



Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation. ¹⁰ God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ¹¹ We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. ¹² We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

¹³ When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” ¹⁵ And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

¹⁶ Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷ Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this 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. 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 does a good parent do after he spans his child? If you administer discipline in a controlled and loving way, then what you probably do after a spanking is give your child a big bear hug and reassure them of your love. I feel like I applied some corporal punishment to you all in last weeks’ message and this morning I feel the need to give you all a big hug and reassure you of my love. So come on up here and give me a hug! ☺



I don't have time to hug you all but this sermon is going to be a type of hug. Just as most of us spanked our children when they were young and hugged them afterward, in the same way, God applies spiritual spankings to our bottom line and then reassures us of his perfect, fatherly love.

I think it is fascinating that this is exactly what the author of Hebrews did with his readers. If you recall, he called them slow to learn, slothful hearers the spiritual equivalent of

milk drinking infants. This was a stern and solemn warning that I think we all took to heart last Sunday. Moreover, in the first half of chapter six he warned them about falling away into apostasy and that those who do fall away can never “be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace” (Heb. 6:6). But then as we read in verse nine, the author gave them these amazingly reassuring words, *Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation.*

This is the only time in all of Hebrews where the author referred to them as “dear friends.” He clearly wanted to bring them comfort and reassurance after his strong warnings. The author did not think that his readers had fallen into apostasy. Not that it could not happen to them or that it could not happen to us, but that he had confidence in them. He obviously did feel them some of them were slothful hearers and slothful doers, but even those stern warnings are tempered in this passage by a powerful reminder of God's faithfulness. It is this reminder that I see as a reassuring hug that comes after a spiritual spanking. The reassurance of God's faithfulness follows closely on the heels of his loving, Fatherly discipline—exactly the way it should be.

And what is this hug from our Father? Specifically, the phrase I want us to focus on is verse nineteen. *We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.* We want—we need our souls to be anchored. We get pushed around by life. We can feel like we are drifting away. Our souls take a beating. We need to be anchored to something that will not move. We need to find ourselves in a place that is safe and secure. Let's see how the author moves from his stern warning to the soul anchor.

He begins in verse thirteen with one of his favorite topics—Abraham. The patriarch figures prominently in Hebrews getting mentioned thirteen times. ¹³ *When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,* ¹⁴ *saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.”* ¹⁵ *And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.*

This theme should be familiar to you from when we worked our way through the book of Genesis. The example that is cited here is from Genesis 22 which is part of Abraham's test of faith in offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice on the altar.

¹³ *Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.* ¹⁴ *So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*

¹⁵ *The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time* ¹⁶ *and said, "**I swear by myself**, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,* ¹⁷ *I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,* ¹⁸ *and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."* (Genesis 22:13-18)

Growing up I had a neighbor friend named Scott and whenever Scott told a tall tale that he wanted me to believe, he would get all serious and say, "I swear on a whole stack of Bibles!" "Alright Scott, settle down. I believe you." If you appear as a witness in the courtroom, they still ask you to take the oath. Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? So help you God. I think the courts stopped swearing on a Bible a long time ago but it may still be an option in some courts. Imagine if you were an atheist asking to swear to tell the whole truth, so help you God all the while your hand is on a Bible. Do you see the problem with such a scenario? The atheist neither believes in the Bible or God so they would be swearing to tell the truth based upon something that has no authority or even in the case of God, existence. It would be like you and I asking to take the following oath.

Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? So help you Mickey Mouse? Some of you are thinking—what?! Mickey Mouse isn't real! Actually, there is an atheist website that cautions fellow atheists not to swear on a Bible or in God's name for this very reason. But our author knew full well the ancient practice of taking oaths based upon something "greater than themselves." Such an oath, says the author, "puts an end to all argument." But there is nothing greater than God so he cannot swear by anything outside of himself. Which is why the Lord swore to Abraham saying, "I swear by myself."

Furthermore, the context of the exchange between Abraham and the Lord, Abraham called that place, "The Lord Will Provide." This is the Hebrew phrase, Jehovah Jireh. Recall what was happening here. God's command to sacrifice Isaac placed the promise in peril. How would God fulfill his promise to Abraham to multiply his descendants if Abraham obeyed God's command to sacrifice Isaac? If Isaac is killed the promise would die with him. But God is Jehovah Jireh. He is the Great Provider. Do you know the Lord in this way? Is he Jehovah Jireh to you in your daily life?

Often we cannot figure out how God's perfect promises will prevail when we are faced with difficulties, with difficult decisions and with what seems like impossible commands to obey. Here is how we often think. If I obey this command I will miss out on (fill in the blank.) These are things that I want to do but am not allowed to do? We also have the opposite thought. If I

obey this command I will have to force myself to (fill in the blank). These are things I don't want to do but am commanded to do. Like Abraham, we can find ourselves caught in the middle between God's clear commands and our own wants and desires. I have actually heard Christians say, "I know such and such is wrong, but I also know that God is loving and he will forgive me." That is presumption. Furthermore, God will never ask you to do something that would contradict with another of his commands or promises. Just as his command to Abraham did not nullify the promise so what God asks of you will not nullify his promises to you. Just because you can't figure out how it will all work out does not mean that it will not.

But how do we know that God will fulfill his promises? Of course the Sunday School answer to this question is because he is God. We know that is true but we need more information than this. Otherwise, every sermon I preach could be so simple as saying, "God will keep his promises and meet your needs. Go in peace." We know that we are supposed to know that he will keep his promises, that he is the only one who is worthy of our worship, but our faith is continually slipping. Someone said to me this week that all of our troubles and discontentment stem from a lack of faith. I could not agree more but what we need is not more faith but rather a bigger vision of God. The size of our faith is bound up with the size of our God and the Bible is always telling us how big and amazing he is. And this is why verse seventeen and following is so important.

Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie... Did you notice the repetition of the word unchanging? Both of these are related to his character. God is unchanging. The theological word is immutable. He is not fickle. He does not promise one thing one day and then fail to deliver the next. He does not get grumpy. His character never wavers. He is a fixed anchor in a world of uncertainty. But what are the two unchangeable things of that the author mentions? We know that the promise is one but what is the other?

As it relates to the Abraham illustration, the two unchangeable things are:

1. His promise—you will have many descendants
2. His oath—I swear by myself

Every promise that God speaks is, by definition, perfect and unchanging. But because God knows that we are weak in faith, he doubled the certainty of the promise by swearing an oath by himself. As the author says, there is nothing greater by which God could swear, so he swore by his own character. We all remember the story of Gideon and how he asked for a fleece. Actually, the fleece had two parts. First Gideon asked that God would make the fleece wet but the ground dry. When that worked out perfectly, Gideon asked a second time for God to keep the fleece dry but the ground wet. Again, his request was fulfilled perfectly.

Why did Gideon do that? Wasn't one fleece sufficient? In this story God did not chastise Gideon for asking for a second fleece because God knows we are like the man who said to Jesus, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." God confirmed his will twice to Gideon. Call it grace, call it mercy, but as much as we struggle in our faith we must know that God does all he can to help us to increase our faith. Therefore, God gave a promise to Abraham and predicted its certainty by

swearing by himself. By extension we could say that every promise that he gives is doubly certain.

But I read something in my personal devotions this past week that may work against our faith in God's promises. The story is from Joshua chapter eleven when Joshua and his army was marching their way through Canaan defeating every foe that crossed their path. Word of their destructive path was quickly spreading through the land so many of the smaller provinces united forces together. There were at least ten combined armies and perhaps dozens who joined into one massive army. Listen to how it played out.

They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots—a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. ⁵All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. The Lord said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them over to Israel slain. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots” (Joshua 11:4-6).

As you can probably guess, the Lord fought for them and defeated this enormous fighting machine. But did you notice the strange request that the Lord made of Joshua? After promising to defeat their enemy, the Lord added, *You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.*” Why do you think God issued this order? If I was in charge of this military campaign this is not what I would have done. Israel did not have a single chariot to take into battle. If they defeated this unified fighting force, they could have taken all of their weapons including what was considered the army tank of their day, horses and chariots. In fact, the main battle tank of the



Israeli Defense Forces is called the Merkava. Any guesses as to what the word merkava means in Hebrew? It means *chariot*. So what would have happened if Joshua had taken possession of all of those foreign chariots and war horses? These powerful merkavas

would have quickly become the center of trust and faith for Israel.

King David knew this when he wrote Psalm 20:7.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

In order that the Israelites would not trust in the promise of horses and chariots, the Lord ordered that they be destroyed. In the same way, the struggle we often have with our faith is that we depend on our own horses and chariots. We cannot believe the promises of God because our own self-confidence is standing in the way. I don't know what this might be for you, but it will probably be different for everyone. For some, this is your job. It is wonderful that God provides for your needs with a steady income, but many guys, especially in this economy, worry excessively about getting laid off. This might show that your faith is not really in the Lord but in

your paycheck. For others, especially moms, their proverbial chariots and horses and their children. Your identity and self-image is wrapped up in the success of your children. If they fail at something you feel like a failure. If they succeed this means you are a success. If this is true, then your parenting is getting in the way of your faith in God's promises.

But because God has sworn by two unchangeable things in which he cannot lie, then, as verse 18 says, *we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged*. The word fled is very important. The word fled is the word that is used for refugees fleeing from persecution and death. The word is so appropriate here because we really have no other place to go. We are refugees fleeing to Christ to ask for mercy, for clemency, for sanctuary. We have already been granted amnesty, which is a forgiveness for all sins against God and now what we need is asylum. We need a safe place to abide, a sanctuary for the soul. And this is exactly what we have.

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.

Now we get to question of why Jesus is an anchor for the soul. We have an anchor for the soul because our hope entered the inner sanctuary with Jesus. Jesus went behind the curtain. Jesus entered the inner sanctuary. Jesus went there as a high priest.

In two weeks¹ Jewish people around the world will celebrate their most important holy day—Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is the one day of the year that the high priest would enter the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. Most Jews who celebrate Yom Kippur probably don't even know the true meaning and even those who do know its meaning must be frustrated because there is no temple in Jerusalem. There is no inner sanctuary where the high priest can offer atonement for sin. But by the grace of God, you and I know better. We know that Jesus went into the inner sanctuary once for all. We also know that he did not bring the blood of a bull and the blood of a goat behind the curtain. Jesus brought his own blood and offered it on the altar. Jesus went before us and entered on our behalf.

This is why we flee as refugees to the sanctuary. It is a literal sanctuary—the sanctuary where the blood of Jesus was poured out. The sanctuary where we can flee to take hold of the anchor for our soul. But this place of sanctuary and rest is only for people who are desperate. Desperate because you have nowhere else to go. Desperate because you are beaten up by the cares of life. Desperate because you have no more horses and chariots to hold you back. Flee as refugees to Christ.

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September 24, 2011

¹ This year, Yom Kippur is on October 8, 2011.