

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **The Hand of the Lord: The Hand with Wounds - Zechariah 13:1-6**

The study of the hands of the Lord in the New Testament brings before us many very sweet features of the love and kindness of God that came into this world in the person of His beloved Son. We may think of the hand that could touch the leper, or the hand that could raise Jairus' daughter, and again the hand stretched forth to save Peter on the lake when he took His eyes off the Lord. Probably the thought that comes to our minds first when we think of the hands of the Lord is. It was those very same hands that men nailed to the cross. I think of a children's hymn we used to sing that has the lines, 'Those gentle hands that did such good, they nailed them to a cross of wood'.

The apostle John, however, tells us in John 13:3, "that the Father had given all things into His hands". Those hands that had dealt with every need that came to Him in faith in His pathway in this world are competent to hold everything for God. So also as far as the believer is concerned for the Lord Jesus says in John 10:28, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand". Everything in His hands is secure and there is no power in the whole universe that can wrest the believer from His care.

But we have turned to the chapter in the prophet Zechariah where there seems to be an illusion to hands that have been wounded. The setting of this verse is very wonderful as it refers to a day yet to come when the remnant of Israel will be restored to God. Verse 1 of our chapter tells us, "In that day there will be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." Not only will the awful sin that Israel committed when they crucified their Messiah be cleansed away but also their state will be cleansed. The death of the Lord Jesus and the shedding of His precious blood will be the basis whereby they will come into blessing but also their lives will be made suitable to God. We must remember that Scripture tells us in John 19:34, "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water". Blood is for the eye of God and makes the believer judicially clean, but water makes us morally clean so that our lives are suitable to God.

The next few verses in Zechariah describe how that everything false will be removed from the nation of Israel. Idols, false prophets and unclean spirits will be cast out of the land. Often in the Old Testament do we read of terrible days in Israel's history when they sought after idols and were lead astray by false prophets. Also during the coming reign of Antichrist the nation will have suffered terribly from them, but all this will be cleansed away. The false prophets will be dealt with very severely, even parents will execute judgment against their own children who dare to prophesy falsely and 'will thrust him through' thus wounding him. But in contrast to these we read in verse 5 of another who was wounded and pierced through, One who was thought nothing of men and was despised as the Nazarene but is asked in verse 6, "What are these wounds in thine hands?"

Wounds in Scripture seem to speak of two things. On the one, hand they speak of the cruelty of those who inflict them, but on the other, they speak of the devotion of the one who is wounded. In Exodus 21 we have the instructions concerning the devoted Hebrew servant. Having been offered his liberty according to the commandment, he could go free, but alone. If he had been given a wife and she had borne him children, they would have to stay. But in verse 5 we read, "And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children: I will not go out free; then his master shall bring him to the judges; he shall also bring him unto the door, or unto the doorpost; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him forever." That wound in his ear would ever remind his wife and children, and his master of his love and devotion that let him, even when standing at the door with his liberty before him, that he plainly declare his love to his master, wife and children and was prepared to serve forever in order to keep them.

These verses find their fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ. Having come into this world as the divine servant and arriving at that critical moment when His love and devotion was to be tested, He plainly says in John 14:31, "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." In Ephesians 5:25 we read, "Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it." Finally in Galatians 2 the apostle Paul writes, "The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." These Scriptures clearly show that those pieced hands that were nailed to the cross of Calvary would ever remind us of the love of Christ that led Him to suffer and die such a death, that He might ever have us with Him.

In Zechariah 12:10, we read of the future day when Israel will be restored, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." When God begins to take up His earthly people again, He pours upon them the spirit of grace and supplication. This reminds us that none of us would ever have turned to God in repentance had He not first worked in our hearts. But with Israel there is added the fact that they will actually look upon the very One that the nation had crucified many years before, and they will realise how awful their mistake was. This will bring about a national mourning for Him and repentance towards God. How significant it is that the thing which brings this about is the sight of those pierced and wounded hands.

The fact of the crucifixion is prophesied in Psalm 22, hundreds of years before that mode of execution was known. Crucifixion was probably of Phoenician origin but Rome adopted and improved it, but this was long after David so accurately describes it in Psalm 22:14-17, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and My tongue cleaveth to My jaws; and Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed Me: they pierced my hands and feet. I may tell all My bones: they look and stare upon Me."

It was probably the most painful method of execution and reserved for the worst criminals and especially for the Jews. It was not unusual for a victim to take three days to die; this is why we read of the soldiers coming to break the legs of the three who were executed at Calvary, to hasten death.

I quote from Alfred Edersheim's book, *'The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah'* where he describes crucifixion. "Avowedly, the punishment was invented to make death as painful and as lingering as the power of human endurance. First the upright wood was planted in the ground. It was not high, and probably the feet of the sufferer were not above one or two feet from the ground. Next the transverse wood was placed on the ground, and the sufferer laid on it, when his arms were extended, drawn up and bound to it, then a strong sharp nail was driven first into the right and then into the left hand. The sufferer was then drawn up by means of ropes and ladders; the transverse either bound or nailed to the upright and a rest or support for the body fastened to it. Lastly, the feet were extended, and either one nail hammered into each, or a large piece of iron through the two."

Not only was there terrible pain from the wounds in the hands and feet taking all the weight of the body but also the whole physical frame was so strained that it felt as though all the bones were out of joint. Breathing would become very difficult due to the strain on the shoulders and chest; "My heart is like wax...melted." Complete loss of strength and extreme thirst would ensue. On top of all this there was the terrible sense of being beyond all hope and being made a spectacle before men and women devoid of human feelings.

These details of crucifixion will give us a better understanding of what Scripture means when in Philippians 2:8 we read, "And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." This verse speaks of the death of the cross as being the extent to which His obedience would go; being the ultimate of human suffering, as indeed it is. Yet His love and obedience were equal to it. In order that His love to His Father and to you and me could be demonstrated, He was prepared to suffer such a death. Even while in the midst of such suffering and bad treatment, yet He prays that they might be forgiven: "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" Luke 23:34.

How perfect was His example of His own words when He taught His disciples in Luke 6:28, "Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." How perfectly He loved His enemies! Romans 5:10 tells us, "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." But we must remember that this forgiveness and reconciliation to God had to have a righteous basis. Terrible though His physical sufferings were, they could never take away our sins. They demonstrate to us the wonder of His love and devotion, but they could not form the basis upon which God could forgive you and me. Whilst enduring those sufferings of crucifixion, He had to bear the judgement of God.

We may be able to imagine a little what pain crucifixion inflicted upon the victim. Many other Jews were to suffer this a few years later, but no other has ever endured the wrath of God against sin. So it is absolutely impossible for us to enter into what He suffered during those three hours of darkness. God would not allow men to see it. What took place during those three hours was between God and His Son alone. The only sound we hear is that awful cry of Psalm 22:1, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" We who have come to love God know the answer to that question. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

There are three more occasions when the sight of those wounded hands is used to bring peace and assurance to Jesus' disciples. On the very same day that He was raised from among the dead, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then to Simon Peter. Also to the two distraught souls going home to Emmaus, all with a view to drawing

them together, as we read in Luke 24:36-40. "And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have. And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet."

It seems as though the sight of His wounded hands and feet would remedy the doubts and fears that filled their hearts. They could not understand what they saw, and jumped to the wrong conclusion. He would assure them that it was actually Himself and not a spirit. John, in his account of this incident, says in 20:20, "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." Those wounds brought complete relief to their hearts and filled them with joy and gladness. Does it not do the same with us? Can we doubt the love of Christ when we think on those wounded hands and feet? Surely not!

The Spirit of God seems to gather together all the power of Satan and death all the hatred and cruelty of men, and even the forsaking of His own disciples in those wounds in His hands. But they plainly tell us that His love was equal to it and had triumphed over it all.

But the disciple Thomas was missing from this meeting, and when told of it he said, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe." Remarkably, this is the only scriptural mention of 'the print of the nails' and they were the words of a man who would not believe unless he saw them. Thomas here is a picture of the nation of Israel, who today has not believed the testimony of the Scriptures. But in a coming day, as we have previously considered, they will see and believe.

In John 20:26-27 we read, "And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them; then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing." What an effect this had on Thomas! What must have been his thoughts as he may have considered his own doubts compared to the love that bore those wounds! He exclaims in verse 28, "My Lord and my God." In a very similar way, the nation of Israel when they have been restored will exclaim, as Isaiah 25:9 says, "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Finally, I am sure that it is not without significance that at the end of his gospel as Luke describes the Lord being taken up into heaven, that there is the last mention of the Lord's hands. Luke 24:50-51 says, "And 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." So the very last sight the disciples had of the Lord would have been His outstretched hands. Do we wonder then that the next verses say, "And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." May this consideration of the Lord's wounded hands have a similar effect upon each one of us!

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