



“Promises...”

Hebrews 6:9 – 20

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

10 For God is not unjust to forget

your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. 13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." 15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. 16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. 17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

6:9-12

After speaking concerning those who had not matured, had not embraced a life of sanctification and growth, yes, even those that were living an external “spiritual life” yet possibly having never truly been reborn, the writer now turns his voice to a little more positive and upbeat framework. No doubt many of the readers of our last text in the author’s day were somewhat stunned by the writer’s bluntness, as were some of you last week with mine. There was no doubt, both then and now, those who were bruised, offended even, by the language and insinuation of the text. Yet on the other hand, some of you, upon hearing the last commentary, left here joyous and praising God! As the old saying goes, if you throw a rock into a pack of dogs, it is not difficult to know which dog got hit. It is the one that lets out the yelp! And always, in perfect confirmation of the words I delivered as well as for the writer of Hebrews, there were those who got angry over what was written, as if I wrote the scriptures we read! Sadly, there will always be those who just can’t and factually just won’t, not at any cost, look into the spiritual mirror of life. These folks rightfully fear what they will find.

The writer goes on this week by saying “*we are confident of better things for you.*” That word confident means “persuaded”, “convinced.” Both of these latter descriptions lend even more of an understanding of “having been led to believe” or “having come to understand” that some of those reading this letter have indeed manifested the fruit of a maturing salvation. For apparently it was clearly seen in some the “*things that accompany salvation.*” So let us reconfirm herein that there are indeed “*things that accompany salvation*”! And even though he, the writer, felt compelled to “speak in this manner”, as he did in the last passage, he was not writing them all off and surrendering to mediocrity. No, he acknowledges that some of them indeed have it going on! I too have

been vividly reminded of such a fact here in our midst. While there will always be those who find it easy to reject every message given here as pertaining to them, there are others that fearlessly embrace the messages as well as every word of scripture as addressed to them.

The writer speaks of these fruitful ever-maturing believers as “beloved.” There was obviously some intimacy with the author, as he uses this word nowhere else in Hebrews. Such a bond is a natural occurrence within the family of faith. Those who are growing, serving and maturing seem to drift toward one another and a natural communion and covenant occurs between them because there is an understanding of commonality. Goals and priorities and passions are aligned and peace and unity is thus established between such individuals. Even an unspoken unity of fellowship is recognized that goes deeper than most of us even have with our blood families!

It all comes from the fact that I know you understand. You “get it.” You understand what drives me, motivates me, impassions me. And I know the same about you. In this fact, I find my brothers and my sisters. I find my “beloved.” I personally understand this phenomenon clearly. It is how I have found those who today are more than flock and church mates, but those that are indeed my tightest friends and confidants.

Verse 10 says, “*For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*” The writer reminds all of these “beloved” saints and friends that their commitment and service is not lost and forgotten, but rather their work is indeed seen by God, and further, it is recognized by Him as a “labor of love.” Certainly there are those that serve with a lot of false and insincere motives. But there are those who do indeed serve as a “labor of love.”

It seems that some people have the innate ability to not forget: where they came from, what the gospel means to them, what Jesus did for them, the cost and the pain of sin as well as the expense of errors of decisions that have made. Others seem cursed to go around and around the same mountain again and again, making the same mistakes repeatedly and essentially going nowhere. It’s a spiritual Groundhog’s Day and they seem just stuck.

With these latter folks, I am relegated to the position of the bystander just shaking my head instead of being their pastor, leader and friend. As they pass me on 10th trip around, panting, they want to tell me that this time it will be different. This guy will be different. This girl will be different. Or she will be different with them! Or this time they won’t fall, or this time they will not come out in the same place. These folks are not “laboring in love”, but “slaving for self” in order to achieve and receive. They are trying to earn love and position. But that’s not love. Our service, our “labor of love” is not about us at all; *it is all about Christ.*

Notice that while such service is not exhaustive, the writer refers here specifically to a “labor of love” toward God that manifests itself in “ministry toward the saints.” Now, we can be apt to get all super-spiritual and Mother Teresa-like here and see our service to be exercised toward the unredeemed and suffering world outside the family of God. But scripture overwhelmingly renders up a very different picture. A picture that sees our service and our spiritual gifts as something to be especially exercised within the “body life” of the local church. 1 John 3:17 speaks of blessing a “brother” in need. In 3:16, we are called to “lay down our lives for our brethren.” James 2:15 talks of blessing “a brother or sister (who) is naked and destitute of daily food...” Philemon 1:5 says, “...hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.” 1Co 14:12, speaking of the use of our spiritual gifts, says, “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.”

Undeniably, scripture calls us as believers to have a special commitment to and for the body of Christ to which we are called. This doesn’t mean we are not to bless the unredeemed! But such should pale in comparison to our service and blessing toward those within our community family. This is a very real part of the covenant

relationship that is to exist between us as brothers and sisters here in this church. You may be one who struggles with the idea that a church should seek to establish and even perpetuate such a covenant. But I find license throughout scripture, not the least of which is Malachi 3:18, which says, “...you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.”

Verses 11-12 say, “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Herein again is another example of the emphatic language concerning this issue of believing, loving and serving God and community. The writer seeks “diligence” on our part. Diligence to the end of life! He calls upon us to not be “sluggish,” which obviously means we can easily *become* sluggish! I am often a bit amused when I hear folks comment on the fact that they don’t always feel like serving God and doing for kingdom. Because the reality is, if this was not a danger and an issue for every Christian, we wouldn’t need the book of Hebrews or other such passages to call us out to suck it up and be “diligent”, to not become “sluggish.”

He goes even further and, *are you ready for this*, calls us to “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Seriously? There is a place for a life imitation of another human? So says this passage in the holy Word of God! Inherit what promises? All the scriptural realities that occur in the lives of those who are faithful, committed, and diligent. That list would be long but no doubt would include a joy and peace unparalleled. A care over one’s comings and goings. A richness of life that continues to elude those of us that are not diligent with these issues.

This is the “missing link” to the mystery that many of us wonder about: why some people are so joyous and peaceful while our own lives seem tumultuous and precarious. Because this passage says that a diligence to a work, a labor of love, a security of my salvation, is a proof manifested. These things bring us an “inheritance of the promises of God.” If you love God, love His church, love His service and are diligent toward these things, you know what I’m talking about. It’s like the secret Fountain of Youth or something.

6:13-20

All of this is speaking to us as a church, to all of us that are slowly coming to terms with this idea of commitment, endurance and faithfulness, this idea of a covenant relationship with God and with each other in this fellowship. All of that is so contrary to the world, so opposite of what our culture preaches, which is “me first” and “individualism.” The “do your own thing” and “let it all hang out” kind of attitude toward life. Promises? Faithfulness? Counting on anyone and anything else? Are you kidding? Outside of the kingdom issues, what are you really sure about today? What do they say? Taxes and death?

So you understand that what this passage is telling us to do and be is so contrary to the world out there today. So opposite that even most churches are unwilling or seemingly unable to pull this off. This real love, commitment and service to each other and God Himself. To count on God, something we call “faith”, and in light of His Spirit filling us to be able to count on each other. Me being able to believe you will actually be there for me, and me promising to be there for you. Doing all of this and *enduring* in such behavior! Participating in an agreement and a promise. A “covenant” agreement between you and me, between me and God, between you and God.

Abraham and God entered into such an agreement, a “deal” so to speak. Now the end was a long time in coming, and Abraham was seriously tested as to his part in it all, but God came through. He promised and He came through.

Verse 16 says, *“Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding.”* Broken promises destroy trust, causing distress and pain. In Numbers 30:2, God says, *“When a man makes a vow...he must not break his word but must do everything he said.”*

Our faith, our very salvation, is a covenant, an agreement with God. An agreement that I am surrendering myself, my very body and life, to the control of God, that He would hold me, keep me, walk with me, protect me, and ultimately take me home to be with Him for eternity. It's our deal. It's our agreement. It's our covenant. And it's binding on both parties. Do you get that? It's binding.

Verses 17-18a says, *“God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie.”*

The reason we don't trust God to really be there for us, not to mention the lack of faith in our salvation if we have indeed really been reborn, is that we don't trust *us*! And why should we? We seem to break promises as easy as swatting a fly! So if we can't trust this end of the agreement, we tend to think that the other side is just as precarious. But God is herein saying, “Don't you believe it, buddy.” We can be sure because God is not like us. He doesn't lie. He doesn't break His promises!

That being said, the ball is volleyed back into our end of the court: what about us? If God is faithful, is it ok if we are not? If God doesn't lie and we say He possesses us, is it ok if *we* lie? Can I break *my* covenant to God? Is it ok to break my covenant with you, my body, the family of God?

The guarantee of God's promises, further, the understanding, the grasp, the believing of those promises, like Abraham, moves us out of our fear, our lethargy, our worries, and sweeps us into the presence of God. It takes us behind the curtain that separates man from the presence of God in the “Holy of Holies”. We are swept into a realm that the world knows not and never gets to experience. We walk through this life in the presence of deity, Creator of the stars! And standing in the promise of God, His agreement and covenant with us, we have a (verse 19) “strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls.” Do you understand what is being said there? What does an anchor do? It keeps you from moving. So what's the answer to our end of the deal according to all of this? Do I try harder? Do I toughen up, grit my teeth, discipline myself? Well, maybe some of that is in order. But the bottom line is when I stay in that presence of God, the “Holy of Holies”, I get “anchored.” You see, God doesn't move away, gang. We do.

My “labor of love”, my “diligence to the end”, and my “anchor for my soul” will come only as I embrace the security and faithfulness of God...not MY faithfulness, because I have none! Not my security because, outside of God, I have none to truthfully offer. This heart state involves worship of the heart, belief of the mind, and service and living in the body. We say, “I don't feel like serving. I don't feel like worshipping. My heart's just not in it, so I guess I should just step off.” NO. You made a deal. You have an agreement, a covenant. You are to nuzzle up closer to the Master and He anchors your soul. You cannot anchor your soul yourself so you can be close to Jesus! That's His side of the deal. And He promised. You are to focus on ONE THING: Jesus. Once anchored down, there comes worship, service, community, prayer, devotions, faithfulness, love.

Ah, but when He is slow in coming, we panic. Imagine Abraham! How long he waited for what seemed to be an impossibility. “Surely I will bless you...surely I will multiply you...” He promises us that even today. How we complicate this issue! We look for the “missing link”, the “magic equation” to make it all happen. We tend to

search the corners of the world when the answer is here in front of us! For this hope we have—have already—
an anchor for our soul.