

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Lesson – 16

"Hope"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. For the past few months, we have been looking at various problems everyone faces in life – whether they are a Christian or not.
 - A. One of the greatest myths of all is that being a Christian frees us from problems.
 1. Unfortunately, some people have believed that, and later lost their faith completely when they were hit with various calamities in their lives.
 - B. However, now that we've looked at a variety of problems, I want to conclude this series by looking at the subject of **HOPE**.
- II. For many of us, there are certain times when doubts seem to reach maximum proportions – where things simply don't make any sense at all. And because of this, our faith is often severely shaken. Let me suggest three of the most common.
 - A. One of those times would be when things happen we are sure would never happen.

1. There may be times when our loving, gracious, merciful God surprises us by saying "Yes" to something we were convinced would be answered with a "No."
 - a. Like when bad things happen to good people.
 - b. Or when good things happen to bad people.
 - c. Or when some lie is passed off as the truth and is believed by the majority.
 2. These are times when it's easy to become very confused about God's way of responding to our prayers – times when doubts begin to creep in.
- B. Another time when doubts increase is when we believe certain things should happen, and then don't.
1. These are the times we were sure God would say "Yes," but He says "No" instead.
 - a. Like when a sick child gets worse instead of better and finally dies.
 - b. When a marriage we thought sure would succeed doesn't.
 - c. Or when the pathology report comes back positive, or someone we love doesn't come home safely from a trip.
 2. These are times when our confidence gets shaken to the very foundation, and we begin to question God's sovereignty in our doubts.

- C. But there's a third situation when doubts begin to grow; when things we believe should happen NOW, happen much, much later.
 - 1. One of the most difficult things to do is to sit quietly and patiently while God says, "Wait... just be patient and wait."
 - a. I can remember times when I've reminded God that He's eternal, and I'm not -- then I caught myself and realized that I'm eternal too.
 - b. After confessing my lack of faith, I explained that while I know there will be blessings beyond compare in heaven, I'm in need of a few things right now.
 - c. But, all He did was say, "Wait!"
 - d. I'm STILL waiting for some of those prayers to be answered.
 - 2. All of us have wrestled with God's timing, and fought the feelings of frustration and doubt that God will ever grant our request.

BODY

- I. All these doubt-producing situations provide a perfect introduction to the verses in Hebrews chapter 6 that we want to consider.
 - A. This is the great chapter that begins with a strong warning, continues with words of affirmation, and closes with words of reassurance and confidence.

1. It addressed the Christian who is hanging on by his fingernails and he feels himself sliding down the hill.
 - a. It shouts to us all – "Hang in there! Don't quit now! Don't give up yet!"
 - (1). Even when God says "NO" when you expected Him to say "YES."
 - (2). Even when He says "YES" and you thought for SURE it would be "NO."
 - (3). And ESPECIALLY when He says, "WAIT" and you expected an answer NOW.
- B. Let's look at a few verses together.
 1. **Hebrews 6:13-15** – *For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.*
 2. What are these verses all about?
 - a. To understand these verses, we need to go back and look at the warning in verses 11 and 12 that comes just before the mention of Abraham.

b. **Hebrews 6:11-12** – *And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

(1). This verse is saying, "Imitate those strong-minded men and women in biblical history!"

(2). They believed in God!

(3). They said, "I will stand, no matter what happens. I will believe in God, even though my world crumbles around my feet. No calamity will make me abandon the Lord!"

2. An so, to ILLUSTRATE this kind of person, the Hebrew writer turns our attention to Abraham and Sarah.

a. If you know about his life, you're familiar with the story about Abraham and Sarah trusting in God to fulfill the promise of a son.

b. Abraham and Sarah had been married for years – she was 65 and he was 75, and even though that was close to middle-age in those days, she was quickly approaching the time when she would pass the child-bearing years.

c. But God's promise was clear and unmistakable.

- d. God swore on the basis of HIS OWN INTEGRITY that Sarah would have a son – but there was a catch. Sarah would have to wait a while.
3. So, the process of waiting began.
 - a. Abraham and Sarah waited a year – nothing happened.
 - (1). Sarah was now **66** years old.
 - b. They waited another year – still nothing.
 - c. They waited for a third year – nothing.
 - d. Four years now passed since God made the promise – not a single sign.
 - e. Five years – six – seven – eight – nine – ten – still nothing from God.
 - (1). Sarah was now **75** years old.
 - f. Abraham and Sarah waited during the 11th year, the 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th – and not a SINGLE SIGN from God – no morning sickness, no indication whatsoever.
 - (1). TWENTY YEARS of waiting – and NOTHING!
 - (2). Sarah was now 85 years old!
 - g. Year 21 came and went, year 22, 23, 24 – and NOTHING happened.

4. Finally, as Abraham was about to turn **100** and Sarah was about to celebrate her **90th** birthday, God announced that Sarah was going to have that baby after all.
 - a. Even though Abraham and Sarah had been waiting for TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, God NEVER forgot His promise to them.
 - b. In fact, God made His promise crystal-clear.
 - c. **Genesis 17:15-17** – *Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"*
 - (1). Can't you imagine Abraham's response. He falls to the ground and laughs – not just a little chuckle, a real "belly laugh!"
 - (2). It wasn't because he didn't believe God, but because he couldn't imagine how in the world God would do all this – but he couldn't wait to find out.

- d. Now, Sarah was waiting in the wings, listening to this conversation through the tent flap -- but she's not as convinced.
- e. **Genesis 18:9-12** – *Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" So he said, "Here, in the tent." And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"*

(1). Sarah was having a VERY HARD TIME believing in all this. To her, she was well past childbearing age, and she was convinced that this simply wasn't going to happen!

C. Now, before we go back to Hebrews chapter 6, I want you to turn with me to Romans chapter 4.

1. We can't fully appreciate Hebrews 6 or Genesis 12 through 17 without Romans 4.

- a. Here's Abraham again – he laughed on the outside, but deep down inside, he was confident that if God SAID IT, He would DO IT!

(1). Now listen to these words VERY CAREFULLY.

b. **Romans 4:18a** – The apostle Paul writes of Abraham and says, "...who (Abraham) contrary to hope, in hope believed..."

2. There it is – that's the message of Hebrews 6!

a. When there was absolutely no reason for hope, Abraham still believed in hope!

b. At a time when there was nothing that Abraham could do himself to bring about God's promise by his own human power, Abraham never doubted that God could still do it!

c. When it was IMPOSSIBLE FOR MAN, Abraham knew deep in his heart it was NOT IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD!

3. **Look at the rest of these verses.**

a. **Romans 4:19-22** – *And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."*

b. That's faith! That's believing even when doubts come.

- c. That's trusting in God day after day, year after year, decade after decade – for twenty-five long years!
 - d. That's being confident in God's promises through the long nights of loneliness and the endless days of despair.
4. HE HOPED AGAINST HOPE!
- a. But notice something else – all the time he was waiting, he was doing something.
 - b. *"...he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and GAVE GLORY TO GOD!" (v. 20)*
 - c. All the time he was waiting, Abraham was giving glory to God!
 - d. He was thanking the Lord for all that he has been blessed with, and glorified God for the promise God made – a promise Abraham knew God would keep.
5. While you're waiting, are you giving the Lord glory?
- a. Do you praise Him and thank Him for all He's done, and for all He will yet do because of His promises?
 - b. Abraham was fully assured that whatever God promised, He was also able to perform.
 - c. And because of this kind of faith, Abraham was reckoned (accounted – credited) as righteous!

II. Now, let's go back to Hebrews chapter 6.

A. This isn't a lesson on Abraham's life, it's a lesson for us today.

1. And this lesson has to do with trusting in God when things don't work our way.
 - a. It's a lesson on how to deal with doubt when dark clouds come over the horizon when we expected a sun-shiny day.
 - b. It's a lesson on how to have hope when the answers we've been waiting for don't come, or when we get an answer that isn't at all what we expected.
 - c. It's a lesson on how we can be confident in God when we cannot be confident in our circumstances or in our future.

B. Look with me at the transition in verse 16 of Hebrews 6.

1. It all goes back to God's promising on His own name that everything will occur just as He has promised.
2. Listen to what the writer is saying to you and me today.
 - a. **Hebrews 6:16** – *For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.*
3. If you've ever testified in a court of law, you've been asked to raise your right hand and affirm this oath – "Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

- a. When you respond "Yes," you've sworn by a Name greater than your own – and now you're expected to tell the truth in court.
 - b. If you fail to tell the truth, you've purgered yourself, and broken an oath made on the Name of One who is greater than yourself – you've not only brought reproach on your own character, but on the character of God!
4. But in God's case, there is no one greater than Him!
- a. Therefore, almighty God swore on His Own name.
- C. Now, verses 17 and 18 tie this all together.
1. **Hebrews 6:17-18** – *Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.*
 2. With God, there is an unchangeable purpose.
 - a. It is mysterious, unfathomable – there is no way, in this life, that we can unravel all of the reasons behind His purpose.
 3. But it IS UNCHANGEABLE!
 - a. It is absolutely sure because God confirmed it with an oath.

4. That's why the writer says, "*that by two immutable (unchangeable) things, in which it is impossible for God to lie...*" (v. 18a)
 - a. The two immutable or unchangeable things are God's purpose and God's oath -- neither one will change.
 - b. God's purpose is unchangeable because He swore with an oath by His Own name!

- D. But, let's be real honest with ourselves – painfully honest.
 1. There are times when things haven't worked out as I thought they would – when I received a NO instead of a YES, or a YES instead of a NO.
 2. Or those times when nothing made sense and I couldn't see any purpose for what was happening, or when I had to wait and wait and wait and wait.
 3. During those times, I will admit, I struggled with hope – my faith was shaken – and my confidence wasn't all that confident.
 4. But here's something I've learned – when the bottom drops out of your life, it's time to think THEOLOGICALLY rather than LOGICALLY.
 5. The THEOLOGICAL facts are:
 - a. There is an unchangeable purpose with God.
 - b. That purpose is guaranteed with an oath.

6. During these troubling and doubtful times we need to go back to **Hebrews 6:17-18**, and we need to remember Solomon's statement in Ecclesiastes.
 - a. *"God has made everything appropriate in its time."* (**Eccl. 3:11a**)
 7. Let me put it in the form of a simple syllogism – a theological syllogism.
 - a. God is in control of the times and the seasons.
 - b. Some times are hard and some seasons are dry.
 - c. Therefore, God is in control of hard times and dry seasons.
 8. We're quick to praise God when all blessings flow, but when tough times come it's not as easy – for any of us, including me.
- E. But, there are some benefits that come when we begin thinking THEOLOGICALLY rather than logically – let me suggest three benefits, all found in **verses 18 and 19**.
1. The first benefit is strong encouragement (consolation).
 - a. I can't explain it – I just know that when we begin to trust in the Lord and believe that He has a purpose for what we're going through – consolation comes.
 - b. We experience a peaceful reassurance that everything is safely in God's hands.

2. The second benefit is a refuge of hope.
 - a. While encouragement is the opposite of discouragement, hope is the opposite of despair.
 - b. When we accept the fact that God is in control of the storm we're going through, and truly make Jesus the Captain of our boat – IT WILL FIND SAFE HARBOR!
 - (1). The miracle of Jesus calming the storm isn't finished yet – day after day, He is still calming the storms in the lives of His disciples – sometimes in spite of our lack of faith.
3. The third benefit is an anchor for the soul.
 - a. The word "anchor" is often used in ancient literature, but it is used only once in the New Testament.
 - b. **Hebrews 6:19** – *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.*
 - c. Walter Hendrichsen, in his book "After the Sacrifice," has this to say about the meaning of this word "anchor."
 - (1). "The picture is that of an ancient sailing vessel finding its way through the narrow entrance to a harbor. This was one of the trickiest maneuvers the captain of a ship had to make. As his ship moved through the opening, he had to guard against a gust of wind running it onto a reef or a

sandbar. The skeleton of many a ship could be seen on the rocks, giving testimony to the fact that its captain had failed his navigation test. To minimize the risk, the olden-day skipper would lower the ship's anchor into a smaller boat, which would then be rowed through the narrow entrance of the harbor. The anchor would then be dropped and this ship, with sails down, would be pulled past the obstacles, through the narrow opening, and into the safety of the harbor."

- d. This is exactly what Jesus does for us when the bottom drops out of our life – He asks us to give Him our anchor, so that he can bring us safe into the harbor.

F. But notice something else about this verse. Let's read it again.

1. **Hebrews 6:19** – *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.*
2. When the Jews worshipped in the days of the Tabernacle, there was a veil that separated the Holy Place, where the priests would perform their daily worship to Jehovah, from the Most Holy Place, where the glory of God resided.
 - a. Within that room was the ark of the covenant, a small chest, with a golden cherubin on each end (angel-like creatures with their wings folded in front of them).

- b. Once a year the high priest would enter than room with a small pan of blood, and pour it on the "mercy seat" which was located between the two cherubim.
 - c. When God witnessed that event of the spilling of the blood, and was pleased with the sacrifice that had been made according to the Law, He graciously forgave the people of Israel all their sins.
 - d. But this had to be done every year, because the blood of those sacrificial animals was not good enough to take away the sins of the people permanently.
2. Now read the rest of this text.
- a. **Hebrews 6:19-20** – *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*
 - b. What's the writer saying? – He's saying Jesus has already gone through this life, and suffered everything that life could bring (sorrows, disappointments, discouragement, pain, suffering, and even death).
 - c. Jesus has gone on before us, and now He is pulling us toward Himself!

- d. Jesus is inviting you and me to place our anchors in His boat, and let Him pull us safely into heaven – beyond the veil – where the glory of God resides!
- e. When we find our boats being rocked by storms, and we're wondering whether or not we're going to make the harbor safely – look up ahead.
 - (1). Jesus is on His way across the stormy seas to take our anchor in His boat, and bring us safely home.

CONCLUSION

- I. Strong consolation – a refuge of hope and an anchor for the soul.
 - A. That's what we have in Jesus Christ!
 - 1. Brethren, THAT'S HOPE!
 - a. That's reassurance, and confidence.
 - b. That's peace of mind when doubts threaten.
 - c. That's the assurance that every Christian has.
 - 2. You don't get this confidence, or this peace of mind, or this assurance on the basis of your spiritual perfection.
 - a. If we all had to be spiritually perfect, none of us would ever make it.
 - 3. Rather, we get this confidence, peace and assurance on the basis of our faith in God's promises!

- a. That's how Abraham got it -- he never doubted for a minute that God would keep His promise.
 - (1). And Abraham's unwavering faith in God's promises was accounted for righteousness.
- b. And that's how we will get it as well – when we never doubt for a minute that God will keep the promises He made to us.
 - (1). Our unwavering faith in God's promises will also be accounted for righteousness.

B. Do you have confidence in the promises of God?

- 1. If you do, it will show by the way you live your life.
 - a. Your's will be a life of dedicated service to the Lord.
 - b. It will be a life that radiates the glory of a resurrected Christ – as Peter puts it, one that shows forth the excellency of Jesus Christ.
- 2. It won't be a perfect life – it won't be a sinless life.
- 3. But it will be a life characterized by trust and obedience.
- 4. And it will be a life that trusts in the saving, merciful grace of God to cover whatever we may be lacking.

II. Some of you don't have this hope.

- A. It's either because you've always believed you had to make it to heaven on the basis of your OWN perfection, or because you've never trusted in the saving grace of Jesus Christ.
 - 1. If you've been trying to get to heaven on the basis of your own perfection – you'll live a life frustrated by fears and uncertainty.
 - a. There will be no confidence, and no assurance.
 - b. You need to trust in God's grace rather than your track record.
 - (1). Confess the areas of your life that are not in keeping with His will, turn those areas over to Him, and continue to grow in spiritual things.
 - 2. If you've never trusted in the saving grace of Jesus Christ – you're living in sin, and the only future that awaits you is death.
 - a. You need to trust in the saving grace of God as well, and allow the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse you from all your sins.
 - (1). Come to Him in faith, repenting of your sinful life, confessing your faith in Jesus, and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins.