



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 20th January 2019

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Scripture: Hebrews 6:13-18

Subject: Part 17 – The Value of God’s Covenant

It’s been a while since we were here in The Book of Hebrews and delving into its truths. I trust that you are looking forward to getting back into it and that you have learned and been challenged by the series so far. If you need to catch up on any of it, just go to the website and under the Sermon section, and under the Expository Section and you will find them all there in The Book of Hebrews and can listen to them!

I want to start where we left off last time in verse 12 as it is a natural lead into verse 13, which says –

“that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”

The great French Christian scholar and author of the 18th century, Lefevre d’Etaples, commented finely on this passage, as follows:

“They are sluggish who, impatient of labours and the long delays of the promised blessings, cease from doing good or prefer to follow present pleasures and are opposed to those who persevere. ... But those who are patient are not broken by any delay, are not diverted by any blandishments, are not cast down by any adversities, from the hope of those blessings, and they bear all things and do all things for the sake of him who solely by his goodness promises such good things to those who have faith and hope in him. And lest those who trust and hope should ever relax their faith and patience and become less confident, he swore by himself, so that they might have absolute certainty regarding the

promise and as they persevere further might no more doubt those blessings than if they were a present possession”.

Yes... God did swear by Himself so that they may have absolute certainty as we see this is this point in Chapter 6, commencing in verse 13 to verse 20 -

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,¹⁴ saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.”¹⁵ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.¹⁶ For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.¹⁷ Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath,¹⁸ that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.¹⁹ This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,²⁰ where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

God has made many great and exceedingly precious promises throughout his Word, for all time. There are some promises which have conditions attached to them. For example, God promised to wipe out Nineveh but when they repented, he forgave them. Another example would be the established throne of Salomon. God promised that he would establish his dynasty forever, only if Salomon would keep the commandments, which we know that he didn't. But there are those promises which God made, that have no conditions attached to them because they fulfil His purposes and His ultimately Glory.

Here in verse 13, we are pointed to such a promise but to understand it, we need to go back to Genesis 12. God broke into the life of Abraham who was a descendant of Noah through the line of Shem. God called Him out of Ur, to leave his home and country to go to a land that God would show him. God did not take Abraham from his homeland and send him to a foreign land to sojourn the rest of his life in order to fulfil a divine whim. God had a purpose for Abraham and for the world in which in him, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Over the years, Abraham had many trials, became rich, and seen many things without seeing the fulfilment of God's promise. In Genesis 15, The Lord spoke to Abraham in a vision and told him to not be afraid, that He was his shield and exceedingly great reward. Keeping in

mind that it was many years since God promised Abraham descendants, he questioned God how could it be, for at that time he still had no children of his own and his only heir, which was in line with the customs of those days, was Eliezer of Damascus who was Abraham's right hand and business partner. God again confirmed his promise to Abraham, even pointed to the stars to illustrate how many descendants he would have. And in verse 6, we see the first mention in the bible of the condition for Salvation which is by faith, for it says-

“And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”

This is a foundational truth that is repeated in the New Testament – Romans 4, Galatians 3 and James 2, showing that righteous is accounted in return for faith. We cannot earn our righteousness, we don't have the capacity, but we can have it counted to us by faith.

After Abraham questioned God how, in verse 9, God instructed Abraham to bring the animals and cut them in half, except the birds, for a sacrifice, and Abraham obeyed. Then in the next few verses we see something quite amazing. We see that God undertook a classic ritual which people in those days done when making a very serious contract. It was a divinely ordered ritual called Barath – which means to Cut a contract or to cut a covenant. If a Barath were to happen between two ordinary people, then the participants would divide a sacrifice into 2 parts, and together in a figure 8, go around and through the sacrifice repeating the terms of the covenant.

But God and Abraham did not follow this procedure. In verse 12 Abraham fell into a deep and dark sleep. God, through a vision, gave him a prophetic promise how his descendants would be afflicted in Egypt for 400 years and that they would return back to the land that he had given. It was God's idea, God's purpose and God's plan. God's call of Abraham, His promise to Abraham, and His covenant with Abraham were all entirely of His own doing. We know this because in verse 17, God undertook Barath alone. A smoking oven and a burning torch passed between those pieces of the sacrifice while Abraham slept. This covenant that God made was unique and also necessary for Abraham and his descendants because God was declaring it an eternal and unconditional covenant. The fact that only God walked between the pieces signified that the total responsibility for fulfilling the covenant was His and His alone. God did not tell Abraham he would be blessed if he fulfilled certain requirements or if

he met certain conditions. God told Abraham to do many things, and Abraham was obedient. But it was not Abraham's obedience, as important and fine as it was, that guaranteed the fulfilment of God's promise to him. God's promise guaranteed its own fulfilment. God expected many things of Abraham, but as far as fulfilling the promise was concerned, Abraham was but a spectator watching what God was doing for him and through him. God had a predetermined purpose for Abraham.

There were no terms and conditions of the covenant that Abraham could bring. Regardless of how many times he messed up, or even his descendants messed up, it didn't matter because God had declared this for all time. This covenant was re-confirmed by an oath in Genesis 22 verses 15 to 18 after Abraham's trial, and it was confirmed to Isaac and to Jacob in Genesis 26 verses 2 to 5 despite their acts of disobedience.

This unconditional covenant reminds us that God did not give up on man when he fell because it was in His eternal plan that those whom He had created in His own image would worship and serve Him. Philippians 2 verses 10 and 11 tells us that –

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

God would recover man back into fellowship with Himself only by drastic means. He had this recovery plan laid out prior to the foundations of the world. It did not take God by surprise. He chose a certain people to be the channel to bring the river of life to the world again. The father of that people was Abraham. From his descendants was to come the nation of Israel, God's earthly, historical channel of revelation and redemption. The Old and New Covenants, the law, the prophecies, the priestly sacrifices—all came through Israel. The Messiah Himself was a Jew.

God's plan of redemption was to be carried out through these specially chosen people. "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22) and all Jews are from Abraham. God picked Abraham and predetermined his life. God set His love upon Abraham to be the one through whom the channel would be cut. It was a matter of divine choice. Abraham was honoured by God because of his faith and he was saved because of his faith, but he was not chosen because of

his faith. Abraham was not chosen because of any merit or quality or virtue. He was chosen purely out of the sovereign will of God.

"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers" (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

Abraham spent many years of his life, without seeing the fulfilment of the promises of God. For he was 75 years old when he departed from his country, about to make a new start and he was 100 years old before Isaac, the son which was promised to him, was born. That was a 25 year wait. In verse 15 of chapter 6 shows clearly Abraham's response to the promises –

"And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."

Surely Abraham was patient and he endured until he obtained the promise given to him even though we know he did mess up, big time, and not just once. Kind of like us, isn't it? But Abraham continually trusted in God. He steadily kept set his eyes on the Lord, trusting what God said, knowing that God is a God of His word.

God has not changed. He doesn't have to after all He is perfect! And His Word has not changed! When God makes a promise, it does not occur on our timetable, even though we would all love that, and are often disappointed when it doesn't. God makes a promise and fulfils it according to his purpose and time. Remember, God is outside time, he can see life as a big picture, he is in control just like a grand weaver, as someone once said, a-lining circumstances, events and hearts all at the right time to make a beautiful picture to reflect his Glory.

Let's look at verses 16 to 18 of Chapter 6,

¹⁶For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. ¹⁷Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, ¹⁸that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

God is not like man. Men need to swear by something higher than themselves to give some kind of creditability to their oath and to their contracts. It was common for a person to make an oath on something or someone greater than himself—such as the altar, or the high priest, or even God. Once such an oath was made, argument was over; the dispute was ended. It was assumed that no one would make such an oath unless he was fully determined to keep it.

But who is higher than God? This is why God swore by His own name. We know that the only greater thing than God's name is His word! Since His promise already is unbreakable, His pledge did not make His promise any more secure. But He nonetheless gave it, as further assurance to those who are slow to believe. The bare word of God is guarantee enough, but God gave an oath just to show that He meant what He said.

The promise here is God showing that His word is immutable. It is unchanging and the Word of God, the Bible has incredible promises in relation to faith in Christ. So many want to add on works but what kind? And how many? Would they be even good enough? No! Salvation was ratified by one sacrifice and by one Lamb.

The trouble in the New Testament times and now, is that man wants to be involved, to set his terms and conditions. Man is not perfect only God is. When John wrote his epistle under the guidance of the Holy Spirit you will notice that Christ and Christ alone is central. His message is not about what you can or can't do apart from faith. It is all about who He is and what he has done.

Calvary is the offering that does away with all others, the words of Christ from the Cross 'IT IS FINISHED!' is the promised sealed. The resurrection is the ratification of the assurance given. To believe in Christ alone, in the once and for all sacrifice is sufficient for the forgiveness of sin and salvation. Yet faith is not just a believe, it is also a behaviour, a growth in our lives. It is not just an event but and life altering, ongoing walk with the Lord.

The promises that the Lord has made in His word to His people not the world, are amazing and very encouraging. Jesus made a covenant with those who would by faith believe in him and His finished work on the cross that he would forgive them their sin, and make them join-heirs with Him. When you make him Lord of your life, and Saviour of your Soul, you can declare just like Paul did in Romans 8 verse 38 and 39 –

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Yes, Paul was persuaded, he was convinced because of the promises of Jesus ratified by his Death, Resurrection and Ascension. God has given us great many promises that have no conditions, not just the promise of Salvation and to be with him forever, but of Him giving us a new heart, never leaving us nor forsaking us, and to provide for us. There are promises that we are still waiting for to be fulfilled such as the rapture and Christ's second coming. There are many promises and we know we can trust these promises because of who has made them, and evidence of the promises He has fulfilled so far.

The promise to Abraham and the promise to everyone who trusts in Christ are as secure as God Himself. *"Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand"* (Isaiah 14:24). *"The counsel of the LORD stands forever"* (Psalm 33:11).

I believe that the two immutable things that verse 18 speaks of in chapter 6 are that God cannot lie and God does not break His covenants. They are immutable, without any possibility of change or variance. The term (ametathetos) was used in relation to wills. Once properly made, a will was ametathetos, unchangeable by anyone but the maker. God has declared His promise and His pledge to be ametathetos, even by Himself. They cannot be turned around or altered. "You're secure," He says. "Come to Christ; there's nothing to fear. I'll hold you; I'll never let go of you." Our security is not in our never letting go of God but in His never letting go of us.

In the Septuagint, word for refuge used here in verse 18 is the Greek word used for the cities of refuge God provided for those who sought protection from avengers for an accidental killing. The believer can grasp Him by faith, just as the manslayer grabbed the horns of the altar. In Christ, the believer finds safety, as the manslayer found safety in the city of refuge. What a picture of the safety and security of the saint. And, incidentally, since our High Priest lives forever, we find refuge and safety in Him forever. We will never know whether God can hold us until in desperation we run to Him for refuge.

Therefore, as believers we are secure in Christ because God purposed this before the world began to conform us to the image of His Son, and if He failed in that promise He would fail in His eternal purpose. God's promise to those who believe in Christ is, in fact, an extension of His promise to Abraham.

"They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants" (Romans 9:6, 8).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him" (Ephesians 1:3-4).

Nothing is said about our part, our work, our faithfulness, our anything. This is the sovereign side of God's plan and is alone the basis of our security. God has purposed to love us and purposed to conform us to Christ and nothing can violate that.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30).

The promise is so certain that Paul puts it in the past tense—even for future believers.

This is the hope that we read about in Verse 19 and 20 of our text this morning,

¹⁹ This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The imagery of an anchor should come as no surprise to the reader of this epistle. It no doubt is used because of what we have already read in chapter 2:

Therefore, we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away (Hebrews 2:1).

It is not difficult to see how an anchor prevents drifting. A certain hope in God's covenant promises made to Abraham and his descendants, guaranteed by God's oath, is the anchor for our souls. As it is unchangeable, so it is immovable. We shall not drift if we cling to Christ. The hope set before us is Jesus Himself and the gospel He has brought. Paul speaks of his Saviour as "*Christ Jesus, who is our hope*" (1 Timothy 1:1). In Colossians he speaks of the gospel as our hope (1:5). This hope we have is an anchor of our souls, a hope both sure and steadfast, just like the Covenant that God gave to Abraham. God gave Abraham the security of His Person, His purpose, and His pledge. All these He also gives to us who have believed in Christ.

And like Jesus, we are able to enter within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek! What a hope, What a Promise!! As our High Priest, Jesus serves as the anchor of our souls, the One who will forever keep us from drifting away from God. Our anchored soul is, in God's mind, already secure within the veil, secure within His eternal sanctuary. When Jesus entered the heavenly Holy of Holies, he did not leave after the sacrifice as did the Aaronic high priests, but

"He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3).

He made atonement for our sins once for all as our Great High Priest, a Priest after the order of Melchizedek who lives forever. In other words, Jesus remains there forever as Guardian of our souls. Such absolute security is almost incomprehensible. Not only are our souls anchored within the impregnable, inviolable heavenly sanctuary, but our Saviour, Jesus Christ, stands guard over His people as well! How can the Christian's security be described as anything but eternal? Truly we can trust God as our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, with our souls. That is good cause to come all the way to salvation and to enjoy its security.

Christians rejoice in the hope of seeing God's glory (see Romans 8:18-25), and they do so in the midst of trials and tribulations. How can this be? Paul tells us that God uses suffering to enhance our hope and our endurance. When we endure suffering by faith, we experience God's sustaining strength. We discover that suffering actually strengthens our faith because God is faithful to sustain us. Successful suffering gives us greater confidence in God, and it produces hope by assuring us that, with God's enablement, we will endure to the end and experience the full revelation of God's glory in the future.

This is what our text this morning is all about, it's highlighting how God's covenant promises bolsters and strengthen our hope, which then becomes the basis for perseverance and endurance in the midst of adversity.

Hope is the basis for endurance because it inspires and encourages us. We see this in

Romans 8:24-25 *For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with endurance"*

It helps us to preserve and trust in God's promises regardless of what the circumstances look like, or what advice people are giving us.

Incidentally, these promises which are the basis of our hope and of our endurance, are a prominent theme in the Book of Hebrews. Some form of the word "promise" occurs 17 times in Hebrews, more frequently than in any other book of the Bible.

Our text has been about God's promises, so let's conclude by focusing on some of the truths we have seen and what impact these have on us.

My friend, if you have never trusted in Jesus Christ, I urge you to do so today. In fulfilment of His Old Testament promise to Abraham, God sent Jesus to take on humanity (without surrendering any of His deity) and to serve as our Great High Priest by suffering the punishment for our sins. He now sits at the Father's right hand in heaven to mediate on our behalf and to help us in our time of need. There is no other solution for our sin, and its eternal punishment (hell). There is no other anchor for the soul than Jesus Christ. Trust in Him. We have an amazing promise, which we know God will help, because he has sworn by His own name. What an amazing God we serve! If we go back to the quote by the French author I read at the beginning, let me encourage us, keep doing good while you are looking on to Jesus who is the author and finisher of our Faith. Keep His promises always in front of you to encourage you and give you hope, for we know that he will fulfil His Word. *Amen.*