

Refugees of Hope

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 6:17-20

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

When you flee for refuge it is because things, may I say, aren't going so well for you. To be a refugee is to mean your life has been turned upside down. A great calamity has devastated your homeland, and so you flee the country in order to find safety and shelter, to find hope. While in Romania, I was in the home of two refugees, Zoran Milovanovic and Josimovic Dragan. They had left their homeland of Serbia in order to escape the hostilities of a Civil War under the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic. These two men are now planning to leave their families and go back to Serbia to establish new church plants. The Serbian government has said that all refugees can come back to Serbia without facing criminal charges of treason. However, because they have fled the country in order to get their families out of harm's way, those who remained consider them to be traitors and cowards. It is very possible that when these men return, even though there is no legal penalty against them, when they reenter the country, they may be beaten or even killed by the border police. Should the Lord display His mercy and allow them to escape harm from the hands of the border police, they will face opposition because the people simply view them as traitors or cowards for fleeing for refuge in order to lay hold of some hope for their families. When I asked them about their conditions during the war and what the conditions were like in the refugee camps, they described severely impoverished conditions. For these men and their families being refugees was not and is not a pleasant experience.

Yet the writer of Hebrews makes the idea of being a refugee a glamorous one. He speaks as if this is the most wonderful thing that could occur in your life or in mine, that there is no hope in our lives except for fleeing for refuge, and without fleeing for refuge there is no hope. And so if you want hope today, you need to become a refugee, but where do you run? Because wherever you go, your problems will most likely go with you. In most cases our problems are self-originated. They stem from our own hearts. So where can you really flee to find hope?

Then there are many of you who would say, “I don’t need to flee anything.” “Everything is going well with me.” Ah, yes, you who have everything under control, you who have need of nothing, it is you that I give a most stern warning to this morning. For unless the Holy Spirit opens your eyes and causes you see what you are now blinded to, my words will be wasted on you. The truth is you are in the most dangerous of all positions this morning, needing to flee, but not realizing it.

REASONS TO FLEE FOR REFUGE

We today, who believe in the resurrected Lord, are refugees of hope. We have fled and found refuge, and we found refuge in Christ Jesus. Let me share with you reasons why you and I ought to flee, if we haven’t done so already. For those of us who have flown to Christ for our refuge, these are the reasons we did so. We will rejoice, I pray, this morning, thanking God that there was hope outside our miserable condition. If, you have not yet found Christ to be your hope, oh, dear friend, I want to encourage you now with three reasons why you ought to flee.

We Must Flee the Wrath of God

The first reason we find in the last portion of Hebrews chapter six and verse eighteen.

We...who have fled for refuge (Hebrews 6:18).

Why should we flee? Where is the danger? Why do I need to run and find a hiding place of safety? The reason is to flee the wrath of God. I can’t help but think that this was probably one of the inspirational verses for John Bunyan when he wrote *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in that Bedford jail in England. The Bible says about us all that before Jesus transforms us we are under the wrath of God. John Bunyan wrote a story about a man called Pilgrim, and you find in the beginning of the book, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, this man clothed in rags weeping profusely. He couldn’t stop crying because there was a burden on his back, and he was reading in a book the judgment of God was to come upon all of those in the City of Destruction. This so gripped his heart with terror he began to weep and to cry and to wonder where there was safety against the wrath of God?

Did you know the Bible says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God? The terror of God is enough to stop your heart from beating. Physically, the terror of His awesome power and might can make a man’s system shut down. He is so awesome. You may say that you do not understand the terminology, “the terror of who God is.” You have been told all of your life that God is love. You have been told correctly He is love, but the Bible also says He is a God of Justice. His anger is hot against all of the workers of iniquity. Listen to what John the Baptist said in John 3: 36, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Even at that present moment God’s wrath abides on everyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ. Do you say, “Well, I believe in Jesus. I believe that Jesus existed. I believe that He died on a cross and rose from the dead. I believe in God. Therefore the wrath of God doesn’t abide in me.” No, that is not what this word “believe” means. It does not mean a mental assent to the fact that God exists or that the Bible is true. It

means that you are placing your eternal confidence in Jesus. Not only do you trust that He exists and that He is who He said He is, but that He died in your place, taking the penalty of your sins on the cross for you and receiving that very wrath of God's judgment against sin.

I think there is a concept missing in most of our definitions of faith. It is the concept of treasuring that which you trust. If you believe upon Jesus and have been saved, not only are you placing confidence in Christ, you are treasuring Christ. You're valuing Him. In other words, you are loving Him. Now how do you know if you love God or not? Jesus said we demonstrate love by obeying Him. Obeying God's commandments doesn't mean going through the outward motions of obedience. It means from the heart you so love Him that you desire to do all that He desires of you. You cannot love God and not obey His commandments. Now my question is once again, do you really believe in Jesus to this degree? Or do you have a mental agreement to the facts of the literal Jesus that He is who He said He was, the Son of God? Are you placing the confidence of your eternity on Him? Are you treasuring Him for His own intrinsic worth? If not, the Bible says the wrath of God is already on you. What is so sad here this morning is that people can literally exist under the wrath of God and not know it. My dear friend, it is my prayer this morning that the Holy Spirit would pull back the blinders from your eyes that you might see the terror of God. I do not know if it is a mercy or not, that God doesn't allow you to see His awesome anger against your sins. It might very well be His judgment against you that He doesn't, because you could not sleep at night if you knew what awaited you. If you only knew that the Lord God who created Heaven and Earth and all that exists within them is totally opposed to you, why, you would look to the rocks of the hills to cover you from the One who sits on the throne. You would be running from Him. You would be such a frightened thing that you could not continue to exist. You would be in the despairs of all despairs. Oh, may God pierce your heart today to know that right now, if you are not following Christ, that God is opposed to you, and His wrath is against you.

Flee the Judgment of God on the World

Not only do we flee the wrath of God, but also the second reason to flee, the judgment of God on the world. The Bible tells us in the book of Acts that God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness. God is going to judge this world. As poor Pilgrim read about this in his book, he realized there was coming a day called the day of the Lord, in which Christ would come like a thief in the night and the Heavens would "pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). He read this and he wept. He said, "Where is there refuge, where is there hope to escape the judgment to come?" Friends, there is a day in which God will destroy this earth. It is not some fairy tale, some fable that is found in religious circles. It is the absolute truth. God is just, and being just, He cannot always allow sin to have its course without there being a penalty. There will come a judgment day. Where can you find refuge on that day when God judges the earth? The fire of Heaven is unleashed upon this earth and it is melted with a fervent heat.

Flee the Judgment of God on Unbelievers

The third reason to flee is to flee the judgment of God on unbelievers. In the book of Revelations 20:11-15, we find that there is coming a final day of judgment when all of those, from the beginning of human race until the very end, who did not obey God, love God, did not accept the death of Christ as substitution for their sins will stand before God.

And I saw a great white throne and him that sat on it from whose face and the earth and the Heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

Notice that. Heaven and earth flees from the face of one who sits on the throne. Don't think that you will waltz up to God in your self-assurance. All self-assurance and control will melt away quickly when you stand in the presence of the Almighty God. Self-assurance cannot be propped up under the very piercing presence of the God of righteousness. The text then says,

And I saw the dead small and great stand before God and the books were opened. And another book was opened which was the Book of Life. The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works, and the sea gave up the dead which were in it. And death and hell delivered up the dead, which were in them. They were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire; this is the second death. Whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of Fire.

There is a judgment day coming. Paul said that there was going to be a flaming fire taking vengeance on them that do not know God, meaning those that don't obey or love Him. In fact, he made it very clear that it is vengeance on those who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What are the commands of the gospel of Christ? Repent and believe. Repentance means to acknowledge that your sins are not only contrary to society, but, dear friends, they are a crime against God Almighty, that your sin is a literal attack upon the holy righteousness of God. It is to hate that and it is to have a sense of remorse for that and to turn from the control of your life over to the control of Jesus Christ. That is repentance.

And then the Bible says to believe. There is that word again, "believe," to trust. I want to be clear with you here, religion does not mean being good. Because if it does, I am in the biggest trouble of us all. I am not good. I tell you if you could peel my heart back, you would not find one good thing. If you could literally see my heart, none of you would come back next Sunday. There is no goodness in me. And there is none in you. Religion is not about being good. It is about fleeing for refuge and laying hold of one who is good----Jesus Christ. That is what Christianity is all about. It is not trusting in yourself, it is not being morally reformed or improving yourself. It is all about running, running away from what you are and laying hold of what He is----perfection, holiness, purity and love, peace and joy. Joy unspeakable! Would you have these things sir? You need to leave yourself and run to Christ Jesus the Lord. Christianity is not about you. It is not about me. It is about Christ. If you and I don't believe in Christ and we don't repent of our sins, the Bible

says there is judgment awaiting us. At the end of that judgment there are no pardons. There are no reprieves. There is no hope of a second chance after this final judgment. No wonder that poor man in Bunyan's story was reading and weeping at the same time. Oh that God would allow my words to cut deep into your heart, and you would literally weep at this moment and say, "Where can I run to, to find hope this morning, please, preacher, don't go any more until you tell me." But I have no hope that you will do so unless God takes mercy on you. You are so opposed to Him, you want nothing to do with Him, and you are so in love with the control of your life, you are willing to suffer for all of eternity just to have control for a few short years. That is how much you hate God! There is wrath to come upon all God-haters.

FLEE TO A HOPE SECURE

The Nature of this Hope

So what do you do? Flee to a hope secure. Let's look at our text. We are to run. What are we to run to? The author of Hebrews says we are to run to find refuge and to lay hold of the hope set before us. What is the nature of this hope? In order to answer this we must know that there is a natural hope and a spiritual hope. In the movie, "Apollo 13" which is a reenactment of that fateful flight to the moon, where en route to the moon an explosion took place on the spacecraft. With great ingenuity and a lot of mercy from God the crew of Apollo 13 was allowed to circle the moon in a damaged spacecraft and finally make their way back to Earth. It was a remarkable feat. In one particular scene of the movie's recreation of the astronaut's plight, Houston Control Center anxiously worried whether they could solve the problem and get the marooned men back to earth. The question is asked in Houston Space Control Center, "Is there any hope?" And the man said, "I don't know. I can only hope that there is hope." In other words, there was no certainty about it. There is a hope that we wish with. We are not certain about it. And so we say, "Well, I hope this will happen." Some of you are listening right now and God has begun to pierce your heart, he has begun to affect your soul, and you are beginning to be a little bit disturbed on the inside. You are saying, "I hope there is a hope here today. I hope that there is an answer here." But you are not sure. You are not sure if God would do something for you, you are not sure if God would take mercy upon you and love you enough to come into your life. That is a natural hope. Benjamin Franklin said of natural hope "he that lives upon this kind of hope will die fasting." Of this kind of hope Omar Khayyam said it is like snow in the desert. It just doesn't happen, it will not work. It looks bright, it looks cheerful, but in the end it dies of heart failure. It cannot sustain you.

In our text hope is called an "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." There is a spiritual hope that is unlike a natural hope. Let me define the nature of this hope. It simply means a confident and joyful anticipation for the future. This is the hope of our text and it is the hope of every believer. It is a certain knowing that it is going to happen. It is not a hope that is wishing it were going to happen, it is a certain knowing, a definite confidence, that this future event is going to take place. Along with the definite confidence that it is going to take place, it carries with it a joyful anticipation. There is a joy in anticipating what's going to happen. You know it is going to

happen. You are confident that it will happen, and you joyfully anticipate it. This is what you and I need. In Romans chapter eight and verse twenty-four, the Bible says we are saved by hope. "But hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" If it were already taking place, then why would you and I hope for it? No, hope is something about the future yet to take place. But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. So there is a certainty of knowing it is going to happen, but you don't just wait. You wait joyfully. I don't know what you have seen here this morning, those of you who are not believers, but I hope there is one thing that you have seen. I hope the one thing you have seen here is . . . joy. We have joy because we are joyfully awaiting the fulfillment of all the promises that God has made to us. He has promised eternal life, dwelling with Him forever, ruling and reigning with Him, the resurrection of this body. I joyfully anticipate the fulfillment of these future events. I am certain that they are going to take place.

The Requirements for Experiencing this Hope

How might you have such joy? Here is what you do. You flee to a hope that is not fleeting, not wishful but secure. Oh what we would give today for security. What would you not give for security? The only security in life is being able to have a faith and a confidence in something that you can't see; yet you know that it is going to happen. That is the nature of this type of hope. The requirements for experiencing this hope is also found in these three verses. First, he says you have to flee sin and the world. You cannot have this hope without leaving something behind. Now the word "flee" represents to me the renouncing of all things marked for judgment in order to lay hold of and trust in Christ. The true sign that you have become a Christian is that you flee or renounce the things of this world. It matters little that you profess to be a Christian; you can tell me that if you die you are going to Heaven, but that means little to me. I said that for twenty-six years of my life. It meant nothing, for I was unconverted. What means something is have you forsaken the world? Since we still have to live in this world, what do I mean by the world? How do you flee a world that you have to live in? The answer is you no longer allow the world to have a hold on your heart. The world should have nothing in it that grips your heart, that you love it and pursue it more than you love and pursue Christ. Dear Christian, is it markedly visible in your life that you are no longer in love with this world or anything about it.

The second requirement for experiencing this hope is that you have faith in the promise of God. The reason I know that what I am preaching about is certain and true and just as real as this moment is real, is because of the person who promised it to me. Faith is fueled by the promise, and faith is only as good as the person who promised what you are trusting in. I am telling you that Jesus Christ has promised you and me something, and He doesn't go back on His promises. Do you trust Him? Do you trust Him when He says forsake the world because nothing in this world can bring you the pleasure that He can give you? Do you still look to the world to be the source of your contentment, satisfaction, and pleasure? If you do, it tells me you don't really trust the promise. As long as you have one foot in the world, trying to find satisfaction, peace, and contentment by it, and then try to find it through Christ, you really don't believe Jesus. You have believed just enough to be miserable. You believe enough to know that there is something more

that just this world and yet you do not believe enough to turn loose of the world. No wonder you cannot be happy.

The Stability of Hope

Look at what hope is called in our text. It is called the anchor of the soul. The purpose of an anchor is to bring stability where there is instability. When a ship is upon the raging tidal waves of a storm, the hope of safety is that the anchor is long enough and heavy enough and sufficient enough to grab hold of the bottom of the ocean. While the storm beats the boat around, it is still stable. If this hope is an anchor of the soul then our hearts should have stability. Now what about your soul?

The soul is the person you really are. It is not the body that you and I are seeing. It is your personality, it is who you are. It is that person that you talk to when you first get up in the morning. Did you know that you talk to yourself and the self talks to you? When you wake up in the morning don't thoughts come into your mind, and you begin to talk to yourself. That is the soul. That is the real person you are. The writer of Hebrews is indicating that the soul is unstable at best. This morning you can be happy and experiencing delight and one hour later someone tells you something and you are all upset. One moment you are confident that you can whip the world, thirty seconds later somebody says something to you and you have your tail between your legs. No stability about the human soul. Its like a ship without an anchor, it will go wherever the winds and waves send it. Friends, you need something stable in your life. The text tells me there is an anchor of hope that will stabilize you.

Now where is the location of our anchor? Verse nineteen says the anchor entered beyond the veil. This is referring to something back in the Old Testament in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was made up of three parts, the outer court, the inner court, which was the Holy place where they offered the sacrifices, and then the Holy of Holies. What separated the Holy place from the Holy of Holies was a big thick curtain or veil. The only time the high priest went beyond the veil was one time a year when he made a sacrifice and took blood with him to intercede on behalf of the nation's sins. He would ask for God's forgiveness for the sins of the people for that entire year. It was called the Day of Atonement. The Bible says that your anchor of hope is not anywhere on this earth. It is not in a preacher, it is not in your church, it is not in a religion; it is in a place not of this earth. It literally goes beyond the realm of the visible. Of what I speak is not science fiction. This is truth. The anchor goes into the very heavenly of heavenlies, into a place the Bible says is the very holy of Holiest in all of Heaven. That is how you can be stable today. You have an anchor in a world that will never pass away and is unaffected by the instability of this world in which we live.

How many of you would say your world is topsy turvy? Your world---one day it's good, the next day it isn't. You are constantly being shifted. There is no stability. Let me proclaim to you today that there is an anchor that reaches out of this world, and that no matter how much upheaval and turmoil surrounds you, you can have stability. I'm leaving a world that is not stable to one

that is. It is not controlled by the winds and passions of evil men. But it is controlled by the love and goodness of a righteous God. That is why I have joy today.

THE OBJECT OF HOPE

Now what is the object of this hope? Because hope is only as good as what it is hoping in. The object of our hope is found in verse twenty.

Whither the forerunner is for us entered, [even] Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Hebrews 6:20).

Christ is the object of our hope. Some of you people have a misunderstanding of what Christianity is all about. I know because I did for twenty-six years. I tried to do Christianity, and it did not work. You don't do Christianity. Christianity is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christianity is not conforming, it is being conformed. There is a big difference. When you try to make yourself like God, you fail every time. But when you let God make you into His very image, God is always successful. Our hope is in Christ. I am not trusting that God in the very end is going to somehow weigh my deeds of goodness against my deeds of badness. If I were I could only have hope if I had more good deeds than my bad deeds. But that in the end would provide no hope because all it takes is one sin, one sin to condemn your soul to Hell forever. Why just one? Because to violate one commandment of God is to break them all. My hope is in a person who perfectly obeyed God. Who was God. Who is stable. He fulfilled all righteousness for me. My hope is in Christ. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and His righteousness. Christ is the object of our hope. We are hoping in the Son of God.

Jesus, as High Priest, is entered behind the veil. Now what is a high priest? A high priest is the main intercessor or mediator. That is all the word "priest" means here. Mediator is one who goes in between two parties. Jesus Christ, who is God, is the offended party. He is the one that has been sinned against. Yet Christ came in the form of a man, and He came to be a go-between the offending party which is you and me and to bring us together with God the offended party. As a High Priest Jesus has entered behind the veil. Three important statements are made by this act. First, Jesus entered into the very Holy of Holies just like the old high priests of the Old Testament did once a year. This means Jesus went into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for us. This is significant. This is what you need to be clinging to this morning for hope. My Lord on Calvary's tree paid my sin debt and assuaged the wrath of God against me. He was perfectly innocent. He was not dying for any sins that He committed. He was dying for mine. The reason we celebrate Resurrection Day is because it validates Jesus' ability to go into the Holy of Holies where God sits on the throne and present Himself as the sacrifice that was slain. If Jesus didn't get out of the grave that day, He could not appear before the Father as the sacrifice that pays for my sin. The resurrection seals our pardon. Paul tells the Corinthians that we are justified by Christ's life as well as His death.

The second important statement made by Jesus' entering the Holy of Holies is that He is interceding for us. The high priest would pray for the sins of the people when he was behind the veil. Dear friend, there is not one single sin you have ever committed that Jesus doesn't have the ability to get forgiven. Third and last, it means He is surety for us. He is beyond the veil into the place where you and I cannot see Him just as the high priest entered beyond the veil and could not be seen. In fact they had to tie a rope to his foot. On the other foot they would tie a bell. He would constantly have to shake that bell because if he did not prepare himself rightly, God's justice would kill him immediately when he walked into the presence of God. If they heard the bell stop ringing they knew what had happened, he had died because the sacrifice or the priest was unacceptable to God. They would have to pull the dead body out with the rope.

We can't see Christ Jesus right now. He is hidden from us but we need not worry. The resurrection is the validation that Jesus paid our sin debt. He has entered into the presence of the Father interceding for us, and now I don't stand condemned. I am free. Saints of God where are you this morning? You are free! The sin debt is no longer accounted to you! I have surety this morning. If this heart stops beating in the next second I will see Him as I go beyond the veil. The Bible tells us that one day our Lord is coming out from behind the veil, out of the Holy of Holies, to gather all of us and take us back in. He is our surety. He is our hope. Well, friends, I know that you can't always feel the excitement that I feel. Oh, how we anxiously await that day when our feeble feelings will give way to pure divine passions! Today, would God pour forth His Spirit upon us who have been redeemed to enjoy our liberty and to value our surety who is Christ our hope. For you who have yet to know what redemption is all about, oh may God at this very precise moment penetrate your heart in such a way you cannot resist it. May God render your arguments useless and all you can do is say, "God, yes, have thy will with me." Flee for refuge. Do you want hope today? Flee and run to Christ and lay hold of Him. Amen.