

The Word of Hope

Hebrews 6:13-20

Gordon Randall – 29th December 2013

Introduction

Are you optimistic about the coming New Year? Are you full of hope? Are you feeling positive about 2014? To check this out let me ask you a few questions... In 2014... Will you win the Lottery – yes or no? Will Reading football club win promotion to the Premiership – yes or no? Will England win the World Cup – yes or no?

In our world today there are many false and faint hopes, winning the lottery, Reading winning promotion to the Premiership, England winning the world cup. Sometimes our hope rests on mere fantasy and in reality it's often worthless. To be valid, real hope must be based on truth and certainty. So as we move into a New Year perhaps now is a good time to reflect and remind ourselves that our God is the God of hope. Romans 15:13 says: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we move into 2014 let's remember - we as God's children are called to be people of hope—not mere optimists, but people filled with hope because of the certainty of God's promises in Christ. And this is what I believe our passage this morning will help us with. But first a bit of background. The author of Hebrews was writing to people who were facing hardship and persecution because of their Christian faith. Some were tempted to abandon Christ and return to Judaism. He's urging them to persevere by putting their focus on the power of Jesus Christ and the salvation He has provided. He is trying to instil in them biblical hope—not just a positive, cheerful outlook—but a steady attitude of joy based on the promises of God, who cannot lie.

Verse 19 of our reading uses the image of an anchor. But instead of going down into the ocean, this anchor goes up into the heavens, behind the curtain, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us becoming our high priest forever. So imagine an anchor. Last June, Ruth and I celebrated our 29th Wedding anniversary on the Greek island of Kafelonia. On the actual day we hired a small speed boat. It was brilliant exploring tiny coastal inlets where no-one even by land could reach. It felt safe in the calm, sunny and warm Mediterranean but even so each time we stopped we still needed to anchor our little boat so as we swam, snorkelled and had lunch the boat would not drift, hit something, and sink. By contrast sometimes in life we can be like a boat stuck out in a rough sea – again it's important to lower the anchor so we can ride out the storm in our life and not be blown off course or onto the rocks. Whether in the storms of life or in the harbour during the calm times of life, we need an anchor for our souls – in other words the certain hope of our future salvation.

Notice how verse 19 begins, “We have this hope”. What is this hope? Jesus Himself is our hope - He is our anchor and God's sure promises give us strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. As Christians we are called not to hope in hope itself, but in Jesus, and all that is promised in Him. This anchor is the certain hope of salvation God has provided in

Christ. And it also provides a steadiness for us as we encounter and endure the various storms of life. So let's examine 'the word of hope' in more depth. To help I've divided things down into two distinct sections.

1. **Remaining Certain**
2. **Remaining Steady**

1. Remaining Certain

To hammer home the absolute certainty of our salvation the writer of Hebrews begins this passage by using Abraham as an example of someone who through faith and patience inherited God's promises. In verses 13 to 15 he's referring back to Genesis 22:16-17, where after Abraham displayed his faith in God by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, God swore by Himself to bless Abraham and to multiply his descendants. The author goes on to apply this to the heirs of the promise, in other words, believers in Christ and provides a number of reasons why our hope of salvation in Christ is certain. For example by referring Abraham he immediately highlights how God's promises have never failed anyone that trusted in them. Abraham trusted God against all odds and found Him to be faithful. Paul called Abraham "the father of all who believe," and added, "against hope, Abraham in hope believed..." (Rom. 4:11, 18). Abraham's life is the story of God initiating and promising, with Abraham responding in faith. Let's remind ourselves - God appeared to Abraham while he was still named Abram and was living in Ur. He commanded Abram to leave his relatives and go to a place God would show him (Acts 7:3). Abram's obedience was not easy. In those days you didn't just hire the local man and van firm and move to the town on the next junction of the motorway while keeping in touch with your mates back home through emails and phone calls. To move hundreds of miles away meant permanent separation from family and friends. There were unknown hardships to encounter. Would the people of the new land be hostile or friendly? Could you provide adequately for your family there? What about learning the new language? Where would you live? There wasn't a friendly new church community to help you get settled into your new home.

But Abram trusted and obeyed. God had promised to multiply Abram, making him the father of a multitude. His name, Abram, meant, "exalted father," but his wife Sarah was barren. They were more than just getting on a bit. They were old but still had no children in spite of God's promise. Imagine the encounters he had as he and Sarah moved into Canaan? This 75-year-old man says, "Hello, my name is Abram [exalted father]." The Canaanite responds, "Nice to meet you. How many children do you have?" "None yet." Right! Then when he was 99, the Lord appeared to him, reaffirmed His promise to multiply him exceedingly, and then changed his name to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude"!

He'd waited 24 years since God first promised to give him and Sarah a son. He still has no children, except for Ishmael through Hagar. But now he tells everyone that God has given him a new name, "father of a multitude"! It would be like me - a guy seriously losing his hair and God says, "Let's change your name to Bushy-haired Gordon"! And yet when Abraham died at 175, he had fathered several nations through Ishmael's descendants and through the sons that he had with Keturah (Gen. 25:1-4, 12-16). And through Isaac, Abraham had twin grandsons, Esau and Jacob. And he died in faith, "looking to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). Though Abraham didn't see it, history has validated God's promise, that his

descendants, both physically and spiritually (Gal. 3:7), are as many as the stars of heaven, and as innumerable as the sand of the seashore (Heb. 11:12).

So what's the message for us today: There has never been anyone who trusted in God's promises and was finally disappointed. God may delay the visible answers to His promises, because He always answers in *his* time, not in ours. We may not see the answer until we're in heaven. But He is utterly trustworthy to keep His Word. He has promised eternal salvation to us through our faith in Jesus, therefore we can count on it as absolutely true!

Here's another reason for recognising certainty in our salvation. God's is incapable of lying. Verse 18 states the obvious, "it is impossible for God to lie". If He lied, He would deny His very nature as the God of truth, whose very word is truth. Whatever it is - if God has said it then *it is true*. If you were standing in front of him right now would you dare to question Him!? Let's face it - we're all prone to bend the truth when it suits our purposes. We don't want to look bad, and so we tell "little white lies." We withhold the truth when it is to our advantage to keep things under cover. But in spite of our tendency toward compromising the truth, we get offended if anyone challenges the truthfulness of our word, and we'd be outraged if they directly called us liars! But here is the God for whom it is *impossible* to lie. He has never lied in all of eternity. When we doubt His promises, and especially His promise of salvation to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ, we are in effect calling Him a liar! 1 John 5:10 says, "The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son." Do you believe God's promise concerning His Son, or are you calling God a liar? Our hope of future salvation is certain because God is incapable of lying.

Another reason why our hope of future salvation is certain is because God's provides an Oath to back up His promise. God's word should be sufficient, since His word is always true. But when God says it with an oath, He wants us to know that it's a done deal! Verse 17 says: 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. Because of the people's weakness of faith to believe in His promise, God condescends to add the oath to His word to give them (and us) double assurance.

Verse 15 adds to this where we read about a situation when men are having a dispute, and they swear under penalty of perjury to do something, that ends the matter. They *must* do what they have sworn to do, or they will pay a stiff penalty. But when the God who cannot lie inserts an oath then how much more certain is His word! As verse 19 confirms - our hope of future salvation is both "firm and secure". So why is this so important? What difference does it make in our day to day lives?

2. Remaining Steady

In Romans Paul reminds us that we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God. Now read verse 20 of our passage which speaks of Jesus as our high priest – this is really good news because every sinner needs a refuge from God's coming judgment. Jesus Christ is the refuge God has provided. The question is, *have we fled to that refuge?* Have we trusted in Christ alone to save us from our sins? If our hope is in our good works, we are not saved.

Our hope of salvation must be in Christ alone. But also be assured - it is not our feeble grasp of God, but His firm hold on us, that secures our hope of heaven. But, why then does the writer in verse 18 encourage us “to take hold of the hope offered to us?” If it depends totally on God why do we have to hope in Him?” This quote from a theologian called John Piper helps us with 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, but the empowering of our wills because we want to hold fast. What he bought was not the cancelling of the commandment to hold fast but the fulfillment of the commandment to hold fast”.

John Piper goes on to cite Paul’s statement in (CLICK) 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.” Christ Jesus had laid hold of Paul by His sovereign grace. As a result, Paul pressed on to lay hold of the hope of all that his salvation promised. This urges us to battle discouragement through taking hold by faith of God’s promise to save all who take refuge in Christ. God’s promise and His oath are two strong motivating forces to encourage us to grab onto the hope set before us and don’t let go.

This hope becomes an anchor for our souls enabling us to remain steady throughout the trials and tribulations of this life. We need this anchor to keep from drifting into things that potentially destroy us, especially during storms. We face numerous types of storms that threaten to rob us of hope in Christ. There are *storms of false teaching* that can blow us off course. We must weather them by holding firmly to the promise of salvation in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone. There will be *storms of doubt*, when we question the Christian faith, or perhaps even the existence of God. We can weather them by coming back to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, which is the bedrock of our entire faith. If He is not risen, our faith *is* in vain. But if He is risen, then our future salvation is certain and our hope can rest confidently in Him. There will be *storms of difficult trials*, where we wonder why God is allowing them and question whether He loves us. We weather them by remembering that God, did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all and has promised to bring us through every conceivable difficulty to ultimate glorification. There may be *storms of defeat*, where we fall into sin and dishonour our Lord and Saviour. We can weather even these storms if we realize that Jesus our High Priest is praying for us, that our faith may not fail, and that by His grace, we can be restored.

Conclusion

And so as we bring things to a close let’s once again think about this coming New Year and ask ourselves again are we optimistic, are we full of hope? To be fair depending on our character each of us will be more or less optimistic or pessimistic. It’s just the way we are! And if we think of this fallen world in which we live it can sometimes feel pretty hopeless when we witness the things of this world going on around us. But from a Christian perspective also consider this. Paul in Ephesians 2:12 describes those who don’t know Christ as “having no hope and without God” – contrary to this we should therefore stand out as people of hope. The certain hope of our future salvation is the anchor God has given to us to steady our souls, even in times of storm.

So in 2014 it's pretty certain if you buy a lottery ticket you are not likely to win. If you back Reading to win promotion to the Premiership it's probably not going to happen. If you hope England will win the World Cup – well it's a virtual certainty they won't – they will lose on penalties. But to finish remember this – if you are a follower of Jesus then you have God's word and when we go to Revelation, we read how the story ends.

Here's the good news – if you believe in Jesus then you are definitely on the winning side! Because He has promised to save all who take refuge in Him. Let's take hold of our certain hope in Jesus!