



Reflecting on Hope

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Hope is the thing that turns the heart upside-down in the middle of grief. Hope is the embers burning after the fire has gone out. Hope is the healthy spare tire in the trunk of the car with a flat.

Unlike the above examples, our modern use of the word "hope" no longer carries the biblical notion. It now carries a heart-cry of whimsical uncertainty or anxious waiting. As children we hope for a bicycle on Christmas morning. As adults we hope the colonoscopy brings back negative cancer results. In neither is there a promise.

When the Bible talks about hope, it often carries certainty with it. And, like faith, it is necessary that the one making the promises has the kind of character that can deliver on those promises.

What about Israel's King David? Where was his hope? God spoke to him in an ancient land. "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me;

your throne will be established forever." David holds the hope and replies, "Your servant has found courage" because of the bold promise of God. David knew God's character was one that did not lie.

Then a thousand years later, the New Testament writers shatter the silence and exclaim that, among many other prophecies, David's hope was born in his own city. The angel, unhindered by the sentimentality of many holiday cards, moves to proclaim the mystery of the incarnation to a young virgin girl. Borrowing the same wording that God spoke to David, the angel comes to a lone individual to speak forth the fulfilled promise that consummated David's hope, "The Lord God will give [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32-33).

But the hope God gives in his promises are not solely for kings in ancient days. Jesus Christ uttered the certainty to his followers, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3).

There are, no doubt, many ready skeptics who find pleasure in calling this "wishful thinking." And there's a certain texture of joy in hope that is similar to the excitement of "wishful thinking." But isn't that just the point? Why does my heart long so deeply for eternal hope and confidence if it is never to be gained? Why do longings for future glory have to be merely "wishful"? The skeptic who says such things about hope is often the one who has been burned by bad promises told by bad people. Does a broken promise mean the heart's desire is broken too? The heart still reaches for the right promise from an eternally unchanging character.

The writer of Hebrews understood this when he wrote, "We... 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 steadfast" (Hebrews 6:18-19). The hope in Jesus Christ!

Go with Mary into the place where the angel announces Jesus. Hear the angel tell of kept promises to David and the world. Go with the disciples into the room where Jesus promises his return. Go with the writer of Hebrews into the refuge that is found in the anchor of hope. And anticipate with wonder

that God indeed visited our planet as a carpenter near Galilee and will come again without any disguises. May hope turn your heart upside-down this celebration season because of God's unbendable promises.

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