

THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." Hebrews 6:19.

A few years ago, in company with some friends, I left the city of Rome, Italy, and went out to the catacombs, where the early Christians had buried their dead. Following our guide, we descended the steps which had been cut out of the soil, and found ourselves in one of the innumerable narrow passages which undermined that area. On either side of these narrow passages were the niches into which the bodies of the dead had been pushed, and on the stone or cement which sealed the bodies we could still read in Latin and Greek the names of the dead, and sentiments of faith or sorrow carved thereon. We arrived at one of the chambers where services for the dead had been held, and there we saw inscribed the ancient symbols of Christianity. One of the favorite symbols was the anchor, which was the symbol of hope.

Even in the pagan world the anchor had been the symbol of hope because there were times when it was the last dependence and last resource of the storm-tossed sailor. It was easy for the early Christians to take over this ancient symbol and give it a Christian meaning, for the very form of the anchor suggested the cross, and in the letter to the Hebrews the Christian faith had been explained and illustrated by the metaphor of the anchor.

Anchor is a word which comes to us through the Anglo-Saxon and Latin from a Greek word which means "hook." That indicates the purpose of an anchor. It hooks or fastens to something which will hold the ship. From the earliest times of which there is any record anchors have been used. In all probability, at first the anchor was a large stone or stones whose weight dragged on the bottom and held the ship. Then some inventive genius began to make anchors of iron with the flukes to grasp the bottom of the sea. Inasmuch as there are times when the lives of captain, mates, crew, and passengers will depend on the anchor, it is important that the anchor be made of the right material and thoroughly tested before it is used. A poor anchor is worse than none, because it deceives these who depend upon it and who might have procured a good one.

Frequently we hear something about the queens of the seas, such as the "Queen Mary," and the "Queen Elizabeth," their length, and depth, and breadth, their marvelous engines, their safety devices, their luxurious suites, their restaurants, and their acres of decks; but no one, if he knew it, would go to sea in either of them unless the ship carried an anchor, because circumstances might arise in which the sole hope of the ship and her passengers would depend upon the anchor. Of the thousands of ships that leave the ports of the world every year, not a one of them goes out to sea without an anchor. So essential is an anchor that ships are usually equipped with several anchors in case of an emergency. The ship may roll, she may pitch, or she may put her nose under the waves, but she is safe. There is no fear on board and there is not any danger from without because of the anchor.

It is no wonder that the inspired writer of the epistle to the Hebrews likened the Christian hope to the anchor of a ship. He wrote: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." That statement refers to the hope that the Christian has in Jesus Christ, and especially in the work which He did for sinners through the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. As I shall speak of this beautiful metaphor, I hope that you will think of the world as the sea, of the soul as the ship, and of hope in Christ as the anchor which lays hold upon God.

The voyage of life on the sea of this world is tumultuous. There are at least two prominent sources of peril.. One is that of drifting. The customs of society and the tides of popular opinion often carry the Christian in dangerous directions. It is much easier to float with the stream than it is to go against it. For this reason many are carried into the worst conditions of peril by simply permitting themselves to drift. Another prominent source of peril comes from the storms. The blasts of temptation break over the soul hither and yon upon the sea of life. Through the Christian faith and hope we shall be brought through the temptations, storms, afflictions, and sorrows of life to heaven, which is our destination.

The dominant note in our text is the Christian hope, and it is called the anchor of the soul. What would life be without hope? The man who is smitten with despair is next door to death. False religions are hopeless, but the child of God, through regenerating grace, cherishes a well-grounded hope and he can cheerfully give a "reason for the hope that is in him." Hope is a combination of desire, expectation, patience, and joy. It implies a desire for some good, which is future in its realization and enjoyment, attended with the pleasant anticipation and probability of obtaining it. Hope is the sweetener of our joys, the lightener of our cares, and the soother of our sorrows. Hope is not merely an unfounded wish or an indefinite guess. It rests on a sure foundation, which is the Word of God. That Word is immutable or unchanging.

In our ordinary conversation hope is something less than faith, but in the Bible it is something more than faith. As is generally used in this country, hope is a sort of first cousin to despair. But in the scriptures hope is something more than faith; it is faith at her very best; it is faith that has developed into confidence and full assurance. With us hope is a sort of doubtful expectation of something that may or may not come to pass.

In answer to the question, "How is Mr. So-and-So?" one replies, "He is at the point of death, but I hope that he will recover." That is little removed from calling a funeral director. Or, you may ask, "How is Mr. So-and-So getting along -- is there any change in his condition?" The answer, "Well, I hope so," is equivalent to saying: "I don't think so." When a person remarks about another's health, "I believe he will get well," that is something more than saying, "I hope he will." But in the Bible the reverse is true; hope is something more than believing. It is faith developed into a full assurance. Hope is always future. We do not hope for that which we already possess and enjoy. The Christian is in present possession of salvation, but he looks forward to the consummation of that salvation in the return of our Lord. Our hope will be fulfilled when our Lord comes again to take us with Him and to make us like Himself. Then we shall be delivered from all the consequences of sin. As yet we have not experienced that, but we do await it. We have fled to Christ for refuge from the doom of sin. So, for us doom is behind us, but glory is before us.

An anchor is an indispensable piece of equipment for a ship. It is required at all times. It is used in time of calm as well as in time of storm. In the calmest weather there are treacherous undercurrents which threaten the safety of the vessel. Many a vessel has been carried upon the reefs even in calm weather because of strong and unseen currents. In times of storm the outer

forces of wind and wave demand the holding power of a reliable anchor. There is not time when the Christian can do without the anchor of hope, and there is no time when the soul is not exposed to Satan. All of us know something of the open assaults of Satan through stormy outward forces, but too many of us are forgetful of the strong undercurrent of his artful wiles.

No life is without its storms. None of us can traverse the sea of life without encountering fierce gales. Each of us needs an anchor to keep us from drifting into danger.

What is the basis of hope? Faith. Without faith there cannot be any hope. Faith has to do with the truth of God's Word, while hope has to do with the accomplishment of God's purpose. What is the basis of faith? Promises. What is the strength of the promises? The person who makes the promises. The Christian hope is described as an anchor to the soul.

God's Word says that this hope is sure. In some soils an anchor will not hold. The anchor is worthless without the proper holding ground. An anchor lying on the deck of the ship does not add anything to the security of the vessel. Certainly no shipmaster would ever cast his anchor into the hold of his own vessel. You cannot anchor a ship in that way. Yet how many who call themselves Christians have all their hope in themselves. They tell of their own goodness. They talk of their own self-righteousness. They boast of their own progress. They do not take hold of the promises, provisions, or prospects in Christ. They trust wholly in self. They would call the captain of the ship a fool if he cast his anchor into the hold of the ship; yet they see nothing wrong in their own course of having their hope in themselves. If the anchor is cast into shifting sand, it is certainly misplaced. Yet how many are trusting today in the shifting sands of men's opinions and ideas instead of the Rock of Ages, Christ Jesus.

Hope is to the Christian an anchor in every trial and difficulty which sweeps around his soul. God's Word says this hope is sure. What else of earth is sure? The longer you live the more you will realize how uncertain everything is here. Man proposes, but he fails in his plans. In relating his plans Napoleon was reminded by an old lady of the mutability of human affairs when she said: "Remember, sire, man proposes, but God disposes." He replied, "Napoleon proposes, and Napoleon disposes." Even then he was going down to defeat.

About a century ago, a man stood in a neighboring state and told his audience how he had accumulated property for his children, proposing to leave each one \$20,000. The means were in his possession, but a war swept it all away. He said, "If I cannot give it to them while I live, they shall have it when I die." He insured his life. The crash of 1873 came and the insurance companies failed. Then his children died one by one until all of them were gone. He stood there alone, saying, "Property all gone, insurance all gone, children all gone, but Christ is mine still." The hope which had cheered him heart fifty years before cheered him still.

God's Word still says that the Christian hope is steadfast. The word "steadfast" means "able to hold." A vessel securely anchored may roll and sway and

toss and turn its prow first one way and then the other, but it does not leave its place. The anchor holds the ship. All of us have come to hard experiences in life where it would be impossible for us to hold on were it not for our hope which stands as the anchor sure and steadfast when the tempest rages in its fury, and when everything seems to be joined together in a great conspiracy to overwhelm us. We are able to endure the storm because we are anchored to the Rock.

Concerning this hope which "we have as an anchor of the soul", we are told that it "entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus." The veil, of course, is the veil of the Tabernacle which separated the tabernacle proper into two rooms. The place within the veil was the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt in symbol. This Holy of Holies was typical of the true place into which Christ entered -- heaven itself -- for us. The only thing that lies between earth and heaven is a veil. The only thing between our present distress and our future glory is a veil. Within the veil we have heaven. Outside the veil we have earth. Within the veil we have a sinless God. Outside the veil we have sinful people.

The anchor of a ship is cast downward. The anchor of the soul is cast upward. The anchor of a ship enters the sea. The anchor of the souls enters the sky. The anchor of a ship goes through the veil of water. The anchor of the soul goes through the veil of heaven. Our anchor is not fixed in the depths below, but in the height above, on Christ. Apart from Christ there is not anything on which a sinful soul can fasten, or for which a sinful man could hope. But Christ is our hope. Everything the Christian hopes for centers in Him. Everything the Christian hopes for attaches to Him. Our hope anchors to the Rock of ages. He is the foundation of all our hope -- the true Rock which is our holding ground.

"Tho' the angry surges roll
On my tempest-driven soul,
I am peaceful for I know,
Wildly though the winds may blow,
I've an anchor safe and sure,
That can evermore endure.

And it holds, my anchor holds;
Blow your wildest, then O gale,
On my bark so small and frail;
By His grace I shall not fail,
For my anchor holds,
My anchor holds.

Mighty tides about me sweep,
Perils lurk within the deep,
Angry clouds o'ershade the sky,
And the tempest rises high;
Still I stand the tempest's shock,
For my anchor grips the Rock.

I can feel the anchor fast,
As I meet each sudden blast,
And the cable though unseen,
Bears the heavy strain between;
Thro' the storm I safely ride,
Till the turning of the tide.

Troubles almost 'whelm the soul;
Griefs like billows o'er me roll;
Tempters seek to lure astray;
Storms obscure the light of day;
But in Christ I can be bold,
I've an anchor that shall hold."

-- D. B. Towner

It is pathetic if one does not have this hope. An infidel, who was on his last bed of sickness, was urged by his godless companions not to show the white feather, but to hold on. With a face filled with hopeless dismay he looked at them and said, "How can I hold on, when I have nothing to hold by?" Surely he felt the need of a spiritual grapnel, something "sure and steadfast" to which he could hold. Alas, how many there are who still do not have the Christian hope!

What does the Christian hope do for us? It makes us rejoice in the Lord our God. It makes us patient. It helps us in our work. It takes the gloom from death and lights up the dying hour. When the death sweat stood upon the brow of a dying sailor, a friend said, "Well, mate, how is it with you now?" The dying man smiled and said, "The anchor holds, the anchor holds." God grant that every one of you may be able to say this both in life and in death.

Years ago a boy was returning home after having been away for months for the first time in attendance at a school in another state. He was on a boat going home. Somehow the boat seemed to move slowly and stop often. From time to time he would go to the upper deck and ask the captain: "Are we almost there?" And the answer would come, "Not yet." A drizzly, cold December rain set in, night came on, and the captain, seeing anxiety in the boy's face, said: "Your father told me to tell you he would meet you at the landing." By-and-by, as a turn was made in the river, the captain said: "You see that light away down yonder; well, your father is right there waiting for you." And sure enough he was there. Together through the darkness they went until they saw, at the head of the beautiful, broad avenue on the top of the hill, the dear old family mansion, with its lights and loving hearts, awaiting the son's coming home. Oh, how sweet the meeting, the greeting of the loved ones, the rest at home! The journey and the darkness were forgotten. At home again, at home again!

The one who related that incident said, "Years have passed. The old family circle is broken. The billows have beaten around us. Those who waited and watched for the boy that night have gone years ago, but somehow heaven has been nearer and sweeter ever since. They seem to be waiting and watching, still saying, "Brother, son, we are in the home and await you." Christ says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." We trust, and we hope, and through Him we will meet again at home. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."