

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 6, Verses 13-20
Notes From Class on October 20, 2009
Last Revised on (October 26, 2009)

Good evening everyone!

Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

Before we begin please make sure that you have everything you need.

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

If you are using an English translation of the Bible other than the English Standard Version ("ESV"), then it may help you to have the handout which I have prepared, which has the ESV text of Hebrews (in its entirety)

There is coffee and tea at the back.

Please get what you need and, then, let's get started....

Introduction

OK. Last week we started reading **Chapter 6**.

And we made it through **Verse 12**.

Tonight, as usual, I will begin with a **review** of what we have studied so far

When we have finished with that, we will **continue** reading at **verse 13** of Chapter 6.

Tonight we will **stop** at **verse 20**, which is the last verse of Chapter 6.

This should leave us with plenty of time tonight.

So if you have **comments** or **questions** please share them with the class.

Review

Hebrews is a document written in Greek around the end of the **First Century** A.D

It is perhaps best thought of as the text of a **sermon**,

to be preached to a particular church,

a church which the preacher **knew**.

One of his main objectives was to encourage them to **hold fast** to their confession of faith.

It seems most of them had long before confessed their faith in Christ, but that some were in danger of "**falling away**".

This theme, of holding fast **until the end** and not falling away, is constant and pervasive in Hebrews.

Until recently I have been thinking that this theme is nearly **unique** to Hebrews, but I was wrong.

Christ **himself** had a number of things to say about holding fast to the end, and many of them were very **frightening**.

One thinks of **Matthew 7:23**, for example, where Jesus imagines himself on Judgment Day, saying to some who had done various **miracles** in his name, "I never **knew** you. Away from me you evildoers!"

Or another example is **Matthew 24:12, 13** where Jesus says: "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of **most** will grow **cold**, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. "

And one naturally thinks of the severe **warnings** which Jesus issues to the **Seven Churches** in Revelation; in effect urging **them** to hold fast and not to fall away.

In **Acts, Chapter 7**, Steven condemns Israel throughout all her history for having repeatedly fallen away from God, and finally killed the Lord of Glory,

If you think of it, the entire Old Testament, with few exceptions, is the history of **God's** people **falling away**.

The **only** one of God's children who never fell away, not even a little bit, not even for a moment, was **Jesus**.

He is **why** all the rest of us can have hope.

We put our trust in **Him** and He holds fast to **us**.

He **never** lets us slip away!

But if we should put our trust in anyone or anything **other** than Jesus, then we are really in trouble.

And there has never been a shortage of Christians or churches that stand under this **threat**.

This is kind of the **point** our preacher is hammering.

Chapters 1 and 2

In Chapters 1 and 2 we read of the **unqualified supremacy** of Christ.

He is the **eternal Son** of God.

Certainly he is greater than **everything** in all creation, on Earth and in the heavens,

including, of course, even than the **angels**.

However it is not the angels he came to help, but the offspring of **Abraham**. (2:16)

That is why, for a time, Jesus became just like us, "so that he might become a merciful and faithful **high priest** in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." (2:17b)

This metaphor, of Jesus as our priest, is **pervasive** in Hebrews but rarely seen elsewhere in the Bible.

Chapters 3 and 4

Just as he is superior to the **angels**,

the Son of God is certainly superior to **Moses**.

While it is true that Moses was faithful **in** all of God's house, as a **servant** (God said so!)

Jesus is faithful **over** Gods house, as a **son**.

We are therefore urged more strongly **to** hold fast to our confession of Christ

and **not** to behave as did the Exodus generation in Israel, who rejected God and his servant Moses

Contemplation of the Exodus generation dominates **Chapter 3** and continues through the first **11** verses of **Chapter 4**.

This is an **example** (one of many in the Bible) of how some of God's **chosen** people "fell away."

None of that generation, save Joshua and Caleb, entered Canaan

we wonder what happened to most of them in **eternity**.

We may **never** know what happened to them,

But we should certainly be **careful** and **learn** from their example.

The **Apostle Paul** says (in first Corinthians, Chapter 10) that these things took place **as** examples **for** us.

I think this means that as God led Israel out of Egypt, he had you and me personally in mind!

(1 Corinthians 10)

For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,³ and all ate the same spiritual food,⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things took place as **examples for us, that we might **not** desire evil as they did.**

Yet the sad fact is that we generally **do** desire evil just as they did! At least I do.

Which is why we **need** Jesus, who is the **only** one who can save **any** of us. The **last paragraph of Chapter 4** reads:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive **mercy and find **grace** to help in time of need. (4:14-16)**

Surely this is a big part of what it means to be a Christian: to be confident of his **grace** and **mercy** in time of need.

The preacher needs the church to which he is preaching to **really** understand this.

He believes that the **metaphor** of Jesus as the Great High **Priest** is an effective figure to help them see it.

Chapter 5, Verses 1 - 10

The first 10 verses of Chapter 5, **expand** the metaphor of Jesus as our great high priest, looking at the three ways in which he is like the Levitical high priests of the Old Testament.

A priest can only be appointed by God --- Jesus was appointed by God, not as an ordinary Levitical priest but a priest **forever** of the order of Melchizedek.

A priest must understand his people and be able to address their weaknesses properly--- Jesus understands better than anyone else ever could, through his **experience** of enduring the struggle and suffering of perfect obedience to God

A priest must make offerings for sins --- Jesus is not only the perfect **priest** but he is also himself the perfect **sacrifice** and therefore the **source** of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Notice that **Melchizedek** is mentioned twice in Chapter 5, once in verse 6 and again in Verse 10

Chapter 5, Verses 11 -14

The author has **more** to say about **Melchizedek** and much more to say about **Jesus** as our great high priest

but he does not expect it to be easy to explain these things to his audience, because they have become **dull** of hearing.

Thus begins a long digression, which runs from **verse 11 of Chapter 5** all the way until the **end of Chapter 6** where the preacher once again returns to the subject of Melchizedek and Jesus as our priest.

The last four verses of Chapter 5 make it plain that the people who first heard this sermon had a grasp of scripture which the preacher considered both **childish** and **dangerous**.

Chapter 6, Verses 1-8

Nevertheless, at the start of Chapter 6, he expresses his **intention** to lead them to **maturity**,

if God **permits** it.

This caveat ("if God permits") is a fairly **standard expression** among Christians and Jews.

But our preacher uses it **here** to reinforce his constant warning against "falling away" from Christ,

by suggesting that God might actually **prevent** the preacher from bringing **certain** people to maturity,

meaning some who who once apparently were **within** the church but now seem to have have **fallen** away

This does **not** mean that any child of God is ever lost. This is impossible, by definition.

But it does **warn** us, most forcefully, to **make certain** and **hold fast** to our confession of Christ until the end

Just as God finally swore **not** to let the entire Exodus generation of Israel enter Canaan, it is not difficult to imagine that he might **deny** repentance and spiritual maturity on this side of the grave to those who openly and knowingly and repeatedly reject Christ.

Just as we do **not** know the eternal fate of the entire Exodus generation of Israel, we can **not** know the eternal fate of all who seem to have knowingly rejected Christ and died (apparently) apostate.

Scripture gives us just enough examples to keep us from drawing simple conclusions about the fate of individuals (viz. **Moses** not entering the promised land, **Peter** rejecting Christ three times, **Judas** having first been a disciple of Christ, the story of **Simon** the Magician, etc.)

The whole point of all of this is to encourage us to **avoid** apostasy within the church, in ourselves and in our brothers and sisters, and **not** to see whether we can **identify** those who may be apostate.

Certainly the preacher does **not** wish to **discourage** any of God's children,

so he now moves to add **assurances**.

Chapter 6, Verses 9-12

Last week we read Verses 9-12 of Chapter 6. Verse 9 says....

(Verse 9)

Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things---things that belong to salvation.

Clearly the preacher understood that some of his remarks, especially the things he said in the first 8 verses of Chapter 6, were **disturbing**

And he also seems to understand that they were disturbing precisely because, in hearing them, some might come to **doubt** their own salvation.

It was not his intention to remove the assurance of salvation from any child of God

So he tells them that he feels **sure** they **are** saved.

(Verse 10)

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

His feeling is based **not** on their spiritual maturity but on some things he has observed them **doing**

and, also, on what he knows of God's **character**.

They have been **servicing** other Christians in a way that demonstrates their love for **Christ**.

Such service **can** only be works of God, the Holy Spirit, in them and **evidence** of salvation.

But this is a **general** statement directed toward **all** those whom he is addressing.

(Verses 11 and 12)

And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

I understand this to mean that the loving Christian service he has described was **not** exhibited **equally** in all of them, or perhaps **sufficiently** in most of them.

So he urges them **all** to be equally **earnest**, following in effect the example set by the best of them.

And while loving Christian service is part of the earnestness he is urging upon them, it is plainly **only** a part.

Their immature and regressive understanding of the things of God, is still a very **real cause for concern**,

otherwise our preacher would not have digressed at such length to comment on it, nor would he be working so hard in this sermon to **teach** them better.

Q Do you understand **why**? --- i.e. why it is so important for them to have a mature and constantly maturing understanding of the things of God?

Q. And why is it important for **us**?

A. For every coin in the kingdom of God, Satan has a **counterfeit**. (Calvin)

The world in which we live is still ruled by **Satan** and a variety of forces from without and within try our faith and threaten to overwhelm us, generally by **deception**.

It is neither **safe** nor **sufficient** nor finally even **possible** to be **just** a loving person, one who does not also strive to hear and understand and obey God's word and hold fast to their confession of Christ.

Since our faith in Christ is the **only** thing that can save us, **that** is what Satan will try to remove.

If he cannot remove it completely (through apostasy outright) he will try to **distort** it with false ideas.

So that finally, without even knowing it, we are worshiping **not** God and his Son Jesus Christ but an idol of some sort.

If we are finally saying the **word** Jesus without really understanding **who** He is, and if we are calling ourselves Christians while thinking and acting in ways that disgrace and contradict his teaching, then Satan has nearly won.

Those who **inherit** the **promises** are those who remain **faithful** and **patient** until the **end**.

This theme will be developed further in future chapters

So ends our **review**.

Now lets read on to the **end** of the **chapter**.

Chapter 6, Verses 13-20

Will someone please read Hebrews **Chapter 6, Verses 13-20** in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

Thank you. Will someone now please read those verses in English (ESV)

- 13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself,**
- 14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."**
- 15 And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.**
- 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.**
- 17 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,**
- 18 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.**

19 **We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,**

20 **where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.**

Thank you.

Structurally these 8 verses bring us back to the discussion of Christ as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, which had been **interrupted** at verse 10 of Chapter 5 for the long and difficult **digression** on apostasy, which we have been discussing.

Again, the point of the digression was **not** to accuse anyone of apostasy but, rather, to warn everyone to do the **opposite** of apostasy which is to move forward, **on** to a more mature faith in Christ, holding **fast** until the **end**, and thus inheriting the **promises**.

Furthermore, he knows that some of his audience have become "**dull of hearing**" so he has said some things to **shake** them up and **wake** them up and hopefully render their hearing a little more **acute** for what follows.

Because as they (and we) we move through this corrupt and fallen world, in which it can sometimes be almost impossible to press on and to hold fast, they (and we) are going to need **something** to cling to.

What we cling to is God's **words**, his **promises**

Which were spoken to Abraham, David, and others and fulfilled in Christ through whom **we** are heirs **also**.

This thought will be **elaborated** as we read on into Hebrews, but it is **introduced** here.

(Verses 13 and 14)

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."

Most of you will recall that, at a time when the whole world was, then as now, plunged into **sin** and **corruption**,

God called Abraham up out of Mesopotamia and **commanded** him to pick up and move his household from Ur to the land that God would **show** him,

the land which God later promised to **give** him, which is the **Promised Land** of **Canaan**.

The Bible records what God wants us to know about the **relationship** between God and Abraham,

Basically God **commanded** Abraham and **made promises** to him and Abraham **obeyed** and **believed** God.

Neither Abraham's' obedience nor his faith were **perfect**, as you will know from reading your Old Testament,

but they were, on the whole, **exemplary** by human standards.

Here our preacher has in mind one of the **most** remarkable examples of Abraham's obedience and faith,

a certain episode which is recorded in **Genesis, Chapter 22.**

This is the story of when Abraham was asked by God to **sacrifice** his son Isaac.

It is important to remember the **background** to this story.

We remember that God had promised all these things to Abraham and that he had promised that these things would be fulfilled through his son **Isaac**.

We remember that Abraham and his wife Sarah were very **old** when Isaac was born, far beyond the age when people can have children.

So Isaac was the **miraculous** bearer of all these **wonderful** promises.

Then, beyond all imagination, God asked Abraham to **sacrifice** him!

That was strange enough, but **Abraham** was prepared to do it!

And Abraham **would** have done it, too, if God had not stopped him.

It is just after this, after God **stopped** Abraham from killing Isaac, that we read the passage which our preacher has quoted in Hebrews.

Let's turn to **Genesis, Chapter 22**, and read **verses 15-19**

Can someone please read this in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)?

Thank you. No would someone please read it in English (ESV).

(Genesis 22: 15-19)

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven¹⁶ and said, "**By myself I have sworn**, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

Thank you. In what we have just read, in Genesis 22:16, you'll notice that God "**swore by Himself**"

This is the passage that our preacher had in mind (Hebrews 6:13)

(Verse 15)

And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.

He then notes that Abraham **did**, in fact, obtain the promise.

This is **true** on several levels.

He obtained the **son**, Isaac, that he had been promised in his old age against all odds.

Isaac was preserved and through him was born Jacob and the entire Nation of **Israel**.

Israel obtained, in the time of David and Solomon, the **land** that God had promised

From Israel came **Christ**, the Son of God, and Lord and Savior of the whole **world**.

And all who believe in Christ are **heirs** according to this same **promise**.

Which is finally a promise of **blessed eternal life with God!**

But I may be pushing a bit beyond what the preacher has in mind here. (Or am I?)

He at least means to say that God **keeps** his promises

And that he is gracious in helping **us** to believe them.

This latter point is very important.

(Verse 16)

For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

To make things certain, **people** swear by something greater than themselves.

God's people solemnly swear in the name of God,

calling **Him** as witness to the truth of what they have said.

To break such an oath is **unthinkable** among those who are truly Godly.

and the breaking of such an oath in **Israel** was subject to the most serious penalties.

For this reason the people in Israel played a lot of games with their oaths, attempting to swear by things **greater** than themselves but **other** than God, so as to be able to break a promise without breaking a commandment and therefore exposing themselves to a serious penalty under the law, conceivably death.

It is in response to **this** sort of nonsense I believe that Jesus responds in Matthew Chapter 5 when he says that we should, simply tell the truth and keep our promises, in which case no oaths would be needed to make people believe you.

i.e. let your yes be yes and your no be no (an expression found also in James)

We must all certainly do that!

But I do **not** think Jesus meant to forbid the proper use of solemn oaths sworn in the name of the Living God,

The passage we are studying here tends to support this view.

God himself swears by himself.

(Verse 17)

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,

When God makes a promise, he doesn't really **need** to go beyond that.

I mean, He is the One **by** whom all other people swear!

And he is **God**, after all.

Q. If people are unwilling or unable to believe him, then why should he **care**?

Q. This is a real question: why should **God** care if we fail to believe what he says?!

A. Because He is gracious and loving; the promise is for **our** sake, not for his; it benefits **us** to believe it. And God does so many surprising and amazing and wonderful things to help us to believe his promises.

In the story we just read, from Genesis 22, the story **itself** was intended to help us believe, and **within** the story, among other things, God **repeated** and **enlarged** the promises he had previously made to Abraham and, for our benefit, wanting us to be convinced that we could believe them, he sealed the promises with an **oath** to **Himself**!

It's like he says, "you can believe **me**; I **do** not lie, I **know** myself, I **can** do whatever I will, and I **will** never fail to deliver on these promises I have just made, so for your **own** sake, please proceed based on the belief that I will deliver!

The Bible screams out to us: **Please** be like Abraham! **Believe** God! **Hold** fast! Do **Not** fall away!

This is **not** some sort of propaganda calculated to benefit **God** in some way.

No! It we **we** who need to believe for **our** benefit.

Perhaps this --- in part --- is why the Son of **God** came down and allowed himself to be **nailed** to the cross,

so that we who are so dull of hearing and understanding through our sin, could **see** and understand as in a **picture**,

that God is **serious** about sin

but even **more** serious about saving us out of it!

to make sure we understand this picture, the Holy Spirit actually condescends to **dwell** in us, sinners though we are!

but I am getting ahead of the story...

(Verse 18)

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.

The two unchangeable things here are, I think, first, what God **says** will happen, and second, God's promise that it **will** indeed happen as he said.

Neither could be a lie, so our encouragement is **strong** that what God promises will happen.

This principle of promise and affirmation and reaffirmation is **everywhere** seen in the word of God.

And it is seen in the **Godhead** itself: the Father and the Son bearing witness to one another and the Spirit in us bearing witness to the Father through the Son.

We are totally corrupted by sin and reluctant to believe anyone even God, but God is so gracious as to accommodate Himself to our incredulity and to speak to us in ways that we **can** believe.

(Verses 19 and 20)

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.

What God has **promised** and repeatedly **affirmed** is the **anchor** of the soul.

It keeps us from **drifting** away and from being tossed about so badly that we are **destroyed** by life.

We are **justified** in hoping that we will not forever be separated from God

Because of what God had **promised** us in the Bible, through everyone from Adam to Christ.

Because Jesus has already **gone** there as a forerunner on our behalf.

Where he is the high priest forever after the order of **Melchizedek**

Now we are finally back to Melchizedek.

We will talk about him a lot next week, as we read on into Chapter 7

Questions?

Comments?