God’s Promise: The Anchor for Our Soul

Hebrews 5:11-6:20

Key Verse: 6:19 “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtains.”

In chapter 2:17 the author of Hebrews describes Jesus as the merciful and faithful high priest. Indeed, Jesus shared our humanity and became fully human in every way. He took our pain and sorrow in his body and became an atoning sacrifice for our sins. In 4:14 Jesus is called a great high priest because he is able to empathize with our weaknesses. Jesus is the merciful high priest. Jesus who became fully human in every way understands our weaknesses and intercedes for us to the Holy God. In the merit of Jesus’ mercy and love we can approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, and we can receive mercy and find grace in our time of need. (4:14-16)

Even though Jesus is the merciful shepherd who understands our weakness so that we may receive mercy and find grace, this does not allow our laziness and ignorance in our spiritual battle to grow as mature Christians. In today’s passage the author warns Christians against two sins: Complacency and Apostasy. As Paul said in Romans, God’s grace is not a license for our sin, so Jesus’ mercy is not a license for our laziness (Ro 6:1,2). Laziness is not weakness, but wickedness. In the Parable of Minas Jesus rebukes the one who didn’t work, but hid his minas, calling him a wicked and lazy servant. (Mt 25:14-30) I want to make something clear according to Jesus’ definition: A lazy person is not a weak person, but a wicked person. Let us study how and why the author warns Christians against complacency and apostasy and what the resolution for these two destructive sins is.

First, warning against complacency (5:11-6:3) Look at verses 11-14. “***We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.***” Here the words “no longer try to understand” is *nothros* in Greek, which holds the same meaning as “to become lazy” in 6:12. The word *nothros* means sluggish, slow, and lazy. The author warned them because they no longer tried to understand the word of God. He meant that they lost desire for God’s word. They were satisfied with hearing only the elementary truths of God’s word, which is described as milk. They do not want to eat solid foods such as teachings about righteousness and spiritual discernment, which means teaching and shepherding others.

Teaching about righteousness is teaching us about how to live by faith. Living by faith requires spiritual struggle in this ungodly generation. To live by faith we often deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus daily. To live by faith we have to have the same mindset of Christ. Living by faith requires constant self-denial and disciplines which accompany suffering and pain. No one wants suffering and discipline. So many want to remain in their comfort zone and live as sheep, not as shepherds or teachers. The author describes them as spiritual infants who still drink milk.

The author does not mean that we may ignore the elementary truths of God’s word. We need to hear them over and over again. He introduces the elementary truths of God’s word in 6:1-3. They are the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, faith in God, instructions about cleansing rites which means baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. All these are very important for believers, and it is necessary for us to practice for our spiritual growth. But the author urges them to have more than all these elementary teachings to grow as mature Christians. In 6:1 he said, “***Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity***,..” He meant that we must move beyond the basic principles to take higher steps towards maturity. He warned us of our complacency. Complacency is self-satisfaction. Complacency is thinking that I am okay and I have enough so I don’t need to struggle for more. So, complacency makes us stop growing and produces laziness.

Look at verses 13-14 again. I thank God for the Philippians' study through the Missionary and Leaders conference last weekend. Through Philippians study we learn Apostle Paul’s strong desire to know Christ by participating in his suffering and by experiencing the power of resurrection. Paul had many reasons to brag about his flesh, his career, education, family background, achievements and so on. But, he considered all of these as rubbish compared to knowing Christ more and deeper. He did not think that he had already obtained all, or had already arrived at his goal, but he pressed on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him. He did one thing. He forgot what was behind and strived forward towards what was ahead. (Php 3:12-13) Paul showed us how to overcome complacency and grow spiritually as mature Christians.

We often remain in our comfort zone and will not move on for our spiritual growth. We want to drink milk because we don’t have to chew or bite. Wouldn’t you rather not have to chew your food? Don’t we prepare for a comfortable retirement and live the rest of our lives in an easy way? Msn Mary repented after she had heard an American missionary Sarah Chang who went to Belize as a silver missionary after she had retired. There is no age limit in our spiritual growth. There is no limit to knowing Christ and participating in his suffering and resurrection. Through the missionary conference and the Hebrews study I also repented for my complacency. I made a decision to resume my weekday relay prayer and regular visits and fishing at Wash U. I also pray for outreaching to the Delmar Loop to advance the gospel.

We are God’s precious children. God does not want us to remain as infants forever. He wants us to grow as servants of God who eat solid food and work hard for the glory of God. May God get rid of the yeast of laziness, complacency from us so that we may participate in the extension of God’s kingdom in Wash U and in other major campuses in St. Louis. Amen!

Second, warning against apostasy. (6:4-15) The author warned of not only complacency, but also apostasy. What is apostasy? Apostasy is to stop following or obeying their faith or abandoning their previous loyalty. In a word they leave their faith and go back to their previous lives. The Bible describes apostasy as a dog returns its vomit and a sow that was washed returns to her wallowing in the mud. (Prov 26:11, 2 Pe 2:22) What a disgusting thing it is when a dog eats what he vomited. Those who leave their life of faith and return to the world again are like dogs who return to their vomit.

The author said that those who practice apostasy have difficulty repenting. Look at verses 4-6. “***It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him on public disgrace***.” Those who were once enlightened means those whose spiritual eyes were opened to see the spiritual world. Those who tasted the heavenly gifts are those who experienced miracles of God. Some experienced the Holy Spirit and the joy of sharing and teaching the word of God. Others have power to interpret the future. But all these people, when they are tempted and fall away from their faith, have difficulty returning. This is because they become proud thinking that they know everything and look down on other believers. Also, they do not want to lose or give up the pleasure of sin. So, among the once-devoted Christians who fall away there are not many who repent. I met some students on campus who once were very devoted in their church, but lost their faith after they entered college.

The apostasy is not only their personal choice, but also re-crucifixion of Jesus in public. The Bible says that to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

The author shows a good illustration about apostasy in verses 7-8. “***Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.***” There is one shower of rain in two different lands. One land receives rain and produces good crops which brings joy to the farmer. It is like a person who hears the gospel and produces good fruits of life, the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The other land receives rain and produces only thorns and thistles which are worthless to the farmer. It is like a person who hears the gospel, lives a Christian life, but soon produces all kinds of bad fruits, the fruits of evil spirit. This illustration reminds us of the Parable of Sower. When people leave from their faith, their hearts become a wasteland until all kinds of thorns and thistles grow and cover the whole land. Verse 8 says that in the end it will be burned. This is the warning of final judgment to those who practice apostasy. Judas Iscariot followed Jesus for three years as one of the Twelve disciples. He was loved by the Lord Jesus. But he fell away from his faith when he was tempted by money. He sold his master for thirty silvers and finally hanged himself and died. This shows us how difficult it is for those who fall away to repent and come back to their first faith.

Therefore, we must continue to work for our salvation. Look at verses 10-12. “***God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised***.” The author encourages us to have two things to overcome these two destructive lives which are complacency and apostasy. These two things are diligence and patience. He asks each of us to show the same diligence to the very end. Abraham showed us a good example of how to become the source of blessing through faith and patience. Look at verses 13-15. “***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***.” Abraham was 75 years old when he was called by God. He received Isaac, his son, when he was 100 years old. Abraham believed in God’s promise and waited for 25 years. Verse 15 says, “*so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised*.” Many people fall away because of impatience. Patience is an expression of faith. If Judas Iscariot waited a little longer, his destiny would have been changed. I know a woman who left her faith when her prayer didn’t seem to be answered. She did not know God tested her patience. We have to remember that God answers our prayers. He answers our prayers when we are ready. Our prayer is not denied, but delayed until we are ready. Faith requires patience. I pray that we all experience God’s blessing and receive what was promised through our faith and patience. Amen!

Third, God’s promise, as hope and anchor for our soul. (16-20) In Romans 5:3-5 Paul said that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame (does not disappoint us). What is our true hope? Recently we heard encouraging news from our young leaders. Deborah Park, Grace Choi, and Luke Yang Jr. made their academic achievements. Deborah will go to Case Western University in Ohio with a full scholarship. Grace Choi was accepted for Mizzou Medical School, and Luke gained a very high score for dental school. We all shared their joy. However, becoming a doctor and a dentist cannot be their true hope because they will meet many discouraging things during their professional career. I don’t mean to discourage them in advance. I mean that our true hope is God’s firm and secure promise, which is like an anchor for our soul. God’s promise is firm and secure because God swears it by himself. God does not lie because his character cannot allow him to lie. He is always truthful. Look at verses 17. “***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 confirmed the unchanging nature of his purpose, which is our salvation, with his oath. God made his oath to himself. So, his promise of our salvation is firm and secure by God’s oath. Look at verse 18. “***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***.” Here two unchangeable things are God’s promise and his oath. His promise and oath are never changed because God swore by himself and he does not lie.

Look at verses 19-20. “***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, in the order of Melchizedek***.” Abraham left his country and his father’s household with the promise of God. For the last 25 years he had many ups and downs in his life, but he was not shaken because he held firmly the promise of God. God’s promise was an anchor for his soul. An anchor is a heavy device which catches in the sea bottom to hold a ship from drifting away by the wind or storm. God’s promise is our true and living hope which never disappoints us. We have great hope and pictures for each young leaders’ future. We are very encouraged by all these. However, their firm and secure hope is God’s promise which is an anchor for their soul. We cannot see an anchor because it is fastened to the bottom of the sea. But the anchor holds its ship when the billows roll. In the same way God’s promise in their hearts is not visible, but it will hold them firm and secure when they meet the storms of life. Indeed, they will meet storms and waves which threaten their voyage. But, as long as they have God’s promise in their hearts, their journey will be safe and secure. Let us pray that we all may have this hope as an anchor for our soul, firm and secure. Amen!

In conclusion the author came back to the issue of Jesus Christ as a great high priest. Jesus entered the Most Holy Place with his own blood to make our hope firm and secure. He himself became our anchor which holds our lives firm and secure from all storms and winds. Praise Jesus who is our true and living hope and anchor for our soul, firm and secure! Amen!