

The Majestic Jesus  
Hebrews for Today  
viii. An Anchor for the Soul (Heb 6:13-20)

The writer of Hebrews is an astute pastor concerned about the spiritual well-being of his readers. He uses sound biblical theology to encourage them, some of whom were tempted to abandon their faith as part of a beleaguered Christian community and revert to the relative safety of organised religion recognized by the Roman state such as Judaism or a variety of mystery religions. Having written about the snare of drifting and the danger of hard hearts, he exhorts his readers to experience Christ who offers "hope as an anchor for the soul" (v19a), as an antidote to despair and discouragement in the midst of difficulty and hardship.

Jesus as our high priest who has "entered the heavens" is not simply a "go between", representing humanity before the divine; he has pioneered the way into the Father's presence through his sacrificial death and resurrection. This assurance is the bedrock of faith on which we withstand temptation and the assaults of the devil. The resources to do so are not found within ourselves as we look inward, but outside of ourselves as we look to Christ.

The evangelist Billy Graham was once interviewed on television in Sydney, Australia. He was asked, "Do you believe that you are going to heaven when you die?" Billy Graham replied "Yes". Thereafter the T.V. station switchboard was jammed with angry calls. People were outraged at his perceived arrogance. They assumed his confidence was based on his preaching to millions of people across the world and his role as advisor to presidents and world leaders. In short, he was proud and full of himself. But Billy Graham's assurance was based on the Word of God and its teaching about salvation from sin through faith in Christ as in the passage before us. Far from self-assured pride, it was simply humble trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord as explained in the passage before us.

Having explained that faith is not simply subjective experience but objective trust, the writer uses the example of Abraham's encounter with God. Verses 13-15 recall a specific event in his life. Having set out for the land of promise aged 75, a childless pilgrim, Abraham receives a further promise that Sarah well past child bearing age at 90 would give birth to a son. Twenty-five years elapse before Isaac is born whereupon Abraham is called upon by God to sacrifice his son. He responds in obedient faith, leaves his servant behind with the words "We will worship and then we will come back for you" (Gen 22:5). Remarkably Abraham has faith that God will raise his son from the dead. He assures his son, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" (v8). That notwithstanding, having "built an altar and arranged the wood on it, he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood" (v9). An angel intervenes "Do not lay a hand on the boy" and a ram caught in a thicket is sacrificed instead. A divine promise ensues: "I will surely bless you and make your descendants numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore" (v17).

Just as God promised an oath to Abraham, his two-fold promise – word and act – by way of the finished work of Christ is our assurance; "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb 6:19). The writer alludes to a ship seeking safe mooring. Harbours in the ancient world more often than not presented a challenge. Before the days of dredging, a sand bar would often build up at the entrance. Ships at low tide could not enter, whereupon attached by a long chain a small boat would take the ship's anchor across the sand bar and secure it, whereupon the ship could safely enter the harbour with the incoming tide. In a similar way, Christ is our anchor, having passed, as it were, the sand bar of this life into the safe harbour of heaven, pioneering the way for us to follow.

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