

Hebrews 6:12-20 / The Patient Waiting that Inherits Promises

Pastor Michael Engle

Introduction

Let's imagine your Christian walk like this - you are walking on a very high ridge. There is nothing to your left but a fall into the abyss. There is nothing on your right but a fall into the abyss. The path you are on is very, very narrow. And in case you thought your predicament wasn't frightening enough...you have been up here on the narrow way as a child. You must be careful to stay on the path and not crawl of the edge, God has warned you that it's impossible to be restored to repentance if you do. That warning we heard last week serves as a guard rail up here on the narrow way. What you need is meat. You need to have "powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil"¹.

As you read the beginning of chapter six you might feel uneasy, you might feel like your salvation is but a thin thread wrapped around your waist as you walk this high narrow path. It is fraught with danger. You must grow up. You must move on the meat. Many things in your life will attempt to pull you away and keep you from growing. Those things will entice you from the other side of the guardrail. They sound eerily similar to the hiss of a serpent. "Come over the rail. It's fun out here. If you come over, you will not fall away, but be given wings. Surely God did not say you wouldn't ever be able to come back." But you are not alone up here on the narrow path and today's text is here to encourage you to walk boldly up the narrow path to heaven.

Remember, you are no longer blind. God has given you eyes to see and he has said elsewhere that "[His] word is a lamp to [your] feet and a light to [your] path".² Your path is lit up as far as your next few steps. And you are not tethered to this path by anything like a thin thread, but as we will see in our time together this morning, believers are tethered by the strongest chord known in all the universe, the chord of God's promise.

Our path can seem dangerous and strewn with many pitfalls but our God is far more faithful than our path is dangerous. Our text today will show us.

**Prayer

Let's start reading a few verses before we get to our text this morning. God's word says this starting in Hebrews chapter six verse nine,

9 Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. 10 For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. 11 And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,

...and here's our first verse for the day, Verse twelve...

¹ Hebrews 5:14

² Psalm 119:105

Be Imitators

12 so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

People who "have the full assurance of hope until the end" will do what? They will "not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

Did you hear that? Don't be sluggish. Don't be a milk drinker. Don't be one who can't be restored to repentance. But be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. This is good news! We are not the only ones to have ever walked this narrow path. We are not the only ones to have ever heard the warnings. We are not the only ones on whom the fierce winds of a fallen world have blown. There have been others...and they have inherited the promises of God!

What kind of people were they? These inheritors of the promise. They were full of faith and patience. These are the two characteristics of those who inherit promises. The way you traverse the narrow path is to obey the warnings and to be full of faith and patience.

Now, in case you are, like me, a little slow on the uptake, and you are thinking, "Lord, I wish you had given me an example to look at of "those who through faith and patience inherit the promises". No problem, God is always gracious to us and has been today by including verses thirteen to fifteen. Let go there and see our example of how we should have faith and wait patiently on the Lord.

God's word says this in verses 13-15,

Because God Promised

*13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."
15 And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.*

In these verses the author of Hebrews has taken us back to Genesis 22:15-17 where God made this promise,

And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,

This is great stuff! Did any of you breath sigh of relief when you read that? You should have. Many who call themselves Christian believe obtaining the promises of God depends on their performance. Many of you still struggle with the same thing. But here in verse thirteen we see that God swore, not by Abrahams behavior, but by himself. You know what this is like, don't you? It's like the kid on the playground who swears on his mother's grave he's telling the truth. That kid is looking for something more revered than his own word and what could be more revered than his mom's grave. Or the adult who swears not on one Bible, but a stack of Bibles. Though he disregards this book in most of his dealings, in his search for something more revered than himself he knows that somehow the Bible,

God's word, is better than his, so surely a stack of them is better than that. Well when God looks around for something more revered, of more worth, more holy, more righteous, He finds nothing! Nothing! There is nothing to make his word more sure, than swearing by himself. You can be sure of the promise because he made it! Surely Abraham has no idea how God is going to "multiply [his] offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore", but he knows the promise will come through his son Isaac, so much so that even if he obeys God and sacrifices him - somehow God will fulfill his promise. Abraham believes and he waits patiently for what God has sworn by himself to do. And this scene gives us a shadow of what is to come. A son, sacrificed in obedience to God.

Now listen, we spoke of that chord that keeps you safely on the path. Well picture this promise of God, sworn to by his own self, as one knot in the chord as you walk along the high narrow path. You may still be a child, you may only be able to see a short distance ahead, but you have wrapped that chord around your waste and the knot that holds it to you is a promise God has made and sworn to by himself. Have faith and wait patiently on the Lord. Fear not the path before you Christian, your chord will hold. God has promised.

God's word says this in verses sixteen and seventeen,

Bound with an Oath

16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. 17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,

Oh, God is not done Christian! You are not left with one knot to bind that chord about your waste. There is another...God's oath. Think about what this means brothers and sisters. God has not only made a promise and sworn to it by His own character, he has now put a sort of seal on that promise. You see in Old Testament times they would say things like, "As the Lord lives". That was the end of the argument. You know longer had anything to say. If the person who had sworn an oath by God did not fulfill what he had said, then God would be the judge. You no longer needed to be concerned with whether or not they were speaking the truth 'cause if they weren't, they had way more trouble comin' than you could ever bring. And here, God has guaranteed his promise with an oath. Again, not giving his oath by something greater, because there is no one, but giving it himself. In essence relying on the unfailingly perfect character of himself to show that this promise is a done deal.

Remember the chord wrapped around your waist on the high narrow path? It now has not only the knot of God's promise in it. It now has the double not of God's promise guaranteed with an oath. There is nothing in all the universe so sure as this! How could there be when the creator of all you know has said so?! Have faith and wait patiently on the Lord. Fear not the path before you Christian, your chord will hold. God has promised and guaranteed it with an oath.

God's word says this in verse eighteen,

Begetting Hope

18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

"So that" he says, or "because of" these two unchangeable things, meaning number one, God's promise, and number two, God's oath. You just have to love how caring and kind your God is when he adds this little line in for you, "in which it is impossible for God to lie". In case you had forgotten the kind of being God is after all this talk of promises and oaths, he is one for whom lying is an impossibility. He is truth! Remember what he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life."³ You are dealing with someone who has no potential. He will never be more good than he already is. He will never get bad either. Everyone else you run into has the potential to be better and the potential to be worse. Not God! He has always been and will always be truth. He just IS, and the author of Hebrews seeks to encourage you with that fact. How do I know that? Look at the next part of the verse.

He's talking to those of us who have "fled for refuge". Where? Where are they fleeing to. To God. And we should have "strong encouragement" from this promise. Strong encouragement from this oath. Strong encouragement from the fact that God is truth. Why do we need this encouragement...to hold fast to the hope set before us.

Remember the chord wrapped around you, up here on the high narrow path with guardrails of warning, - the one with the two knots? Think of that rope as your hope. This is not a, "boy I hope we win today", but a, "You will win so bank your life on it" kind of hope. That is the kind of chord you have wrapped around your waist.

Have faith and wait patiently on the Lord. Fear not the path before you Christian, your chord will hold. God has promised, guaranteed it with an oath, and given you hope.

God's word says this in verse nineteen and twenty,

Breaking Through on Our Behalf

19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

What do we have as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul? We have our truth telling God's promise and oath. They don't sway back and forth. God is not like men who will flip flop on every idea to suit their current circumstances. No, he is like the anchor used on the largest of ships. Though the wind blow and the waves buffet, you are safe in him from the storm. For your anchor is not hooked to the shifting sands of this world but moored to the sure foundation of Heaven. You may rest in the bow of the boat with your Lord and Savior for he is the anchor of your soul and when you awake in the morning you shall find that your vessel is unharmed and you have not moved one inch from the path, for you have been safely anchored to Christ all through night.

³ John 14:6

That hope that is "set before us" is one "that enter[ed] into the inner place behind the curtain". What does that remind you of? Remember in the Old Testament, there was a curtain in front of the Holy of Holies. No one but the High Priest went behind that curtain, but look again at verse twenty. "where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf. As we noted in the beginning of our time this morning we are not on an untrodden path, but one that has been taken by many before us. But now we see that there is a more important traveler on our road than even Abraham. We travel a path that has already been walked by our dear savior Jesus Christ. Not only has he travelled our path, but he has gone where no one but the high priest was able to go. He has gone behind the curtain, into the Holy of Holies having been the perfect sacrifice for sin and the most holy of high priests. One even after the order of Melchizedek.

Have faith and wait patiently on the Lord. Fear not the path before you Christian, your chord will hold. God has promised, guaranteed it with an oath, given hope and held you firm on the path, like an anchor in a stormy sea.

How has he done so? He has done so in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. For He is our high priest who has gone before us and the Bible says this about when he died on that cross so long ago, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open."⁴ He has not only gone behind the curtain, but has torn it in two therefore allowing those who would believe in him to enter into the Holy of Holies and see God!

Conclusion

My friend, if you have come here today with your anchor hooked to the shifting sands of this world, no hope in sight for the future and no guarantee of safe passage into world to come I want to warn you of this. You too are on a high path with falls into the abyss on both sides. However you have no guardrails on you path. You are just a blind child alone in the dark with no light to guide you and no promise from God that you will arrive safely at home. It is in fact worse than you could ever imagine, your path with end with an abruptness that will not allow for you to reach back and grab for the edge, no matter how desperately you try. You have no hope of saving yourself and you have no rope to catch you as you fall. So I beg of you before you fall from your path into an eternity without Christ. Call to him through the darkness by believing he has paid for your sin on the cross and has been raised again from the dead. Securing victory for all who would believe in him. He will come. He will find you. He will rescue you from the deadly path you are on and he will bind you to himself with the chord of his promises and anchor you to heaven so you shall never be moved off course.

And to my dear brothers and sisters here this morning. God has given many promises in his word that he is sure to keep. From our text today we see that he was sure to keep his promise to Abraham that he would, "surely bless [him], and [He] will surely multiply [his] offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And [his] offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,". But what about you? I stand before you today to tell you that you, Christian, are the fulfillment of that promise to Abraham. You are one of, "the stars of heaven and...the sand that is on the seashore". God is fulfilling his promise to Abraham even now.

So how should the certainty of God's promises lay upon you today my brothers and sister? You should hear these promises and the certainty of them, that is God's very character, and in that you should so

⁴ Matthew 27:51-52

believe the promises he has made you that you do not wait in fear and anxiety for the final day, but wait with a patient hope that longs for the day when you will follow in the footsteps of the forerunner of our faith, the Lord Jesus Christ, into Glory, behind the curtain, and face to face with God! This is not some pipe dream like playing the lottery and hoping for victory. This, this homegoing, is as sure as God is true, because he has promised.

Have faith. Wait patiently on the Lord. Fear not the path before you Christian, your chord will hold. God has promised, guaranteed it with an oath, given hope and held you firm on the path, like an anchor in a stormy sea. You will inherit his promises.