

“An Anchor for the Soul: Sure and Certain”

Hebrews 6:11-20

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 10, 2016

A while back I bought a power saw on sale at Harbor Freight. If you're not familiar with Harbor Freight they sell low-cost tools, mostly made in China. While checking out they wanted to know if I wanted to purchase the extended warranty. I asked how much it cost and she said \$29.99. The tool was on sale for \$32. I decided to take my chances. You know, it seems like everyone who is trying to sell you something is offering some kind of warranty or guarantee. Cars used to come with a two-year warranty. Now many of them are five years. Even used cars come with warranties these days. Mail order products seem to really push their guarantee. "If you're not completely satisfied, simply send back the empty bottle for a full refund." Of course you have to pay the shipping and a "small" handling fee.

There was a guy who had a small business doing light hauling in his pickup truck. The sign on his truck read, "satisfaction guaranteed or double your trash back." The truth is that when it comes to guarantees, both you and the company are hoping you won't use the warranty. But they want you to feel confidence in their product. What they're offering is a promise, assurance that the product will meet your needs. What it comes down to is a matter of trust.

Most of us, though, have been disappointed enough that we are a little suspicious of so-called guarantees. There's all that fine print that always seems to exclude your particular problem. People disappoint us, too. Promises are made and promises are broken. Much of our legal system is dedicated to either making promises or dealing with broken promises. Contracts exist to guarantee promises. Maybe we are right to be suspicious of promises. But too often that spills over into our faith. We are suspicious of God's promises. It all sounds too good to be true.

Our passage this morning includes part of last week's passage. Verse 12 says, "be imitators

of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." As I said last week, there is no retirement from following Jesus. We decide every day whether we will trust God's Word and put it into practice. We are told to be imitators of those who have persevered and beginning in verse 13 of Hebrews 6 we are given an example to imitate – Abraham.

Abraham is one of the dominant figures in the Old Testament. He is considered the Father of all the tribes of Israel. But perhaps he should be most remembered because he trusted the promises of God. Genesis 12 tells us that when Abram, as he was known then, was 75 God came to him and made a promise. He said, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." We don't know what Abram thought of God's promise. He and his wife were too old at that point to expect to have a baby. But the Bible says, "so Abram went, as the LORD had told him." Sometimes God calls us to things that seem impossible. It's not up to us to decide if it's possible, merely to decide if we will obey. We are imitators of Abraham when we choose to obey God's call in our life. Maybe it's a call to get involved in a new ministry, or help someone meet Jesus, or maybe it's a call to sacrifice something important to us – our time or our money.

Later on God made the same promise to Abraham, the promise of descendants. At the end of Genesis 13 God tells Abram that he will give him all the land that he sees in all directions as an inheritance for his offspring, which will be as numerous as the dust of the earth. Again, Abraham trusted God. That trust didn't mean he had no doubt. In Genesis 15 we find him complaining that God hadn't given

him any children. This time God said, “count the number of the stars. You will have more descendants than that.” And then God confirmed the promise by making a covenant. A covenant is like a contract only more serious. The covenant ceremony involved cutting a sacrificial animal in half as a way of saying, “If I break this covenant this is what you can do to me.”

Over and over again in the story of Abraham God comes and makes the same promise. When Abraham is 99 years old God says once again that his wife Sarah will have a son. This time Abraham laughs at the idea of his 90 year old wife having a baby. It just seems impossible. But nothing is impossible for God – not in Abraham’s life, not in Sarah’s life, not in your life.

Sure enough God kept his promise and Sarah had a son and they called him Isaac, which means “laughter.” All their hopes and dreams finally were fulfilled. So you can imagine how hard it must have been for Abraham to hear God tell him that he needed to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. For me that’s one of the hardest passages in the whole Bible. But it teaches us something very important about following Christ. By the time we get to that story in Genesis 22, Abraham no longer questions God. He no longer laughs when God speaks. Through years of growing in faith and assurance, Abraham simply obeys and takes Isaac off to the wilderness. He was sure and certain that God would keep His promise of many descendents through Isaac that he just does what the LORD commanded. As a result God not only reiterates the promise but this time, as we heard earlier, He swears with an oath. He guarantees it.

The ultimate fulfillment of that promise comes in Jesus, a descendant of Abraham. Through Christ, you and I are adopted as heirs of the promise, children of Abraham. Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises. Jesus himself said, “I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again and take you to myself so that where I am you may be also.” The promise God makes is that we will be with him forever.

Sometimes we have trouble believing the promise which is why we need to keep pressing on in following Christ. It’s why we need to come together as the church, to encourage each other. It’s not that we can lose our salvation if we don’t. But we don’t *experience* that salvation when we are apart from the Body of Christ. Trust is like a muscle. The more we use it the stronger it gets.

The reason God swore an oath to Abraham was not because God needed it, but because *we* need it to strengthen our weak faith. Verse 17 puts it this way: “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.” It was like putting it in **bold** print and capital letters to serve as a “*strong* encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.”

Finally, the writer of Hebrews drives his point home with an illustration of the truth of God’s promises. Verses 19-20 say, “We have this as a *sure and steadfast anchor of the soul*, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. There is a lot of imagery here that will help us understand what he’s saying. The curtain refers to the heavy woven curtain in the Temple that divided the inner and outer chambers. The outer chamber was the Holy Place where the lampstands and the show bread were. This represented the worship of God’s people. The inner chamber was the Holy of Holies where God’s presence was and only the high priest could enter and only one day a year, the Day of Atonement. It was this dividing curtain that tore when Jesus died on the cross.

With that in mind we need to look at the other part of this illustration, which is a nautical image. God’s promise to us is trustworthy. He has even sworn with an oath. It’s so trustworthy that it’s like a rock-solid anchor for our souls. That part I think we all get. But the writer of Hebrews says Jesus has gone “behind the curtain” in to the Holy of Holies, which

represents Heaven, as a “forerunner on our behalf.” The word forerunner is also a nautical term. In the ancient world many times ships could only get into the harbors during high tide because of sand bars that blocked the entrance during low tide. So while they waited they would send a small boat, called a forerunner, with the ship’s anchor across the sand bar. The job of the forerunner was to set the ship’s anchor inside the harbor, guaranteeing that the ship would make it into the harbor safely when the tide was right.

Jesus is not only our anchor, but he is our forerunner. He has entered into the presence of God, the inner place, and has set the anchor of our souls there and there is nothing that can pull it loose. That anchor is sure and steadfast. Galatians 3:29 says, “If you are Christ’s, then you *are* Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” It’s guaranteed.

So what does this mean for us today? We hear the promises and we hear the guarantees but maybe it doesn’t feel like it. Maybe you aren’t confident that God’s promise is true or

that it applies to you. Here is where this passage is so helpful. We are reminded that the promises *are* true and that they are *guaranteed*. They don’t depend on how sure we are. Even Abraham doubted. The question is, “are you growing in your trust and assurance?” That’s where the Christian life comes in. The more we persevere, the greater our sense of assurance, the more confidence we have that it’s true and good. So let me suggest that you spend some time reading and meditating on the promises of God in the Bible. Begin with the promises Jesus made. Read the promises in Paul’s letters. Read the story of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob again. Fall in love with the story. Then step out in faith a little more each day, trusting God a little bit more until it just feels natural. Then, as we talked about last week, your faith will overflow into your daily life and your service to others and they will want what you have. It’s guaranteed.

Amen