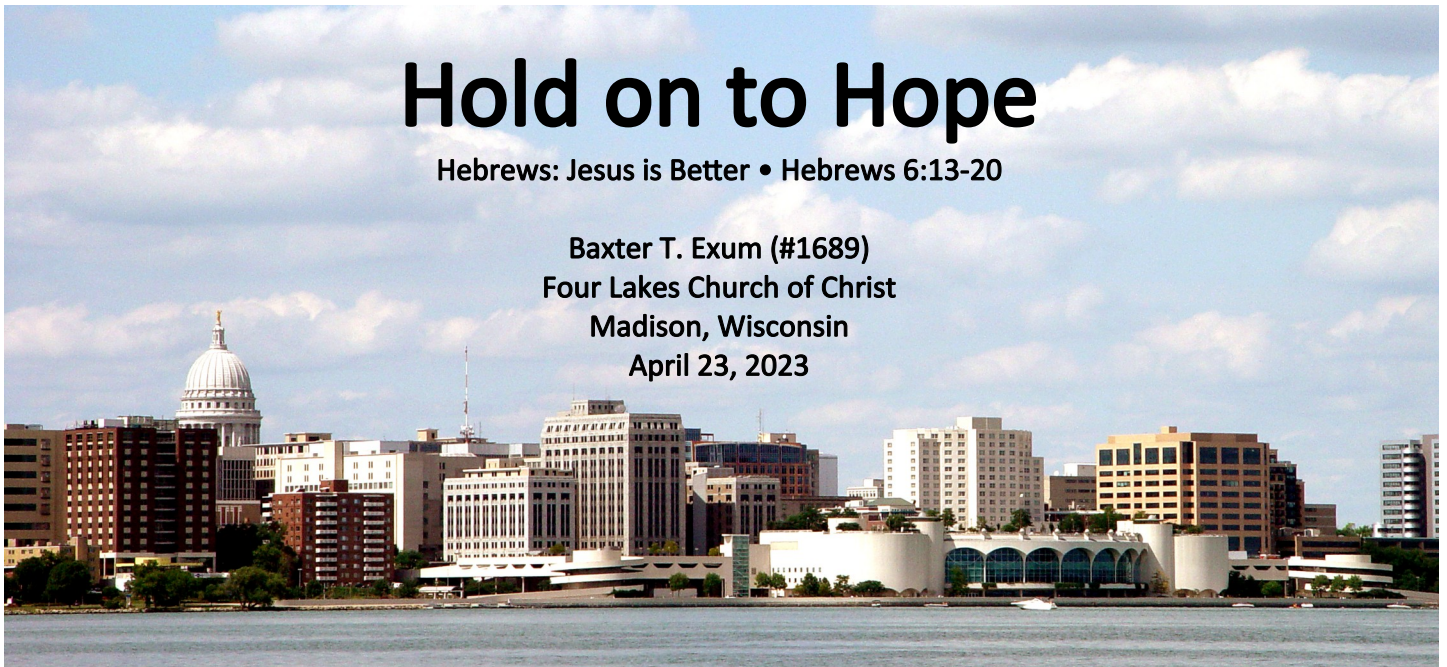


Hold on to Hope

Hebrews: Jesus is Better • Hebrews 6:13-20

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
April 23, 2023



It is a great blessing to be able to be together with God's people this morning! If you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at fourlakeschurch.org/visitor. Or, you can use the cards in the pews this morning – not just if you are visiting with us, but also for special questions and prayer concerns. You can put those in the box on the wall in the entryway or give your card to me on your way out this morning.

After worship today, we're all invited to head downstairs for a fellowship meal. And we are also taking this as an opportunity to say "goodbye" to John and Denesha Long. So, even if you can't eat with us today, I want to invite all of you to join us downstairs right after worship, and we will have a special prayer together. And even if you didn't happen to bring any food today, come down anyway – all things are ready, come to the feast!

We are here this morning to worship God, to encourage each other, and to preach the love of God, the good news that God loves us so much that he gave his only Son to save us; he died on the cross, he was buried, but then he was raised up on the first day of the week. We obey the good news by believing it, by repenting of our sins (by having a change of heart), by confessing our belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and by obeying his command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. And we've had many examples this week. Starting in the upper right, we have Kathy, whose three grandchildren got to see their Gigi become united with Christ this past Thursday in Winchester, Tennessee. We then have Merilei, who obeyed the gospel in Honolulu, Hawaii, this week. Across the bottom, we have three who were baptized at a Holiday Inn in Mongolia this week. So good to see!

Across the top, we then have Marie Brown, baptized this week in Lawton, Oklahoma, after studying with Kaye Moore and Sheila Leuch. In the lower left, we have Jonica, baptized by her boyfriend's father, one of the shepherds of the church out in Ripon, California. In the lower right, we have Bradley, baptized outdoors in the rain at the Southwest Broward congregation down in Florida.

And then, this last update comes from Carla Moore, who's married to John (on the right up here). John is a gospel preacher in Texas, he's a Bible camp director, and he has given me some great advice through the years. We've seen some of his videos here when I've been out of town, "Bible Lands Passages," a series of videos on the culture and geography of the Bible lands. Back in November 2020, John actually died in a Sunday

morning Bible class. Something wasn't right, he sat down, and his heart stopped. This is what his wife Carla posted this week. She says,

This is Tanner, Denny, Dylan and John. Many of you know that Denny (I call him Superman) was so instrumental in saving John's life with CPR. Denny met Dylan on the job somewhere and planted the seed of God's word in his heart. He brought him to worship at the Dripping Springs church of Christ, where he introduced him to John, who studied the Bible with him a number of times. Dylan invited Tanner to come to these studies, too. Last night, both Dylan and Tanner confessed their faith in Jesus and were baptized. It was a beautiful, emotional sight. How can we not be thankful for God's family, for his providence and forgiveness? God has used Denny, has used John and will use Dylan and Tanner to bring light to this dark world. Plant the seed and water it. Bring people. Talk about what God has done for you and can do for others. Shine God's light!

And we share all of this to help illustrate what it means to obey the gospel. Wherever you may live, we want you to know that God loves you and wants you to be saved. And if you have not yet obeyed the gospel yourself, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship today or reach out using the contact information on the website or on the bulletin, and we would love to study together.

This morning we return to our study of Hebrews as we look at the last few verses of Hebrews 6. Several weeks ago, the author tried to introduce the priesthood of Jesus by comparing Jesus to Melchizedek, but he was frustrated, because his audience didn't get it. They were stuck on the basics, so he pulls over for a bit with something of a rebuke: You people need to grow up! And we've described this as a giant parenthetical statement. We have the reference to Melchizedek in Hebrews 5:11, and we don't really get back to it until we come to the transition into Hebrews 7. And in between, we have something of a correction. It's encouraging, but it is something of a rebuke, as he encourages these people to grow up, and as he also gives a warning about the danger of falling away.

This brings us Hebrews 6:13-20, as he ends this little detour with some encouragement to HOLD ON TO HOPE. We actually left off last week (in Hebrews 6:12), with the author's hope that each one of his listeners would ***"show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."*** In today's passage, he continues with some reasons to HOLD ON TO HOPE. And as we will also see this morning, today's passage has been described as an "on ramp" to a much deeper and upcoming study of Melchizedek. So, we are at the end of this parenthetical statement this morning. We are headed for Melchizedek, but before we get there, we have this encouragement to HOLD ON TO HOPE. So, with this in mind, let's look together at Hebrews 6:13-20,

¹³ For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴ saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." ¹⁵ And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. ¹⁶ For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. ¹⁷ In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. ¹⁹ This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, ²⁰ where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

As we think about this message from God this morning, and as we think about how important it is that we hang on and not turn back, let's structure our thoughts around two reasons why we know that our hope is sure. When we are tempted to turn back, we don't, but we HANG ON TO HOPE, for two reasons...

I. ...starting with the reminder that **WE CAN TRUST GOD – HE HAS MADE A PROMISE TO US, AND HE HAS SEALED THAT PROMISE WITH AN OATH.**

And he starts with the reminder that God made a promise to Abraham and that God kept that promise. Well, that's easy to read on a piece of paper, but let's not forget that we have a pretty large gap between the promise and the fulfillment of the promise. We just studied this a few months ago in our Wednesday class, but let's just remember that when God promised Abram a son, he had to wait at least 25 years until that son was born. And that was a rough road. That was a tough wait. As I understand it, there's a 25-year gap between verses 13 and 15 up here, between the promise and the fulfillment of that promise. And let's remember: The name Abram means "exalted father." Can we imagine Abram at 75 years old, introducing himself, "Hello, my name is Exalted Father." "Oh really, how many kids do you have?" "Well, I actually don't have any kids yet, but God has promised!" Most people would assume that that guy is messed up! And then God changed his name to Abraham, meaning, "father of a multitude." And then he waited some more! It was difficult, with Abraham and Sarah being quite impatient, trying to find a number of work-arounds. But ultimately, God fulfilled his promise. And now, the author of Hebrews is using God's promise to Abraham as an example. Just as God fulfilled his promise to Abraham, so also God will fulfill his promise to us. It might take a while, it might be a difficult wait, but God always keeps his word. No one who puts their trust in God will ever be disappointed.

On the other hand, we don't always keep our promises, do we? We promise to love this other person no matter what from here on out, and it doesn't always stick. Or maybe it's something simple, like saying, "I'll call you right back." Sometimes we fail; sometimes we forget. This is why we have contracts. This is why we have stacks upon stacks of papers to sign when we purchase a car or a house or even a cell phone. We as human beings are not very trustworthy. God, though, keeps his promises.

But notice: God doesn't just make a promise, he also swears an oath. And this seems to be not for God's benefit, but for ours. And the reason is: Here on this earth, we normally seal a promise by taking an oath. God, then, is stooping down to our level here. And so, he doesn't just promise our salvation, but he seals that promise with an oath. And we, when we make an oath, we typically swear by something greater. God, though, when he swears an oath, there is nothing greater than God, so he swears by himself! I really hope it's okay for me to find this ever so slightly humorous! As I read this passage, the first thing that comes to my mind is God saying, "I swear to God I'm going to do this!" God is swearing by himself! And we do see this in scripture. Sometimes, people in the Bible would say something like, "**As the Lord lives,**" I will do this or that. Well, we also have God saying in scripture, "**As I live,**" I will do such and such. God, then, will sometimes swear by himself.

But as we go back to the passage, notice the reason for the promise and the oath (at the end of verse 18), "***so that...we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.***" For those who knew the Law of Moses, this idea of "***taking refuge***" would immediately remind them of those cities of refuge set up by God way back in the book of Exodus. Almost as soon as God says that it's wrong to murder, he also designates several places as "***cities of refuge***" where you could flee if you accidentally killed somebody. So the idea is: If I'm out chopping wood and the axe head flies off the handle and kills my neighbor, knowing that this guy's family may try to kill me, I can flee to a city of refuge. And once I'm there, I'm safe, at least until somebody can hear the case and render a judgment. It was almost like home base in a game of tag.

These cities were evenly spread throughout the nation. And that's the picture here. God is our refuge, and because we trust in his promise, and because of his oath, we know we are safe. This is the hope that is set before us. God keeps his word, and if I flee to him, then I know I am safe. This is our hope. This is our guarantee that God will take care of us. We are to hold on to hope because of God's promise and the oath.

II. **As we come to the last two verses, we find that we also hold on to hope BECAUSE OF WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR US AS A HIGH PRIEST.**

And specifically, the hope we have through Christ is pictured as an *"anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil."* I think most of us understand the picture of an anchor. An anchor, in fact, is one of the simple of all tools, and the design and purpose of an anchor really hasn't changed too much, even from ancient times. An anchor is simply something heavy on the end of a long rope or a chain, and its purpose is to prevent a boat or a ship from drifting. That's it! An anchor may be shaped like a giant hook weighing thousands of pounds, or an anchor may be as simple as an old coffee can filled with concrete and an eye-hook sticking out of it. An anchor keeps us from drifting. And here, the author is speaking symbolically. As we are battered with the storms of life, we are in danger of drifting, and our hope in Christ is pictured as an anchor. We might think back to Hebrews 2:1 where the author says, *"For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it."* There's a danger in drifting spiritually. Or we might think of Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 1, where he told the young preacher Timothy to *"fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience,"* so that he would not suffer *"shipwreck in regard to their faith"* like Hymenaeus and Alexander. Drifting in the storms of life can be a real danger.

For most of us, the storms we face are very personal. So, as we face grief, or illness, or uncertainty, or temptation, and as we are tempted to drift or to fall back to some old way of living, Jesus anchors our soul. And when we drop anchor, it changes our behavior. When we put \$5,000 down on a house, we stop looking at other houses, and we start prepping for the big move. When she says "yes" and we give her that ring, it changes the way we live – we start making plans for the future, and hopefully we stop considering other women! And the same is true with our hope in the promise of God: Once our hope is anchored, it changes the way we live. We are no longer tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine, we are no longer anxious about our jobs or the economy, we look at disease and death in a different way.

And according to verse 19, our hope is both *"sure and steadfast."* I learned something the first time I really dug into this passage. I learned that the word translated here as *"sure"* is a word that we might even recognize in English as the word "asphalt." What in the world? It goes back to a word meaning "no tripping." It's the word for "tripping up," with a negative prefix in front of it, "no tripping." So, I suppose when we pave something with asphalt, the idea is that we are making it smooth and secure so that nobody trips. So in a sense, that's the picture here. Our anchor is *"sure,"* in that it prevents us from falling. And isn't that the warning in this section? He's warning about the danger of falling away, and now we have the solution: Hold on to the anchor that is both *"sure and steadfast."*

But I hope we notice that our anchor (spiritually speaking) is not tied down under the sea, but instead, our anchor *"enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us."* Our anchor goes up, not down. Several weeks ago, I invited the kids downstairs to participate in today's lesson by commissioning some artwork. I left some simple instructions on the board down there, asking for a drawing of a ship, with some waves, and with an anchor – not going down (as we might expect), but with the anchor going up into the clouds. And this is it! Thank you, Brendan, for helping out this morning! It's a weird picture, isn't it? But it illustrates our hope as Christians. We are anchored, not in the sea, but in heaven, *"within the veil,"* the author

says. And it's the picture of the high priest entering within the veil of the Most Holy Place once each year, on the Day of Atonement. What a mixed metaphor! Our hope is an anchor that is firmly lodged inside a curtain! But the reference is to Jesus' work as our great high priest. He has done the work for us. Our job is simply to hang on! Hang on through the storm! When we feel the pressure to do what's wrong, we have the strength to say "no," because our anchor is in heaven. When we feel the pressure to ignore the vow we took on our wedding day, we have the strength to honor that vow, because our anchor is in heaven. When we feel the pressure to react in anger when somebody does something to us, we can resist that urge, because we have an anchor, not in the depths of the sea, but in heaven, ***"an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast."***

By the way, have we thought about the fact that when an anchor is doing its job, we can't really see it? If the anchor is with me on the boat, it's not really anchoring. In the same way, our spiritual anchor isn't here on this earth; no, our anchor is ***"within the veil."*** Our anchor is in heaven. Our anchor is in the throne room of God. Our hope is anchored in Jesus who has ***"entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*** And this is where we come to the "on-ramp" to a deeper discussion of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7. Hopefully we will get there two weeks from today. But for now, our hope is in Jesus.

Conclusion:

As we wrap it up, I'll just briefly suggest two very practical thoughts:

- First of all, there are times when we may need to wait patiently for God's promises. When life is full of chaos, and when we're having a hard time, let's remember Abraham, the "Father of a Multitude," who had no children for most of his life. God was faithful, but it sure didn't seem like it at the time for Abraham. And it may be the same for us. So, instead of trying to find some shortcut, we have the reminder here to wait patiently in hope.
- And then, secondly, knowing that our hope in Jesus is described as being an ***"anchor,"*** let's run to him for refuge. And again, when life is falling apart, let's take a moment to remember that our hope is in him (even if we can't see him right now). When life is difficult, when we might be tempted to give up, we run to Jesus. He is our forerunner, and we have to remember that our hope is anchored ***"within the veil."***

Since next week is a fifth Sunday, we hope to come together with a special emphasis on singing and scripture reading. We'll be focused on the theme "One Another," and Gary Mueller, one of our deacons, will be bringing our lesson next week.

Before Caleb leads us in a song to prepare us for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We are so thankful for the hope you have given to us in Jesus. We are thankful for his work as priest, and we are thankful that he serves as a forerunner, going before us behind the veil. We pray that we would be patient as we wait. We ask for courage as we run to your son for refuge. We know that you, God, are a rock and our salvation.

We come to you today through Jesus, our Savior and Priest. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com