

# God's Oath and Our Anchor

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Date: 28 March 2021

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[ 0 : 00 ] Lord, we just thank you. What a great morning it's been already. I feel like even if we just walked out of here right now and we didn't do anything else, this would have been a great morning, worshipping you. I pray you would help us to keep worshipping you, to keep enjoying you, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, good morning to you. Like Jesse said, my name is Brian, and I do just want to say, this has been a great morning. I don't know if it's always this good. It's great. I'm just sitting there.

What's that? Yeah, it's Havala. Right, sure, fair enough. Well, yeah, down at Moorhead is terrible, you know. If you're new, One Harbor's got a bunch of sites.

We call them sites, and so I'm in the one down at Moorhead. But, I mean, honestly, just, you know, singing a song about a God who makes stars in the billions but doesn't leave the one behind, I was like just tearing up, just thinking about that this morning.

And Philip calling us like, hey, for those of us that are in a good season, let's take time to pray for those of us who are in a rough season and hearing from the community group leaders getting to listen to Ben Beach, his sweet baritone, talk about where he lives.

[ 1 : 04 ] I could listen to you talk about where you live all day. So it's really been a great day. Hopefully I'm not the low note of the morning. Okay, we're probably running out of time.

So let's get into the sermon. So as a church, we've been going through the book of Hebrews. Hebrews, I hope it's been as rewarding for you guys as it has been for us down at Moorhead. I mean, God's word is always rewarding.

Preachers always say that, like, oh, this is like the best thing ever. But the whole Bible is like that, right? I mean, all of Scripture is amazing, and Hebrews is no exception. And so we've been, I guess it would have been two weeks ago, we started into a part of this letter that deals with the priesthood of Jesus.

And that is a long, it's really kind of the, one of the central themes of Hebrews, at least one of the themes that Hebrews takes the most time to deal with. It goes through chapter 10. And this week, the passage deals with trusting God, how the priesthood of Jesus should help you trust in God.

Like, what happens when you lose your job? What happens when you go through one of those seasons that Philip was talking about? You know, what happens if there's a financial collapse, and you're retired, and all your investments vanish?

[ 2 : 20 ] What happens in that moment? What happens when a loved one is diagnosed with cancer? What happens when you are diagnosed with cancer? How do you actually trust God?

Not the theory of trusting God, not like the kind of trusting that you talk about in church on a Sunday like this, the kind in everyday actual life when things are terrible. Can you actually trust God in those kinds of circumstances?

I'm a former Marine, served like many of the folks in the room here have served, and, you know, in the Marines, and in the military in general, it's widely understood that you do not know how you will respond to combat until you're in it.

You think you know, but you don't really know. And it seems like in this church, shots have been fired, so to speak. In other words, what the author of Hebrews is writing about to these people is not theory.

He is writing to people who, we don't actually know all the details. We just know that things have gotten real, that following Jesus had all of a sudden become very, it was coming at a cost.

[ 3 : 24 ] And people were starting to, it seems like they were beginning to drift away. People were not convinced that when it gets hard, that God can be trusted.

So, we're going to read from chapter 6, verses 13 to 20. So if you have your Bibles, that's where we are. And if not, the words should be on the, well, there they are, on the screen behind me.

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, surely I will bless you and multiply you.

And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes, an oath is final for confirmation.

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, 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.

[ 4 : 36 ] 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.

Pretty amazing passage. Now, if you're new to the Bible, that name Melchizedek, there's probably some things in there that are like, yeah, that sounds really good. And then there's probably some parts that sound a little confusing, specifically this guy Melchizedek.

We're going to, we've kind of been putting him off. We're going to come back to him next week. But this passage has some language that's like, we, I mean, we like put it on paintings and wall art.

I mean, people tattoo it on their bodies, you know. The idea that God, that Jesus is this hope that anchors your soul. That is a wonderful idea that comforts us.

But like most of the passages in the Bible that offer you good news, if you really want to appreciate what it's saying, you also need to appreciate the bad news it is addressing.

[ 5 : 40 ] And this passage is trying to come to grips with this fact. You are less secure than you think you are. Now, I bet you in the room, we're at different sort of, there's probably a spectrum of how in control of our lives that we feel.

It doesn't matter what you think about your life in terms of your ability to manage it, you are less capable of it than you think. Less so. And that's true for me too. It doesn't matter how competent, dependable, reliable, faithful you think you are, you're less.

That's the whole point of the anchor idea, right? I mean, we live in a part of the country that shouldn't need this metaphor to be over-explained. We know what an anchor's for.

The whole point of that image is to suggest that you are in water and it's moving and you're powerless because there is nothing to grab hold of.

It's just wind and water and waves and you're just bouncing around. Now, to be fair, life does not always feel that way. We have seasons, especially when things are going very well, we have seasons where actually we really think we can manage things and I think we kind of get tricked into thinking that the world is predictable and that there are things in life that are dependable.

[ 6 : 59 ] Every single thing around us is constantly changing. There is nothing in your life that doesn't change. Have you ever think about that? How nothing.

I mean, there's an ancient philosopher who says you cannot step twice into the same river. Like that river is changing. It is grinding a new path every second that water flows down.

Everything's like that. Your body, you don't wake up in the same body twice. You're older today than you were yesterday. Sometimes you don't see that change happening because it's happening slowly. Some days it's like you wake up and you're like, I am older than I was yesterday.

There is some new pain that I did not ever, I, you know, have parts of my body that I didn't know even were a thing. And now they hurt. Your family is constantly changing. Relationships are changing.

Cities change. You know, these towns on the, you know, these towns in our counties, you know. I live down in Moorhead. And every time I talk to somebody who grew up in Moorhead, they talk about the change always with a hint of sadness.

[ 7 : 58 ] It does not matter how many people want to keep that town from changing. And let me tell you, there's a lot of them. They are powerless from keeping it changing. You've got a stable career until a new technology comes along and renders it obsolete.

Nature is changing. Our government spends millions of dollars to keep those barrier islands from moving around out there because they're always wanting to change and they're always wanting to move. The most magnificent tree in the Croatan forest that withstands hurricane after hurricane after hurricane one day will fall over and die.

Mountains wear down into dust. Stars, every one of them, they will one day go out. Cheerful morning. The Bible reckons with this.

Psalms 103. As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field, for the wind passes over and it's gone. And its place knows it no more. So everybody wants, we want stability.

We want to feel like there are things that are concrete, that are stable, but it's nowhere. You know, and again, that change. Sometimes it happens over time. Sometimes it happens in a moment.

[ 9 : 04 ] You wait, a tragedy. Something outside your control happens and your whole life is different than it was the day before. The reason you need an anchor is because you're in an ocean, man, and you are getting blown around.

Sometimes the sea state is calm, but it is a matter of time until it is not. So the question is, how do you function? I mean, how do you function in life like that when the sea state is not ideal?

Well, Abraham is the guy we're told to imitate in this passage. And he's a great example because you want to talk about somebody confronted with their own inability to manage their situation, it's Abraham.

So Abraham's story starts late in his life. I mean, it's actually amazing how old he is by the time his very long story starts in the Bible. Genesis 12, God comes to him with these great promises.

Abraham is 75 years old when God shows up. And the promises are God's going to give him not just a child, he's going to give him many children, this promise of many descendants, a promise of land, he's going to be a blessing to the nations.

[10:07] The problem is Abraham is very old and he is married to a barren woman. Furthermore, God tells Abraham to leave his home and says, he tells Abraham, I want you to go to a land that I'm going to give to you and your descendants.

Except in that moment, all Abraham gets to do is go wander around in it. Like, you're going to get a land, but for now you just need to go wander around. And that wandering and waiting lasted 25 years.

25. Just imagine, you've heard these great promises and two and a half decades go by and you're waiting for those things to come true. You're wandering around, no permanent home, no permanent land without a kid.

You know, Abraham's 100 years old waiting for his life to start. And I think some of us can resonate with that. I bet you there's some of us in the room, if not all of us have experienced this at some point, where your life is just not going the way that you had imagined it would at one point in your life.

You had an idea of the way things were going to go and this is not it. And it can even, the older you get, and I'm still a young man, and so I have not experienced this the way that some of you have.

[11:14] But I imagine there's a point where you just feel like the best years are gone. Surely Abraham would have appreciated having the land as a young man to enjoy later. But that is not what happened.

And so like Abraham, we can feel like we're just wandering around, waiting for life to start. Everything just feels, sand, wind, waves, pick your metaphor, instability. But people need stability to function.

Jesse mentioned that my wife and I are foster parents. In the foster care community, you learn about this, that the children that are coming out of these homes have a lot of trauma because they lived in such unstable environments.

So when you become a foster parent, it's one of the things you learn about is the importance of introducing stability because human beings need stability to function. And it raises such an interesting question.

If nothing in the world really is stable, if everything is changing, why do we crave unchanging stability? Why is nostalgia a thing?

[12:14] Why is it that when you look back at the past, it's with that note of sadness or melancholy that things have changed and you can't stop it and you can never get back? And by the way, this is not a temperament thing.

I'm like the poster guy for someone that doesn't want a thing to change. Like for me, the idea of sitting in the same rocking chair with the same mug of coffee on the same front porch for the rest of my life is like heaven on earth.

For my wife, that is hell on earth. My wife likes change. Kimberly likes change. You know, she feels this desire to, you know, recreate inside the house that, you know, what our house feels like just as the rest of us are getting used to it.

But even for her, even for her, the things that she wants to change, by the way, are very specific. The most meaningful things in life, she does not want to change because every one of us want to know that they're going to be, this is why, this is why a lot of us, why a lot of people want to get married, but like as an idea we want to get married.

Like before we've even met the person we're going to marry. And I'm saying this appreciating not all of us are married, but one of the reasons that a lot of people want to get married is that we want to know that throughout our life, one person is going to, at least one person is going to be constant.

[ 13 : 31 ] Every day, they're going to be there and they're not going to change and our relationship with them isn't going to change and so when they do leave, either because they have abandoned us or we have abandoned them or because death has taken them too early, man, we are wrecked.

Because even a spouse cannot be the anchor you want them to be. Why do we crave stability in a world that offers none of it?

Well, I think it's part of the design. You are designed to want something that only Jesus Christ can give you. He is the, that's what's being said here.

You're powerless. You're out of control. Jesus is the very thing you want. He's the anchor that reaches to bedrock. That's what anchors do, right? They go to the realm you can't get to.

You're on the surface. You want to get to something that you can put your hands on. You can't get there. The anchor goes there for you. Jesus says, I'm going there for you. You're going to be with him one day. But for now, he's there for you and you're lashed to him.

[ 14 : 31 ] And so this passage is also highlighting, it's not just that you're not in control or you're not secure. It's also highlighting the fact that God is more dependable than you think he is.

Again, I suppose there's a spectrum in the room in terms of faith and how much we trust God. However much any one of us trust him, however dependable any one of us thinks that he is, he's more.

You can count on it. He's more dependable than you can possibly fathom. He will never and literally cannot fail you. Malachi 3, God famously says, for I the Lord do not change.

The only thing in your life, I mean, I tried to kind of give you some context for that, right? Nothing else cannot be said if God says, I don't change. Not even over millions of years.

I'm not being ground into dust. I don't change. And this passage talks about the unchangeable character of his purpose. He doesn't wake up in the morning with a new idea. He's not like that.

[ 15 : 31 ] He doesn't have a new vision for your life. His purpose for you has, from the very beginning of time, his purpose for you has stayed the same. That's comforting. Again, the author of Hebrews is using the story of Abraham to highlight this unchanging faithfulness of God.

Now, I think it's probably already been pointed out many times. This whole letter slash sermon being sent to the Hebrews is steeped in the Old Testament. So in order for you to hear it like they're hearing it, I want to step out of Hebrews real quick and just look at what actually happened in Genesis so you can appreciate what the author of Hebrews is saying.

See, the quote in Hebrews that we read is of God's promise to Abraham to surely bless him and give him many descendants. And that promise occurs in more than one place. It's reiterated multiple times.

And chapter 15 of Genesis is one of those places. This is what happens. God brought him outside and said, look to the heaven and number the stars if you're able to number them. And then he said to him, so shall your offspring be.

And Abraham believed the Lord and God counted it to him as righteousness. That's a great moment in Abraham's life. And the New Testament writers do a lot with this verse. The best thing that Abraham did wasn't, you know, bravely strike out in obedience to what God said.

[ 16 : 45 ] The best thing Abraham ever did was just say, I believe you. I believe. I believe you're going to do what you say you're going to do. It's this great moment. Well, look what happens in the next verse. And God said to him, I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.

But Abraham said, oh Lord, I'm closing in on a hundred years old. How am I to know that I shall possess it? Now, I think that's a great, I love that this story is in the Bible because this, I can identify with this because I got moments where I feel like I got great faith and the next moment I'm like, how can I know?

How can I really know? And what follows in this story is God's answer to this question. Okay? And it's a weird part of the story. There's parts of the Bible that you read them and you're like, this is why I don't like reading the Bible because it's weird and it's strange and I don't understand.

This is one of those stories. Okay? God tells Abraham to cut up a whole bunch of animals and put them into piles. You know, and you're reading and you're like, man, this is strange. Well, in the ancient Near East this would not have been strange because contracts or covenants would have always or very likely most often been made in blood.

And so, if someone was going to come make a covenant with a ruler, what they likely would have done was bring an animal, essentially sacrifice it and do this kind of thing and then they would have walked around or through these cut up pieces of meat as if to say, look, I'm making this covenant with you, oh gracious king and if I don't keep up my end of the deal, may I become like these cut up pieces of meat.

[ 18 : 19 ] May I become like them, cut off. And so, what you would expect to happen is that God who is the king would tell Abraham, cut up these things and I want to see you kind of walk around and show your commitment to me but that is not what happens.

God causes Abraham to fall asleep and Abraham has a vision and the story gets even stranger because he's got a vision of a torch and a smoking pot and now you're like, this is really weird but you have to remember that in the Bible, fire and smoke almost always represent the presence of God and in Abraham's vision, it's the torch and the smoking pot that goes through all these pieces of meat.

God is saying, here's how you can know because if I don't do this, I will become like these cut off pieces of meat. That's, I mean, for Abraham, this would have been a mind-blowing moment that God would have done.

No king, no king would have done that except our king and so even the quote in Hebrews, the ESV where the author of Hebrews is quoting God who says, surely I will bless you and multiply you.

It's actually an incomplete statement. The literal Greek would have said, if I don't surely bless you as if to imply the rest of the sentence, if I don't surely bless you, may I never be trusted again.

[ 19 : 31 ] That's the idea here. That's how you know. That's how you know, Abraham, because my whole reputation hangs on this moment and God doesn't just say it.

According to the author of Hebrews, he makes an oath and the author of Hebrews is kind of underlining that, the significance of the oath and that's a reference to something that happens later in the story with Abraham. So, we move from Genesis 15, flash forward to Genesis 22.

By the time you get to that chapter, Abraham's well over 100 years old. He has got his son. The promised miracle son, Isaac, has been born and you just imagine, you know, you wanted kids your whole life and then you thought it would never happen and then God promises a miracle and you wait two and a half decades and it actually happens and you've got this boy and then God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

God says, that promised son that you've waited so long for, that thing you have waited for, I want it back. and man, do you still trust God in that moment?

You still trust God when he gives you what you've always wanted and then asks for it back? I mean, I don't know what I would do. I would say for Abraham, this was another, this was a great moment for him, a great moment of faith because Abraham decided to, that he was still going to put his faith in God.

[ 20 : 54 ] He was going to trust God and so he is literally ready to sacrifice this promised son when God steps in, stops him and says, you know, may it never be so.

I will not demand that you give up your firstborn son. This was a test of faith and on the back of this test, which was surely, I would imagine, I mean, no way to know, but I would imagine probably one of the most difficult moments of Abraham's life, this is the moment that God makes the oath.

That's the context for the oath. It's like this horrible test of faith that Abraham just endured. God comes to him in the form of an angel. The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, by myself I have sworn, declares the Lord.

So there's the oath. That's the oath the author of Hebrews is talking about. Because you've done this and not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of the heaven and as the sand that's on the seashore.

Your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice. God swears by his own name.

[ 21 : 59 ] See, whether it's Abraham in chapter 15 asking like, how can I know? Whether it's the congregation that the author of Hebrews was writing to. Things were hard for them. Whether it's them saying, how can we really know?

Whether it's some of you in the room asking, how can I really know that God can be trusted with everything? See, God doesn't just tell you what he's going to do. He backs up his promise by swearing an oath on his own authority and I would imagine that's not very meaningful for many of us.

Like, I would imagine for you, God telling you something and then backing up with an oath just basically feels like the same thing. Like, what's the big deal about the oath? Well, later, in the story of the Israelites, God would one day tell them that if they ever swore, if they ever took any oath, it could only be in his name.

And the reason for that is because of what we already talked about, nothing in the world stands the test of time. Why make an oath on anything? Because anything else eventually changes, turns into dust.

He said, if you want to swear an oath, you want to prove like you're telling the truth, you swear it on my name because I'm the only thing that can be trusted. I read something a couple weeks ago by Tim Keller, a pastor, Tim Keller, that really helped me appreciate the significance of this.

[ 23 : 14 ] He was pointing out that, you know, there is nothing in your life that you even know without trusting something else. Like, you trust, there is so much trust involved in your everyday lived experience that you and I probably rarely think about.

I mean, you're trusting what your eyes tell you and neurologists and scientists have proven that your eyes can deceive you. It's so, you can literally see things that aren't there because your eyes trick you, but you trust your eyes all the time.

You trust the friends of, sorry, the opinions of friends or experts. I think it's safe to say 2020 has been a year where there's been a lot of debate about a lot of things, 2020, 2021, and something that's been kind of amusing to me is that people on both sides of virtually every issue are all saying, do your research.

What they really mean is, go listen to the people they listen to and trust them like they do. That's what they actually mean. Because on some of these things that are actually technical, nobody is doing proper research.

Nobody is going to look at the primary data because if you're not a scientist, you don't even know what you're looking at. You have to listen to someone who is a scientist, someone who's got expertise in that field, and then you decide to trust them so they can tell you what, I mean, this is in almost everything that you believe about anything.

[ 24 : 28 ] What do you believe about history? What you're trusting the people who write history books to tell you the truth. And it's not just ideas, it's your, man, you don't have any idea how much trust is involved in the practical things you do.

Think about, think about driving. Man, you are going down the road and there's a double solid line that I, you know, who thought that it only needed to be this wide?

You are driving down the road and there are cars coming the other direction. You are, we are missiles going through the air, time and space, and you are totally at peace.

You're listening to the radio. You're talking to your spouse, trusting that the person coming the other direction is not going to, at the last second, turn in front of you. I want you to imagine the terror of driving, the terror that driving would be if you did not actually trust people to stay in their lane.

Every time that someone drove past you would be a shattering psychological experience. Every time, oh God, oh God, it's a, oh. Every, but you don't.

[ 25 : 36 ] Life, you don't freak out because you, you implicitly trust people who are literally texting on their phones and you're, you're putting your trust in them not to hit you.

God is saying, look at all the things you trust. Look at the things you trust that you know things by, that you do things by. I'm not like any of them.

I swear on myself because it's the only thing you've got. It's it. Where else are you going to go? It's wind and waves out there. And if you don't have him, you, just appreciate this.

For those of us maybe on the fence of faith, you know, you don't have him, you've got nothing. The world might seem like it's under control and it's not. In a moment, someone can turn in front of you.

You're doing everything right. And in a moment, someone can take everything from you because they're texting on their phone. But if you do have him, even when the world does seem like chaos, even when you do get hit by that distracted driver, even if it seems like God's going back on his promise, even if it seems like God is taking something from you that he once gave you, that you felt like you're owed, that you felt like was originally a gift, even in that moment, you know that actually he's bedrock and his purposes for your life are unchanged.

[ 27 : 04 ] God makes an oath on his name because it is literally the most emphatic thing he could ever say to earn your trust and bind yourself. There is nothing else he could say. There's nothing else. You know, at the time that this letter to the Hebrews was written, Jewish writers were debating about whether this oath literally happened because it seemed irreverent to suggest that God, because when you take an oath, you're binding yourself, you're literally, when you take an oath, you're saying, I am not allowed to go outside of the circumstances of this promise.



And Jewish writers felt like this was what you would call an anthropomorphism, which is like in the Bible where it says like, in Isaiah, it talks about God's arm not being too short to save. That's an anthropomorphism. God does not have a literal arm that has a fixed length.

We're using a human idea to try to say something about God. Jewish writers thought that the whole oath thing in Genesis, many of them thought it was an anthropomorphism. There's no way a God outside time and space would ever constrain himself to tiny human beings with an oath.

And the author of the Hebrew, the letter of the Hebrew saying, oh yes, that's exactly what he did. Totally constrain himself for you. And because of that, the point of this passage is that we can and must hold fast to hope in God.

That is what verse 18 is saying. So that by two unchangeable things, which are that God said something and backed it up with an oath, in which it's impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

[ 28 : 27 ] We who have fled for refuge, we who we are aware of the fact that we're in the wind and the water and there is nothing to grab. That's us. He said, keep holding on. Do not let go of him.

Now the hope idea, that word hope, it's a bit weak. It's a bit weak in our context. The way that we use the word hope is very different than how it would have been used in the Bible and I don't mean to say that it's wrong.

I'm just saying it's different. Like we can use the word hope to refer to kind of a cheerful optimism, a hopeful person, someone who's just very by temperament maybe, you know, very cheerful, optimistic.

But very ironically, the way that we use hope is very often the opposite of the way that the Bible uses hope. And I have just really been tickled thinking about this. Like imagine that you're on a plane.

We've got some pilots in the room, right? I think. We're Cherry Point. Come on. We've got some pilots. Okay. Imagine you're on a plane. Pilots always like to come over the intercom and like tell you what's happening. I have no idea.

[ 29 : 26 ] For you pilots, we don't know why you need to tell us all that information, but it seems like it's important. You know, we're up here at 30,000 feet and I want you to imagine the pilot comes over and he's like, we're at 30,000 feet and I've got to be frank, we're a little high.

I sure hope we make it. You hope we make it? I'd like a little more confidence than I hope we make it. If someone says to you that they hope in something, the fact of the matter is in our day that often reflects a lack of confidence.

You know, if you took a job and you told your employer, I hope I'm going to be at work tomorrow, they say, you better do better than that. You know, no hoping involved, you will be at work tomorrow. Right? That is not how the Bible uses the word hope.

It's not naive optimism. It's not being cheerful. Scholars will tell you that the hope in the Bible is actually not even, when you see that word, it's not even a reflection of the inward experience as much as it's always a reference to the object of hope.

Similar to faith, when we talk about faith, we're talking about more than our subjective experience of how much trust we feel. We're talking about the object of our faith, not the quality of our faith. Hope is the same way. When we talk about hope, we're talking about the thing in which we hope.

[ 30 : 39 ] And Paul specifically, again, Abraham is the template here. Paul in Romans talks about Abraham and his hope. It's in chapter 4, it says, in hope, Abraham believed against hope, meaning when it seemed like there was no reason to hope, he still did.

That he would become the father of many nations as he had been told, so shall your offspring be. And that passage goes on to talk about how he did not waver in his faith. He grew strong in faith over time.

He was fully convinced that God was going to do what he had said. And Christians have more reason to hope in God than Abraham did because we know the story of Jesus. Faith and hope both together say, yes, Jesus is the anchor.

He is there for me and he is never going to budge. So we have to have faith and hope in him. Now, yeah, if you've wondered what is the difference, if you've wondered what's the difference between faith and hope, hope is like that forward-looking aspect of faith.

Faith is that general, I believe in God. Hope is the, and I know what he is going to do for me. And it's, I know what he's going to do for me in the future. It's, hope is faith looking forward. And I think it's very hard to have hope like, like that for two primary reasons.

[ 31 : 53 ] I'm sure there's more, but I think most of us, the reason we struggle to actually hope in God, like we're told to in this passage, is for two reasons. The first reason is because we think that God won't come through. We're just not sure that he's going to keep up his end of the deal.

We think we know what we want in life. We're afraid. We're very often afraid that obeying God means being disappointed in the end. And so, every time that we disobey, whether it's because we've done something we shouldn't do, we're not willing to do the thing that we should do, anytime that happens, it's really a trust issue.

We're disobeying because we think whatever I have to give up for God is going to make me happier than what I'm going to get from God. I would say most of us have that experience almost every day. I don't know, there's a day that goes by that I don't in some way blow it or sin in some way.

Every time I sin, it's because I am, I'm going through that experience, thinking that what I have to give up for God is going to make me happier than what I'm going to get from God. But the Bible says, the Bible says that it's the other way around.

Psalms 37 says, so trust in the Lord, put your faith in Him, your hope in Him, do good, dwell in the land, befriend faithfulness, delight yourself in the Lord and He'll give you the desires of your heart. The Scripture actually says that God knows what you want out of life better than you do.

[ 33 : 12 ] So we think we're going to be disappointed in the end because we think we know what we want. Part of the problem, that's part of the problem. Part of this whole problem is that we think we know what we want. The Bible says, the heart of man is like deep water. Not a single one of us can plum its depths.

God knows what you want better than you do. What we think we know though, we think we do, we think the things that we really want. And I'm not talking about what you say to the pastor about what you want in life, I'm talking about the stuff that you actually daydream about.

So think about that. What's the stuff you daydream about in your future that gets you really excited? We think we know. It's going to be when we get that better job, when we finally get married and have kids, when we finally have grandkids, when we get that bigger house.

We do not very often realize, again, I'm guilty of this. I'm no different. I do the same thing. We do not realize those things are just expressions of desires that go way deeper than career and family and housing.

This is that illustration that C.S. Lewis used famously of the kid who's playing in the mud and he wants to play in the mud puddle because he cannot imagine what's meant when his parents offer him a vacation at the beach.

[ 34 : 19 ] The parent comes along and says, come on, I know what's going to really make you happy but the child says, no, no, no. I'm playing with this mud puddle. I know what I want and the parent's saying, I know you think you want this.

I know what you want better than you do. This little bit of water is entertaining to you. Wait till you see the ocean. The problem is you just haven't seen it yet because you haven't seen it. The Bible talks about this.

Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love and trust him. God is the one coming along saying, I know you think you know what you want. I want to take you to the beach.

I want to take you to the ocean. And so, the writer here is saying, hold fast to your hope in Jesus. He has gone as a forerunner to the place you want to be.

You can't imagine what it's like there. You cannot imagine what it's like there but it's everything that you want. It's everything that you want. You just haven't seen it yet. And anything that God asks of you until that time, anything he demands of you, is worth it.

[ 35 : 23 ] You may have to give up the thing you're obsessed with. I promise you, it is a mud puddle compared to what's coming. And I'm not trying to be insensitive. I'm not trying to call your family and kids a mud puddle. In fact, I guarantee you that whatever it is that you are obsessed with is probably a really good thing.

There's a medieval theologian, there was a medieval theologian named Thomas Aquinas, one of the most important theologians in 2,000 years of church history. And he was writing during the 13th century.

His most famous theological works are still widely used. And that most famous of his work, the Summa Theologica, he is an unfinished work.

So if you've ever heard of it, he never finished it. And the reason that he never finished it is because later in his life he had an experience that he never actually would describe for anyone.

People just have kind of put the pieces together some kind of supernatural experience where he experienced the presence of God in a way that he never had before. And after that experience, his friend who was helping him write this stuff came to him and asked him to keep writing and he said, no.

[ 36 : 29 ] He said, all my works, now that I've seen that, all my works are nothing but straw. See, that one day you're going to see the face of God and you're going to realize this is everything that you've wanted.

Everything else was just straw. even works of theology. The works of theology do not compare to the person of whom they speak.

That's what's coming for you. That's what hope is. Hope is saying, I don't know what it's going to be like but I know that day is coming. I'm going to realize everything else was straw.

So that's the first reason it's hard. We're not convinced that God's going to come through on all that. We're not convinced that he knows what we want better than we do. The second reason that it's hard is not necessarily because we're afraid God won't come through it's because we're afraid we won't come through.

And the book of Hebrews can make you feel that. We just went through one of the really difficult passages last week. The book of Hebrews is saying, we should totally trust in God and then keeps warning me about falling away.

[ 37 : 29 ] So, well, which is it preacher? Am I supposed to trust in God or my ability not to fall away? After all, this is about a covenant. We all know that's a two-way deal. The pastor's always talking about covenants.

Well, the problem is it's a two-way deal. What happens when I blow my end of the bargain? And I would say that tension that I just articulated in that question, that is one of the most interesting things in my mind about the covenant that God made with Abraham.

Because people, you know, there are debates about how we should think about the promises that God made to Abraham. Were they unconditional promises or were they a conditional covenant?

Because, like we said earlier, God's promises to Abraham get said a couple different ways. They get articulated in different ways. There's places where God makes promises to Abraham that it doesn't even sound like a covenant. God just says, I will surely do this for you.

Period. Unconditional promise. Then there's other places where it does have the feel of a covenant where God says, I'm going to keep up my end, you're going to keep up your end. This is how this relationship is going to work.

[ 38 : 32 ] And so, that can, again, I think can feel a little bit like Hebrews. Well, which is it? It feels like a theological riddle. And if it is, well, Jesus Christ is the key to solving it.

And I think this is one of the most beautiful things about that strange story in Genesis chapter 15. God comes to Abraham, tells him that he and his descendants must meet the conditions of the covenant.

Abraham has moments where he passes his test, but his descendants don't. And this is where that whole vision with the smoking pot and the torch becomes so key. Because remember, what would have happened is that a subject would have come to their king and said, if I don't keep up my end of the deal, may I be cut off like these things.

But in the vision, God comes to Abraham and says, it's as if God's saying to him, here's how you know. If you don't keep up your end of the deal, I will be cut off like these things.

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of that strange story in Genesis 15. The Bible says that is what happened to Jesus. A later prophet would one day write of him, by oppression and judgment he was taken away.

[ 39 : 38 ] And as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? Man, this is the whole point of the cross.

Jesus becomes one of us so that he could die in our place, be cut off for us, butchered like those pieces of meat, come back from the dead, ascend to heaven as our priest, our representative, keeping the marks of his torment in his flesh, saying, look, I did it.

God kept up his end of the deal. Jesus says, I kept up their end of the deal. Both sides of the covenant fulfilled in the person of God. And so he's there.

He's the anchor in the inner place, the presence of God, bearing the marks and the proof, proving that the whole covenant rests on him. The whole, every bit of it. I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon that one of the reasons people like to get married is because they want to know there's going to be someone who's there for them.

A week ago, I was talking with a young lady in our church. She's single. We were talking about how actually, historically, Christianity has championed the cause of singleness.

[ 40 : 45 ] Scripture champions the cause of singleness. And one of the reasons Christians have been so willing to pursue singleness and celibacy over a lifetime has been because, unlike everyone else, Christians aren't afraid of getting old and dying alone because they know that no Christian ever gets old and dies alone.

Because Jesus Christ said, I am with you to the end of the age. I am going to my father's house. I am preparing a place for you. No one in the family of God is ever alone when they have Jesus as their anchor.

If you cannot trust him, you can trust nothing. You have only yourself. You will be your only reward whatever you manage to eke out of life. Jesus Christ is where you want to be.

He is a steadfast anchor for your soul and one day he is going to bring you where he is. There is no, friends, it doesn't matter what you're experiencing in life. Phil really felt like there was someone in the room experiencing a very difficult season.

Even very difficult seasons are not a reason to give up hope in Jesus no matter what happens. None of us can imagine, none of us can imagine what he has prepared for us, for those of us who love and trust him.

[ 42 : 05 ] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the gift of your son. You once told Abraham you would not be the kind of God who requires men to give up their sons, but you gave up your son.

You did it for us and you did it so that he could stand in your presence as our great priest bearing in his flesh the marks of the cutting off that we deserve.

We thank you that you're a covenant keeping God. I want to pray as we close our time that however much faith is in the room, we pray that you would increase it even just a little bit.

Help us to trust you a little more. Help us to have a little more hope in you. May our lives be a constant ever crescendoing experience of greater and greater faith and hope for the risen Lord.

In Jesus' name, amen. We're going to take communion. Why don't you take your cup? Does everyone have one of these? Everyone should. They should be under your seats maybe. And we've got, I think, some hospitality folks if anybody does need one.

[ 43 : 17 ] So I do want to say this is a meal for the family of God. If you are still on the fence of faith, you're like, obviously you're here, but you're not yet convinced. Your faith is not in Jesus alone. I would recommend you not take this meal.

The Bible warns us about taking the sacred meal irreverently. For those of us who are part of the family, this is a moment to remember what Jesus has done for us.

So we're going to do this together. I want you to take out the bread, which is in the top there. the night before Jesus was executed. He took bread and he gave it to his disciples and he said, he broke it for them.

He said, never forget, I was cut off for you. I was cut off like those pieces of meat. Never forget, take this in remembrance of him. And then you can open up your cup before you take it.

Remember that when Jesus gave the cup to his disciples, he said it was the blood of the new covenant. God made a covenant to Abraham. We're going to talk about this later in that series in Hebrews. There's a new covenant.

[ 44 : 29 ] Made not in the blood of animals, made in the blood of God himself. And Jesus said that this cup is the cup of the forgiveness of sins. I want you now to take a moment before you drink this and I want you to think about how little you trust God.

I want you to think about how little you hope in him because whatever it is, it's less than he deserves. I want you to think about that and I want you to confess it and tell that to your father. Amen.

Well friends, as your brother in Christ, I tell you that you are forgiven in the name of Jesus all over again. You are forgiven son or daughter to drink in remembrance of him.