

**“Promise - God’s Power to Guarantee Your Future.”**  
**Hebrews 6:13-19**  
**April 22, 2001**  
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Promises are powerful!

The right promise, by the right person, can guarantee the future and even change the present.

When I was about 10 years of age I was left home alone while my parents and siblings visited my grandparents about six miles away in the town closest to our farm home.

Like the huge wind and thunderstorms that strike eastern Colorado on occasion, so that night a storm hit our area of Wisconsin.

It was one of those storms when the lightening and thunder nearly coincide - you see the flash and a bone-jarring clap strikes immediately.

You are certain the lightening has struck the house even as the house shakes.

I had seen such storms before and just that summer a tornado had smashed two of the smaller buildings near our house and strewn the boards and contents over our yard and nearby fields.

That night as the storm raged, I was in a second-floor bedroom.

I was in bed and I had the covers pulled over my head as I alternated between singing and crying.

I would sing loudly attempting to drown out the sound of the storm.

But every so often the sound would penetrate and I would cry in fear.

Then I would get hold of myself and begin again to sing or whistle loudly, pretending all was well.

I tell you that story as a parable of life.

There are times in our lives when the future seems very uncertain.

Two weeks ago I noted there are two anxieties that are common to all people - anxiety over the past and anxiety about the future.

I spoke to the first of those - our anxiety about the past - then.

Many of us would do almost anything to be able to change some of our past.

But only one thing can alter our history and that is forgiveness.

God by his grace changes our past when he forgives and forgets - when he treats us as if it never happened.

We likewise alter someone else's past when we do the same for them.

Forgiveness is the power to change the past.

Today I want us to think about the other anxiety that is common to all people - anxiety about the future.

Uncertainty sometimes niggles away in the backs of everyone's mind.

Young people are often consumed with anxiety about the future - when their parents divorce, when moving to a new city or school, when they approach graduation from high school or college.

Some older people are overcome with it as health deteriorates, as family members die, as expenses increase but income doesn't.

And the rest of us try hard to avoid anxiety and work hard to insure against it.

But anxiety is pervasive and too often severe.

Dr. Arman Nicholi Jr (professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School) notes the great increase in depression in America.

There are currently eleven million people diagnosed as clinically depressed and over 250,000 people each year attempt to take their lives.

He asks, "How do we explain the explosive increase in depression and hopelessness within our society as we enter the twenty-first century A.D.?"

He went on to write, "Historians and social scientists tell us that we have fewer spiritual resources to draw from than at any time in Western cultural history. Many young people today feel that their cultures fail to provide answers to questions of purpose and meaning and destiny. We fail, they feel, to provide some reason for hope. The consequence is that we are now in a cultural crisis and living in what is being called "The Age of Despair." We hear of our "spiritual vacuum" and our "crisis of meaning". (In Finding God at Harvard: Spiritual Journeys of Thinking Christians, Zondervan 1996 p112-113)

All of us long for a sense of security in our lives - some guarantee about the future.

We take out insurance to insure.

We open mutual funds and bank accounts to assure sufficient funds for the future, we seek a particular education to insure our future, and we seek out specific relationships in an attempt to guarantee against loneliness.

But in the back of our mind and sometimes in the forefront we realize that all our guarantees could evaporate in a minute.

We witness an auto accident, a Columbine, a friend with cancer, we see others being laid off or a business that fails and we wonder how secure the future really is.

Walt Whitman captures something of our longing for security.

"A noiseless patient spider  
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,  
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surround,  
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,  
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my soul where you stand,  
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,

Ceaselessly musing, venturing throwing,  
    Seeking the spheres to connect them,  
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,  
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

We are forever attempting to anchor our lives, to attach ourselves to something that is more secure, to bring some certainty into an uncertain future.

    Is there anything that can do that?  
        Is there anything that can guarantee the future?  
            The answer is yes and they are called promises.

Promises are powerful!  
    The right promise, by the right person, can guarantee the future and even change the present.

That night, as the wind howled around the house of this, then 10 year-old boy, I heard the phone ring.  
    I don't remember if it rang during a fit of crying or a fantasy of singing but I heard it and, as frightened as I was to venture from the bed, I answered it.

The first six words I heard changed my night.  
    They were a promise and they guaranteed my future.  
        It was my father on the phone and he said, "Jerry, I'm coming to get you."

The wind still blew, the thunder cracked, and it seemed like an eternity but the outcome in my mind was never in doubt - my father had promised he was coming.  
    That promise guaranteed my future and altered my present.  
        Promises are powerful.

Only one thing affirms that humanity will not just simply expire.  
    Only one thing assures us that the entire universe will not just simply fly apart.  
        Only one thing guarantees that you and I will not soon just simply cease to exist.  
            That one thing is a promise!

Only one thing assures that human history is moving to a predictable end.

Only one thing guarantees that you and I will live forever.

A promise!

God's promise!!

Listen to Hebrews 6:13-19

"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.

Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 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 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 offered to us **may be greatly encouraged**.

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf."

There are two key words here: God's Promise!

Forgiveness is God's power to change the past.

Promise is God's power to guarantee the future.

Let me show you that from this text in Hebrews 6.

The author is clearly using the example of God's promise to Abraham from Genesis 22 to illustrate the quality of God's promises to us.

In that account, Abraham is commanded by God to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

When Abraham was willing to obey this nigh impossible, this seemingly contradictory, command of God we are told that God made a promise to Abraham.

In the words of the author of Hebrews that promise was: "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants."

But the author wants us to see something unusual about the way God makes this promise to Abraham:

“When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself...”

In verse 16 we are told the significance of this:

When men or women want someone to believe them, they claim some more permanent person or object as a witness to their promise:

We will "swear on a stack of Bibles" that we will do such and such.

Or we will say, "so help me God".

In either case we are appealing to something or someone with more credibility than we have, to back us up.

Well according to V17 when God wanted to express his promise to Abraham AND TO US in such a way as to give us absolute confidence that it would happen - since there was no one or nothing greater than himself on whom or which he could call, God took an oath on himself.

God in essence said, "I God, so help me God" will do as I promised.

So in two ways God guarantees that what he says will happen:

One, he God, promises it AND

Two, he God, swears to it.

These two unchangeable things show how impossible it is for God to lie.

Or as Moses wrote it in Numbers 23:19

“God is not a man, that he should lie,  
nor a son of man, that he should change his mind.

Does he speak and then not act?

Does he promise and not fulfill?”

Back to Abraham’s experience, the author of Hebrews writes what every one of his readers would have known:

“after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.”

God promised and it absolutely happened!

With that illustration cited the author then **makes his point**:  
“God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear... so that... we... may be greatly encouraged.”

God’s purpose in promising and swearing to it was not for Abraham alone but **also for us**.

He wanted to make clear the **unchanging nature** of his purpose so that we would not be overcome with anxiety about the future.

Our future is guaranteed by nothing less than God’s promise and he has sworn himself to fulfilling it.

And what has he promised as it relates to your future?  
Listen to his own words carefully:

What about your life?

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Thinking he would only be with us a few weeks, Barbara and I made the decision early in our son’s life that we would rock him or lie with him until he drifted off to sleep each night.

It’s a great time as we talk, pray and sing together.

Many nights after he falls asleep, I stroke his head and just stare intently at him and think it is impossible to love someone more than we love him.

And often it occurs to me in that moment to acknowledge to God, “This is how you feel about me isn’t it?”

And that is how he feels about you!

What about God’s own presence in your life now?

Hebrews 13:5 God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

That is God’s promise to Carol Kimbriel as she faces death.

What about the seemingly impossible situations you face?

I Corinthians 10:13 “No testing has gripped you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tested beyond what you can bear. But when you are tested, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

That’s God’s promise to Sharon and John Boyer as Sharon continues to battle cancer.

What about death itself?

John 11:25 “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”

That’s God’s promise to every widow and widower in this church.

What about a future after death?

John 14:3 “I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Do you realize what we have in these promises?

No, the promises don’t directly address every detail of life.

We’d like to know which college, which job, will we have always have sufficient income, will our health hold, will our relationships thrive.

But God gives us promises that are far more foundational, significant and eternal.

He promises his loving presence and his powerful superintendence in all of life and beyond life to eternity itself.

By his promise God has already guaranteed our future.

It is impossible for God to lie.

We can lay hold of his promises.

They are ours to claim.

We can come into face of God and say, “You promised!”

When I’m with my son and I suggest we not do what I had said we would do, he says, “But Papa, **you said!**”

And with those words he grabs hold of my integrity - “You said!”

Yes, I did say. Can I go back on my word? Can I do less than I promised?

Would I not cease to be something of what “Papa”, “father” means?

God would cease to be God if he failed in his promises.

And if we cease to believe his promises we cease to believe in God.

Rather, the author says, “we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”

This hope we have is the certain promise of God.

Playwright Jean Kerr wrote, “Hope is the feeling you have that the feeling you have isn’t permanent.” (Finishing Touches, act III)

But in the Scripture hope is not that hopefulness (that “I hope so” of so many) but hope is the absolute certainty of what will come - what God has guaranteed will happen.

These promises of God are an anchor for the soul.

That’s a brilliant phrase!

An anchor bites into the solid-ness of the ocean floor and holds a boat securely in place.

The promises of God tie us directly to the person of God.

Our lives are secured by the certainty of God’s promises.

We are moored to an immovable object.

In keeping with the maritime motif I want to show you a familiar picture. It’s the picture of a lighthouse in a violent storm.

The other elders of our church gave this to me in a particularly difficult time in my family’s life.

The most obvious and powerful point is the immovable rock to which the lighthouse is anchored.

The promise of God anchors us to the rock.

“Let the winds blow, and billows roll,

Hope is the anchor of my soul.

But can I by so slight a tie,  
An unseen hope, on God rely?

Steadfast and sure, it cannot fail,  
It enters deep within the veil,

It fastens on a land unknown,  
And moors me to my father's throne."

God has promised and he has sworn to it.  
All that makes God "God" stands behind his promise.  
He will not, he cannot fail you.

Promise is God's power to guarantee the future