

The Surety of God's Promises, Our Hope.
Hebrews 13-20

Romans 4:13-25

Colossians 1:19-29

Responsive Reading Romans 8:31-39

Today we are going to be closing out chapter 6 looking at the last 8 verses. But, as we often do for starters this morning I want to go back and start reading in verse 9, for if you will notice here in verse 13 it starts with the word for, meaning that it is tied to the previous verses, and indeed is the conclusion of his statement that we started last week as to why he can be confident in their claim of faith. So let us read this morning, starting here in Hebrews 6:9-20.

So you will notice that in verse 12, he implores his readers to “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” And then right away points to Abraham. There are many other hero's of faith that can be used as examples but Abraham stands out as the golden standard of faith in the old testament for he never doubted God and his promises as he awaited patiently for their fulfillment. If you remember last week, the importance of hope in faith, and how the two go hand in hand. If you do not have faith, then there is nothing for your hope to be grounded in. We never hope for what we have, or had, but it is what is coming, and that is where faith steps in for it is only through faith that we can believe what we hope for will in fact take place. Without faith in God, there is no hope in Christ. And like wise, if you have no hope, then you have no faith which empowers such hopes.

So Abraham stands as a perfect example of one who has faith and hopes for the fulfillment of the promises, believing that God who promised will fulfill them. It was Abraham's faith in God which gave him that hope even though it seemed delayed, the fulfillment of the promises would not fail, and this hope is what stimulated his patient perseverance. As James says, trials produce patience, and patience hope, for he says, “Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and lacking in nothing. IF any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. BUT, let him ask in faith, with no doubt,” Where there is doubt, there is no hope, so again let him ask in faith, with hope, “for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind, for let not that man suppose that the will receive anything from the Lord. So again, faith and hope you cannot have one without the other, verse 7 “For let not that man, who doubts, suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Doubting, and lack of hope in God's promises points to a lack of faith, and belief that God will do as he promises. And if you doubt God, the sober reality is that your faith is empty.

As Paul wrote in Roman's about Abraham and his faith, that we read this morning, “who contrary to hope, in hope believed. He did not wave at the promises of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to preform.” But God's promise to Abraham was not just a promise, but a promise with an oath as we see the Author of Hebrews here mentioned in verse 13 this morning. It is interesting that God would follow up his promises to Abraham with an oath, Usually an oath is something that is sworn with a reference to God himself as God is the source of all that is true and trustworthy. Also, an oath is something that is usually performed by mankind where the need for an oath arises being that mankind is untrustworthy, and unreliable due to sin. Human words and promises do not have any weight in themselves hence the need for an oath, or as we see now a days, written contracts to bind one another to the promises we claim.

So we see here in this passage that God swore an oath he swore it to himself. This also is an interesting thing, what would be the purpose of this? Well I think first off, and most importantly is fact that such an oath is unnecessary as far as God is concerned, he himself being truth is unable to break that which he promises. So it must be something more than just backing up his promises with an oath. Secondly, if God had sworn by anything other than himself that would have implied that thing or person by whom he swore and oath by would then be superior to God. Which as we know has been a major thrust of this Author's letter and his argumentation against the worship of angels, or anything other than God himself. If God were to swear an oath by anything other than himself, then the reality is that he would not be God, for he would therefore not be trustworthy, or true, or righteous, or just. But in his case with Abraham, he reinforced Abraham's faith in the promise by the use of an oath, and since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself. As we know God cannot fail, and his word will never fail, but for Abraham's sake, who was part of this sin sick fallen world full of untrustworthy individuals, God made his promise to Abraham doubly secure by appealing to his own unfailable nature.

Verse, 14, is a quote taken from Genesis 22: saying, "surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." It was at this time that Abraham had gone to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice to God, the God who told him that he would have a son, in whom his promises would be fulfilled. God promised him a son, and then told him to sacrifice that son but we see Abraham's trust in the word's and promises of God persevered, even to the point within moments of plunging a knife into his son. It was this son in whom the promises to Abraham hung, and God's commandment to sacrifice him would have been a contradiction to his previous promised word which he secured doubly by an oath. If Abraham were to slay Isaac, it would appear that God's word would then indeed have been no more credible than any word given in promise from mankind. But we all know the story, Abraham's faith and trust in God was so strong that he believed even if he were to offer Isaac as a sacrifice as God commanded that God would have raised him up from the dead if need be. Through this picture of a father offering up his only son which he was promised to have we can understand why Abraham stands out as such a hero of the faith.

Because of Abraham's faith, he obtained the promises that God gave him as verse 15 says. "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." Through the testing of his faith by God's command to offer up Isaac would be this final test, for God promised through Isaac he would have many children, having to wait patiently on God through various trials and seeming delays, and then be told to kill that child is a true act of patience through faith and hope in God's promise. And I was not until that time, when Isaac was on the alter and he was stopped from sacrificing his son that the promise could be fulfilled, so as it says here in verse 15, after patiently enduring, he obtained the promise. It was at this moment proving his faith and hope in God as he received Isaac back from the dead in a sense, for he was as good as dead for Abraham was obedient and was going to follow through as God commanded. And so after this event, in a very real sense Abraham obtained his only son back, and with him the promises of God.

In the next following few verses the Author here points out the stark difference between God's promises and man's. Verse 16 "For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath."

As we all know the word of man is unreliable, this fallen world is full of liars and those who would deceive you. Even at the time this letter here was written the problem was yet the same, as Soloman said, truly nothing is new under the sun. So because of this the use of an oath, to swear by something greater than yourself became common practice to show not only the seriousness of your intention, but in a way binding your word to a higher authority. But it seems that even this too has been lost in this world as we move further and further away from the concept of God being, well, God. The absolute ultimate authority over his creation. It does little to swear by God in an oath anymore, and has seemed to become more or less an empty tradition that we still use in the court system. Swearing upon the bible, or upon God has little weight to cause the person to be truthful if they do not believe in the authority of the God, or his word that they are invoking. The reality is, as the author says here, an oath for confirmation is the end of all disputes. There is none greater that mankind can call upon than the one who created them, And in doing so, to swear an oath by God, the one who never lies, is making God a witness that what was is saying is indeed true.

It's a bit scary to think about anyone who would swear by God that they were being true, when in fact were using such an oath to deceive and lie. Surely this is not something that God would take lightly for the God who cannot lie, the God of truth and righteousness will not allow his name to bear such a mark. An oath before God is nothing something to take lightly, for you are claiming at that moment to be just as trustworthy as God himself. And it is for this reason I am sure that Jesus was teaching in Matthew 5, to not swear an oath. Verse 33” Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all; neither by heaven for it is God's throne; nor by earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your own head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.. But let your yes be yes, and your no be no. For whatever is more than those is from the evil one.

But unlike man, who is untrustworthy, there is none higher than God, so he swore by himself. God's oath to Abraham was added not because God's word was lacking or doubtful, for God's nature is that of truth so therefore his word is true, but rather it was added because the human situation being what it is, God in his goodness desired to show more convincingly, or to emphasize and underline as it were with a double assurance his own unchangeable character. As we see in verse 17, he did not do this for juse Abraham's sake. But for ours as well, all of those who are heirs according to the promise given to Abraham. “Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.” This promise has continued from Abraham, through Isaac right up until this present moment, and it will continue until God see's fit to return and call his children home. It should also be mentioned, so it isn't misunderstood, the promised line of Abraham is in a sense 2 fold. There is the physical, and the spiritual fulfillment. Through Abraham's son Isaac the nation of Israel can trace their heritage, but we, even being gentiles can trace a different heritage back to Abraham and that is one born of faith and the new birth as Paul wrote in Galatians “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are the son's of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying in you all the nations shall be blessed, so then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

So, God then guaranteed his trustworthiness through 2 un-changable things at it says in verse 18, which are his word of promise, and his oath of confirmation of that word. In which we know it is impossible for the God of truth to be proven a liar, or false. So what we are seeing here in this verse is God's absolute truth being doubly established so that we, the false and un-trusting mankind can be assured in the the word of that promise., so that we may be encouraged to to take hold of the hope that is set before us. This should effectively shift our focus upon Christ and the promises that were given to us by the father. It should cause our hearts and minds to contemplate what that hope is which we rest. This hope that the author is talking about here, is not hope for a better life, or hope for success but hope that our souls are anchored in Christ and we have been justified by his blood. We can rest knowing that there is a forgiveness of sin, that in our hopeless natural state God provided for us hope in his Son to become heirs according to this promise he made to Abraham. This should act as a powerful incentive to each and everyone one of us to not be as the Author puts it here, sluggish, but rather vibrant, living people of God grounded firm in the hope of our salvation. For our hope isn't only Christ, but it also that which comes after this life. Being finally united with our father in heaven, worshiping with the saints who have gone before. To be free of this body of flesh and sin. That is our hope and it is double sure by God's word, and his oath that all who are the children of Abraham will be justified and one day united with God in paradise.

When I think of the glory of this hope that surpasses this life, which should surpass our fears and doubts I think of the thief on the cross who was hanging there being crucified next to Jesus. Lets reads that short account quickly. Luke 23:39. "Then one of the criminals who were hanging blasphemed Him saying, If you are the Christ save yourself and us." Think upon the response of this criminal for a moment. In his words you can almost hear the anguish, frustration and fear as he is facing certain death. He is hopeless, and his last effort is to blaspheme and mock Jesus. I am reminded as Vic would always say about Stephen Hawking, here is a man that God allowed for everything to be taken away but his ability to think and what does he do with that final ability...curse and deny God. Fear, hopelessness and anger flowing from a sinful, rebellious lost soul. So here is this thief, everything taken from him, facing death and he denies and blasphemes God. But look at the other, verse 40" he answers rebuking the first saying, Do you not even fear God? Seeing you are under the same condemnation?" Oh the hopelessness of the lost soul looking into the unknown of death, full of bitterness and anger to the end. Verse 41" And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." In this one sentence we can see the admittance of sin, and the proclamation of Christ's holiness, he recognizes his punishment and death on the cross is deserved, but he also recognizes that Christ's is not, and we can see in the following verse that this thief was no stranger to the concept of the coming messiah, and he recognizes that Jesus dying here on the cross, is that messiah, for he says "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus says, Assuredly, you can be sure, you can rest upon it for I have promised a double oath to Abraham that all those who believe upon me will be heirs of the coming kingdom, therefore I say to you, today...today you will be with me in paradise.

What sweat words to a dying man, what hope was given to him in the end. We do not know anything else of this man, but we see his confession of faith, and recognition of sin, and he is given this great hope that transcends suffering, even the cruel sufferings of the cross. What a glorious Savior, who died so that we may have such hope. To paraphrase Paul talking about the resurrection, if we don't have this hope, we are of all men most pitiable. Our faith is empty, our life and ministry is pointless, but we not that is not the case for the holy spirit witness this hope to us, ever driving our hearts and minds to our saviour.

If we didn't have this hope, why would we pray? Why would we cry out to God in our dark hours to provide grace and mercy? Without this hope, where is faith? And likewise without faith, where is this hope? They work together, you can not have one without the other. Verse 19 in Hebrews, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul," The surety of God's promise is our anchor of the soul, much like how an anchor will hold a ship steadfast in a storm, so to does God's promises. As Calvin wrote, "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." this anchor of the soul that each and every christian has, is grounded steadfast as verse 19 continues on to say, enters the very presence behind the veil. This is a reference of the inner chamber of the wilderness tabernacle where the ark of the covenant was kept, the holy of hollies behind the veil, which was torn asunder symbolizing the access we now have directly to God through the blood of Christ, the final and true blood sacrifice that all others were but shadows pointing to.

Which is referenced in the final verse we are looking at today, verse 20 "where the forerunner, has entered for us, even Jesus, having become high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." So we can see that our hope in Christ is bound also in the realization that we can now enter this heavenly sanctuary which Jesus has gone before us on our behalf, to prepare the way for us. There is no greater hope that this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us so that we maybe brought into this rest, so that no matter what life may toss our way in this fallen sinful world we have the hope of the promises of God that he will provide, maybe not always our desires but he will provide the grace and mercy to endure so that one day, when the time has come we may stand before the throne in our glorified heavenly bodies, no longer bound in these vessels of sin, despair, and death, but to be fully realized in this hope as we bow and worship the creator, the most high, glorious, sovereign merciful God.