

“Hold On To Hope”
Hebrews 6:13-20

Series: Strengthening Your Grip Week 2. Hope

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The Welland River flows placidly through Southern Ontario, Canada. It's a beautiful passageway for fishing, boating and all types of water sports. Near its end, however, is a dire warning. Posted on the pedestrian bridge, which spans its mouth, are two signs. The first asks, "Do you have an anchor?" the second adds, "Do you know how to use it?" Why inquire about the obvious? Why worry about mooring in place when the river is so calm and serene? The Welland River empties into a larger river just a short distance above Niagara Falls. The tranquil waters will fool you. Without an anchor to hold you in place, you will quickly pick up speed, get caught in the turbulent rapids and plunge 180 feet over the falls.

Where are you on the river right now? Calmly enjoying the placid circumstances? Everything is relaxed and peaceful at school, home, work. Do you feel events are picking up speed? You are moving at a rate which is still manageable if you row harder. Are you caught in the rush of a strong current? Are you straining at the oars to fight the rapids, to go against the flow? Are you gripped by an ominous fear the falls are up ahead – that's you'll soon tip over and plummet?

These days it seems we are on a rapid river of worry. What if my marriage, my family, my job, my health, my loved ones don't survive this pandemic? We worry about the state of our schools, our economy, our leaders, our nation, our world. It's like you're in a boat on a storm tossed river, pulled by the rapids, driven by every gust and gale. It's hard to have Hope when nothing is solid and nothing is certain. Yet Hope is just what we need at a time like this. Christian author Andy Crouch says,

Human beings can live for forty days without food, four days without water, and four minutes without air. But we cannot live for four seconds without hope.¹

A lot of hope is offered you each day. A good deal of it is false hope. Gus, the second most famous groundhog in Pennsylvania, encourages you to keep on scratching the lottery. 45 states and DC run a lottery. More than half of all Americans buy a lottery ticket spending about \$72 billion a year. Lottery ticket sales have gone up every year even during the Great Recession. This is true even though you are more likely to die in a lightning strike (1 in 3 million) or be attacked by a shark (1 in 11.5 million) than to win Powerball's grand prize (1 in 175 million). About the only thing less likely is having a meteor crash into your house (1 in 182 trillion).

So why do people keep on scratching? That lottery ticket is the doorway to a fantasy world of false hope. \$2 lets you spend time dreaming about how you will spend half a billion dollars.

Psychologist Dr. Stephen Goldbart suggests the lottery "lets you believe in magic: that you will be the one who spent a little and got a lot" and that the money "will give you a respite from the conflict, complexity, and angst of everyday life." Journalist Adam Piore writes,

¹ Andy Crouch, "The Gospel of Steve Jobs," Christianity Today (1-21-11)

“The lottery is a game where reason and logic are rendered obsolete, and hope and dreams are on sale.”²

Even if you don't buy lottery tickets there are other forms of false hope on sale these days. They come through your phone. They're offered by your friends. They pop up on Facebook. False hope tempts you to escape, indulge, fantasize, medicate. False hope can cost you a lot more than the few dollars you lost on lottery tickets. What's more, the worry, stress and anxiety you were trying to escape are still with you. In fact, you might be closer to the rapids and the falls than before. Not all hope is false. It's essential to find and hold onto hope that helps you.

When it comes to True Hope, the Bible asks you two questions: “Do you have an anchor?” and “Do you know how to use it?” The Book of Hebrews says,

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever. Hebrews 6:19-20

When I think of hope I don't normally picture an anchor. Hope looks up. Anchors go down. Hope seeks the light. Anchors descend into the dark. Hope takes flight. Anchors drag on the bottom. Yet the anchor became a favorite image of hope for the first Christians. Why?

True Hope meets you in the middle of the storm. As an anchor holds a ship secure in a storm, the Hope of Jesus keeps us safe and steady while all around rises and falls. The Jewish Christians who first hear Hebrews face a hellacious storm. Insults and hardships beat down on them. Waves of rejection by family and fellow Jews wash over their bow. Prison and the loss of property threaten to swamp them. My preaching professor Tom Long writes,

This congregation is exhausted. They are tired – tired of serving the world, tired of worship...tired even of Jesus. Their hands droop and their knees are weak, attendance is down at church, and they are losing confidence. The threat here is that, worn down and worn out, they will drop their end of the rope and drift away. Tired of walking the walk, many of them are considering taking a walk, leaving the community and falling away from the faith.³

Their ship is tempest tossed and spiraling out of control. It's enough to make one sick.

While on vacation last summer, Lisa and I signed up for a romantic, sunset dinner cruise. They promised we'd see dolphins, dine on a delicious three course meal and even share a champagne toast. There were no storms – barely a cloud in the sky. Yet going out the captain warned us the wind and the waves were against us. The boat turned into a bucking bronco. Multiple times we literally lifted off our seats and then were soaked by waves crashing over the sides. When we arrived at the spot for the romantic dinner and champagne toast we both felt like toast. I was ready to try walking on water just to get off that boat. One poor bride on her honeymoon filled up so many bags I thought she was going to turn inside out. Lisa and I both felt sick. How sick? Let

² Mike Poteet, "What's Wrong with Playing the Lottery?" Ministry Matters (12-30-13)

³ Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY, John Knox Press: 1997) p. 3.

me just say it left a bad taste in our mouths. But crew member Jason was great. He came right to us, cleaned everything up, and gave us something to settle our stomachs. Then he took our picture. Jason said, “Given the circumstances you might not want to do this, but you know it’s real love if you kiss.” So we did.

Hebrews says Jesus came right to us and cleaned us up.

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15

The Son of God took on human flesh and blood. He shared in our humanity. Then He went further. He entered the raging storm of our sin and sacrificed His life for us. His broken body broke the power of sin, death and the devil. He set us free so we don’t have to live in fear. True Hope is not afraid to stand by you in the storm.

True Hope throws you a secure lifeline. Hebrews says the anchor for your soul is firm and secure. Your soul needs to feel secure. Your soul needs an anchor. Without Jesus’ Hope to anchor you, your soul will be driven this way and that by fear. Fear often lurks behind dread, anxiety, stress, and panic. Fear has many faces.

- Fear of failure
- Fear of disapproval
- Fear of rejection
- Fear of attack and abuse
- Fear of hunger or sickness
- Fear of death

These fears make you feel insecure. There is plenty in the present to make you feel afraid. Yet more likely, these fears go back – way back. Michael Dye, a leader in the Christian Recovery movement, shares how his childhood caused him to live in fear.

I grew up with a stepfather who was not outwardly abusive or angry, but we were always afraid of him. We could sense that we never wanted to make him mad. He was also emotionally absent, so we just stayed away, creating a life outside the home. When growing up in an unsafe environment, the best way to cope may have been to stay away or become invisible to avoid being hurt by abuse or neglect.⁴

When you anchor your soul to something or someone here on earth, inevitably they will let you down, change or leave. They can’t help it. Life on earth is always transitory, temporary, and unpredictable. The way to dispel fear and overcome insecurity is to tie your soul to an anchor that is solid, sure, certain, and steadfast.

The Hope of Jesus is anchored to Someone outside this planet. Look again at our passage from Hebrews.

⁴ Michael Dye, *The Genesis Process for Change Groups* p. 48.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever. Hebrews 6:19-20

True Hope doesn't drop anchor down on a shifting sandy beach, the bedrock of the ocean floor, the highs and lows of the stock market or the new wave of cultural trends. Jesus grabs the lifeline tied to your soul, runs ahead of you up into heaven and ties it to the very throne of God the Father. Why is this the most secure place to be?

True Hope delivers on its promise of something better. Hope always looks forward to something better – paying off debt, graduating college, the cure of your illness, an end to this pandemic. Hope seeks the light at the end of the tunnel, the sunrise after the long dark night, the blue sky after the storm. Hope rises when someone promises it will get better. What if it doesn't?

God promised Abraham and Sarah they would have many descendants. Years went by with no children and they started to lose hope. Who can blame them? At their age they were more ready for a nursing home than painting a nursery. Two things kept their hopes alive: God's promise and God's oath. Hebrews says,

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Hebrews 6:13-15

Wait?! God swore? It's not that kind of swearing. When God made a promise He backed it up with a vow, an oath. Kids make vows when they say, "Cross my heart and hope to die." Adults may raise their hand and declare, "As God is my witness." Even in court a witness lays a hand on the Bible and swears to "Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God." These oaths ask God to back up their promise, to help them fulfill their promise, to even punish them if they don't deliver what they promise. Since there is no one higher than God, the Lord swears by Himself. He says, "I swear to tell the truth so help Me...Me."

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. 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 set before us may be greatly encouraged. Hebrews 6:17-18

God promised and swore to give Abraham and Sarah a child and God delivered on that promise. God promised and swore to give Abraham and Sarah many descendants and God delivered on that promise. Do you know who those descendants are? You. Through Jesus Christ, you are a child of Abraham. Even more, through Jesus Christ, you are a child of God. He made a promise, He swore an oath and...most importantly...He signed your adoption papers with His blood. Your soul can stand firm in the storm. Your soul can be secure in His love. Your soul is anchored to His throne in Heaven. He made a promise. He swore an oath. He will not change His mind. Hold on to the Anchor of Hope.

And be the Hope of Jesus for other children. This Advent, when we prepare to welcome the Child born in the manger, we ask you to prayerfully support the vital work of two homes in

Zambia, Africa – the Bill and Bette Bryant Crisis Nursery and the Namumu Orphanage. These important missions welcome children who are orphaned and abandoned.

A three-week-old baby boy was abandoned on the streets of Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. Those who found the child first brought him to a home called the House of Moses. The caregivers welcomed him and eventually named him Jacob. They called him Jake. He spent his first two years living and thriving in this amazing rescue home. Although the social workers tirelessly searched for relatives to care for him, they were not successful.

When Jake turned two, he went to live at the Bill and Bette Bryant Crisis Nursery. In this loving, nurturing environment, he continued to develop as a healthy toddler. He enjoyed interacting with the other children. Eventually, Jake was cleared by government authorities to enter the Foster-to-Adopt program. After a thorough matching process, he was placed with the Libuku family. Jake has settled easily into his new family. Best of all, he knows he has a mommy and daddy of his very own. He is loved, secure. He has the hope of Jesus – the best anchor of all.

God welcomes you into His family. You are loved. You are secure. Hold onto Hope.

You have an Anchor. Do you know how to use it?