

MATCHLESS HANDS

"And when He had thus spoken, He showed them His hands and His feet." Luke 24:40.

"But to Israel He saith, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Romans 10:21.

A close observer can tell many things about a person just by studying the hands. There are hands that tell of toil, rough and calloused with the task of providing for each day. There are hands that reveal a life of idleness. There are hands that indicate skill in the arts and professions.

The hand is a great revealer of character. There is more love written on the blistered palm of the toiler than was ever traced on perfumed paper. More sympathy is expressed in the warm grasp of the hand than in the most eloquent words; and there is more hate in the clenched fist than in the blazing eye. The versatility and expressiveness of the hand are virtually exhaustless. It can receive or reject; it can beckon or repel; it can direct or confuse; it can caress or kill; it can soothe or stab; it can signal a threat or betoken a benediction.

Much has been written about the hands of the Lord Jesus: His strong hands that early in life learned to manage the hammer and the saw in the carpenter's shop in Nazareth; the divinely strong hands that in the days of His ministry restored sight to the blind, unstopped the deaf ears and gave health and cleansing to the lepers; yea, that stopped the funeral bier and gave a dead son back to his mother, alive and well.

After His resurrection He said to His disciples, "Behold my hands" (Luke 24:39). We like to think of His kindly hands upon the heads of the children in blessing. We wonder as we see the whip of cords in His righteous hands as He drives the animals from the sacred precincts of the temple and hurls the tables of the money changers to the ground. We worship as we see Him break the bread on that last night with His disciples, and as He extends the cup to them. In a real way we feel that His hands are offering a sacrifice for our sins as He gives His life for us. Our hearts are touched deeply as we think of His hands being nailed to the cruel cross, and the pain in those wondrous hands through those long hours of agony there. Then we remember that "He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). So we would think of the hands of our Lord Jesus still outstretched in blessing upon His followers here below.

There is something immensely suggestive in the fact that Jesus, almost at the end of His earthly pilgrimage, presented His hands. Our concern now is to discern their character and their message, because they were the most marvelous hands that human eyes ever beheld.

I. They Were Productive Hands

Poetry and art have given us many pictures of Christ. As they portray Him, He was effeminate in features, with long, flowing hair, and soft, delicate hands with tapering fingers. But this is not the Messiah of the Old Testament, nor the Jesus of the New Testament. The prophets saw Him as One with form and visage marred. He was as a root out of dry ground, having neither form nor comeliness. The Evangelists saw Him as the lowly Nazareth carpenter. During the first thirty years of His life, He followed in the steps of the first Adam, and earned His bread with the sweat of His face. How this ennoble toil, and sheds a glory on the burden bearers. He Who now

sits upon the throne of the Eternal, once worked at a carpenter's bench. The hands that now hold the seven stars, once handled the carpenter's tools. The brow that is now wearing the many crowns was once bathed in honest sweat. Down to the lowliest experience He came, and tasted of every cup that touches human lips, so that He could not only sympathize with, but help in every department of human life.

1. Producing the worthwhile.

As a carpenter, He made things that were needed and useful.

2. Producing Healing.

It is a common belief that the hands of certain persons have peculiar healing powers. In childhood days nothing can so ease a wound as a mother's touch. Many a heartache has been charmed away by a tender caress, and many a broken friendship has been healed by the grasp of the hand. But think of the wonderful things that were done by the hands of Jesus. Concerning the afflicted we read, "Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers disease brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them." Luke 4:40. He touched deaf ears, and they heard; the lame, and they walked; the lepers, and they were cleansed; the dead, and they lived again. And what was true then is true today. Many can bear testimony to Christ's healing touch. They were blind and could not see any beauty in the man of Nazareth, but He touched their eyes, and now He is to them the chiefest of ten thousand and the One who is altogether lovely. They were deaf, and heard no music in His praise; but He touched their ears; and now they know no sweeter words than "Jesus Christ our Saviour." They were dead in trespasses and sins, but He touched them and called them to arise, and now they live in Him. God pity the person who has never felt the healing touch of Jesus. His healing is prompt, perfect and free. There is nothing to pay for it, but there is one thing which must be given up, and that is sin.

3. Produced blessing.

His hands were tireless in the fruitful ministry of "Doing good." Of the children we read, "He put His hands upon them and blessed them." He was not afraid of work. He toiled helpfully in every instance. He was a lifter of burdens and a solver of problems. The hands of Jesus are found where the need is the greatest, where the night is the darkest, where the storm sweeps the fiercest, where the tears are the hottest, and where the heartbreak is the saddest.

II. They Were Pierced Hands.

These hands figured in prophecy. In Psalms 22:16 we read, "They pierced my hands and my feet.: It was not the nails alone, but love also that held Jesus to the cross. A little girl once said to her mother, "Mamma, why are your hands so different from other people's. They are all scarred, and bent, and don't look nice at all." Her mother replied, "My dear, I will tell you." Years ago, when you were an infant lying in the cradle, by some means the clothing caught fire and I saw the flames rushing toward your little hands and face. To save you I seized the burning blanket, and in tearing it away, my hands were dreadfully burned, and so these scars were received for you." Then reverently the little girl pressed the hand to her lips, and while tears of gratitude bathed her face she said, "They will always be supremely beautiful to me."

It is the vision of the pierced hands that we so sorely need today. Too many are trying to save themselves by following good advice, when salvation comes only by believing the good news and receiving the only Saviour. Good advice tells men what they ought to do; the good news of the gospel tells them what God has done objectively at the cross, and offers to do subjectively in them through the Holy Spirit.

One day a stranger said to Dr. D. M. Stearns of Philadelphia, "I don't like your preaching. I don't care for the cross. I think that, instead of preaching the death of Christ on the cross, it would be far better to preach Jesus the teacher and example."

Dr. Stearns replied, "Would you then be willing, if I preach Christ the example, to follow His steps?" "I would," said the stranger. "All right," said the preacher, "Then let us take the first step, and this is it: 'Who did no sin.' Can you take this step?"

The critical stranger was manifestly embarrassed. "No," said he, "I do sin; I acknowledge that." "Then," said Dr. Stearns, "You do not need Christ as an example, you need Christ as a Saviour."

Christ is indeed the pattern of the redeemed, but He is first of all the power of their redemption. Sinful humanity needs an expiation as well as an example. and Christ is both.

III. They Were Preserving Hands.

Can't you visualize Peter trying to walk on the wind-tossed waves of Galilee? At length his eyes go from Jesus to the billows and he begins to sink, but Jesus reached forth His hand and touched him and immediately the yielding waves became as a solid rock beneath him. How much that is like our Christian experience! For a while we run well, then we become self-confident and turn our gaze away from Christ, forgetting that His hands are our place of safety.

Listen to the Master as He says, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." John 10:28-29. First, the Son puts the believer in His hand and closes it over him; then the Father puts His hand over the Son's hand and closes it. Until someone stronger than the Father is found to wrench His hand open, and someone stronger than the son to rob Him of His own, no harm can come to the believer in Jesus. As Peter tells us we "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." I Peter 1:5.

"That soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no never forsake."

IV. They Were Pleading Hands.

In Paul's letter to the Romans there is a Christian use of a passage from Isaiah: "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." Romans 10:21. These are none other than the inviting hands of Him who said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28. Thus, He stands in an attitude of invitation.

Look at those Matchless Hands! There is healing in their touch. And they quiver with yearning to heal all the hurts of your soul and all the hurts of men everywhere. They will not coerce or compel us, save as we may be compelled by the divine love they symbolize. They plead with us. Eagerly they reach to receive us and to touch us with their healing and their health.

He touched Mary Magdalene, the sinner, and she became a saint. He touched Peter, the fickle, and he became Peter the rock. He touched one of the "sons of thunder," and he became John, the apostle of love. He touched Saul, the persecutor, and he became Paul, the preacher. He touched John Newton, the libertine, and he became Newton, the preacher, the Missionary promoter, and the immortal author of

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see."

And still those hands of Jesus are extended and pleading with intense earnestness and gentle forbearance and longsuffering. What they have done for millions, they would do for millions more. No sadder language do they ever speak than when their plea is persistently denied. Then they cry, in the rending lament of love's anguish: "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." John 5:40.

I must not leave this thought without insisting that those of us who have been touched by these Productive, Pierced, Preserving and Pleading Hands must in turn extend pleading hands to others. The pleading posture and the pleading gesture must find meaningful place in these redeemed lives of ours.

Some years ago, a traveller from the United States, searching for reminiscences of the great preacher Robert Murray McCheyne, was referred to an old man who had been a member of McCheyne's congregation "Can you tell me some of the texts of McCheyne's great sermons?" asked the visitor. The old man shook his head and said, "I don't remember them." "Then can you tell me some of the striking sentences he uttered-- some of his best sayings?" "I've forgotten them entirely," replied the old man. "Well," said the visitor, with ill concealed disappointment, "don't you remember anything at all about him?" "Ah," said the aged man, brightening, "that is a different question. One day when I was a laddie playing by the roadside, Robert Murray McCheyne came along, and, laying his hand on my head, said 'Jamie, I've been to see your poor sick sister. I'm always glad to see her and help her as I can.' Then he paused, and after looking a bit into my eyes added, 'And Jamie, I'm very much concerned about your soul.' I have forgotten his texts and grand sermons, sir, but I can still feel the tremble of his hand and see the tear in his eye."

That, just that, is the spirit that will possess us if we live under the benediction of the hands of Jesus. Unsaved friend, if you will yield yourself completely to the

Productive, Pierced, Preserving and Pleading Hands of Jesus now, He will break every bond and lift you out of the bondage of Satan into the glorious liberty of Christ, Having grasped you, He will keep you forever.