

## Psalm 138 – The Works of God’s Own Hands

*Forsake not the works of thine own hands – v. 8*

There’s a term in theology you sometimes hear that is called *anthropomorphism*. The meaning of this term is *the representation of God under a human form*. So Dr. Cairns writes in his Dictionary of Theological Terms:

*When the Bible attributes human characteristics to God, it speaks metaphorically to enable us to understand an otherwise abstract truth. Thus God’s eye speaks of His knowledge; His hand speaks of His action; His heart speaks of His love; His face speaks of His presence.*

In our text this morning we find the Psalmist utilizing this literary device by making reference to the hands of God. *Forsake not the works of thine own hands*, David prays. We’re able to recognize in this phrase both a metaphorical meaning as well as a literal meaning.

The deliverance of Israel from Egypt is very often attributed to God’s mighty hand and stretched out arm. That’s the metaphorical meaning of the phrase. So we read in Deuteronomy 5:15 *And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and [that] the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.*

On the other hand – we can take the phrase very literally when we consider that the works of God’s hands are the works of redemption. And redemption was literally accomplished when nails were driven into the hands and feet of Christ - *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.* (Luke 24:39,40).

John 20:25 *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* – said doubting Thomas. And you know that when the Lord appeared to His disciples and Thomas was present He said to Thomas personally – *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.*

The Lord Jesus around this table says the same thing to us. There’s a sense in which we behold His hands when we remember that He took to Himself flesh – He became one of us. And when we gaze at the cup it brings to our remembrance the truth that those hands were pierced by the nails that fastened Him to the cross. He bled for us from those hands.

It’s no wonder the hymn writer calls upon us to *see from His head, His hands, His feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down. Did e’er such love and sorrow meet or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

When we behold His head and hands and feet we're reminded that there's a literal sense in which redemption is the work of His hands. Now if we keep that truth in mind – that redemption is the work of Christ's hands and we look back in our text in Psalm 138 we can see the confidence that can be gained by realizing that redemption is the work of His hands – *thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.*

And the way we can be sure that such a prayer will be answered and that God's mercy will endure for ever is to consider the truth that redemption is the work of His hands. Because those nails were driven into the hands of Christ we can be sure that His mercy will endure forever. And we can be sure of what's earlier stated in the verse – *The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me.* You can be sure of that – how can you be sure of that? Through the assurance that redemption is the work of His hands. When those nails were driven into His hands and feet and He was suspended between heaven and earth – He purchased you to Himself. And because He's made such a purchase at such a cost you can be sure that He will perfect that which concerns you.

His work of grace will be advanced in your life. Your sanctification will progress. Everything He brings into your life will contribute to that end – why? Because redemption is the work of His hands.

I have a couple of thoughts pertaining to the works of God's hands that I'd like you consider this morning before we partake of the Lord's table

## I. Uplifted Hands Speak to us of Intercession -

Lam. 3:40,41 *Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.* The call in this text is for the people of God following the destruction of Jerusalem to search their hearts, repent of their sins, and make their pleas to God for mercy. It is in keeping with this idea of intercession that they're exhorted to lift their hands to heaven. More importantly than lifting their hands, however, would be the idea that they were to lift their hearts unto God. The lifting of hands would have been an external manifestation of an inward act of lifting the heart in intercessory prayer.

In the book of Ezra we find Ezra making intercession and confession of sin for the children of Israel following their sins of mixed marriages. So in Ezra 9:5 we read: *And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God.* In the verses that follow you find Ezra making intercession for the people of God and magnifying the high crime of their sins especially in the light of their captivity and then their deliverance to return back to the land. Ezra with his hands spread out to the Lord acknowledges that they hadn't learned anything as a result of what had come upon

them. *Behold* he says in v. 15 *we are before thee in our trespasses; for we cannot stand before thee because of this.*

Perhaps the most familiar example of hands lifted up in intercession is found in Exod. 17. In that chapter we find Moses instructing Joshua to make war against Amalek. And as Joshua leads the troops into battle Moses intercedes from atop a high hill with outstretched arms. *And it came to pass* we read in v. 11 of that chapter *when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.*

So long as Moses kept his hands lifted to God in intercessory prayer we know that the children of Israel prevailed. But we come now to consider Christ around this table of the Lord. And when we think of Christ's atoning sacrifice we may view His work as being the work of stretching out His hands to God for us. His hands, you see, were stretched out and nailed to a cross and from that cross He pleaded for His people.

We could draw the application from His statement – *Father forgive them for they know not what they do* as being His intercession for all who would believe on Him. And here is a prevailing plea because it's a plea that's grounded in the atoning sacrifice that Christ was undergoing at that moment.

You know, of course, because I've mentioned it many times that all the way through His sufferings from the cross He was both our priest and our sacrifice. He was engaged during that whole period in the activity of a priest which was to make intercession for His people.

And what strength there was behind such intercession – with all the forces of heaven and hell leveled against Him still He intercedes. When His own Father would forsake Him still He intercedes – until at last He could announce *it is finished*. And with that announcement His intercession was successful. He prayed on and He prayed through until redemption was accomplished and our sins were forgiven and God's anger against us was appeased.

Our salvation is attributed to His intercession. That's why we read in Heb. 7:25 *Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

And in Isa. 53:12 the idea of intercession and atonement are linked when we read – *Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors: and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

So the uplifted hands of Christ point us to His intercession. Consider next that:

## II. Outstretched Hands speak to us of Invitation –

The apostle Paul, quoting from Isa. 65 says in Rom. 10:21 *All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.* The picture given to us by this text is of Israel forsaking the Lord but the Lord stretching forth His hands to invite them to return to Him.

Christ's invitation has always been open to sinners. You will never find on the door of any true church of Christ a sign saying – *Private Club – members only.* His invitation is for sinners to come. His desire is for sinners to come. *Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out* – He says in Jn. 6:37.

And in the context of that statement He invites men and women to do spiritually what we're doing today. He invites them to spiritually feed on His body and His blood. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world* (Jn. 6:51).

And in v. 53 He says – *Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.*

The Jews, and even many of His own followers, didn't understand the meaning of His words. They didn't see the spiritual significance to Christ becoming the Son of man. And they didn't understand the need for His blood to be shed for their sins. But the point I'm raising this morning is that the invitation was and is extended to all.

Those that are repulsed by the body and blood of Christ won't respond. A suffering, bleeding, dying Messiah strikes hard at the world's pride and exposes the world's sin and for that reason many are repulsed by Christ and the provision He made. But those who see their sins and their need of a Savior and the provision that Christ has made for their sins will gladly respond to His invitation.

His stretched out hands signify His invitation to you and me this morning. Maybe you would have to characterize yourself as someone who has been disobedient – one who has drifted away or has fallen prey to the temptations of the flesh and the world. His hands are nonetheless stretched out to you.

One of the functions this table serves is for the people of God to return to Christ. How often we're prone to wander! How often we turn each one to our own way! How often we grow cold and careless in the things of God – neglecting prayer and the word of God forgetting about Christ and becoming too absorbed with the world or with our own interests.

You would think Christ would forget about us. How would it be if Christ was as careless toward us as we sometimes are toward Him? But He's not. When we drift into

unbelief He extends His hands to us the way He did to doubting Thomas and He says to you and to me – *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see.*

And the way we can be assured that His hands will always be stretched out to us in invitation is by noting the fact that His stretched out hands are nail pierced hands. He's paid for you with the price of blood. He could never forget you. He's propitiated the wrath of God against your sins – He will therefore never condemn you. Every dealing He takes with you has been and will be a dealing in love. And so long as you can be reminded of His nail pierced hands and His bleeding wounds then there's no way that you can doubt that He loves you.

This is why we remember His body and His blood. The emblems of His body and blood are testimonials to His love and His faithfulness. They remind us that He will never forget or forsake us. And they remind us that if we have forgotten or forsaken Him – His hands are stretched out still for you to return to Him.

So uplifted hands speak to us of His intercession – outstretched hands speak to us of His invitation – His willingness to receive us back.

### III. Overlapped Hands Speak to us of Protection –

*John 10:28,29 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.*

You see in this statement that the believer is not only said to be in Christ's hand but he's also said to be in the Father's hand. You can picture the Father's hand being cupped over Christ's hand and you might say in a sense that the believer is kept, as it were, by the double power of omnipotence.

When you have something firmly held in your hand you can certainly be said to be in possession of it. Have you ever had something valuable that you didn't want to misplace and that you didn't want to forget about? It won't do to place the item in your pocket – things are forgotten in your pocket. Or it won't do for ladies to place that item in their purses – it's as good as lost in a purse.

But you keep the thing in your hand. You're most conscious of it when it's in your hand and the item is most protected in your hand. Clever thieves may pick our pockets but they'll never pick our hands. If they want what's in our hands they have to force it out of our hands.

Now there's a phrase that occurs often in Scripture. We read numerous instances of someone being given into the hand of another. So we read in Joshua 8:7 *Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand.*

The meaning is that the city would be delivered into their possession. When it's in your hand it's in your possession. And so when we think upon the body and blood of

Christ, this morning we have cause to think of ourselves as being in Christ's possession and in God the Father's possession. Indeed we find the phrase *purchased possession* in Eph. 1:13,14 where we read: *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

When you pay much for something you tend to guard it carefully. How much more then must God protect those that He has purchased with the blood of His Son? Nothing can come your way but through the One who loved you and gave Himself for you.

The devil may seek to assault you. He sought to assault Peter. But in the end it was Christ's intercession for Peter that prevailed – his faith failed not. The devil may accuse one of God's redeemed ones and he may challenge God over the integrity of that person's faith. This is what happened in the book of Job.

But it's God who gives the permission for His children to be tried. And it's God who sets the boundaries for how far the devil can go with his designs. And it's God who appears in the end of the trial to vindicate His sorely tried servants. They learn much of their own weakness and corruption but they also learn that God never leaves them nor forsakes them.

So we benefit from Christ's intercession today. His hands are uplifted on our behalf and since His hands bear the prints of the nails, His plea that salvation to the uttermost be applied to His people will never be denied.

His hands are stretched out to His people – to His erring ones that wander away. He wants you back. He invites you to return and He invites sinners to come. He loves you too much and He paid too much for you to let you go.

And His hands and His Father's hands are viewed as holding the ones that he's purchased. You belong to Him. And not all the forces of earth and hell can remove you from His possession.

And so with these thoughts in mind let's remember Him this morning. Let's be assured that His mercy will endure for ever and that He'll perfect that which pertains to you. This is a prayer we can pray with confidence when we pray as the Psalmist prayed – *forsake not the works of thine own hands*. May the Lord grant us the help of His Spirit as we meditate upon the works of Christ's hands.