Sermon Summary 23 July 2023

An Anchor for the Soul: by Graham Mol

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife
When the strong tides lift and the cables strain
Will your anchor drift or firm remain

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love

This week I was drawn to the phrase "an anchor for the soul". This phrase comes from the book of Hebrews as the author speaks about the promise, the oath, of God and the hope that is found in that promise. This hope is an "anchor for the soul".

Before we look at the passage in Hebrews let us take a moment to understand what an anchor is and what it does. The word anchor actually comes from the ancient Greek *agkyra* (ang-koo-rah). Here we can see a picture of what the anchors at that time looked like. Notice the "flukes" that would hook into the sea bed to hold the ship secure preventing it from drifting due to the wind or current.

An anchor could be temporary or permanent. A permanent one was used as a mooring, the anchor was placed and locked in keeping the ship rooted to where it is supposed to be.

An anchor for the soul is one that keeps us rooted where we're supposed to be. It keeps us from drifting, from being pulled away. It keeps us steady in the storms of life. We can understand it's importance but let's get a fuller picture from Hebrews:

> **Hebrews 6:13-20 CSB**
> For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself: I will indeed bless you, and I will greatly multiply you. And so, after waiting patiently, Abraham obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and for them a confirming oath ends every dispute. Because God wanted to show his unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of the promise, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. Jesus has entered there on our behalf as a forerunner, because he has become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The promise stems right back to Abraham, God's promise to make him a father of nations, to bless him and – the big one – that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him. We know that this promise was fulfilled in its entirety by Jesus.

God made an oath, He made a covenant with Abraham. The custom was to swear by something greater than you but there is nothing greater than God Himself – His word is over all. He gives an unchangeable oath revealing His unchangeable purpose. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. His word is true, through two unchangeable things – His purpose and promise – what He swore to do, He did, and that same promise is available to us today. We are heirs of that promise. We are encouraged to seize the hope set before us.

This anchor for our souls – it is rooted in the inner sanctuary – behind the curtain. The meaning of this comes from the imagery of the temple. The author of Hebrews says that the Tabernacle and later the Temple are shadows or copies of the reality in Heaven. The area behind the curtain is the most holy place, the Holy of Holies. The place of God's presence. When Jesus died on the cross the curtain in the temple in Jerusalem, the divider between the people and the Holy of Holies, was torn in two opening the way for us sinners to enter into the presence of a Holy God. It is through Jesus the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice.

Jesus became the high priest forever, the intermediary between God and man. Through Him we are reconciled. We are made right with God.

Jesus is our anchor, rooting our identity in belonging to God. We have become children of God, heirs of the promise. No matter what storms may come. No matter the stresses and strains of the billowing waves. No matter the pull of current of the world, the ideologies and temptations. We are not moved from His presence for Christ is our anchor.

What an encouraging truth! Yet it is one that the author of Hebrews delivers after two particular warnings. There are two dangers that he highlights. The first, of not understanding and appreciating the truth of the promise we have in Christ the anchor for our soul. The second, and more serious, choosing a different anchor, one that is other than Christ.

The author of Hebrews is in the middle of discussing the role of Jesus as our high priest and then has an aside moment, a vent of frustration possibly:

> **Hebrews 5:11-14**
> We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become too lazy to understand. Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature – for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil.

You can sense the exasperation, the "Come on guys, you should know this! You shouldn't have to learn it all again. Where's the growth in your spiritual lives? You've become lazy, not progressing, not growing.

As I think about what the author is saying here I get the feeling that it comes down to the fact of application of the Gospel truths in their lives. The mature have chewed on the tensions between justice and grace. They have wrestled with the war between Spirit and flesh. They have churned the over the reality of a holy and loving God and the presence of evil in this fallen world. They have digested and internalised the Word of God and are allowing it to direct and shape their lives. The have progressed from the elementary teachings about Christ and have become doers of the word. Their lives are being transformed all the more to resemble Jesus. They are maturing in their spiritual lives.

We are therefore warned not to stagnate in the shallow end. We are meant to head into the deep. Through practice our senses become trained to distinguish between good and evil, we learn how to stay anchored in Jesus, not tossed around by worldly problems and philosophies. In the information saturated world today, the practice of discernment has become more vital than ever. We need to mature in our ability to discern and follow the truth amidst all the temptation and lies.

The greater warning is against falling away:

> **Hebrews 6:4-8**
> For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, who tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age, and who have fallen away. This is because, to their own harm, they are recrucifying

> the Son of God and holding him up to contempt. For the ground that drinks the rain that often falls on it and that produces vegetation useful to those for whom it is cultivated receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and about to be cursed, and at the end will be burned.

There are those who may look like they are anchored in Christ but in reality they have chosen something else. These are people who have experienced, had a taste of, God's goodness. They have heard the Gospel truth, they have witnessed the love of God to them. And yet despite all that they have chosen something else.

It is impossible for them to repent and turn back to God. Not because they've been locked out by God but rather because they've gazed upon the loving sacrifice of Jesus and decided they wanted something "better". They have numbed themselves to God's call to them.

The warning here is to each one of us to reflect and ask have I truly accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour? Is He my anchor, my everything, my righteousness, my friend. You can come to church, you can sing the worship songs, you can even say the right things but does your heart belong to Jesus?

> **Hebrews 6:9-12**
> Even though we are speaking this way, dearly loved friends, in your case we are confident of things that are better and that pertain to salvation. For God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you demonstrated for his name by serving the saints – and by continuing to serve them. Now we desire each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the full assurance of your hope until the end, so that you won't become lazy but will be imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance.

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