

THE HANDS OF THE MIGHTY GOD OF JACOB

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(GENESIS 49:22-24)

The imagery in this scripture is very suggestive, for the aged Jacob, in blessing his sons, saw Joseph as a fruitful tree planted by a well. Drawing sustenance from the depths of God's grace, Joseph had become prosperous in many ways, and his influence had spread over the walls which protected the grove. Jacob's favorite son had been used by God in Egypt, and from the heavenly source had come—or would come—"The Shepherd or Rock of Israel." Many commentators believe this to be a Messianic prediction fulfilled when the hands of Jesus supplied healing to suffering people.

Rescuing Peter from Drowning ... I-low Strong (Matt. 14:30-31)

"But when he (Peter) saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Perhaps Peter's response to the invitation of the Lord was impulsive and irrational, but his faith was commendable. He walked upon the water and did the apparently impossible. It should always be remembered that as long as he looked at the Lord, he did not sink! Christ imparted to His follower something which He alone possessed. Furthermore, when Peter's faith diminished and he cried for help, Jesus did what no other person could have done. To lift a drowning man, the rescuer must be standing on something solid—otherwise, the desperate man will pull him down. Peter's experience was an example of Christ's strength being made perfect in the disciple's weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

The Savior's attitude toward Simon Peter may be summarized under four headings. He loved; looked; listened and lifted. It is encouraging to know that Christ remains the unchanging One. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever (Heb. 13:8). Life is filled with storms which can be more threatening than any which disturbed the Sea of Galilee. Problems

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ruin serenity, but in every emergency the Lord is able and willing to help those who call upon Him.

Reclaiming the Leper from Despair... How Suggestive
(Matt. 8:2-3)

"And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." It was illegal for any leper to approach other people. Lepers were isolated, for there was always danger of contagion. It may never be known how fierce was the conflict within the mind of the sufferer who came to Christ. If he disobeyed the law, he could be stoned. Probably he knew death was inevitable whatever he did. If he did nothing the disease would kill him; if he went to Jesus and was arrested, his premature death would be a welcome release from suffering. There appeared to be some hope at the feet of the Savior and any risk involved was worth taking. Nevertheless, the leper never expected Christ to touch him. That action was considered beyond the realm of possibility, for to touch a leper was not only dangerous; it was defiling. Evidently God's power met the man's need where it was. The Lord was above the law and everything that accompanied it. It was significant

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that throughout His ministry, no person ever came in vain to Jesus. Once again the incident may be summarized under four headings: The law with its prohibition (see Leviticus 14). The leper with his problem. The Lord with His power. The liberation with its praise.

Restoring the Beggar from Darkness... How Sufficient
(Mark 8:22-25)

"And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked if he saw ought. And he looked up and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly."

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This was a remarkable account, for it revealed facets of Christ's ministry not mentioned elsewhere. The fact that this man was brought to Jesus indicated friends cared about his condition. Throughout the history of the church theologians debated the reason for the gradual recovery of this man's sight. Could not Christ have completed the miracle instantly? The Savior decided it would be better to heal the man by stages. For this there could be several reasons. Perhaps the man's health necessitated a gradual improvement. The sudden inrush of light might have caused other physical damage. The Pulpit Commentary interprets the passage as: "I see men; for I beheld them as trees walking; that is, I see something confusedly and obscurely; not deafly, for I see what I think must be men, and yet so dimly that they look to me like trees only that I know men move from their places, whereas trees do not" (Pulpit Commentary. "Mark," pg. 333). Perhaps Christ rewarded the man according to his faith. An imperfect faith was answered by an incomplete miracle. Christ encouraged the beggar to "believe with all his heart" that even greater things could be performed on his behalf. Jesus demonstrated the fact that He was able to meet the man's need under all circumstances, and what He did then, He still performs for all who trust Him.

Relieving the Widow from Difficulty ... How Splendid
(Luke 13:11-13)

"And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God." The age of this afflicted woman is not known, but she had probably spent half of her life as a victim of a crippling disease. She was troubled by a malady which affected her spine, and consequently could not even lift her head to see the Savior. When Jesus called her, even though she could not see Him, at least she heard His voice and obeyed! That was the secret of the transformation which removed her disability.

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There are innumerable people whose sight is limited; oppressive circumstances prevent their recognition of the goodness of God. The Lord never asks the impossible. When men are overwhelmed by problems, God calls, and obedience makes all things possible. There was no religious order which could perform miracles; the secret of recovery was in a personal con-

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frontation with the living Christ, and as it was long ago, it remains unchanged today.

Releasing the Disciples from Doubt.. . How Safe (John 10:27-29)

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And 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." The "double-grip" of the hands of The Father and Son provides immeasurable strength and incomparable safety. This is a delightful endorsement of the words spoken by Jacob. ". . . the aims of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel" (Gen. 49:24).

Jesus realized the future of His followers would be hazardous; Simon Peter would be ashamed of his inconsistency; Thomas worried by his doubts, and others a prey to their fear. After each failure, despondency would harass the minds of His dearest friends, and the thought of being unworthy of God's kindness could haunt them throughout their earthly pilgrimage. The Lord was emphatic when He announced that nothing would be able to pluck them from "the double-grip" of the divine Family. Paul evidently believed this fact, for he wrote: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

The keeping power of God's hand is sufficient for every emergency of life. It was written that the Lord Jesus "took them

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(little children) up into his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:16). At the other extreme of life, David said: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139:7-10).

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