

THE ANCHOR HOLDS



Hebrews 6:19-20

What we saw this morning from **verses 9-18** is that God has gone the extra mile in seeing to it that we have strong encouragement and assurance to hold fast to our hope in him. He wants us to have encouragement and the encouragement he wants us to have is the assurance that all his promises will come true for us and that our future is firmly in his hand for our good.

So he not only makes promises to his children, but he takes an oath and swears that he will bless them, and only that he swears by the highest and most precious reality in the universe, himself (v. 13). So there are two things, not just one—a promise and an oath—that secure our hope.

Let's pick it up at **verse 18** and then move into tonight's text. It says that he took an oath *so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.*

In other words he wants us to have strong encouragement to lay hold on the hope he has sworn will be ours. The promise and the oath are meant to give us the deep confidence that we WILL inherit all that he promises us in Jesus.

So he wants us to experientially *"take (lay) hold of"* it. What does it mean to be told that God has secured a future for us with promise and oath and that we are to "lay hold of" it? **What does "lay hold of" mean in real life experience?**

It means bank on that hope. Trust in it. Feel secure in it. Be satisfied with it. Long for it the way you long for the coming of the dawn after a long, dark, scary night.

There are at least five practical things you can do to move your heart toward "laying hold of your hope."

1. Meditate from the Bible on how sure your hope is in the presence of God.
2. Pray earnestly that God would open your mind and heart to this greatness and this certainty and incline you to hope in him.
3. Consider how much Christ has suffered for your

hope.

4. Consider Christians like yourselves who have laid hold on hope in Christ. *For example, in 1934, when twenty-eight-year-old John Stam, missionary to China, was being led away to execution by the communists with his wife Betty, someone on the road asked, "Where are you going?" John laid hold on the hope set before him and said, "We are going to heaven."*

5. Help each other do all these things in your small groups. Exhort each other every day to lay hold on hope.

This is God's will for us—to have strong encouragement to lay hold on our hope.

VV. 19-20

Now this time the writer keeps on fighting for our encouragement and our laying hold on the good future God has promised and sworn. But he turns from the promise and the oath to give us another image that he hopes will stick in our minds and give us solid assurance about our future.

The image is the **"anchor."**

Hebrews 6:19–20 (NIV) ¹⁹ *We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,* ²⁰ *where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*

What is the "hope" which is like an anchor in this image? It says, *"We have this hope as an anchor."* But let's be precise. You can use the word "hope" in at least three ways:

- 1) a subjective feeling or conviction in the soul ("I hope to go to heaven.").
- 2) A future objective reality that you hope for ("Heaven is my hope.").
- 3) A person or event that makes your confidence sure ("Jesus' death is my only hope of escaping judgment.").

Which of these three is meant in verse 19 when it says, *"This hope we have as an anchor"?*

The answer is given in the preceding **verse 18**. It says, we are to *"have strong encouragement, we who*

have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us." The hope is something "set before us." It is the future objective reality that we hope for. **It is heaven and the blessing promised in verse 14 and the sum of all the good that God has sworn to be for us in Jesus.**

This is the anchor of verse 19. In other words: What anchors our soul is not our subjective confidence, but the sure objective reality that God has promised. This is our anchor. And this is what we are to lay hold of.

So the writer's point is that what we are hoping for is absolutely sure. He uses three descriptions of the anchor to stress this. In verse **19b** he calls the anchor (the hope), "both (1) *sure* and (2) *steadfast* (secure) and (3) one which *enters within the veil*."

The anchor is sure, certain and safe. The anchor is steadfast, firm and reliable. The anchor is lodged within the veil. This is a reference to the veil that hung across the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and concealed the arc of the covenant where God in his glory met with the high priest once a year as he brought a blood sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people.

So what's the point of saying that our hope is an anchor lodged in the heavenly holy of holies where God's glory dwells? **Verse 20** fills it out. This is where Jesus has gone as a forerunner for us (which means we will enter with him someday).

And he has gone as a high priest. Not in the order of Aaron and Levi—who (1) had to offer sacrifices for *themselves* and for the people (5:3; 7:27), and (2) who died and had to be replaced year by year (7:23), and (3) who offered the blood of bulls and goats which could never take away sins (10:4). But Jesus entered into the holy of holies once for all with his own infinitely precious blood and his own indestructible life so that his atoning work for us is perfect and lasts for ever. This is what **verse 20** means when it says that Jesus *"has become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*

So our anchor—our promised future—is *sure*; it is *steadfast*; and it is the *finished and purchased work of Jesus* our High Priest.

So this morning the writer helps us hold fast our hope by telling us that it is based on two unchangeable things: God's promise and God's oath to bless us forever. Tonight he helps us hold fast our

hope by telling us that our promised future (our hope) is *"an anchor of the soul"* that is sure and steadfast and as complete and binding *as the work of Jesus in shedding his blood for our sins and taking it himself into the presence of God to plead the case of those he purchased.*

CAN/WILL WE HOLD ON?

Our anchor is upside down in Heaven, firmly secured to Jesus Christ and the altar of God.

Now here is the burning question for me. Is the anchor of my soul as firmly attached to my soul as it is to the altar of God? In other words is the picture here of an anchor with its hook and chain bound unbreakably to the altar of God in the holy of holies so that nothing could loose it from that end, but with the rope just hanging out of heaven in the air? Is the only point of this text to say "Take hold of the loose end of this rope and you will have safety and firmness and assurance"?

Would that give you the sense of security and confidence and hope and firmness that this morning's text and this text seem to be about?

What was the point of an anchor in those days? It was to keep you from being blown by the wind or swept by the tide into destruction—out to sea or on the rocks. But what if someone said: I have fitted your boat with a good solid heavy anchor that will grip any sea-bottom. Only have not made it fast to the boat. Would that give you encouragement?

I don't think that is the image the author has in mind here. When he says in **verse 19** that we have an *"anchor of the soul"* I think he means that the anchor is firmly anchored in heaven, *and* the anchor is firmly attached to the Christian's soul.

Here are my four reasons for thinking this, which I pray will give you a deep sense of God's sovereign care for your perseverance and hope and encouragement. You are not left to yourself to hold on the storms of life.

1. Recall Hebrews 6:9. The writer had just warned against drifting away from God and committing apostasy and being judged. But then he said in verse 9, *"But beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation."* The better things are perseverance in faith and patient obedience—in other words "holding fast to their hope." And he says that this "accompanies salvation." That is, it belongs to God's children as part

of their salvation. Persevering in hope and laying hold on our inheritance and banking on it and being satisfied in it and living by the power of it "belongs to" (literally: "is had by") salvation. That's part of our salvation. Salvation is not merely an anchored rope dangling from heaven for us to hold on to with our own strength. Better things belong to salvation, including, the holding on. That too is a work of our salvation. The anchor of our souls is bound to us as well as to heaven.

2. Recall Hebrews 3:14 where the writer says, *"We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."* Not: we WILL become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast." But: we HAVE become partakers of Christ if we hold fast. In other words, holding fast to the rope anchored in heaven is an effect and proof of belonging to Christ, not a cause of it. We *must* hold fast. But we *can* hold fast only because we *are* held fast (see Philippians 3:12). We *have become* partakers of Christ—evidence? We hold fast to our hope. Christ's power in us sees to it that it happens. The anchor of our souls is bound to us as well as to heaven.

3. Recall Hebrews 3:6. The writer compared Christ to the maker and master of a house, and compared Christians to the house itself. Then he said, *"Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."*

Hebrews 3:6 (NIV)

⁶ But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

Note, it does not say that we WILL become his house if we hold fast to our hope. No, it says that we ARE (now!) his house if we (in the future) hold fast to our hope. So holding fast is not the cause of our being Christ's house, but the proof of it. Belonging to his as his new creation, and being owned by him because of his purchase and being indwelt by him as his home—all this *secures* our perseverance. It is not *created* by perseverance.

The anchor of our souls is not a rope hanging in the air waiting for our weak hands to grasp and hold. That would be no security. The anchor of our soul is as solidly bound to us as it is to heaven.

4. Consider Hebrews 13:20-21. What the writer shows there is that when Jesus purchased our salvation by his "blood of the eternal covenant"—the new covenant (Luke 22:20; Jeremiah 31:33; 32:40; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:27; Deuteronomy 30:6)—what he obtained for us was not just heaven, but the faith and hope that it takes to get to heaven. The blood of the new covenant obtained the promises of the new covenant, and they included the promises to "cause us to walk in his statutes." Which means that holding fast to our anchored hope is not our self-securing work, but God's blood-bought work in us to bring us to heaven.

Hebrews 13:20–21 (NIV) ²⁰ *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,* ²¹ *equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

If I am going to hold fast to my well-anchored hope, then I will need some sin-conquering help from God. And that is what verse 21 says I get: *"[God] is working in us that which is pleasing in his sight"*—namely, our holding fast to the well anchored hope.

And notice the next three words: *"through Jesus Christ."* That means that our High Priest, our never-dying, Melchizedek-like High Priest obtained by the blood of the eternal covenant not just firm attachment at one end of the anchor, but at both ends. It is firm in heaven, and it is firm in us. This is the salvation he obtained by his blood: the hope of heaven, and the holding fast to get there. We are not left to our own weak hands to hold on. The anchor of our souls is bound to us as well as to heaven.

CONCLUSION

So what we have seen is that God is not inconsistent. He does not exert himself with promises, and oaths, and the blood of his Son, and the eternal priesthood of Jesus simply to anchor down one end of our security while leaving the other to dangle in the air. The salvation Jesus obtained by his blood was everything it takes to save his people, not just part of it.

So we are prone to ask, **Why does the writer encourage us to hold fast to our hope (verse 18)? If our holding fast was obtained and irrevocably secured by the blood of Jesus, then why does God tell us to hold fast? (hang on, not let go, beware of**

drifting, guard against dullness, hard hearts, “don’t throw away your confidence” (Heb 10:33)?

The answer is this:

What Christ bought for us when he died was not the freedom from having to hold fast but the enabling power to hold fast.

What he bought was not the nullification of our wills as though we didn't have to hold fast anymore, but the empowering of our wills so that we *want* to hold fast and *can* hold fast.

What he bought was not the canceling of the commandment to hold fast but the fulfillment of the commandment to hold fast.

What he bought was not the end of exhortation, but the triumph of exhortation.

He died so that you would do exactly what Paul did in Philippians 3:12, *"I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus."* It is not foolishness, it is the Gospel, to tell a sinner to do what Christ alone can enable him to do, namely, hope in God.

So I exhort you tonight with all my heart: reach out and take hold of that for which you have been taken hold of by Christ, and hold it fast with all HIS might.