

A Strong Encouragement to Hope

Heb. 6:9-20

INTRO

How does it feel to be a Christian? Is believing in Jesus easy? It certainly is simple to trust Christ. But as we experience more of life “under the sun” as Solomon describes it in Ecclesiastes, we go through periods where it is hard to stay strong in our faith. And in America these days, it is harder than it ever was to be a Christian.

Most of you will have heard that the Supreme Court just made gay marriage legal in all 50 states. And it seems like refusing to condone gay marriage will be seen as hateful in the eyes of this world. We are facing pressures from all sides: 1) a pressure to conform to this world’s thinking (who wants to be a bigot?) 2) the looming possibility of real persecution (loss of tax exemption, business pressures, loss of job, even jail time) 3) an intellectual assault against God (do you really believe in a God who hates homosexuals?). In this context, there is nothing easy about believing in the Gospel.

We sometimes forget, that our position is not surprising. Christians have been persecuted for hundreds of years. The last couple centuries of religious freedom in America represent the exception rather than the norm.

In our text today, the Hebrew churches were facing severe persecution. Some of their members were in jail. They were cut out of the public marketplace. There was a legal safe haven, however. Judaism was sanctioned by the state, and it wasn’t as dangerous to be a Jew as it was to profess that Jesus Christ was Lord of Lords. So there was a temptation to make a peace with the world, and remain Jewish

and stop short of identifying with those who were losing their property in their stand for Jesus.

Some had joined with the church but were shrinking back in fear. They needed to be challenged to keep believing and to recognize that Jesus Christ and the Gospel was so much “better” than the OT shadows that Judaism represented. Christ was the fullness and the true High Priest who made a Better Covenant.

The author of Hebrews reminded these waffling believers of their calling, and of what the Gospel is all about. And he focused their eyes on Christ, most of all. And seeing Him, and His glory, the first recipients of the book of Hebrews were encouraged to keep going, and to follow this glorious Lord. That the Christian life with all its perils and problems, really did result in the best prize of all – Eternal Joy in Christ’s presence forever.

Our text today includes a strong encouragement to hope that I trust will be helpful to in our day.

PRAY, READ: Heb. 6:9-20 Title: A Strong Encouragement to Hope

TRANSITION: A *Strong Encouragement to Hope*

I. Encouragement Needed (vs. 9-10)

A. Context

--Stern Rebuke (5:11-14) and solemn warning (6:4-8).

--Now he uses tender language “beloved” (only time in Heb.)

B. Our Similar Situation

--Some of us too easily get discouraged by trials, burdens & the high bar of holiness that Scripture sets.

--This text is written for us – we need to be encouraged about the hope set before us too.

C. Assurance

--These works of love (see Heb. 10:32-34), testify to the genuineness of the faith of these Christians, and are the reason that the author doesn't think they are in the state of those in vs. 4-8

--These works are fruit (cf. v. 7) and testify to the reality of their faith. Ulrich Zwingli: *"Where there is true faith, works necessarily result, just as fire brings with it heat."*

--Evidence of spiritual fruit (Gal. 5) can provide us with assurance, which prevents us from getting discouraged about our faith.

APPLICATION:

- We need people to find evidence of fruit and encourage us that they are "convinced / feel sure" of our faith
- Salvation is "worked out" and is shown in love to others and good works – these don't earn our salvation but assure us of it

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II. Strength Demanded (v. 11-12)

A. Effort Needed

1. Have earnestness (v. 11)
2. Don't be sluggish (v. 12)
3. Takes Faith + Patience (v. 12)

B. Endurance Required

1. full assurance of hope until the end (v. 11)
2. Inheriting comes after patient waiting (v 12)

C. Why is Perseverance needed?

1. We often don't think of perseverance as a calling for us. Isn't just faith enough?
2. Perseverance = true believers will persevere until the end (because of God's work in them) – but they will keep believing (1 Pet. 1:5 – kept thru faith)

3. They certainly fall, trip and stumble, but true believers keep on going "The wise man falls seven times but rises yet again" Prov. 24:16

4. Consider Hebrews' teaching on perseverance:

Hebrews' Teaching on Perseverance

--Hebrews focuses on the need for persevering faith, but it doesn't disconnect it from the Work of Christ on our behalf. When we truly appreciate what Christ has done (the Gospel Content), we will work out our own salvation & faithfully persevere to the end (the Gospel-driven Life), bearing witness to the fact that God's work in us is real.

--Here's a quick flyby of Hebrews on this important topic:

Our need to persevere in Faith (accompanied by exhortations to "strive, watch out, exhort one another, encourage each other, pay closer attention, etc.):

- Real possibility of drifting from the truth we've heard 2:1-3
- Real danger of sin stealing our hearts, 3:12-13
- Our share in Christ, is certain if we hold our original confidence firm to the end 3:14 (also 3:6)
- Our unbelief and disobedience could cause us to fail to enter that rest God has for us 4:10-11 (also 3:18-19)
- Obedience to Christ is required of us for eternal salvation 5:9
- The sobering fact that some do fall away utterly, even though it appeared to us that they were genuine believers (6:4-8)
- Through faith and patience, we will inherit the promises 6:12
- We need to eagerly wait for Christ 9:28
- Need for mutual encouragement 10:22-25
- Deliberate sinning has fearful consequences 10:26-35
- We need endurance in order to actually receive what God has promised, some shrink back and are destroyed, but we need to have faith and preserve our souls 10:36-39
- We need enduring faith ch. 11

- We need to lay aside besetting sin, and run with endurance the Christian Life's race, struggling against sin 12:1-4
- We need holiness without which no one will see the Lord 12:14

D. Practical Application – where are we tempted to not persevere?

1. Assaulted by doubts, intellectually deceived by convincing arguments → leads to abandoning the faith (Nathan)
2. Overwhelmed by trials, temptation to blame God → leads to withdrawing from active faith
3. Overcome by temptations and addictions, seduced by worldly pleasures → leads to abandoning church, ceasing to worship God, defeatism or outright rebellion
4. Offended and hurt by actions of other Christians → leads to being overly sensitive – easier to just stay home away from other churches and possible future offenses
5. Afraid of sickness, health problems, the approach of death → can lead one to wonder is the Bible really true? What will really happen to me? Does God care?

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III. A Pattern Provided (vs. 13-17)

A. **Abraham is offered as an example**, we are to follow or imitate or pursue (along with others – see chapter 11 and 13:7 – leaders)

B. Why Abraham? –

- “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham... [who] are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” Gal. 3:7,9 -- we share a heritage with Abraham
- “if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” Gal. 3:29 -- so we share his promises We are to “walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had” Rom. 4:11-12 – we follow his faith (our father)

C. Abraham's Faith (it grew as it aged)

- “No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.” 4:20-21
- “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead...” Heb. 11:19
- Instance mentioned here is Abraham's offering up of Isaac

D. Abraham's Patience

25 years from promise to Isaac, many more till grandkids

E. Abraham's God-Given Oath

--God's Oath 22:17 [God condescended in using an oath – a human mechanism not needed for God]

F. Abraham's True Longing

Turn to Heb. 11:9-10, 13-16 (with Heb. 13:14)

G. Abraham Obtained the Promise

--Abraham's example is this: He received glorious promises, was given an oath too, and he persevered in faith and received those promises. He received the inheritance (John 8:56 “saw my day and was glad”). His example, and of course God's promise-keeping track record, combine to give us a “strong encouragement... to hope”.

--Note also that the oath God gave to Abraham had us in view, so we would be encouraged and know the “unchangeable character of his purpose” We are the “heirs of the promise” (Heb. 2:15, we are the

offspring of Abraham who are helped by Jesus, rather than the angels)

Here's the meat of the message now. The call for us to persevere, and the example of Abraham – the father of our faith, bring us to this point. God and his faithfulness to His promises for people then and now, gives us strong encouragement to hope.

Many times in our life, like Abraham, we have to remind ourselves of the truth of God's promises. We have to remember we are seeking a heavenly city. John Calvin had this to say about perseverance in our text: "the grace of God is offered to us in vain, except we receive the promise by faith, **and constantly cherish it in the bosom of our heart.**" [Like Abraham's example showed us. This is really what perseverance is.]

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IV. A Hope Offered (vs. 18-20)

A. Hope – What is it?

--Confident Expectation / similar to Faith see Heb. 11:1, hope emphasizes the confidence and the future looking expectation

--Faith is more focused on the facts and the belief and doctrinal truth, but Hope is our orientation toward the future realities promised

B. Basis of our Encouragement to Hope

--2 unchangeable things: God's promise & His Oath (could also refer to the Oath talked about in chapter 7 and the one here in chapter 6)

--We are encouraged to trust based on God's oath-keeping nature

--Moreover, God wants us to be encouraged. That's why the Book is full of "lives of the saints" and evidence of God pulling through for them. That's why God condescends to make promises and oaths, and repeats His word to us.

C. Gripping on to Hope

--Sometimes all we can do is "hold on" in life. Our grip on to hope isn't really all that hard when we see what roots our hope

D. Foundation of our Hope

- Salvation – completely the work of God in and for us:
 1. Past – Fled for refuge
 2. Present –Gripping on
 3. Future –Promised Hope
- Christ our City of Refuge "fled for refuge" same word used of cities of Refuge Deut. 4:42 flee & live
- We are looking for a heavenly city (Heb. 11 and Heb. 13:14)
- Christ the Anchor of our Hope -- Life is a moving shifting sea, but Jesus has rooted our hope to his sure work (not just spiritual hope but of our current life now, too)
- Christ our Forerunner -- he has gone before and entered the "rest" that is set before us (may be hinted at with the refuge we have sought above, developed in ch. 3-4) – he entered the heavenly sanctuary as a promise that we will enter the "inner curtain" too! Fellowship now (ch. 10:19-20), & eternally hereafter. Also, "where" literally, not "whither" – means we will go there too.
- Christ our High Priest
 - The High Priest bore the names of the tribes on his shoulders, and 12 stones on his chest to typify them, he represented the people. But Jesus opens the way for us to follow him to the inner place.
 - Jesus being an eternal priest "forever", means it is certain that his priestly work will be completely accomplished on our behalf. Our sins atoned, the intercessions given for us, we will be purified by Him.
 - Ultimately the Priestly work of Christ is the only sure foundation of our continued Hope in this world.

E. Surety of our Encouragement

Since God gives us this “strong encouragement”, we know it is strong enough to get us through.

CONCLUSION

Some of you may be discouraged. Life’s been rough of late, or maybe you feel oppressed and not really sure why you’re downhearted. Beware, God calls you to a persevering, vibrant faith. Look to Christ our High Priest. Find grace to help, find an open path to fuller and sweeter fellowship with God. Look to your brothers and sisters for mutual encouragement. Don’t slowly drift away.

If you’re weak and to the point of being faint-hearted, just focus on “holding on”. Jesus will surely keep you up. He is a sure Anchor for your soul.

Perhaps you may not have realized that the Gospel is more than a mere belief in historical facts – that it is a calling to live in reliance on Jesus and to weather the storms of life. Maybe you have never totally surrendered to this call. Realize that Jesus is the only hope we have. Give yourself to Him. Don’t be satisfied with coffee-table book Christianity. Go deeper into an experience with Christ.

Those struggling with sin, dust yourself off and get back up. The promises are too great for you to be defeated. God will give you grace and power to mortify / put to death the deeds of the flesh. Realize that it is through faith *and patience* that you will inherit the promises.

I trust that God will help us to be encouraged and determined to learn more of how the Gospel can fuel a life of loving service for God. May God be pleased to bless us to that end.

BENEDICTION

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20-21)