#)

Verse 17—“Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.” Notice that God not only *made* a promise, but in addition...

B. God confirmed His promise with an oath (17b-18). Again, God didn’t have to take an oath, for His words are true *period*. But He did take an oath, and He did so for our sake. We learn here that God wants us to have two things.

1. *He wants us to have certainty (17).* Notice again verse 17. It says that God *wanted* something. “God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose *very clear* to the heirs of what was promised.”[\[6\]](#)

The Greek language has two words that can be translated ‘wanted.’ The writer here uses the stronger word (*boulomenos*) rather than the weaker (*thelein*) to emphasize that this is not merely a whim nor wish for God, but a determined resolve.[\[7\]](#)

And what is it that God wanted? He wanted to show something to His people (called “His heirs” here). He wanted to show them the unchanging nature of His purpose, and He wanted to make it very clear for them. That’s why He made promises to them. That’s also why He confirmed those promises with an oath.

There’s a battle raging these days that you need to know about. It’s a battle that’s affecting evangelicalism and it’s fed by the mysticism, relativism, and skepticism of post-modern thinking. There are those who are questioning the certainty of propositional statements. We’re told that absolute truth can’t be known, not with certainty.

But what Hebrews 6:17 tell us? It informs us that God is truthful and that God has taken steps to make truth known to His people. He gave them promises, promises that He instructed His prophets and apostles to record in Holy Scripture. He took an oath to confirm the validity of His promises. Again, God’s word by itself is enough, but His oath makes it doubly sure. He did all this so that His people might have *certainty*.

My friend, God wants us to have certainty. That's why He gave us the Scriptures, His self-revelation, and more specifically, it's why He gave us the promises recorded in His Word. And ultimately, it's why He sent His Son into the world, He who is the main character in the Scriptures and the focal point of the promises therein, the One who said clearly, "I am the way, the *truth*, and the life (John 14:6)." Yet in addition to certainty...

2. *He wants us to have courage (18)*. Consider verse 18, "God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged."

Put on your thinking cap and follow the line of reasoning here. *God did this*—did what? As we were just told in verse 17, God gave promises to His heirs and confirmed His promises with an oath. God did this *so that, by two unchangeable things*—what two unchangeable things? God's promise and God's oath. These two things cannot change. By these two unchangeable things *in which it is impossible for God to lie*—God is omnipotent, yes, but here's something He *cannot* do. It is impossible for Him to lie (see also Titus 1:1). Therefore, it is impossible for Him to break either His promise or His oath. God did this so that...*we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged*—there's the intended outcome, the purpose God had in mind when He gave His promises and confirmed them by His oath. He wants His people to be *greatly encouraged*.

We've seen that word before in Hebrews, haven't we? To encourage is to "put courage into" someone. That's God's intent. It's why He gave His promises to His people. He wants us to have courage.

Remember, that's exactly what the first readers of Hebrews needed. They were being persecuted for their faith, and some were considering throwing in the towel. What they needed was courage. And so the writer gives them the very thing that could put courage into their hearts, the promises of God.

Likewise, there are two things we must do, according to this verse, if we want to experience courage in tough times.

a. We must make Him our refuge. I love the definition of a Christian the writer gives in verse 18. Christians are people who have "fled to take hold of the hope offered to us." That's who we are. Which raises some questions. Why did we flee? The answer—because we were in danger. Why were we in danger? The answer—because of sin, our sin and the sins of others. Where did we flee? The answer—to the One who held out the offer of hope to us, the Savior God, Jesus Christ.

Ponder the implication of those words. A Christian is a person who has *fled*. He has run *from* something *to* something. He has fled from hopelessness to the God of hope. Commenting on this verb John Calvin writes, "By this he means that we do not really trust God except when we are stripped of all other defence and take refuge in His firm promise, finding there our only asylum."⁸

That's the first key to experiencing courage, according to our text. We must flee to Christ and make Him our refuge. Secondly...

b. We must live in light of our future hope. We fled, verse 18 says, *to take hold of the hope* offered to us. The word *hope* indicates it's something we don't yet have.

Think of a farmer. He knows what living in light of a future hope is all about. He knows that if he puts seed in the ground in the spring there will be a harvest in the fall. And what's the proof that he truly believes that? It's not that he looks out at the field in April and merely *says*, "Yes, I believe there will be a harvest in the fall." If he truly believes what he is saying, he will get to work and plant his seed.

That's our calling, Christian brother and sister. We're called to live in light of a future hope. That's also the essence of promise-based living, when we live, not for what we can *see*, but for what we can't see but know to be reality. And why do we know it? Because, as with Abraham, so with us. God made a promise. God confirmed His promise with an oath. And...

C. God delivered and will deliver what He promised (19-20). God *has* delivered (past tense) and *will* deliver (future tense) what He promised. Listen to verses 19-20, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

When we live by God’s promises we experience four very practical benefits.

1. *We have an anchor for the soul (19a).* We have this hope as an anchor for the soul. Our text indicates our anchor is both ‘firm’ and ‘secure.’ “Westcott takes ‘firm’ (*asphales*) to mean that hope is ‘undisturbed by outward influences’ and ‘secure’ (*bebaia*) as ‘firm in its inherent character.’”^[9]

The symbol of the anchor, like that of the fish, was a popular symbol of hope for the early Christians. I’ve read that at least sixty-six pictures of anchors have been found in the catacombs.^[10]

My earliest experience with an anchor was on a lake where my grandparents lived. We visited in the summer and loved to go out in their boat. I learned quickly that the boat didn’t stay where you stopped rowing. It drifted. But there was one thing you had in your boat that could remedy the problem, an anchor.

When you go fishing, you drop your anchor in the water to keep the boat from drifting from your desired site. But, as Warren Wiersbe points out, “This spiritual anchor is different from material anchors on ships. For one thing, we are anchored *upward*—to heaven—not downward. We are anchored, not to stand still, but to *move ahead!*”^[11]

We are so vulnerable, beloved. Left to ourselves we’d never make it in this storm-filled world. But God has given us exactly what we need, an anchor, and not just any anchor. It’s an anchor *for the soul*.

How do we use this anchor? Calvin offers this helpful devotional thought: “The devil never ceases from stirring up countless tempests which would at once capsize and submerge our ship if we do not cast our anchor far down in the depths. There is no haven anywhere apparent to our sight, but to whatever direction we turn our gaze, the only thing in view is water, and indeed waves which mount up and threaten us. But just as an anchor is let down through the midst of the water to a dark, hidden place, and while it remains there it holds the ship that is exposed to the waves safely in its station so that it is not swept away, so our hope is fixed on the unseen God. There is difference, that an anchor is cast down on the sea because there is solid ground at the bottom, but our hope rises and flies aloft because it finds nothing to stand on in this world. It cannot rely on created things, but finds rest in God alone.”^[12]

2. *We have access into God’s presence (19b).* Verse 19 states that this hope that we possess “enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.”

The picture here is of the tabernacle, and in the tabernacle was the little room called the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest had access to that room, a room that represented the very presence of God Himself (see Heb. 9:7).

But now, we have a hope that enters this inner sanctuary. This hope is a person, and this person has gone past the curtain into the Holy of Holies. Ponder this amazing truth. Through Christ every person can enter that room, right into the very presence of God.

The phrase ‘behind the curtain’ in the KJV is ‘within the veil.’ Dr. Harry Ironside suggested that the two phrases, “within the veil” (here in 6:19) and “without the camp” (in 13:13) summarize the book of Hebrews. Wiersbe explains, “Jesus Christ is ‘within the veil’ as our High Priest. We can therefore come boldly to His throne and receive all the help that we need. But we must not be ‘secret saints.’ We must be willing to identify with Christ in His rejection and go ‘without the camp, bearing His reproach (Heb. 13:13).’ The Hebrew believers who received this letter were tempted to compromise to avoid that reproach. However, if we live ‘within the veil,’ we shall have no trouble going ‘without the camp.’”^[13]

3. *We have a forerunner (20a).* The text states, “It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, *who went before us*, has entered on our behalf.”

In the first century a “forerunner” was a term used to describe an advance team of soldiers that scouted out the destination and prepared the scene for the arrival of an army. That’s what Christ is for us, our *prodromos*. He is our forerunner who has gone ahead of us. He has opened the way.

But Christ didn’t just open the way. The text says He did so “on our behalf.” That is, Christ Himself went ahead of us and entered the Holy of Holies for our benefit. Remember His promise in John 14:1-3? “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Yet there’s more. What’s Christ doing in the inner sanctuary? The end of verse 20 tells us, “He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

4. *We have a high priest (20b)*. And now the writer of Hebrews returns to a truth he began to expound back in chapter five, but tabled momentarily to address the problem of his readers’ spiritual immaturity. Now they’re ready to hear what he has to say about Melchizedek, and he’ll tell them in chapter seven.

What a wonderful thought this is. We have an anchor *here* and a forerunner and high priest *there*! Talk about being secure!

Make It Personal: How then should we live?

Let me suggest three responses.

1. *Refuse to live by your feelings*. Our emotions take us up one day and down the next. People who live by their feelings lack stability. Life is hard when you live by your feelings, hard for you, and hard for those around you. So refuse to live by your feelings.

2. *Choose to live by what God has said in His Word*. Study His Word and find His promises. They are true and reliable. When God makes a promise, you can build your life on it.

He sent His Son into the world who died on the cross for sinners. He raised His Son from the dead on the third day, and today God offers abundant and eternal life to all who will repent and believe in Him. That’s a promise. What have you done with that promise?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean to your own understandings...and He will direct your path. That too is a promise. Are you taking God at His word?

3. *Realize that those who are in Christ will soon be with Christ forever!*

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] William Lane , p. 97.

[2] According to Hebrews 11:19, “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”

[3] Philip Hughes, p. 229.

[4] Observation by Leon Morris, p. 59.

[\[5\]](#) Verse 16 in the *Young's Literal* states, “an end of all controversy to them for confirmation *is* the oath.”

[\[6\]](#) Proverbs 19:21 “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.”

[\[7\]](#) Observation by Donald Guthrie, p. 151.

[\[8\]](#) John Calvin, p. 85.

[\[9\]](#) Quote taken from Leon Morris, p. 61.

[\[10\]](#) In W. Wiersbe , p. 298.

[\[11\]](#) W. Wiersbe, p. 298.

[\[12\]](#) John Calvin, p. 86.

[\[13\]](#) W. Wiersbe, p. 298-9.