

WE HAVE HOPE THAT ENTERS THE INNER SANCTUARY

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 curtain....”

In today's passage the author digressed from his main topic of Jesus' high priesthood. Out of compassion, he shared his pastoral concern for his listeners, and gave them a strong warning and a great encouragement. He challenged the problem of immaturity that stemmed from spiritual laziness (5:11-14). Then he urged them to move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and grow to maturity (6:1-3). He also warned them of the danger of apostasy (6:4-8), and encouraged them to keep doing good (6:9-12). Finally, he taught the certainty of God's promise and to hold on to hope in this promise (6:13-20).

In this passage, we can learn the importance of spiritual growth and holding on to our hope in God. The author realized that the Hebrew believers had remained like spiritual infants and stopped growing. So he warned them that spiritual growth was not an option; they had to grow. If they did not grow, terrible consequences would follow. In order to help them to grow spiritually the author encouraged them to have a clear hope. Spiritual growth is closely related to hope. In fact, growth is related to hope in many aspects of life. For example, in order to get a Ph.D., or become a medical doctor, one must make many sacrifices and study hard and humbly listen to their adviser. In order to become a championship athlete, one must go through strict training. Without having a clear hope and vision it is impossible to do this. Likewise, in order to grow as spiritual giants we need a clear hope and vision for our lives. What hope do we have, and how can we hold on to it? Let's learn in this passage.

First, move forward to maturity (5:11-6:8). In this part the author points out their specific problem, and the danger of becoming apostate. He called them “infants” and addressed them like elementary school children. It was very humiliating for them. But actually, it came from a great shepherd's heart. Without a shepherd's heart no one does that. The author began in verse 11, **“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.”** Here “much to say” refers to

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his teaching that Jesus is our great high priest in the order of Melchizedek. He mentioned this in 5:10, and returns to it again in 6:20. Then, in 7:1-10:18, he describes more deeply Jesus' high priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. This is what he really wanted them to understand. But his audience was slow to learn. The words **“no longer try to understand”** (5:11) and **“lazy”** in 6:12 both come from the same Greek word *“nothros”* and mean lazy and sluggish in understanding spiritual truths. This implies that they had stopped struggling to meditate on the word of God, truly understand it, and apply it to their lives. Those who have spiritual desire for God's words grow in wisdom; they study well and get good grades. They can be free from all kinds of temptations and grow in every way. They find strength in God when they are weary. But those who are spiritually lazy miss all of these blessings. Instead of being concerned about spiritual truth they are concerned about making money, enjoying delicious food, and having fun. By this time the Hebrew believers should have grown mature enough to be teachers. But they needed someone to teach them the elementary truths of God's word all over again (12a). They needed milk, not solid food (12b). Why had they stopped growing? Did they want to enjoy being loved and served forever without taking responsibility? Usually when such people feel challenged, they complain, saying, “Don't push me.” However, when they face problems, they are easily swayed by deception and doubt. This is not just a personal problem; it makes them a bad influence in the body of Christ. When we lose spiritual desire to grow in Christ, we gradually wither and become useless.

Here we learn that we should grow to maturity. The author said, **“By this time you ought to be teachers.”** He assumes that all believers should be Bible teachers. This does not mean that they become professionally trained, but that through their own spiritual growth they share what they learned with young believers. Becoming a Bible teacher is not optional; it is natural and a sign of maturity. And as we teach others, we ourselves can grow, and we become happy and healthy and strong. When each person grows to maturity as a Bible teacher, the community becomes healthy and strong.

In verses 13-14 we find the characteristics of spiritual infants, and in contrast, of the mature. Spiritual infants are not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. For them, it is like solid food that is hard to digest. But the spiritually mature are not satisfied with milk and ice cream. They want meat. Meat is not easy to chew and digest; it requires work. But as we chew

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it again and again, we can appreciate the taste. And it has lots of protein that helps us grow strong and healthy. Spiritually speaking this “**meat**” is “**the teaching about righteousness**” and “**training oneself to distinguish good from evil.**” There is an emphasis on “**training oneself.**” This means to make a personal decision to grow from self-centered, to Christ-centered. This requires us to develop sharp spiritual discernment and to make wise decisions that promote our spiritual growth. This does not come naturally. Some people misunderstand that they will grow simply with the passing of time. So they brag about how long they have been Christians as if this is an indicator of how mature they are. Sadly, that is not true. One high school principal promoted a man with just ten years’ experience to an important position. Then a person with twenty years on the job complained. The principal replied, “You have one year of experience repeated twenty times. He has ten years of experience.” Spiritual growth is not a matter of time, but of attitude. So we need to train ourselves to be godly. Paul exhorted Timothy: “**...train yourself to be godly**” (1Ti 4:7b). In order to do that, we need to avoid evil—love of money, lustful desires, pride of life—and pursue godliness and fight the good fight (1Ti 4:11b-12a). Let’s train ourselves to be godly.

After addressing their immaturity, the author challenged them, “**...let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity...**” (1a). Here, the “**elementary teachings about Christ**” include: repentance from acts that lead to death, faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment (1b-2). Repentance means turning away from the acts that lead to death. Here “**acts that lead to death**” mean “**dead works.**” The ancient work, “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles” (Didache), described these as: murder, adultery, unlawful sexual acts, theft, idolatry, magic arts, sorcery, robbery, false testimony, hypocrisy, deceit, arrogance, and more. We must turn away from these acts that lead to death. Repentance and faith go together (Mk 1:15b; Ac 20:21). As repentance is turning away from sin, faith is turning to God, who forgives our sins and gives us new life. According to the NIV footnote, the words “**cleansing rites**” can also be translated “**baptisms.**” This meant teaching the difference between Jewish and Christian baptism. Jewish baptism was necessary only for Gentile proselytes. In contrast, Christian baptism was required of all believers according to Jesus’ command, and was done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). This was a distinct mark of being a

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Christian. **“Laying on of hands”** could refer to an initiatory rite associated with baptism, or to prayers for healing the sick, or to the bestowal of blessing during commissioning or ordaining (Mk 6:5; Ac 6:6; Mt 19:13-15; Ac 13:3). Believing the resurrection of the dead is an essential element of Christian faith. Resurrection of the dead is not only for believers, but everyone (Jn 5:28b-29). When Jesus comes again, all people of all nations will stand before him to be judged according to what they have done (Mt 25:31-46; 2Co 5:10). Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mk 16:15). This is eternal judgment. Repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection and eternal judgment are the six elementary teachings of Christian faith. They may seem like advanced teachings, but they are elementary. Our Christian lives should be firmly rooted in these elementary teachings and we should move beyond them to maturity. In verse 3, the author said, **“And God permitting we will do so.”** Although he taught with a great shepherd’s heart, he depended on God, who alone can open minds and hearts and bring spiritual maturity.

In 6:4-8, the author warns them of the danger of apostasy—publicly renouncing Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. These verses have been interpreted in substantially different ways down through history. Some understand them to teach that genuine Christians can lose their salvation. But it is not necessary to come to this conclusion. Other Bible passages clearly teach that those who are truly born again by the work of the Holy Spirit will never lose their salvation. Jesus said in John 10:28, **“I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.”** Nevertheless, apostasy has severe consequences which the author explained with an agricultural metaphor. Verses 7-8 do not refer to two different lands, but to one land in two conditions. This land is a metaphor of a person’s life. If one receives God’s blessing, grows and bears good fruit and becomes a blessing to others, he or she becomes like the fruitful land. However, if that person renounces Jesus and dishonors him publicly, he or she becomes the land that produces thorns and thistles and then is cursed and burned in the fire. This is why we should be very serious about growing spiritually, producing good fruit and being a blessing to others.

Second, take hold of the hope that anchors our souls (6:9-20). Thus far, the author has sternly warned about the danger of apostasy. Now, in 6:9-20, he changes to a tone of encouragement: **“Even though we speak like this,**

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dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation” (9). He was confident that God had been at work among them and the evidence was clear through the fruit of their lives. God is just. He never forgets the good works of his children which expressed their love for him and his people. Even the smallest act of giving a cup of cold water in Jesus’ name is remembered by God. When someone recognizes our good works, we are motivated to continue. However, when no one notices we may can why we need to do good works. But God recognizes us. Still, we easily grow weary in doing good. The author urges us to be diligent in doing good, to have the full assurance of hope until the end (11, ESV). Moreover, we have the examples of those who have already gone ahead of us. Through faith and patience they have inherited what has been promised (12).

The author mentioned Abraham as a model of faith in God whom all Christians should imitate. After making his promises to Abraham, God wanted to confirm it with an oath. 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”** (13-14). This is a quotation from Genesis 22:17 where God spoke to Abraham after he passed God’s test and was ready to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Obviously, God’s promise meant more than the birth of Isaac; he was just a sign of the promise. God’s promise is much bigger. It is the Messianic hope, which was to send the Messiah through Abraham’s offspring and to fulfill his salvation purpose. When God called Abraham, he gave him a great promise. Though this promise was vague, and too big to believe, Abraham held on to it. Whenever Abraham struggled, God encouraged him to hold on to his promise. God really wanted Abraham to understand the nature of his promise. So he challenged Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham obeyed. Finally, he came to understand that God’s promise was much more than Isaac; it was the fulfillment of God’s world salvation plan. After waiting patiently, Abraham received this promise itself as a reward. God’s promise never disappoints us. All we have to do is to be patient, holding on to God’s promise.

Based on God’s work with Abraham, the author explains the certainty of God’s promise in verses 16-18a. Usually, to settle an argument, people swear by someone greater than themselves. This oath is the final word that puts an end to all argument (16). God used this method to encourage Abraham. No one is greater than God, so he swore by himself. This oath

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made the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear (17). Here we can find two unchangeable things: God's promise and God's oath. God's promise alone is completely trustworthy. Yet he confirmed it with an oath in order to make it doubly sure. Both God's promise and God's oath are unchangeable because their source is God, who cannot lie. God did this, not only for Abraham's sake, but to encourage trust and patient endurance in all the heirs of his promise. Anyone who has faith in Christ and follows Abraham's footsteps of faith can claim this promise (Gal 3:7). Verse 18b describes these people as, **"...we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us...."** We realize that it is foolish to try to settle down in this world which is subject to the power of sin and death. So we flee to take hold of the hope that God set before us. As we take hold of this hope, we obtain an amazing privilege. Let's read verse 19: **"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain...."** Through this hope, we can enter the inner sanctuary. This corresponds to the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle, where the living God was present. Ordinary people did not dare even to think about entering the Most Holy Place for fear that they would die. Only the high priest could enter, and only once a year. Entering the inner sanctuary to meet the living God was a great blessing and privilege. Meeting the living and holy God is life-changing and history making. For example, when Zechariah met the living God in the temple, his lifelong prayer was heard and his wife, Elizabeth became pregnant and gave birth to John the Baptist. Janet Lynn, a Chicago native, was one of the finalists in women's figure skating in the 1972 Winter Olympics. She got such low scores in the first round of compulsory moves that it was impossible for her to win the gold medal. At first, she was very upset. But in that moment, she kept hope in God, went to the throne of God in prayer, and found that God had a greater purpose than winning the gold medal; it was to reveal his love through her. She wanted to do her best in the final round. But she fell attempting a jump. Strangely, instead of crying, she broke into a big smile which revealed God's love in her soul. Her smile was so endearing that she was awarded a bronze medal. St. Thomas Aquinas once had a vision of the living God. Then he said, referring to his work, *"Summa Theologica,"* which had taken 20 years to write and is still highly regarded as a classic work, "...after what I have experienced, that is just straw."¹ When we meet the living God our problems can be solved, whether they are big or small, and

¹ <http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/thomas-aquinas/>

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we can experience divine transformation. So we should hold on to this hope in any situation. Then, instead of being discouraged and defeated, we can enter the inner sanctuary and meet the living God.

How can we meet the living God? Verse 20 says, “...**where our forerunner Jesus has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.**” Jesus has already entered into God’s presence on our behalf. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (1:3). As our great high priest, he intercedes for us before God. By the mediation of our everlasting high priest Jesus, every believer can meet the living God. We have this hope as an anchor for our souls (19a). Whereas a ship’s anchor goes down into the ocean bed, the believer’s anchor goes up into the true, heavenly sanctuary. Because of our great high priest, our souls can be anchored in the living God, firm and secure. When we live in this world, we confront many things that threaten us, such as misunderstandings, persecution, broken relationships, financial hardship, serious diseases, unforeseen accidents, and the like. Yet, no matter what kind of trial or challenge may beset us, this hope is unshakable. Not only so, but as we meet the living God we can be purified inwardly and become more like Jesus. We can grow and experience joy, peace, and victory. This is a foretaste of the glory we will enjoy when Jesus comes again. Let’s hold on to this hope and grow as spiritual giants.