
WISHES OR HOPE

BY MICHAEL CARD

“Words are clumsy bricks.”

--Augustine

The words we use the most are the ones we understand the least. When God wanted to speak to us, He didn't drop a book from the sky; He spoke a living Word, a flesh and blood and bone Word. Because our human words really are clumsy bricks, God sent a Word that was alive. He sent His Son.

Still, we use words like “faith,” “hope,” and “love” without knowing what they really mean. (1 Cor. 13:13) They represent concepts that are beyond words. They are sounds we make with our lips that represent bottomless ideas.

“I hope it will rain,” we say. “I hope to see you soon.” Or “I hope I won't get cancer.” Or “I hope my loved one won't die.”

When we speak the simple word “hope,” what most of us really have in mind is something like wishful thinking. We say we “hope” because, at the heart of the matter, we really aren't sure we will get our wish. “I'm not sure my loved one will die, but I ‘hope’ not.” If hope for us is only a wish, then “hope” is a word that has lost its meaning, that is no longer alive. Biblical hope is a different matter.

Most of us don't like Hebrews. Be honest. It is a “fuzzy” book. The central concepts seem archaic and obscure. Mechizedek, angels, high priests and altars. Where is the hope in these? But when you begin to understand that Hebrews is really a book about hope, it all begins to come into focus.

Hebrews was first written to a group of Jewish-Christians in Rome in the second half of the first century. In 49 AD, Claudius had the Christians expelled from the Eternal City purportedly for causing a riot, for violating the *pax romana*. For the Christians in Rome, this was the first taste of persecution. Many had been insulted, imprisoned, their property had been confiscated. (In Acts 18:1-2 we meet Priscilla and Aquila who were a part of that same expulsion.) The first hearers of this beautiful letter were teetering on the edge of hopelessness.

But now it is 15 years later, and Nero has become emperor. With his unstable government, fresh persecution is about to break out. He will blame the Christians for the great fire that will destroy virtually the entire central section of the city. For the first time, followers of Jesus will face bloody persecution in the arena. They will see the cross, not simply as a symbol of Jesus, but as a very real shadow of what will become their future experience. As a result of the

pressure some of them will stop coming to meetings of the house churches that dotted the city. Many will be tempted to lose hope.

With that hopeless life situation in view, the writer of Hebrews, perhaps one of their pastors, will make seven pronouncements about hope. Let's outline them briefly:

I. Hope is something we must courageously hold on to.

“But Christ, the faithful Son, was in charge of the entire household. And we are God's household, if we keep up our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ.” 3:6¹

II. Hope is something we must become sure of.

“Our great desire is that you will keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true.” 6:11

III. Hope is a gift offered to us by God.

“So God has given us both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold on to his promise with confidence.” 6:18

IV. Hope gives us stability in the midst of a stormy world.

“This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain of heaven into God's inner sanctuary.” 6:19

V. Hope allows us to draw near to God.

“For the law made nothing perfect, and now a better hope has taken its place. And that is how we draw near to God.” 7:19

VI. Hope is based on His faithfulness.

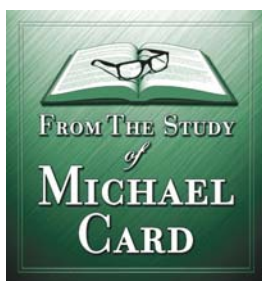
“Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.” 10:23

VII. Hope is inextricably tied to faith.

“What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see.” 11:1

The writer wanted those early Christians (and us as well!) to see that biblical hope is infinitely more than wishful thinking; it is His gracious gift to which we must courageously hold on to. It is rooted, not upon our wishful thinking but upon the faithfulness of the God who has perfectly kept all His promises. Our faith in Him is the link to the hope He alone provides.

If you feel hopeless today, perhaps it is because your hope is only wishful thinking which is not really hope at all. Hope is more than a wish. Let the Living Word transform your heart and mind and then your hope will come alive. You may not be facing persecution in the arena, but still for many of us there are lions prowling about and to be sure there are storms in all our lives. We need more than wishful thoughts. We need the One whom the writer of Hebrews called the Anchor of Hope. *He* is our hope. (1Tim.1: 1) Hold on!



From the Study is a monthly syndicated column by Michael Card. For more information about Michael Card please visit www.michaelcard.com.

¹All references from Holy Bible : New Living Translation. 1997,