



JUST JESUS

The Book of Hebrews

Lesson Nine

TEXT

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. Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 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. 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. 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.

Hebrews 6:13-20

CONTEXT

Hebrews 1:1-2:18

God spoke in various ways to our fathers through the prophets, but now he has spoken his final word to us in his Son, his perfect representative. The Son of God is his agent not only in creation and revelation, but also—and pre-eminently—in the salvation of the human race. He is greater than any prophet; he is greater even than the angels, as the ancient scriptures abundantly testify. It was through angels that Moses' law was communicated, and its sanctions were severe enough; how much more perilous must it be to ignore the saving message brought by no angel, but by Jesus, the Son of God!

Jesus, the Son of God, is the one to whom the dominion of the world has been committed for all time to come. As the eighth psalm teaches us, God has put everything under the dominion of human beings, and it was the nature of humans—*our* nature—that the Son of God took upon himself in order to win back this dominion. To do this he had to conquer the devil who had usurped it, and rescue those whom he held in bondage; and he conquered the devil when in death he invaded the realm of death, which the devil had controlled until then. It is because Jesus is truly Man, moreover, that he is qualified to serve as high priest on his people's behalf; he knows all their trials from his own experiences and therefore can give them the timely help they need.

Hebrews 3:1-4:14

But let us beware: those who rebelled against God in the days of the wilderness wanderings were excluded from his rest in the promised land. There is, however, a better rest than that which the Israelites found in Canaan; it is the rest that awaits the people of God. We must take care not to forfeit that rest by rebelling against God, when he speaks to us no longer through his servant Moses, as he did in those days, but through his Son, one greater than Moses.

Hebrews 4:15-6:20

As has already been said, Jesus is our great high priest, able to sympathize with his people and help them. We may safely look for understanding and delivering grace to the one who endured the agony of Gethsemane. He has been called to his high-priestly office by God himself, as an inspired oracle makes clear: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.'"

(I should like to enlarge on this subject, but really I do not know if I can; you are acting so spiritually immature. I must warn you solemnly that there are some who look exactly like true believers until the "fruit of their faith" is seen; when that happens it is clear that they never truly believed at all. Not that I think you actually mean to be like them, that is to say apostates; I have better hopes of you than that. I want you rather to press on from the point you have reached, so as to attain full maturity, instead of sticking there, or slipping back.)

Summations adapted from F.F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp. xix-xxii

Verses 6:11-6:20 form one unit in our sermon composed of two parts.

5:11-6:12 An Exhortation to Faithfulness

6:13-6:20 The Example of Abraham's Faithfulness

In the first part of 5:11-6:12 we see the author uses irony in 5:11-6:3 to point out to the Hebrews that although they are not immature believers, their actions don't always support this. Then in 6:4-8 the author gives a stern warning that there are some who look exactly like Christians, but who are in fact not true believers. This only becomes apparent though when the "crop" or "fruits" of their faith comes to maturity. Based on the encouragement offered in 6:9-12, the author doesn't believe that this is true for the Hebrews, but the fact that it happens stands as a prohibitive warning—the true assurance of faith is continuing to persevere and grow in their relationship with God. Now in 6:13ff the author uses Abraham's relationship with God to demonstrate what faithfulness in adversity looks like.

SUBTEXT

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. Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.

Having offered pastoral warning and encouragement to his flock in 5:11-6:12, the author now continues to demonstrate that they do have a very sound basis for holding fast in the face of the opposition that they are facing—namely the utter reliability of God's word of promise. To communicate the surety of God's promise, the author chooses the standard bearer for hope and trust in the Old Testament, Abraham as an example.

When God made his promise to Abraham...saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." The specific citation here refers to Genesis 22:15-18, just after Abraham had been ready to offer Isaac, his only son, to God as a sacrifice because God had asked him too. After God provided a ram to offer instead of Isaac, he says:

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

*...since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself...*the author is making the point that Abraham was given a promise ("I will surely bless you and give you many descendents"), but the promise was also given in a specific form—that of an oath. Oaths in OT times were declarations of intent made by appealing to a greater authority than just the one who was doing the declaring, hence ***Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.*** However, in this case, since God is the one doing the promising and he can appeal to no greater authority to make the promise in the form of an oath, he swears by his own holy name to bring about the fulfillment of his promise.

And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised... serves to remind us of the entirety of Abraham's situation. Abraham gave up everything in his past in order to leave Ur and follow God. After receiving a promise (Genesis 15) that he would have his very own son and that this son would be the way forward for the blessings promised to Abraham to be handed down, Abraham again waited for this to come true. After waiting some more, and launching out on his own disastrous plan to have a child with Hagar instead of Sarah, Abraham finally does have a son with Sarah. And now God asks him to give up everything in his future by bringing Isaac and offering him as a sacrifice. Abraham, despite difficulties and delays, schemes and disappointments, continued to walk in faithful obedience to God. God's assurance to Abraham was clear—a promise of blessing that was made as an oath, as a sign, of the surety of God's word. Hence, ***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.***

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. 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.

Our author now points out that there was a two-fold reason that God made a promise and then took an oath to confirm that promise. The first, as cited above was to be sure that Abraham's descendants were clear about the promise being made. The second is so that ***we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.*** As spiritual heirs of Abraham and the great promise of salvation offered to him, we too should be encouraged. If there is any doubt for the Hebrews (or for us!) that God means what he says and stands by his promises even when circumstances are difficult or we are facing things far beyond our ability to understand we are to again remind ourselves that God has confirmed his intentions to us ***...by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie....*** The promises we have the Christ will never leave us or forsake us and that he is always

with us even in the most desperate and bleak circumstances are part of the same package of promise uttered by God so long ago. And they remain secure and firm.

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.

Our author concludes his encouragement with two images of hope: 1) the nautical image of hope as an anchor; 2) the image as hope personified which enters the Holy of Holies ahead of us.

this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure... gave the original audience an image from the mass transportation of the day—sailing. Lowering an anchor was (especially during inclement weather, storms or dangerous currents) a way of providing security and safety when the conditions had become so dangerous that navigating them safely was impossible. It fixed the ship in a place of relative safety even though all around it the waves and weather beat down upon it. So too is God's word of promise, taken as an oath to us. Despite how things look around us, despite the scarceness of our resources to cope or handle the situation, despite our inability to control what is happening, God's word to us remains secure, solid.

Likewise hope leads us right to the very heart of intimacy in God's presence: ***It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.*** Here hope is described as proactively taking us along Jesus' very own path, directly into the Holy of Holies, the very throne of God. Because of his work on our behalf, when faced with trial and tribulation, travail and testing, we are to go immediately to the very center of the universe, God himself. The image would also recall his earlier encouragement of 4:15-15:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin.

The author then begins his transition into chapter 7 and the topic of Christ as our high priest in the order of Melchizedek, which he had promised in 5:11, ***He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.***

Lane summarizes the passage this way:

In 6:13-20 the preacher presents Abraham as an example of trust and steadfast endurance. But he strengthens this example. He describes God's promise and oath to Abraham as a type of the way in which God relates himself to the Christian community. The promise to bless Abraham anticipates the salvation which God has given to the new people in Jesus. Abraham's experience with God demonstrated that God is faithful, that his words are reliable, and that he stands behind his promises. The promised salvation secured through the high priestly ministry of Jesus is certain because it is guaranteed by God's spoken word. This salvation is the objective content of the Christian hope which lends stability to God's people in a volatile situation.

Lane, Hebrews, p. 100

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

In the larger 5:11-6:20 passage the author challenges his audience, and ourselves, to examine our actions to see if we have been avoiding or shirking the responsibilities that we have as mature believers. He also warns and encourages us that continued endurance and pressing on in our Christian life is essential, not optional. In this final part of the passage he gives us the key to continued perseverance—resting on and receiving from God the promises that he has for us in the gospel.

What are the promises that you have the hardest time believing about what God says about...

- *Himself?*
- *His love, forgiveness and affection toward you?*
- *Your sins and failures?*

What are the promises that you need to be hearing more clearly right now due to specific situations in your life?