

Hebrews 6:13-20

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[0 : 00] You may be seated. Well, good morning. I know we're not used to beginning a service at 9 o'clock with the art fair, though, and the entire city of Chicago dancing around our streets in just an hour or so's time.

I'm glad that we were able to meet together on the front side of this beautiful day. I'm glad you made it. You'll have to take good notes because when you pass people going out the door and they're arriving for the service, you'll have to let them know what they missed.

One of the challenges of life is knowing how to shake people up from their slumber. Let me give you a couple of examples.

Pity the Chicago public school teacher over the next two weeks who has to look out over the glazed look of their students and figure out a way to motivate them toward more learning.

Yeah, students, you thought you had it bad. What about the employer? Walks through the office, sits him or herself down behind their own door and desk and wonders how in the world am I going to move these people.

[1 : 27] I can sense the aimlessness out there amidst all the employees. In just a couple of months, imagine the mother of grade school children after they've been on vacation for a couple of months.

And now they're doing nothing but lying around the house, getting in your way. How will that mother motivate them to some kind of activity? Shaking people from slumber is not always easy.

Having grown up in a locker room, I envision a coach who has to look his team in the eye after a lethargic and listless effort and get something more out of them.

How about a church? One of the things I'm enjoying about Hebrews is I'm watching the writer almost as a leader, utilizing the tools that are available to him to awaken a sluggish congregation. The congregation to which this writer writes, unlike our own, but many senses perhaps there's some overlap, is confronting a people whose spiritual life suddenly was listless.

[2 : 55] They were adrift, corporately adrift. They were sluggish. That's the word we saw twice in the preceding paragraph of our text for this week.

They had stopped growing. They just hadn't been growing spiritually for a while. Some of them had stopped going.

I think I'm just going to get on with something else. Some of them had said, you know, I need a year or two to step away from serving.

They had, in some sense, become wearied with this faith that had come to them in Jesus.

And the writer now is trying to quicken spiritual growth, re-engage those who had gone and not come back, those whose service had just worn thin.

[3 : 59] So what tools are available to the leader? I've loved watching this. If you noticed what happened last week, he took out the rod, in a sense, the tool of persuasion that is a word of warning.

He says, now, you've been on the couch a while, spiritually. And I want to warn you. And to warn them, he gives them an example of Israel in the wilderness.

Basically saying, you don't want to be like them. That ought to shake you from your slumber. But any good leader knows you can't simply cajole people all the time.

You can't just lay into them. I think it was Dwight Eisenhower who said something to the effect on leadership that when you hit people over the head all the time, it's not leadership, that's assault.

And so having warned them with the example of Israel's disobedience, in our text, he now loves on them. Still wanting them to be aroused spiritually, but rather than putting forward Israel and their 40 years in the wilderness and their disobedience, he puts forward Abraham by way of example in his

more than a quarter of a century of faith and patience.

[5 : 36] In other words, he says, Now having shown you Israel, let me put your eyes upon Abraham. Having laid into you what I don't want from you, let me put someone before you.

That's the way it ended last week. You can see it right there, verse 12. So that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit eternal, inherit the promises. He wants them to be imitators of someone. And then in our very first verse, he brings forward Abraham. Now the word imitator, just think of it this way, you can hear it. Mimetai, mime, mimic. I want you to be an imitator of Abraham. So in contrast to Israel, let me show you Abraham. And what is it that he wants you to do?

What can Abraham do for the spiritually malaised people? Well, he's an example through his faith and patience.

[6 : 42] So that's really the first header then. He and I would say to you, imitate the example of Abraham. There it is, 12 through 15.

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

Now, what promise was it that God made to Abraham? I want to mention three. Genesis 12, 1 to 3. He promised to Abraham a new lineage. I'm going to make you a great people.

And he promised him a land. And then he told him to go. And Abraham went. That's a promise. Lineage and land. By Genesis 15, though, Abraham had been wandering for a while, and there had been no movement on the promise.

No heir. No son. No lineage. No legacy. And he began to be discouraged, wondering, I believed your word. I set out under your word.

[7 : 53] But you have not delivered on a cord of your word. And God says, no, no, no. Go out under the skies. And God promises again. And Abraham says, okay, on I go.

Genesis 12, Genesis 15. And then there's that one that's actually the quotation here. The appeal in verse 14 comes from Genesis 22, when Abraham had actually begun to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, and God had spared his own son.

On three different occasions, a promise, a promise, the reiteration of this promise. So let's look at Abraham, he says.

Israel had the law. They had Moses as their spokesperson. And they were a failed experiment. Don't go that way. Abraham had a word from God that was strictly on the basis of God's love. It wasn't a promise that they were to keep. It was a promise that he would keep. And he says, imitate his life. They walked 40 years disbelieving. He walked over a quarter of a century believing.

[9 : 08] What about us? Abraham is a model for you to look at at this very time in your life. Abraham is one that you are to consider.

Abraham is the one that will get you off the couch. Abraham is the one that can stimulate your spiritual growth. Let me put it this way. We all need mentors. We all need models.

I'm giving you one today. It's Abraham. Well, what can you emulate particularly about his faith and patience?

Three things. Number one, when the promise came, God told him to go, and he went. For some of you, the time in life comes to go.

Faith requires going. I say this word to our congregation. The class of 2016, there are those of you who have called upon it this season in life to go.

[10 : 08] And to not go would be a disbelieving act that God has intentioned for the future. So we have the Jacksons going to Kansas City, and the Leinards going to Virginia.

We have the Covingtons going to where they're going. We have Joel Veldkamp going where he's going. We have Helen going where she's going. We have Drew and Mark going where they're going. We have Chester going where he's going.

And we have a number of people, more than I probably even could name, getting ready to go. I guess I would say that in that sense, you hopefully are exemplifying the faith of Abraham.

There's a time to go. Now, interestingly, there's a number of people here, maybe even some here for the first time today. You're here as a result of going. And you don't know what's in front of you. In other words, we have people leaving in faith by going. We have people arriving in faith because they've gone. When I was 36, I went to a men's Bible study, and the teacher was speaking on

Genesis 12 and Abraham going.

[11:18] It came at a precise moment when God was asking me to leave a church I'd been at for about 10 years and to somehow ask him to establish a core of people, the names of which I did not know who they would be, and go to Chicago and start a church.

That's 19 years on now. And I remember listening to that Bible study teacher on a Saturday morning at 730, realizing that the act of faith for me at that moment in life required going.

That's how you can emulate the faith of Abraham. Go. Go in faith.

But not only that, there's an element of faith that's not simply going, thank God. I don't want everyone to leave. There's an element where you don't want to get out in front of God either, do you?

In other words, there's an element of faith that isn't actively going. It's actually just patiently waiting.

That's Genesis 15. Abraham had gone, but nothing had gotten done.

[12:24] And so, and you notice, even in his own life, he didn't perfectly emulate faith in God.

There were moments where he got out in front of himself. He tried to get it on, in a sense, with accomplishing God's promises on behalf of himself.

But in general, he's a faithful one to emulate in that he understood you can't get out in front of God. Now, we've got people in this congregation that have been famous for teaching me this over the years.

Dave, just wait on the Lord. Wait on the Lord, because that's what faith is. A lot of times it's waiting. When we started this church 19 years ago, people actually asked me, well, when are you going to evaluate whether it was successful?

When will you know whether you really heard from God? And I always had one answer, and it came back to that Saturday morning Bible study. I'm not doing any evaluation for at least 25 years.

Because I knew Abraham had to wait 25 years to get that son. I figured I could work hard 25 years to see if we could get a church. Now, we're not used to that.

[13:33] We're used to quarterly reviews, weekly reports. But there's an element in faith where you just have to have the long view. Some of you today need the faith that doesn't get out in front.

That going would be inappropriate. Rather, patiently persevering, walking it out, waiting it out, wrestling with God over it, is what you need to be doing in faith.

But there's a third aspect that you can emulate the faith of Abraham. Not merely going, not merely refraining from getting out in front, but by giving. Think of the actual example that is quoted in our text.

It comes from a moment when having obtained the promise of a son, Abraham awoke on the morning and went to offer that son and give that son back to God.

Faith was emulated by putting everything at risk. Didn't make sense. Other than that he believed God could raise him from the dead because he knew that this was the one to get it done through.

[14:47] Some of you today need to arouse yourself from spiritual slumber by giving. I'm not talking money today. Abraham gave his child to God.

God gave his child back to Abraham. Abraham gave willingly, immediately.

When he heard the word of God, he immediately set out. He willingly, joyfully received God's word and acted on it. That's what many need to do today to emulate the faith of Abraham.

Abraham. Simply obey what you know to be true and what he's calling you to, regardless of the cost. I was sitting on the front porch yesterday with a relative of mine, young, married mother, getting ready to set out, also to Kansas City.

I began to inquire as to, well, how do you know you're to go? And what's calling you to go? And what emerged in the story was the repeated weight of the Lord saying, you need to give up this thing that's just started and has emerged and is growing.

[16:03] And if you hold on to that or you want to buy into that or you want to put down roots because of that, it's all wrong. No, you're nomadic. We need people who give.

Give of yourself in ways that you feel God wants you to give. That quickens people off the couch. Now, he is a wonderful coach then, isn't he?

He doesn't just hit you over the head. Don't be like Israel. No, he said, no, no, let me put your eyes on somebody worthy of emulating.

Be like Abraham. Go like Abraham. Don't get out in front like Abraham. Give like Abraham. And you will begin to find your own soul nourished.

And then he gives two wonderful words and we'll close with these today. Not just an example of Abraham to follow, but encouragement from God to continue.

[17:09] Verse 16 to 18. For people swear by something greater than themselves and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. 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 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.

He wants to encourage you to emulate the example of Abraham and to encourage you. He doesn't merely show you the kind of faith Abraham has. He shows you God's own fidelity to the promises that he made.

You're encouraged to emulate based on the fidelity of God himself and his word. That's why he introduces this idea of a promise of God joined with an oath.

God made a promise in Genesis 12. I'm going to do this for you. But in Genesis 22, if we had time to look at it, and you can do it this afternoon, because you've got plenty of time today.

This is an early service. God did more than just reiterate the promise. In Genesis 22, God swore. He said, I will swear by my own name.

[18:30] Now, that's an oath. Now, you remember when you were a kid? If I give you this ball, do you promise to give it back to me in five minutes?

I promise. You promise to give me this ball in five minutes? Yes, I do. I promise. Do you swear on your heart? Well, what's the kid looking for? I heard your promise, but I'd like an oath.

Go into a marriage ceremony this summer. Bride and groom will come down the front. They'll make a promise. They'll declare, do you promise to do this?

Are you going to promise to do that? Is this the reason you've come today? Is this why you walked down the aisle? And they say, I will. A little later in the service, they're going to come up a little closer. They're going to get on the steps. They're going to arrive.

And at that point, they're going to make a vow. They're going to seal the promise with an oath. Court of law. You actually put your hand on a Bible.

[19:25] You're actually swearing by something greater. It's a solemn oath. So there's a distinction between a promise and an oath in this sense. An oath just weights the promise with unalterable significance and gravity.

In one sense, it's not needed. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. A promise should be a promise. I mean, your word should be your word. But an oath is not to be denigrated.

It just adds solemnity to it. And so if you want to be encouraged at this point in your spiritual life, if you're spiritually lethargic and you're wondering, how do I really keep going?

I mean, the pastor's now talking to me about living this way according to a quarter of a century or more. What is going to keep you going? He says, well, let me encourage you.

God is faithful to his promise. You're to emulate the example of Abraham in his faith and patience. You do so because you know that God is faithful to his promise.

[20:30] This is why, again, I believe there's something here about God's word. He's putting forward God's word as a stimulant to growth.

Let me put it this way. It doesn't surprise me that when we're spiritually lethargic, it usually goes hand in hand with not exposing ourselves to the word of God very often.

It's not because the word of God is some magic box. But when I read the word of God, I'm continually exposed to a God that keeps his word. In other words, I am encouraged.

That's what the Psalms do. If you're really spiritually lethargic this morning, start reading your Bible regularly and maybe even read the Psalms because David, read Psalm 119. David begins to meditate on God's word where he begins to see, when I read God's word, I begin to be encountering a God who actually keeps his promises.

I begin to actually hear about a creator that's very different than the creation. So if you're sluggish, the word of God is an encouragement.

[21:38] But you cannot be profoundly influenced by that which you do not know. As Pastor Hughes drilled into me those many years ago.

If you want to be influenced towards spiritual growth this summer, you want to make some progress rather than plot along where you've been the last 18 months, be encouraged by stepping out in faith.

And then also take encouragement from the fact that you have a God that accomplishes all that he says he is going to do. But it isn't just the word of God.

Notice how the author moves from this word of God written down as an encouragement to the word of God that came down as a further anchor for your hope.

Notice how he finishes 19 and 20. He says, He says, I want you to follow the example of Abraham's faith.

[22 : 57] I want you to be encouraged in the fidelity of God's own word. And I want you to receive hope from Jesus, who is a fixed anchor for your soul. And I love the fact that he actually uses the word here, Jesus.

It's not all high flying. Not a lot of bells and whistles here. Not Christ our Lord. Not the one who, you know, in the fullness of whom deity, no.

Just Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus is your hope. Jesus is the one.

Now look at the metaphors that are there. They're really interesting and they're complicated. One is the metaphor of an anchor. Now you and I think of an anchor on the front of a ship that goes down into the water, finds fixed ground, and holds something fast amidst turbulent times.

But the direction of this anchor metaphor is totally different. This is an anchor that comes to your life in the midst of spiritual sluggishness and rises up into the heavens, having gone right through the curtain.

[24 : 03] You've got an anchor hooked on to the Holy of Holies, going nowhere in the throne room of God. So our eyes are down here, and we're sluggish, and he wants you to know, now you've got to envision a rope, you've got to anchor Jesus, who's already there.

You've got to anchor, just as Abraham had an heir, Jesus is the heir who's already arrived. And you, then it says, hold fast.

You can almost just see. You pull your way home because of the hope you have in Christ. What a wonderful metaphor, this anchor that is high up in the heavens.

It's a person who's entered into the inner place behind the curtain. There's the whole temple imagery is there. You've got someone who got somewhere that nobody else can get to.

So he says, boy, if that doesn't get you off the couch, I don't know what will. Jesus. And then this third metaphor, he's a forerunner. He's this fixed anchor having entered the throne room.

[25 : 22] He is the forerunner on our behalf. It isn't just that you hold on to him and pull your way home, whether it's 25 years or 50 years.

He actually is the guy who ran out in front of you and you follow. Now, I don't know if you've ever run a race. I hate running races. I ran one, a 10K. I'll never do it again. I was young and thought I was in good shape.

10K is, I guess, over six miles. Six miles! That's a long way for me. 94 feet, there's a basket. Then you turn around and run 94 feet to another basket.

That's as long as I'd ever run. I remember at about the four and a half mile mark running with a friend of mine. She was like a doe, you know? Just talking and prancing around.

Talking, first of all, that was a problem. Talking. I didn't want to talk. I was trying to breathe. Then I saw these people passing me up. I played college basketball and I thought to myself, how in the world is that person in front of me?

[26 : 27] This does not make sense. But those are the people I followed home. You've got a forerunner. Get off the slew of your despondency.

Get in the race by walking in the way of Christ. And if you want another example, Abraham is as good as any.

So there you have it. Imitate the example of Abraham. Be encouraged in God who's faithful to his word. But beyond that, gain hope from the person, the word come down, who's run out in front of you to bring you home.

I don't know what you're all wrestling with this week. There's got to be something there for you. It's fun, isn't it, to read a letter written by an author who knows how to use all the available tools to keep us on the way.

Thank God he doesn't just hit us over the head with warnings. Occasionally you can come to church and get loved on. Well then, let's love him well in return.

[28 : 01] Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this beautiful day. It is beautiful. And I want to thank you for Jesus. I want to thank you for the one who already arrived.

And if I hold fast, can pull me home. I want to thank you for the one that went out in front. I want to thank you for this strange character of Abraham who was so nomadic, never really had a home, but went everywhere in faith.

So today may some, as a result of this message, be prepared to go. May others be checked, lest they get out in front. May all of us know what it is to give that which is most costly in an effort to ensure that we arrive safely home.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen.