



HOPE AND AN ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL.

Hebrews 6:1-20

We are usually told to firstly encourage a person before raising areas needing improvement. But this was not the case for the writer of Hebrews. He does it the other way round. If we look back in Chapter 5 the readers were accused of being dull of hearing, that they should be teachers now; babies stuck on milk; were like a field that drinks rain for months and never brings forth fruit and immature in their understanding.

He suggests they are spiritual children who are refusing to develop and grow beyond the basics. He tells them to depend on God to move beyond these foundational teachings. He states that they have “**fallen away**”.

The Greek word used here is *parapipto* meaning “fallen away.” The Hebrew word *ma'al* means “to act unfaithfully.” They were in danger of falling into a permanent state of immaturity.

Does this mean if we don't mature we stop being God's child? Of course not. A believer can be restored again to repentance. The unbelieving Israelites did not lose their covenant relationship with God because they fell away from Him in the wilderness. And God did not refuse to provide for them for the 40 years they wandered. God took an oath in His own name and Abraham trusted and He received what God had promised. Abraham waited 25 years before Isaac was born and he did not fall away from God. Could you wait that long for an answer to a need you have?

How long do you wait before you start wondering and asking God – why is this happening and how long Lord? Now in Covid times many are asking the same questions.

The readers were in danger of falling away from God, perhaps because they felt they had already waited long enough and God just wasn't answering. Sadly, there seems to be an increase in society of victims and whiners and pouters. That is, if someone says something negative about us—no matter how constructive they may try to be—we either slump into a fit of self-justifying woundedness, become self-defensive and self-pitying or we file a harassment suit. Many of us are thin-skinned, easily offended and easily provoked.

The writer is calling his readers to grow up and take the risks of love. He is calling them to be less easily offended and hurt. We have a massive foundation for our salvation in the death of the Son of God and we have an advocate in heaven more powerful and more compelling than any accuser on earth. We should be the freest of all people to listen to criticism and take it into account and not be wounded or self-pitying or resentful. We need to learn how to love and be loved.

As followers of Jesus we have reason to react and act differently. Why? Because God has chosen us. We are loved by God. We are forgiven by God. We are accepted by God.

We are indwelt by God.

We are guided by God.

We are protected by God.

We are strengthened by God. And God is more important than anyone else in the universe.

And if we hold onto that truth then when we feel challenged by tough love for our good, we are able to accept it in the love that it is given. And if we can do that with those who love us then this will help us relate to people we may call enemies.

Now notice a change in verse 9 – the writer finishes his constructive criticism and turns to encouragement. He is hopeful and confident that his readers will heed his warning and admit their fragility and deceitfulness of sin and turn to fight the fight of faith every day.

Why this confidence? Verse 10 speaks of God's justice not His mercy. We usually think of the justice of God bringing us into *judgment* because our sins deserve it, and the *mercy* of God rescuing us from judgment because Christ died in our place. And both are true.

But here the justice of God is the reason he is confident they will be saved and not fall away. God's justice does not let Him forget their work nor the love shown to Him, so He is saying that it's God's memory of their past and ongoing ministry and their love to His name that gives the writer confidence that they will not fall away.

There is something about God's justice or righteousness that causes this writer to be confident that the readers will persevere in faith and patience and not fall away. "We are convinced of better things concerning you . . . because God is not unjust . . ."

Now here's the crucial issue for all of us who love the mercy of God and know that we are sinners and do not deserve to be saved in the first place. We do not become Christians by merit and we do not stay

Christians by merit, however God sees all and remembers the work we do in our lives for Him. And when He witnesses this, He strengthens us more and more to be able to continue faithfully working for Him.

What is unmistakable here is the last phrase, which is the goal of our earnestness: "through faith and patience we inherit the promises."

Through faith! Through trust. Through hope.

The great battle of the Christian life is not to produce merit so that the justice of God will repay with salvation. The great battle of the Christian life is to keep *trusting* God patiently until He freely gives the final inheritance.

The writer is not saying: work hard to earn the just wages of eternal life. He is saying be diligent to put your hope in God alone and not on the things of the world; cherish God and not this age; treasure God and not this world; trust God and not your own abilities, not even your abilities to do good things. This is the assurance of hope: hope in God, who by a single offering has perfected us for all time.

God is calling us, through the writer of Hebrews, to bank our assurance of hope on the mercy and justice of God. The mercy of God to reach out to the utterly unworthy and give us faith and forgiveness, and the justice of God to uphold the honour of His name, magnified in the faith of His people.

Now you may say, well that's all well and good, but sometimes I feel like I am walking through something so difficult and terrifying and I cry out to Jesus and say – where are you?

Each of us is coping in our own way to this ongoing pandemic and real changes to our lives. And sometimes, when life gets overwhelming, hard or confusing, it can feel like our Messiah has gone missing.

In the New Testament, right after Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the 5000, He went off to pray alone. His disciples were in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, straining at the oars because of the wind.

In reality, life was beating against them. They were completely helpless and swallowed up by fear. Sometimes it's hard not to be completely consumed by fear in the midst of circumstances we didn't see coming – especially when we feel helpless and we can't seem to see a good outcome in sight.

But, even when our storms cause us to lose sight of hope, Jesus never loses sight of us. Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water. They had forgotten the recent miracle of the loaves and fishes. Jesus reassures them – don't be afraid – I am with you. Jesus does not leave us alone amidst our fears, so today welcome Jesus into your situation and let Him bring you peace.

When you ask – Lord where are you? Be assured that perfect love casts out all fear and Jesus is perfect love. Come before Him with all your cares and concerns for He will reassure and comfort you. Invite the Holy Spirit to lighten your fears and to replace them with peace.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I must admit I often ask the question – where are you? I forget Your past faithfulness and project fear onto my present circumstances. Lift the load of anxiety and worry I often feel and meet me in my storm. I know You will deliver me as You are my deliverer.