

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The finger of God: God in communication

It is said that the biggest problem in marriage is not finance, or competing demands or any other of a host of reasons but communication. Couples failing to communicate properly. Too often, I have found myself at the wrong end of this one, after forgetting to tell my wife some important information, only for it to come out later, and it be evident that I already knew. Oops! Of course, we communicate in all sorts of ways. We may communicate verbally, by what we say or the sounds we make; for example, a laugh indicates we have found something funny. However, we also communicate non verbally - a small hand placed into the hand of a parent indicates trust. An arm around the shoulders indicates sympathy and support. So many different ways and means by which we put our message across. But then there are two parts to effective communication. It is not just what is said or done, but also what is understood by the person to whom we are communicating. For example, whenever I bought my wife flowers, I was just saying that I loved her and appreciated all she did. However, our children would always immediately assume that I had done something wrong again, or was after something, and was just preparing the ground, so to speak. We speak about "reading between the lines", not taking words at face value but looking for a hidden meaning.

This morning we are going to think about the way in which God has communicated with us. Last week, we began a series looking at the finger of God. As we continue with this theme, we shall see how those same fingers have communicated two great messages. Firstly, we shall look at how those fingers tell us that God is the great life giver. Then, secondly, those same fingers tell us how this life is to be enjoyed. Happily with God, I have found that whenever He has something important to say, He says it in such a plain way that it is really very difficult not to understand what He has to say. For sure, the details of some parts of the Bible are not easy to grasp, but we are left in no doubt as to His meaning when He reveals Himself to us, nor as to what He expects from us in terms of an appropriate response.

God being the source of life

So let us look, then, at the first of these great themes - that of God being the source of life. We see this in the story of the encounter of Moses with Pharaoh that we read about in Exodus 8:16-19: *"So the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to Aaron, "Stretch out your rod, and strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.'" And they did so. For Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod and struck the dust of the earth, and it became lice on man and beast. All the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not. So there were lice on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.' But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said."*

God had sent Moses to Pharaoh with the simple but momentous instruction to let His people, the Israelites, go. No doubt Pharaoh thought to himself that he did not know this God so he saw no reason to obey. After all, who would then do all the manual labour that was making him so rich? So he hardens his heart and refuses to obey God. One of the great excuses of the unbeliever is that if God would only do something dramatic, then we would all believe in Him. Well, the story of Pharaoh shows that this is not the case. Aaron, Moses' brother and spokesman, had thrown down his walking stick in the presence of Pharaoh, and it had turned into a serpent (Exodus 7:8-10). Pharaoh's magicians, Jannes and Jambres, had managed to convince the king that this was nothing special by concocting some illusion that brought the true actions of Aaron into question (Exodus 7:11-13).

But God had not finished with Pharaoh, nor was He to be put off by an initial refusal, and so a series of ten plagues was to be unleashed upon Egypt. In this trial of strength with Pharaoh, there was ever only going to be one winner! So Moses and Aaron are used to turn the waters of the Nile to blood (Exodus 7:14-21). Again the magicians are able to copy this action (Exodus 7:22-25). A plague of frogs (Exodus 8:1-15) follows before the third plague that we read about, the plague of lice (Exodus 8:16-19).

Aaron strikes the dust of the ground with his rod, and it immediately becomes a plague of lice (Exodus 8:16-17). On attempting to do, this even Pharaoh's magicians are left powerless (Exodus 8:18). They could maybe revive an entranced snake, or turn water red, but when it came to giving life to inanimate objects they realised that they were beaten, and exclaim, *"This is the finger of God"* (Exodus 8:19). These magicians were probably the best in the world, but they knew that they could not give life to dust. This was indeed the action of God who is able to give life to all.

Sadly, Pharaoh still would not listen, and again hardens his heart. Sadly for him, it was not until God revealed Himself as the One who also has power to take life away, that Pharaoh realises he is defeated, and the Israelites are free to leave their lives of slavery behind.

Now the great lesson for us today is that God has not changed! What He chose to reveal to Pharaoh in such a dramatic way is still true, and has been revealed to us also. From the very beginning God has been the only One who is able to give life. So we read in Genesis 2:7: *“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”*

Humanity started by a deliberate act of life giving power from God. Our presence on planet earth is not a mistake, or an accident of natural causes, but a deliberate choice of the One who has power over life itself. However, for some, through reasons of circumstance, or health or the actions of others, that life is hard, if not intolerable. We do live in a very broken world. However, what I want us to do now is to see where the finger of God points to, for as we trace the power of God to give life through the New Testament, we see that the real life that God wants us to enjoy is a full relationship with Him, a spiritual life, if you like to call it that, that is untouched by the circumstances that may afflict our physical life.

Let us then consider the full revelation of God as to His power to give life:

- *“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”,* John 1:4.
- *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”,* John 10:10.
- *“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand”,* John 10:28.
- *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”,* John 17:3.
- *“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son”,* 1 John 5:11.

From these verses, as well as many more, we see that it is God’s intention that we should share in the fullest enjoyment of life. Physical life is all very well but God has something more, much more, for those who believe. The fullest life exists in God Himself, and He has chosen to reveal Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. But this life is intended to be shared with all those who come to faith in Him, and His finished work at the cross. This life is given by Him to all those who believe, and is expressed fully by an increasing and wonderful knowledge of God (see John 17:3). Eternal life is not just living for ever and ever but living in the knowledge of God, who is with us and in us and for us. There is nothing better than being able to trace the ways of God in your life, either on a day by day basis, or as we look back over the years and see His guidance and presence throughout good times and bad. It will take an eternity to get to know God in the way we should, and even then, there will be fresh understandings of His glory and person to brighten every day.

Before we move on to our second point, we just need to remind ourselves that fingers form part of a hand. Did you notice that in John 10:28? How wonderful that His power is such that only His finger is required to give us life, but His whole hand is there to offer us His protection, such that none, not even ourselves, can pluck us out of His hand. Once He gives us His new life upon salvation, we are saved for ever, and that nothing can change that transaction, because it is one that God has made with Himself. However, there is another aspect to this that we would do well to take notice of. We read about this in the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 10:31: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

The same God, who now offers us life, will one day stand as judge to those who refuse Him now. It is simply no good us moaning that it is not fair, or that we don’t believe, or that it will all work out in the end. God has chosen to reveal Himself to us, and we do well to acknowledge Him now while there is opportunity, for the fingers that now promise life, form part of the hand that holds the Judge’s hammer!

The life that God offers is to be enjoyed

Now let us move on to see the second way in which God has communicated to us. In this we will see how the life that He offers is to be enjoyed. We will start by reading from Exodus 31:18: *“And when [God] had made an end of speaking with [Moses] on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.”*

The Ten Commandments given by God (see Exodus 20:1-17) lie at the heart of most of this world’s legal systems, and are widely recognised as one of the great works of ancient literature. On one level, all laws are an infringement of my personal liberties. Why should someone else tell me what I am, or am not, allowed to do? And yet we generally accept this restriction for the greater good of the society in which we live, recognising that in the end society’s good is

also to my advantage. For example, I accept that I cannot drive at the speed I want to, even though it delays my journey, on the understanding that other road users are kept safer than if I was allowed to drive at any speed. Those other road users may well be a nurse who one day looks after me in hospital or a lady who marries my son. We accept a limit to our freedom, for a greater good. And yet when it comes to God, and His giving of the law we view Him as some cosmic kill joy. Nothing could be farther from the truth! All Israel had to do was to obey the law, commands that were neither unreasonable nor draconian, and they would receive the unlimited blessing of the Almighty God. We read about one of the great promises of God with mankind in Exodus 19:5-8: *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do.’ So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.”

Imagine that! God has just made an agreement with Moses on behalf of the nation of Israel. In return for the promise of unlimited blessing from God, all Israel had to do was to obey these commands written with the finger of God - the lightest touch of restriction on their lives for the greatest blessing. And yet therein lies the rub. They, and we, just don't like being told what to do, nor do we have the inner strength to be able to obey all the time. If I was to be brutally honest with myself, I would probably have to admit that hardly a week goes by when I do not break the spirit, if not the letter, of the law. I could hardly complain, then, if I spent the rest of my life in prison. I guess they might be quite full! Had Israel kept God's commands then they would have been the world's only superpower - rich in health, in culture in finance, in security. And through them the whole world would come into blessing. No blame on our part can be laid against them, for they just do not have the power to do what is right. When we come to the New Testament, Paul picks up on this theme and applies it to all mankind, rather than just one nation. So let us read about his demonstration of our inability to please God, and what God has done about it.

“For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our member to bear fruit to death ... but sin taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire...For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good ... but I am carnal, sold under sin”, Romans 7:5-14.

There is nothing wrong with the law but there is everything wrong with me. Egged on under the influence of the Devil, my self serving nature views only the narrow immediacy of my circumstances and thinks that I can benefit by doing wrong with impunity. It utterly fails to see the eternal consequences of my actions. I am like a new car that has no petrol in it. There is nothing wrong with the car itself but it cannot go because it has no power to do so. No amount of tinkering with the engine will ever change that!

Now if that was all there was to it, that would be an utterly hopeless message. We have all failed and there is nothing that we can do about it! God be thanked that He has done something about it!

- *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes”*, Romans 10:4.
- *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified”*, Galatians 2:16.

The finger that wrote the law now points to a new righteousness that will similarly yield the untold blessing of God. If, this morning, you still harbour thoughts of being able to please God by your own efforts, thus earning your salvation, then give it up. We can never work out our own salvation by good works and law keeping (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Thousands of years of history stand as damning evidence against such a thought. However, there is a new righteousness that wholly meets God's exacting standards, and that is to be found in Christ Himself. He gives us His righteousness by faith in Him. You see the finger that wrote the law was joined to the hand that was nailed to a cross holding in its clenched fist all my liabilities so far as God is concerned. They have been dealt with, and now I am free to stand before God as perfect. He gives me His perfection in exchange for all my imperfections. As JD Smith has written in his hymn *“Rise my soul! Behold 'tis Jesus”*:

*“All thy sins were laid upon Him,
Jesus bore them on the tree;
God, who knew them, laid them on Him,
And believing, thou art free.”*

The glorious truth of the Gospel is that God has made me right with Himself. It was the only way that I could satisfy His desires and requirements. He has done everything. I simply need to believe that it is so. The wonderful life that He gives is to be enjoyed living under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit of God, serving God not to earn salvation, but as an expression of thankfulness for all that He has done. His power is the “petrol” that is more than

able to power our lives to honour Him. No wonder Paul could say in Galatians 2:20: *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

Each one of us who has trusted in Jesus Christ as Saviour is a living, walking embodiment of the life of Christ here upon earth. What a challenge, as we consider how we ought to behave! What a comfort as we may face hard choices and difficult days. We are never alone. Those fingers that with their lightest touch have given life, are able to show us the way to please God. They are part of the hands that have picked us up and, laying us across His shoulders (see Luke 15:5), are well able to carry us all the way home! We have the most wonderful and Almighty God as our Saviour and Friend, the One who gives life and sustains us in it, to His glory, forever.

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