

THE HANDS OF GOD, Ps.31

Images of Lent #5

◆Intro: You could smell the smoke of the wood fire in the air. There was the sound of crackling twigs as flames leapt up to consume. The church Bishops were burning something. They were burning Czech reformer, John Huss. First they painted a crown with images of demons on it and then proclaimed “We deliver your soul to Satan!” But John Huss replied, “But I commit my spirit into the hands of my Lord, Jesus Christ who has redeemed me.” That was his last day. Almost like a last prayer. Almost like this prayer, which you might just pray along with me as I say it:

◆*“Now I lay me down to sleep. Pray the Lord my soul to keep...”*

◆Psalm 31 was this kind of prayer. The Jews used it as a kind of bedtime prayer, for when we go to sleep. For when we can’t do anything for ourselves. When we can’t watch over ourselves. It’s a child’s prayer.

◆It’s recorded in Luke 23 that the child of God prayed this prayer about two millennia ago. I’d like to meditate with you on those words, and on the hands they talk about.

◆*“It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.” Luke 23:44-48, NIV.*

◆1. Whose hands are safest?

◆A. It’s pretty clear that Psalm 31 is a song about finding safety. Scan the text and you run into words like these: rescue, refuge, fortress, deliver,

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shelter, hide, safe, preserve. The writer is in pain. He's looking for hands that can do something he cannot.

◆ Everything depends on whose hands you wind up in. When we "fall into someone's hands" we are at their mercy. Have you noticed how we talk about hands?

◆ "He fell into hands of thieves."

◆ "I've got her eating out of the palm of my hand."

◆ "She's got him wrapped around her finger."

◆ All these statements denote that hands represent power over someone or something. But the fact is, when it comes to humans, we can never be sure if hands are completely safe. The only perfectly safe hands are both pure and also powerful. Which leads to this obvious conclusion: God's hands are my safest bet because they are both pure and also powerful.

◆ The band Starfield puts it like this:

No greater joy
Is there than this
To know for what
We're meant to live

To hold Your hand
To touch Your face
To find ourselves
In loves embrace

I want to stand before the King
Join in the song that heaven sings
I want to hold the hand that holds the world

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B. Do you dare to commit your spirit into the hands of God? What might he do with you if you do? Can you trust the strength of the hands that hold the world. Well, the cross for one thing should convince us of this.

◆ I can trust hands that are merciful. Check out v7-9 in the Psalm

◆ *“I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place. Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.” Psalms 31:7-9, NIV.*

◆ Verse 8 is more exact in the Hebrew. It says, “you have not handed me over to the enemies *hands*”. This is the nature of God. It is not his way to hand us over, to leave us lay in the bed we make for ourselves. He is by nature the one who sees and hears our plight and cares.

◆ *“See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” Isaiah 40:10, 11, NIV.*

◆ Here is God, both powerful in arm, but gentle, with lambs in those arms. And this is his face toward you too.

◆ When Jesus breathed his last on that cross and committed his spirit into the hands of his father, it was an acted parable telling us that God’s hands are merciful, and therefore safe. God is the one who sent him there because he preferred to gently gather us out of our anguish versus rightly leaving us to our deserved punishment.

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◆ The hand of the Judge is also the hand of the Savior. You can lay down to sleep in those hands.

◆ C. I can trust hands that will hurt themselves for me. I wonder if you've ever seen this painting: (**show** the "Praying Hands" by Albrecht Durer.) Let me tell you the story. Albrecht yoked himself in poverty with his brother artist. Their agreement was that one would do manual labor of whatever sort to support the other in schooling. Durer received the schooling first. His brother's dreams sank into obscurity his hands having been roughened, cracked and ruined by working in the mines to support Albrecht. The Praying Hands, perhaps his most widely popularized piece, are said to be actually his brothers, which Durer immortalized out of gratitude for what they did for him.



◆ Whether this story is true or not, let me tell you, Jesus hands we're in fact ruined for you, pinned in an outstretched embrace. And anyone whose hands would be ruined to deliver you, is trustworthy.

◆ "But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me." Psalms 31:14, 15, NIV.

◆ "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." John 10:28-30, NIV.

◆ **2. Who needs safe hands?**

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◆**A.** The obvious answer to this question is those who lay them selves down to sleep, in the dark of night, when they can't watch over themselves, when all is against you. Those in struggles or places they themselves cannot control; these need safe hands.

◆Psalm 31 is a cry of trust when it seems that things cannot get any worse. Just scan verses 9-13. Does it seem like it can get any worse? It's interesting that Jesus summons this verse at the moment of death. The moment when:

- ◆the doctor says, "We cant do anything for you.";
- ◆there is no time left to get credit;
- ◆when money is useless on a sinking ship;
- ◆when a hard drink will not change anything;
- ◆when it's just you and God.

◆When even the sunlight darkens and goes out, what is left? When Jesus' life flickered and went out, who was left? Maybe you feel like a person who could pray Psalm 31. Maybe you have moments when you could pray Psalm 31. Moments like

- ◆when no matter how much blessings you are surrounded with, you spirit aches;
- ◆when no matter how hard you try, you cannot reach the goal you always wanted;
- ◆when no matter how much put out, you cannot change the circumstance, the person, the outcome, the choices.
- ◆when you sin, even though you despise it, and then yourself...

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◆B. What is your recourse? Perhaps part of what destroys our souls is that we do everything but what I am about to say, what v22 says.

◆“In my alarm I said, “I am cut off from your sight” You heard my cry for mercy...”

◆What’s he doing? He’s committing his spirit into God’s hands. This is an act of faith. It’s where you let your stomach relax because you are no longer desperately thrashing to make you life turn out how you want, or to make your children turn out how you want, or to make your business become what you want, or to...

◆Next time you are filled with anxiety, may I suggest you whisper the words, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”? You may have to pray it more than once. But go ahead. It comes highly recommended.

◆*“For we do not have a high priest not being able to sympathize with our weaknesses but One having been tried in all respects according to our likeness, apart from sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and we may find grace for help in time of need.”*

Hebrews 4:15, 16, GLT.

◆C. Because of Providence I can be patient. Do you know what Providence is? Besides a place in Rhode Island? Listen to how the Heidelberg Catechism puts it.

Providence is

the almighty and ever present power of God
by which he upholds, as with his hand,
heaven
and earth
and all creatures,
and so rules them that
leaf and blade,
rain and drought,
fruitful and lean years,

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food and drink,
health and sickness,
prosperity and poverty--
all things, in fact, come to us
not by chance
but from his fatherly *hand*.

◆ And how does knowing this help us? That's the next question and I love the answer the catechism gives. Go ahead and read this out loud:

We can be patient when things go against us,
thankful when things go well,
and for the future we can have
good confidence in our faithful God and Father
that nothing will separate us from his love.
All creatures are so completely *in his hand*
that without his will
they can neither move nor be moved.

◆ **Conclusion:** Years ago Michael Smith spoke of what the Heidelberg Catechism calls Providence.

Providence, Providence
See it laying down the cornerstone
The Hand of Providence - it's evident
For we could never make it on our own
Apportioning the power
Weighing all that it entails
Giving us the fulcrum
And a balance to the scales
Chorus:
Oh, the Hand of Providence
Is guiding us through choices that we make
Oh, the Hand of Providence
Is reaching out to help us on our way

Providence, ever since

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Any thesis ever entered man
The Hand of Providence
Has been our best defense
Tho' his ways are sometimes hard to understand
From the dying of a heartbeat
To another soul reborn
From in between and circling
Our thoughts of love and war

◆ See folks, our souls can be at rest. We can lay us down to sleep at night even when life is not turning out the way we wanted because God is going to be up all night anyway. The difference lies in what we're doing with our spirit. Are you not his creature? And if so are you not completely in his hand? Is then there anything that can enter your life for a moment that is outside his will? And is not the will of God always good in the end? Can anything separate you from his love? No! Sin itself can not. The Devil cannot. Illness cannot. Tragedy cannot. There are no chance things with God. If we will trust him with our eternal salvation, will we offend his compassion and not trust him with our 24 hour day?

◆ *I invite you to pray this prayer in your heart right now: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray you Lord, my soul to keep. I believe in you. I know who you are. I trust you as much as I know how right now. Please manage my life, my moments and my future. I will trust in you to work it out. Hear me because of Jesus my savior. Amen.*