

INTRODUCTION

Terry Hill is a pastor friend of mine who planted a church in Anchorage, Alaska many years ago. I've visited with him several times through the years. Terry loves to fish, so we went Halibut fishing a couple of times. Terry is a funny guy. He used to say, "When someone asks me why I fish I tell them, 'I like to fish just for the Halibut!'"

On one of our fishing trips we launched his boat at Homer and would go out and anchor in a place and fish for Halibut. Halibut are bottom feeders like their Gulf cousin, the flounder. They are flat fish that can grow up to 400 pounds. In Alaska, tides can vary up to thirty feet in a single cycle, so there are always strong currents in the bays. You've got to have a good anchor, or your bait will drag along faster than the fish can feed.

We were having a good day and had caught several large halibut and were ready to try another spot. But when we tried to raise the anchor, it was caught on something deep under the water. Terry tried moving the boat around in every direction to get the anchor free, but it wouldn't come free. It was frustrating. So finally, Terry had to cut the anchor rope, and we were done fishing. You can't fish for Halibut in Alaska without an anchor. You need an anchor. And knowing the kind of crazy world we live in, we need an anchor for our souls as well.

Let's read about an anchor of hope as we jump back into our journey through the wonderful book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:17-20. "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. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

God has given us many helpful word pictures in the Bible to help us understand spiritual truth. In this message we are going to focus on the symbolism of an anchor. Now whether or not you've ever sailed on a ship, or been in a boat with an anchor, you have an idea of what an anchor is and what an anchor does.

Every year at I Love America, I love hearing our choir sing the different songs of the branches of military. Because my dad was in the Navy, I always smile when they sing the naval song. But most people don't get what the song is really saying. You may think the words are "Anchors Away." Like let's drop the anchors. But the original words are "Anchors aweigh." Our choir sings it correct and the words or correct on the screen. "Anchors away" and "Anchors aweigh" sound exactly the same, but they mean just the opposite. When the captain commands the anchors to be raised the sailors report, "Anchors aweigh" when they are clear of the bottom and the ship can get underway. So the song doesn't mean, let's stop the ship. It means, "Let's get going!" So as we talk about this biblical anchor I want to say, "Anchors aweigh!" Let's go!

I. HOPE IN JESUS IS AN ANCHOR FOR OUR SOULS

The scripture says, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul." Anchor is one of those words that have been transliterated from the Greek language. That means the word "anchor" is the same in Greek and in English. We have archaeological evidence that anchors were used as early 4,000 years ago by the Phoenician seafarers. Early anchors were nothing more than a large stone with a hole in the middle. By the time of the Romans, they had perfected the shape of anchors that we still use today. It has a vertical shank with the curved arms on the bottom that are called flukes. But this design is no fluke, because it was designed to dig into the sand, or to grab onto a solid rock.

In order to fully appreciate the power of this word picture of the anchor, we've got to get our symbolism straight. Jesus isn't the anchor. Hope is the anchor. But the anchor is only as effective as the rock it grabs onto. Jesus is the solid rock that the anchor of hope digs into.

In 1943, Ruth Caye Jones was a pastor's wife in Pennsylvania and the mother of five. She was distressed as she read the daily headlines of the casualties of the Allied troops during World War II. It was a time when Americans faced the challenge of rationing. In the midst of her struggle, God led her to this passage in Hebrews 6. She jotted down the words for a song on a pad in her apron. She later added a tune based on the Westminster chimes playing on her mantle clock. This became one of the most-loved Gospel songs of the 1940s and 1950s. We need these words of encouragement today as well. "In times like these you need a Savior; In times like these you need an anchor; Be very sure, be very sure; Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock! This Rock is Jesus, Yes, He's the One; This Rock is Jesus, the only One! Be very sure, be very sure; Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!"

So let's talk about hope. Do you know what hope means? To the world, hope means wishful thinking. Like, "I hope I win the lottery." Or "I hope I filled out the March Madness bracket correctly."

But in the Bible, the word "hope" means so much more. It's one of God's big three: Faith, hope, and love. In the bible, hope literally means, "confidence, trust, expectation." Adrian Rogers used to say, "In the Bible HOPE is rock-ribbed assurance based on the Word of God and the character of God." So here's my acrostic for HOPE: **H**aving **O**nly **P**ositive **E**xpectations.

That is exactly the opposite of the world's view. Some people are so negative that they are always expecting the worst to happen. They say something like, "Now don't get your hopes up. That way you won't be disappointed." How many of you have known people like that? Don't look at anybody.

So to complete the picture, you must understand the four parts of this symbolism. First, Hope is the anchor. Second, it is attached to Jesus, the solid rock. Third, my soul is the ship. But finally, the anchor chain is the Word of God. Because the David says in Psalm 119:114, "You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word." Say that with me, "I have put my hope in your word."

When I was growing up, we got one catalog in the mail, the Sears and Roebuck Christmas catalog. My family would pass it around and mark different things we wanted for Christmas. It was a wish book because most of what we marked, we never got. The Bible is not a wish book. It's a HOPE book.

Our total personhood is comprised of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. This isn't an anchor for the body, or an anchor for our spirit. It's an anchor for our soul. Your soul is made up of your mind, emotions, and your will. It's what you think, what you feel, and what you want. When we think the wrong way, the Word of God pulls us back to hope. When our mind misleads us, the chain jerks us back to hope. When our feelings and wants are wrong, twaaang! we are drawn back to hope.

Let me illustrate it. Here's some stinking thinking: "Nobody loves me. Everybody is against me. I'm not worth anything." The anchor jerks us back to the truth of the Word: You are a blood-bought child of God, an heir of God and joint heir with Christ.

Here's an example of wrong feeling. "I am so afraid. I don't think I'm going to be able to survive this scary experience." The chain pulls us back to the truth, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in you." "I want this to happen, please God, please this is what I want!" But the chain grab us, "Not my will, but yours be done."

Let me show you other things that this anchor of hope does for us.

II. THIS ANCHOR KEEPS US FROM DRIFTING IN THE STORM

There are two times when a ship may use an anchor. First, in the calm waters of the harbor, the ship lowers the anchor to remain in place. Second, sometimes in a storm, a ship will drop an anchor keep the ship from being dashed onto the rocks.

There is a real account of this in the Book of Acts 27. Paul was a prisoner onboard a ship in the Mediterranean bound for Rome when they encounter a typhoon. The ship was being driven toward dangerous rocks so the captain threw out four anchors from the stern of the ship. In the same way when we go through the storms of life and we need to depend on this anchor of hope to keep us from drifting into the dangerous rocks of fear and despair.

A. Jesus is our hope during times of stress

In my book *Handling Life's Disappointments*, I have a chapter entitled, "All Stressed Up with Nowhere to Go." Americans are under a great deal of stress. Stress is like a rubber band. A rubber band that isn't stretched with a little stress is useless. We all need a little stress in our lives to keep us sharp. But the problem with many of us is we allow stress to build up until the rubber band snaps.

The problem is that we try to face every challenge in our own strength. And we grow tired and weary and often fail under the stress and demand. We run out of strength. That's when God offers us His strength for our stress.

The Bible says, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who HOPE in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:28-31)

God's promise is that when we HOPE in the Lord we received strength to soar like an eagle, strength to run and not grow weary, and to walk and not be afraid. Just remember, we can choose between the rubber band of our strength or depend on the unbreakable chain of the Word of God.

B. Jesus is our hope in times of sorrow

Just as there are storms of stress, there will be storms of sorrow. When we lose someone precious in our lives, our hearts are broken. But Paul wrote to believers who were facing the grief of loved ones who had died. He wrote, "We do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.." (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

As a pastor I can testify to the glaring difference between grief over the death of a believer and the grief over the death of someone who gave no evidence of faith in Christ. I have stood with hundreds of families as they weep saying farewell to a loved one who is in heaven. Their tears are infused with a hope of knowing they will see their loved one again. They have a hope that knows no limit to its height. Then there is the gut-wrenching grief of those who aren't sure about the salvation of their loved one. As they say goodbye to the body of someone they loved, there is a pain that knows no limit to its depth.

This hope allows us to face death with no fear. For many years, I have loved the song entitled, "The Anchor Holds in Spite of the Storm." I entitled this message after this song. I've found through the years that there are some people I associate with certain songs. That's true of this song as well. Some of you probably remember Phil Evans. He died in 2006 and his wife, Teresa, and other family members are still attending Green Acres. Phil was a modern day Job. He served for many years as a pastor and minister of music in Louisiana. He had to give up the pastorate due to a variety of serious health issues. He was diagnosed with diabetes at age 33 and was in a terrible car accident, which broke his back. According to Teresa, Phil was hospitalized over 50 times in 13 years. He underwent nine amputations due to the complications of his diabetes. But through those years that I served as his pastor, Phil never lost his faith. He never lost his joy or his smile. I heard him sing this song dozens of times, and I knew he wasn't just singing words. This song was his personal testimony. In the months before Phil transferred to heaven, he worked as a chaplain at Legacy Hospice. He was walking

on two prosthetic legs, driving a car with hand controls. And he was leading people to Christ just a few days before he passed into the arms of Jesus. And it was only fitting that Phil's two sons would sing this song at his funeral. He and his family knew what it was to face stress and sorrow. But I can still hear Phil singing these amazing words: "The anchor holds; Though the ship is battered; The anchor holds; Though the sails are torn; I have fallen on my knees; As I faced the raging seas; The anchor holds; In spite of the storm."

III. THIS ANCHOR HAS GONE BEFORE US INTO HEAVEN

In the last part of verse twenty the picture of Jesus changes from a solid rock to a Forerunner. The word in Greek is *prodromo*. In a footrace, a *prodromo* was a person running ahead to get to the destination, to clear the way for the other runners. Also to make sure the way is safe for the other runners.

In nautical terms, a Forerunner had a very powerful job as well. There was an ancient sailing practice called kedging. Sometimes a ship couldn't enter a harbor because of a narrow pass or turbulent seas. A special anchor called a kedge anchor would be lowered into a rowboat. The rowboat was called a *prodromo*, a Forerunner. Sailors would row the kedge anchor into the harbor with a line attached to the ship. When they arrived safely in the harbor they would drop the anchor. The sailors on the ship would operate the winch and the ship would be pulled into the safety of the harbor.

When these words were written, there was still a magnificent Jewish Temple standing in Jerusalem. Every Jew was familiar with the layout. There was a small area in the Temple called the Holy of Holies. It was called this because it was where Shekinah glory of God dwelt. Only one man could enter that presence. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the Jewish High Priest would enter there and sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial lamb to symbolize the forgiveness of sins. This special space was separated from the rest of the world by a thick curtain. It was sixty feet tall, twenty feet wide and as thick as a man's hand.

So, according to this text, our anchor has gone behind the veil right into the very presence of God. That's exactly the picture that is presented here as we read in Hebrews 6:19, "It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf."

Jesus came to replace the Temple in Jerusalem. In John 2 we read that Jesus stood beside it and said, "Destroy this Temple and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews said, "This temple took forty-six years to build and you're going to raise it in three days? Yeah, sure!" But the Temple He had spoken of was His body.

The moment Jesus died, the curtain ripped in two. The word in the text is *skhizo*, from which we get our word scissors. We're told the curtain was ripped from TOP to BOTTOM. Only a heavenly Hand from above could rip it from top to bottom.

The symbolic meaning of this miracle is thrilling. No longer does anyone have to approach God with a sacrificial lamb or have a priest approach God on our behalf. The curtain was torn open so the only mediator we need to approach God is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is both our Sacrificial Lamb and our High Priest.

That leads to the wonderful invitation we find in Hebrews 10. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." (Hebrews 10:19-22)

Jesus isn't a human priest after the order of Aaron. He's an eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek. Don't worry; the next message is entitled, "Mel-chiz-a-who?"

So, here's the final symbolism. Just as the kedge anchor was carried into the final destination, the harbor. Jesus carried our hope into our final destination, heaven. The anchor is out of sight. Hope can't be seen, but it's real.

So hope is the anchor. The unbreakable Word of God links my soul to the solid rock of Jesus. So, don't let your mind, emotions, and will mislead you. They will mess with you and fool you. Hang onto the hope that we have in Jesus.

A little boy was flying a kite on a cloudy day. His kite was so high that the clouds hid it from sight. A man wandered by and said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm flying a kite." The man said, "I can't see any kite. How do I know that there's a kite there?" The little boy said, "I can't see it, but I can sure feel the tug of the string."

"MY hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus name."

OUTLINE

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Having Only Positive Expectations

II. THIS ANCHOR KEEPS US FROM DRIFTING IN THE STORM *"An anchor for the soul, firm and secure."*

A. Jesus is our hope during times of stress

B. Jesus is our hope in times of sorrow

III. THIS ANCHOR HAS GONE BEFORE US INTO HEAVEN *"It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf."*

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." Hebrews 10:19-22

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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