

This week in the States, the midterm elections were held to decide on who sits in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. And as usual there was loads of politicians, including some notable ex-presidents, travelling around making promises in an effort to get their party elected.

But as in any election, one of the problems for voters is to know who to believe. That's because, not every politician tells the truth. I know that it is shocking, but the evidence is overwhelming.

There is an independent website called PolitiFact which fact checks the claims of all politicians. And they say that nationwide in the States, across the party divide, only about 12% of statements they check are completely true. Another 35% are partly true. The other 50% or so of the statements made vary between mostly false to what they call a pants-on-fire lie.

But of course this kind of problem is not confined to politicians. Sadly there are lots of people that experience tells us that we cannot trust.

For example, over the past couple of months there have been a number of cheating scandals in a variety of competitions around the world:

- The 19 year old US chess grandmaster Hans Niemann was sensationally accused of cheating by Magnus Carlsen after he beat him in a competition in September.
- The world of competitive fishing was reeling last month after two fishermen were caught after putting lead balls inside the fish they had caught in an attempt to increase their weight.
- There has even been accusations of cheating in Irish dancing competitions where judges have allegedly been receiving text messages from teachers putting pressure on them to fix the result in favour of their kids.

It makes you wonder who can you trust? Is there anyone that you can take at their word?

Well, the writer of Hebrews says a resounding yes. There is someone that we can completely depend on. Someone who always speaks the truth. Someone who we can take at his word. And so we can trust in his better promises and build our lives on them, because they are sure and they are certain.

Hebrews 6:13-20: "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no-one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." ¹⁵And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

¹⁶Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.

¹⁷Because 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. ¹⁸God 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. ¹⁹We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek."

1. A Call to Persevere

In the passage we read last week, the writer of Hebrews warned his readers that if they turned away from Christ, they were putting themselves in real danger. If they did this they were crucifying Jesus all over again and showing that they were still lost, that they'd never put their faith in him.

But we also saw that he was confident of better things in the lives of those he was writing to. He believed that they would not fall away, but rather would continue to display the genuineness of their faith in Christ in their lives.

But this was not an excuse for complacency. Instead he concluded by encouraging them to "show the same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope secure." Hebrews 6:11

He urged them to persevere, to keep on going, keep on trusting in Jesus, right to the end – so that their hope would be secure. So that they would have the assurance that they did belong to Christ and that they would, "through faith and patience inherit what has been promised." Hebrews 6:12

And that is such a crucial exhortation for us too. In this world where so many people walk away from Christ, we need to keep on going, keep believing, to persevere in our faith, because we know that "We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." Hebrews 3:14

We can be sure of our relationship with Christ if we continue to courageously stand with Christ and put our hope in him!

But all of that might make it sound like our hope of heaven depends on our efforts and our commitment, on whether or not we hold onto Christ. If that was the case then none of us would have any assurance. None of us would have any security or certainty in our lives, because we all know our own weakness and limitations.

But that's not the case at all. Our hope doesn't depend on our perseverance. Instead it is based on God's promise. And that's a promise that we can be confident in!

2. A Fulfilled Promise

The writer showed this by pointing to another hero of the faith. For Jewish believers, Abraham was the ultimate example of a man of faith. He left his country, his people, his community and travelled hundreds of miles to Canaan. And he did this because of a promise from God:

"I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
³I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:2-3

But at that time, Abraham had no children and no prospects of any as he and his wife were getting on in years. But God kept his promise. And when Abraham was 100 years old, Isaac was born, the child of the promise.

a) An Impossible Command

But a number of years later, God told Abraham, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Genesis 22:2

In many ways this was an impossible command. Abraham dearly loved his son. And it didn't make sense. Not only because child sacrifices were what idolators did, and not what God asked for; but also because this was the son through whom God had promised to build a nation. Why would God ask him to be sacrificed?

Of course, he did not know that this was going to foreshadow what God would do with his own beloved Son! On this very same Mount Moriah, just outside of Jerusalem, Jesus was sacrificed for our sin, to open up the way of salvation!

Abraham didn't know this deeper meaning. But despite this, Abraham obeyed. He took Isaac up that mountain. Built an altar and laid his son on it. He was just about to kill him when God stopped him and provided a ram as a substitute.

b) An Incredible Future

But in response to Abraham's obedience, the Lord promised: "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies." Genesis 22:16-17

It was an amazing promise to a wandering nomad with a solitary son. But Hebrews 6:15 says, that "after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised."

It was 25 years between the original promise and the birth of his son. It was many years later that Abraham's family would become a great nation. But this promise was fulfilled. God kept his word!

Abraham's experience assures us that God keeps his promises!

3. A Reassuring Pledge

But this promise was not just for Abraham, his son and the nation that would come from him. It was also a promise of blessing for all who would put their faith in his ultimate offspring.

On Mount Moriah, God promised, "And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." Genesis 22:18

And so if we have put our faith in Jesus, Abraham's promised son, and his willing sacrifice on the cross, then we too are children of Abraham. We too are "the heirs of what was promised." Hebrews 6:17

We have come into the blessing that was promised to Abraham. This is the promise that the writer of Hebrews has been speaking about:

- That Jesus became a little lower than the angels to pay the price of our sins.
- That he rose again on the third day to declare his victory over death and the devil.
- That he ascended into heaven where he sat down at the right hand of God
- And that now he is our great high priest, our redeemer and our representative, "A priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 5:6.

Of course, we don't have the reality of that promise in full yet. We do have experienced some of the blessings of what it means to be a child of God.

- Maybe we've felt God's love flooding into our hearts.
- Maybe we've known the joy that comes from God's presence.
- Maybe we've experienced the peace that comes from knowing that our sins are forgiven.

But this is just the down payment, the beginning of our salvation. There is so much more to come.

a) God's Purpose is Unchanging

So how can we be sure that we will receive this inheritance? How can we be sure that we will not lose out? Well it's because, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no-one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." Hebrews 6:13.

When people make declarations in court they are asked to swear by God that they are telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. "Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument." Hebrews 6:16

By appealing to someone greater, the person is assuring the court that they are telling the truth. It is like a legal guarantee.

There is no-one greater than God himself, and so when God made this promise, he swore by himself. That was because "God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear." Hebrews 6:17 He wanted to make clear that he would not change his mind!

b) God's Integrity is Unwavering

Of course there should not have been any doubt about this. People are asked to make oaths in court because we can't always depend on what they say in their everyday lives. Swearing by God is supposed to ensure that they will tell the truth this time.

That's why Jesus taught, "Do not swear at all... Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No', 'No';" Matthew 5:34, 37 As believers in Jesus we should not need to make oaths because we should always tell the truth.

And God too always tells the truth. The writer of Hebrews assures us of this. He said, "It is impossible for God to lie." Hebrews 6:18. He is the God of truth. There is no darkness, no deception in him at all.

"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 fulfil?" Numbers 23:19 The answer of course is no. God always keeps his word.

c) God's Compassion is Unique

But God made this oath not because he cannot be trusted, but because he knows that we struggle to trust him. "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." Hebrews 6:18

So this oath was not for his benefit to force him to keep his promise to Abraham, but out of compassion for Abraham to encourage him to keep trusting in his promise!

And God has done the same for us if we have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us. As we will see in the next couple of weeks, the high priestly work of Jesus has been guaranteed to us by a promise backed up by an oath. The writer of

Hebrews will show this by quoting from Psalm 110:4:

“The Lord has sworn
And will not change his mind,
“You are a priest for ever,
In the order of Melchizedek.”

So these are the two unchangeable things which the writer refers to.

- God’s promise that Jesus is our great high priest forever
- And God’s oath that he gave to us to encourage us to trust in his promise.

These are what we can depend on. This is the solid foundation on which we can build our lives.

4. A Faithful Person

And so this is the basis of our hope.

- It is not trusting in our perseverance, our endurance and our commitment.
- It is not depending on our strength to hold on to Christ until the end.
- Instead it is resting on God’s unchanging promise and oath that we have a high priest forever in heaven!

This is the sure foundation for our lives. It is an anchor for our souls. “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” Hebrews 6:19

When my brother and his family were over visiting in September we took a trip down to Hook Head Lighthouse. It is a really special place and the weather was incredible. But of course sometimes it is not.

And as a result, the sea around Hook Head is some of the most dangerous in the world. Between the lighthouse and the Saltee Islands is what is called ‘The graveyard of a thousand ships.’

One of those ships was the Tempo which sank in 1878. Its huge anchor is on display just on the way into the lighthouse. It is an impressive anchor. But , it wasn’t enough to save that ship it from the rocks off Hook head.

And many people today are trying to provide anchors for their lives. Things that will give them stability and security in this world. It might be their savings or investments, their religious activity or good works, their reputation and popularity, their health or fitness. But none of these are able to combat all the storms of life. Sooner or later, we will all face challenges that will overcome all these things.

But we have something stronger as an anchor for our lives. It is firm and secure. It cannot break and it cannot slip. And no storm can overwhelm it.

a) Our Heavenly Anchor

That is because it is secured in heaven for us! “It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,²⁰ where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.” Hebrews 6:19-20

The inner sanctuary is the Most Holy Place. In the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, the intimate presence of God was barred by a heavy curtain. Only the high priest could enter through it, once a year, with a blood sacrifice.

But when Jesus died, this curtain was torn from top to bottom, signifying that the way into God’s presence was now open through faith in Christ!

And when he rose again, he entered the Most Holy Place. Not the earthly copy, but the real one, in heaven.

- He did this on our behalf, to guarantee our salvation through his blood.
- And he went before us, as our forerunner, so that we might follow him some day!

b) Our Sure Salvation

So this is our anchor for our souls. This is why we can be sure that we will not be lost, why we will never be condemned, why nothing and no-one can ever separate us from God’s love, why no-one can ever pluck us out of his hand.

It is because we have a Saviour in heaven who has paid the price of our salvation in full, once for all. And God has promised, and guaranteed it with an oath, that he is our High Priest forever and “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him.” Hebrews 7:25

Conclusion

We live in such an uncertain world and are surrounded by such unreliable people. None of us know what tomorrow will bring. And despite the promises of people, no-one can offer us the security and stability that we long for.

But God can.

- Yes we are called to persevere in our faith, but our security is not found there.
- Instead it is based on God's better promise,
- Backed up by his reassuring pledge,
- That we have a faithful person to rely upon, a great high priest who has gone before us into heaven and guarantees that one day he will come back for us so that we can be with him forever!

This is our sure foundation. This is the anchor for our souls. This is why we can rejoice in our salvation today and worship Jesus as our Lord!

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