

Hands that Uphold Us  
(Isaiah 41:10, 49:13-16)

## BLURB

This message was given in 2019 and is the third message in our "The Lord's Hands" series. God's hands strengthen us when we are weak, help us when we are in need of help, and uphold us when we feel like we can't go on.

## INTRO

Next to Jesus, the Bible records more about David and his life than any other person in the Bible. David was Israel's greatest king, and he is described in Scripture as being a man after God's own heart. He wrote the most famous psalm in the Bible, Psalm 23, which has been a source of encouragement and comfort to countless Christians. Most people, including non-Christians, know him as the young man with great faith who slew the giant Goliath with a sling and a stone. If you read all of David's psalms, you'll soon realize that, for better or worse, he was a very emotional and passionate man. One thing I like about him is that he was so frank and honest about what he was thinking and feeling when he wrote his psalms. He didn't whitewash his feelings, doubts, and fears. When he was struggling in his faith or hurting, he said so. One example of a very frank and honest psalm is Psalm 13, which begins this way.

<sup>1</sup> How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

<sup>2</sup> How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?

I wonder, how many of you have struggled with similar thoughts and feelings toward God at one time or another?

And I wonder how many of you are struggling with such feelings and thoughts *right now*, ... sitting here wondering where God is and why He has abandoned you.

### I. REVIEW

In our last two messages, we've looked at the nature of the Lord from the viewpoint of various passages of Scripture about His hands. We've seen that, unlike we humans, Jesus did not have hands that grasped tightly to His godhood and authority, but instead humbly laid aside His glory and majesty to become a helpless baby to ultimately die on the cross for our sins. Last week, we looked at some Old Testament passages that describe the Lord as our Creator who welcomes repentant sinners into His arms. We also saw that He is called our Potter, and He has given to all mankind life and breath and all things, and when we put our trust in Him as Savior and Lord, He begins a process of re-formation in our lives — a process that is intended to make us more and more like Jesus Christ.

This morning, I want to continue this theme by looking at some other Old Testament passages related to the Lord's hands, and it is my prayer that these wonderful truths will

encourage, comfort and help you, especially if you are going through a hard time now.

## II. HANDS THAT STRENGTHEN, HELP, AND UPHOLD US

If you have your Bible with you, please turn to Isaiah 41:10. God is speaking here through the prophet Isaiah to Jews who are fearful and anxious about their future after their Babylonian exile is over.

This is what the Lord says to them.

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

### A. WE TEND TO FOCUS ON OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

I wonder how many of us here this morning or watching online are dealing with fear and anxiety now. The Lord wants us to trust Him.

He says to us, “Do not fear. Do not anxiously look about you.”

#### **Peter walked on the water, but ...**

This was Peter’s problem the night he walked on the water in the storm. Many of you know the story well, I think. The disciples saw Jesus walking on the water during a terrible storm, and Peter had the boldness to say this to Jesus.

“Lord, if it is **You**, command me to come to You on the water.”

And when Jesus said, “Come,” Peter got out of the boat and began walking on the water toward Jesus!

Things were going well until Peter did something.

*Do any of the children know what happened to Peter next?*

*But, what happened next?*

(That’s right.) He began to sink.

But seeing the wind, [Peter] became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Why did Peter begin to sink?

Because he took his eyes off of Jesus and looked around him at the storm ... at the frightening circumstances.

In other words, Peter did what God told the Israelites in Isaiah 41:10 **not** to do.

God told them the same thing He tells us today when we are facing uncertain or frightening circumstances —

“Do not fear. Do not anxiously look about you at your circumstances.”

## **B. WE CAN HAVE PEACE INSTEAD OF FEAR AND ANXIETY**

Why can we do this in the midst of uncertain and difficult times?

Let's look at Isaiah 41:10 again. もう一度、イザヤ 41 章 10 節をみてみましょう！

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

God gives us three reasons why we don't need to be fearful or anxious.

He is with us,

He is our God,

and He has promised to strengthen, help, and uphold us.

So, here we see another thing the Lord uses His hand for. In addition to creating us and re-creating us into Christ's image, and in addition to lovingly welcoming us when we repent of our sin and come humbly to Him, the Lord uses His hand to strengthen, help, and uphold us in times of trouble. By using “right hand”, God is saying that He will use His “strongest” hand. And, depending on the translation you use in Japanese, the word translated in English Bibles as “righteous” is translated as “deliverance”, “righteousness” or “victory”.

I'm using the *Shinkyodo-yaku*, which translates it as “deliverance”, but I think all three meanings are applicable. God's hand is righteous and just, strong to save, and always victorious against His enemies. And He wants us to know that it is such a hand that will uphold us.

## **C. HE IS WITH US AND UPHOLDS US THROUGH THE HARD TIMES**

When we're facing circumstances that causes us anxiety and fear, our God is there with us to **see us through** the hard times. Notice that it doesn't say He will change the difficult circumstances or save us out of them.

Sometimes He does, of course.

But in Isaiah 41:10, He is promising to be with us **in the midst of** the hard times to **give us the strength** we need, and to help us and support us **through** the fearful circumstances with His strong hand. Our natural tendency, of course, is to do what Peter did — to look at the things that are causing our fear and anxiety.

But God says to us, “Don't be afraid. I am **with you**.”

Look at Me, not your circumstances. I am **your God**.

And remember — I can **strengthen you** and **help you** through these dark days. I can **uphold you** with My righteous right hand ... if you ask Me to and trust in Me.”

It sounds simple, but I think every Christian here knows that sometimes this is **very hard** to do. And I’m not standing up here, blithely making it sound like it’s always easy to trust God when our hearts are filled with fear and worry. But these are our Creator’s words to us, His **beloved** children. He is with us in the midst of life’s trials, suffering, and pain. Ask Him for the faith and determination to cling to His promises, “I am with you. I am your God. I will strengthen, help, and uphold you.” And don’t hesitate to ask your Christian brothers and sisters for prayer. We are all in this thing called “life” together, especially here, when we are gathered together as the family of God.

### III. “I HAVE INSCRIBED YOU ON THE PALMS OF MY HANDS”

As I said a moment ago, though, sometimes it’s very hard to trust in the Lord, even though we have His promises. And even though God gave the Jews this wonderful promise in Isaiah 41:10, they struggled to believe it. I began my message this morning looking at King David, and his words in Psalm 13.

<sup>1</sup> How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? <sup>2</sup> How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?

When times are tough, when we are overwhelmed by pain, fear, betrayal, and many other things that rob us of peace of heart and mind, it is very easy to feel about God the way David did here.

But please remember this — it was only David’s **feelings**. God had **not** forgotten him at all, or hidden His face from him. It just **felt** that way to David.

#### 1. ISRAEL FEELS FORSAKEN AND FORGOTTEN

In Isaiah 49, we see the same struggle portrayed. The time frame is around the same time as Isaiah 41. The Jews are afraid and worried when they see their circumstances and think about the future now that Jerusalem lies in ruins.

Let’s look now at Isaiah 49:13-16. The passage begins with Isaiah’s joyful praise for God’s faithfulness in bringing His exiled people back to Jerusalem.

<sup>13</sup> Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted. Isaiah is praising and thanking the Lord for comforting His people and showing them mercy.

But, how did the Jews feel about it?

<sup>14</sup> But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me.”

Here Zion, representing the city of Jerusalem as well as God's people, fails to respond to God's goodness to them. Instead, they are focusing on the fact that Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. They feel forsaken and forgotten by God, even though He has given them many promises. The word translated here as "forgotten" means "to forget, to stop caring for." We sometimes feel the same way when tragedy or suffering strikes us or our loved ones, don't we? We tend to wonder where God is, and sometimes we even begin to doubt His love and faithfulness. David felt the same way, as we saw in Psalm 13. Well, how did God respond when His people spoke negatively about Him, saying that He had forsaken them and forgotten them?

In anger? Not at all!

His gracious reply is one of the most comforting passages in the Bible, I think.

<sup>15</sup> "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. <sup>16</sup> Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me."

## B. WE ARE NOT FORSAKEN OR FORGOTTEN

Before talking more about these amazing words, I want to briefly say something about the importance of context when reading Scripture. When we find promises in the Bible, we should remember that context is important. Not **every** promise in the Bible is for **every** Christian today. Looking at the context of this wonderful promise, we see that it was given specifically to "Zion". In Isaiah's day, Zion referred not only to the hill on which the Temple was built but also to the walled city of Jerusalem. And this is the specific context of the promise in verse 16 — the city of Jerusalem. At times, though, the Bible uses the name Zion to refer to God's chosen people, the Jews. And it appears that this is also the meaning intended by God. I say this because of what we read in verse 13, where **Zion** responds to Isaiah's words about God comforting His people and having compassion on them. So, even though these promises are **specifically** for the Jews, considering the nature of God, most Bible scholars believe it is OK to apply this promise to **all who are God's people** by faith, both Jew and Gentile in Isaiah's day and ours ...

So, that is what I will do now. But please remember that context is very, very important when interpreting and applying God's Word. OK, so God begins His response to those who feel He has forgotten them and forsaken them by using an analogy everyone can easily understand.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb?"

This is, of course, a rhetorical question, and the obvious answer should be, "No, of course not!" A mother's love for her newborn baby is truly a special and deep thing, something God has put in the heart of every mother, as those of you who are mothers can attest to.

Yes, sadly, some mothers do forsake their babies and don't love them. But not so with God.

He declares passionately,

"Even these may forget, but **I will not** forget you."

God wants us to know that no matter how forsaken, forgotten and alone we might feel, *it isn't reality*. We find a similar promise in Hebrews 13:5, where God says,

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (ESV)

### **C. WE ARE INSCRIBED ON GOD'S HAND**

God then emphasizes how special and precious His people are to Him by adding these words in verse 16.

“Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands.”

#### **1. “Behold”**

God begins with the word “behold” ... a word that shows us that He wants to get our attention. He is saying to those who feel He has forsaken and forgotten them, “Look at this!”

“Look! I've inscribed you on the palms of My hands!”

He is giving us the image of Him spreading out His hands before us so that we can see that He has engraved us there.

#### **2. Not washable ink, but carved into His palms**

The word translated “inscribed” here can mean “inscribed, carved into, engraved”. Most of us have had the experience of writing something important on our hands so that we don't forget it later. I used to do it all the time, but I'm so forgetful now that my hand isn't big enough for all the reminders! The problem with doing this, though, is that the ink washes off or wears off! Many times I had to stare at my palm for a long time, trying to make out a letter or two so I could remember what I'd written. The nuance of what God has said here is that He has engraved or carved us on the palms of His hands, and we will remain there forever! Some Christians fear that if they don't live a good enough Christian life, if they doubt God too long, ... He will cast them aside. Not so — He will never forget us, leave us, nor forsake us. Such is the grace of God in Isaiah 49:16, a promise that is echoed in Paul's words in 2 Timothy 2:13. If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

#### **3. To show us how important we are to Him**

And notice that God did not say that He inscribed our “name” on His palms.

He said, “I have inscribed **you** on the palms of My hands.”

Some ancient Jews had the custom of drawing the outline of Jerusalem and the Temple on their hands. They did this as a sign of their devotion to, and constant remembrance of, Jerusalem and the Temple. And our Almighty Creator has graciously adopted this practice to confirm how great His love and faithfulness to His children are. He wants us to know how important we are to Him. We sin, we doubt, we fear ... we wonder if God has forgotten us.

## CONCLUSION

The Bible has so much to say about the wonderful hands of God.

His hands are creative hands —the hands of a Master Potter who created and continually re-creates us to make us into the people He envisioned us to be before sin damaged us.

Our Potter's hands are also welcoming hands that are always open to all who acknowledge their sin and come humbly to Him for forgiveness.

His hands are also strong hands

hands that strengthen us when we are weak,  
help us when we are in need of help,  
and uphold us when we feel like we can't go on.

And on those hands, He has engraved our image, and we are constantly on His mind.

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Let's pray.

Loving God and Father,

Forgive us for doubting Your love and faithfulness when times are tough.

Help us to remember and believe that You are always near, ... ready to strengthen, help, and uphold us as we go through hard times.

Help us to remember and believe that You will never forget us and never forsake us.

To prove it, You have engraved our image on the palms of Your hands.

What an amazing, wonderful truth. Thank You.

Please strengthen, help, and uphold those who are going through a painful and difficult time now.

And now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, comfort and strengthen your hearts.