

Friday 28.10.16 English

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[0 : 00] I hope you are aware of it, spend time thinking about it, and long to hear you. And we pray for your help, and ask that you meet your needs, and draw us all closer to you, by your spirit, and to your soul.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Now, the Bible is an amazing book. And one of the amazing things about the Bible is that it tells us what God is like.

Now, that can seem so obvious and so simple, and yet we must stop and see just how astonishing that is. Because describing God is a challenging, challenging task.

Describing God, in many ways, is an impossible task. Because how do you describe the indescribable? And at one sense, when we come together to worship at a time like this, we are aware that God is near.

[1 : 36] And one of the most precious things about the Christian faith is that it tells us that God is near to us. In fact, he's so near to us, he dwells in our hearts, if we are believers. So, the Bible's message is one of real closeness to God.

But at the same time, we have to remember that, in another way, God is beyond us. Beyond our understanding.

Beyond our powers of description. Beyond anything that we can really get our heads around. The thought of God. That's the biggest thought we can ever have.

And so, it's hard to describe the indescribable. But thankfully, the Bible is a good book. And it has a wonderful author. And the Bible teaches us very effectively what God is like.

And one of the ways in which it does that is that it gives us various images or pictures which help us understand more of what God is like.

[2 : 43] And God willing, I want us tonight and in the other services that I hope to take this weekend to look at some of these images. Tonight, we are going to focus on the image of God's hand.

Now, when the Bible talks about God's hand, what does it mean? When we talk about our hands, what do we mean? Well, we use the imagery of hands for a few different things.

Sometimes we'll use the imagery of hands for help, won't we? You're struggling with something, you'll say to somebody, give me a hand. The idea of assistance. Other times, we'll talk about the hand in terms of skill. Oh, he's quite handy at joinery.

He's quite handy with computers. He's quite skillful when it comes to these things. That's our modern use of the word hand. The Bible uses the image of the hand in a different way. Because in the Bible, the word hand means strength and power.

God's hand is a picture of his strength. When you hear that word hand, think strength. That's what we read in verse 13 of Psalm 89.

[3 : 51] Your arm is endowed with power. Your hand is strong. Your right hand, exalted. And we're going to kind of, in many ways, be looking at various points in Scripture that bring out this image.

So rather than focusing on Psalm 89 itself, rather than doing a kind of exegetical study of Psalm 89, we're more kind of in the world of biblical theology, where we're looking at, you know, how this theme manifests itself in different parts of Scripture.

And what we can learn from it. In lots of places, the Bible talks about God's hand. Psalm 89 is a great example.

And this Psalm is looking back at all that God has achieved. If you read through this Psalm, it's recounting all of God's mighty acts because his hand is strong. Psalm 20 is another example. Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed.

He will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. So God's hand is an image of strength.

[4 : 58] And the Bible emphasizes very clearly that God's strength is limitless. So a wonderful version, Jeremiah 32, verse 17, that emphasizes that.

Ah, Lord God, it is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

So when we speak of the strength of God's hand, God's arm, it is a limitless strength. And we see that in many ways. And perhaps the two great ways that we see that are in creation and in providence.

In creation, we see that God is the one who has made all that there is. He is the one who has brought everything into being. And making something requires strength, doesn't it?

If you're growing food, if you're building houses, if you're providing for your homes, whatever you're doing, it all uses up strength. Whenever you're making something, whenever you're doing something. Now in the human race, in our lives, we will always reach the point when something is too hard for us.

[6 : 04] I remember when I was wee, I used to love watching World's Strongest Man. It used to be on every New Year. Those of you who are in their 30s like me will remember this. World's Strongest Man, it was like a kind of New Year tradition.

You would watch it and it was great and you would see them do these astonishing things. But it always reached the point where it was too hard. They couldn't do everything.

Even the guy who was winning it would keep going. But then even he reached his limit. And that's the same in our professions. Whether you're an engineer or whether you're a surgeon, whether you're a builder. Sometimes things are just too hard.

But that is never true of God. And that's why the universe is such a brilliantly clear evidence of God. When you think of the universe, it is mind-blowingly big, isn't it? I don't know how many billions of galaxies there are, but there's billions of them. And there's billions of stars in every galaxy.

[7 : 06] It's just utterly mind-blowingly big. But that makes perfect sense. Because nothing is too hard for God.

Nothing is too difficult for his hand. And it's amazing to think that if making the universe isn't too hard for God, then neither is it too hard for God to listen to you when you talk to him.

Or to help you when you are struggling. Or to comfort you when you are sorrowful. Or to save you from your sins. Whatever your needs are, it's not too hard for God.

His hand is strong. And so we see it in creation. But not only does God's hand create, it also sustains. Psalm 95. In his hand are the depths of the earth.

The heights of the mountains are also his. You think of the whole world. It's in God's hand. Not only is he creating it, he's sustaining it. That's really important because it's one thing to make something. It's quite another to keep it going.

[8 : 17] If you look at the great achievements of history, you can think of astonishing things. You think of the Roman Empire. They created that empire. They built Rome. They built the roads. They conquered the known world.

They built this massive, wonderful, incredible thing. But they could not keep it going. You think of our own country. You think of the Clyde, where they used to build the ships.

You think of the massive industry there. You think of the huge pieces of metal that they built. And they riveted together. And all the incredible engineering that went on there. The massive shafts and propellers and rudders that were put into place.

And all the astonishing things that they started there. But couldn't keep going. Because it's not there anymore. It's easy to start something.

You can't. It's not so easy to keep it going. But God is powerful enough to make the world and to sustain it. And we all know that sustaining something takes a lot of effort.

[9 : 15] Even a garden. I don't know. If you're anything like me, you've got the grass that needs to be cut. And you leave it for three weeks. And then you leave it for another two weeks after that. And the whole thing gets very messy very quickly.

You can very easily neglect things. It's very hard to sustain things. And yet with God, the whole world, from the depths of the ocean, to the bacteria that does everywhere but we can't see it, to the great forests and prairies and mountains and grasslands of the world, it is all sustained by God.

Now we are at our limit when we are at the extremes of the world. Whether it's at the top of a mountain or at the bottom of the sea. But it's all within hands' reach for God. And God's sustaining power is especially seen in the church. And I think this is really quite amazing. The church of Christ has existed on earth for 2,000 years.

And it is still growing. And I read a statistic not that long ago where it's estimated that by 2,050 there will be 3 billion Christians in the world.

[10:34] Now you remember the 12 who were in the upper room. And one of them left. And now we're at 3 billion. In Africa in 1900 there were 10 million Christians estimated.

In 2000 there were 360 million. In one century. And in China where I think technically over the past 50, 60 years Christianity is supposed to be not part of their country.

How many Christians are there? 100 million. More than there is in the whole of Britain. Far more than there is in the whole of Britain. And so although we always have to be cautious about statistics. It's clear that the trend is undeniable. God's church is growing. God is sustaining his church. The gates of hell will never, ever prevail against it.

And though our country has been secularized. And though Islam can seem very dominant in parts of the world. Never think that these things are winning. Because they're not. Christ will build his church.

[11:47] And the other thing that's really interesting to note. Is that the Christian church is not like a religion like Islam. Because in Islam it expands and continues by pro-generation.

Now by that I mean by the fact that people are born Muslims. People are born into that Islamic faith. And that's kind of their culture. It's almost like it's their nationality.

The religion continues and grows by pro-generation. Christianity is different because our faith grows and sustains. Not by pro-generation.

But by re-generation. In other words. Every new generation of the church does not simply have to be born. It has to be born again. And that's quite amazing when you think that every single generation.

That has existed since the New Testament. In order for the church to carry on existing. Even just to stand still. There has to be thousands and millions of conversions.

[12:52] To keep the church going. And that's exactly what's happened. God is powerful. God's hand is strong. And perhaps most of all.

Most amazing of all. Is the fact that God uses his hand for the benefit of his people. The Psalms speak of that. Psalm 98 verse 1. Oh sing to the Lord a new song. For he has done marvellous things.

His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. Psalm 44 verse 1 is the same. Oh God we have heard with our ears. Our fathers have told us.

What deeds you performed in their days. In the days of old. You with your own hand drove out the nations. But then you planted. You afflicted the peoples. But then you set free.

Not by their own sword did they win the land. Nor did their own arms save them. But your right hand and your arm. And the light of your face. For you delighted in them.

[13:47] Throughout the whole Bible. God engages in action. With his hand. For the benefit. Of his people. In other words.

God's hand. Is incredibly strong. And he is using that strength. For you. He is using that strength. For you. And God's strength. Means that God is able. To fulfil his purposes. And to help us.

There is a clear logical connection. God is powerful. Therefore God is able. Very often we are not able to do things. Because we are not powerful enough.

But God has the power. Therefore he has the ability. And if you look across the Bible. We see that this image of God's hand. Teaches us that God's doing amazing things.

[14:45] For us. And I want us just to pick up. Four of these. In particular. Tonight. For the rest of the time. Four things. That God is doing for us.

With his hand. If you like. It's quite easy. They all begin with P. I'm not much of a kind of alliteration kind of guy. But I am for tonight. So. Four Ps tonight.

First of all. God's hand. Is an image. Of his presence. We sang about that in Psalm 139. You hem me in.

Behind and before. And lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It's high. I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I

ascend to heaven.

You are there. If I make my bed in shell. You are there. If I take the wings of the morning. And dwell in the utmost part of the sea. Even there. Your hand. Shall lead me.

[15:41] And your right hand. Shall hold me. Now remember. Again. This makes perfect sense. God's hand is powerful. Therefore he is able. To be present.

With us. And that's a wonderfully precious thing. When you have children. The one thing. You want. Is to keep them in your hands.

You want to keep. Hold of them. You want to look after them. And it's. Incredibly hard. To let them go. Isn't it?

Whether it's their first day. At school. Or their first day. At high school. Or if it's their going to uni. Or something like that. Letting them go. As a parent. Is really hard.

You think. You boys and girls here. You think it's hard for you. It's ten times harder. For your mum and dad. Even if they're hiding it. It's really hard. When you've got to let them go.

[16:42] And sometimes. When you're a child. And you get into difficulty. And things are hard. You want your parents nearby. Don't you? I mean. When things are great. You kind of want parents. Just to disappear. But when things are hard.

You want them nearby. You want their help. And. The problem that we have. As our dad. Or as our mum.

Is that. We want to be on hand. For our children. Always. But we don't have the ability. To do that. I want to always be there.

Available. At an instant. For my child. But I can't be there. I don't have the ability. To do that. Now God is the same. But he's different. He's the same. And that he has the same desire. He wants to be on hand for us.

He's different. Because he can actually do it. God. Can be there. One of the most awful. Situations. That we can face. Is when somebody.

[17:39] Is in trouble. And they are. Out of reach. Say somebody. Is stuck somewhere. The ferry hasn't sailed. They're stuck. In New England. You can't get them. They're out of reach.

Say somebody's phone. Is. Is. Is. Gone out of range. You can't find out. Where they are. They are out of reach. And. You know. The image. The image of somebody. You know.

Struggling. Or in difficulty. And you're trying to reach them. And they're out of reach. It's an awful. Awful. Thought. But the amazing thing.

About God's hand. Is that you are. Never. Ever. Out of his reach. You are never. Out of God's reach.

When it comes to God's hand. There is no such thing. As too high. Or too long. Or too far. You're never.

[18:36] Ever. Out of his reach. Now. If you want. To become a Christian. You remember that. Because a lot of people.

Can think to themselves. I'm too far gone. Or I lost my chance. Or I've left it too long.

You're never. Out of God's reach. While you have breath in your lap. So please remember that. Isaiah says in chapter 59.

The Lord's hand. Is not. Shortened. That it cannot. His hand is able. But the presence of God. Of God's hand. Has another effect as well. It actually challenges us. When we wander away from God. Another psalm speaks of that.

[19:38] Psalm 32. Verse 4. For night and day. Your hand. Was heavy upon me. My strength. Was dried up. As by the heat of summer. Psalm 32 is a fascinating psalm.

Because it's a psalm. Where David speaks about. His own experience. Where he sinned.

Desperately. And he talks about. How the fact. That this sin. Meant that God's.

Hand. Was heavy upon him. Now that's a really interesting thing. To think about. And that's maybe. How you feel tonight. Maybe your sin. Is heavy. On you.

Maybe. It's weighing you down. And part of the reason for that. Is because when we sin. We sin in the presence of God. We sin before him.

And it's his standards. That we are breaking. We can't. Kind of sin. And then. Sin in secret. And then come back to God. We can do that with our parents.

[20:32] Can't we? Sometimes we can go away. And do something bad. And then come back. And pretend that it's never happened. And. We've all done that. I won't give you any of the

examples. Of my life. But. We all do it. We can't with God.

Every sin is done. In God's presence. And so God's hand is there. When we sin. And that means we can feel it. Heavy. But the fact that God's hand is there.

Tells you that God has not. Discarded you. And God has not turned his back on you. Rather God's hand is heavy.

Because it is beckoning you back. It's calling you to repentance. And it's pointing you to the cross. God's hand is there.

To draw you back to himself. So God's hand. Is a symbol of his presence. Our second P is protection.

[21 : 39] God's hand. Is an image of protection. A couple of examples. Are here. Psalm 17. Verse 7.

Wondrously you show your steadfast love. O saviour of those who seek refuge from their adversaries. At your right hand. Keep me as the apple of your eye.

Hide me in the shadow of your wings. Where do we get protection from our enemies? At God's hand. Isaiah 41.10. Fear not. For I am with you. Be not dismayed. For I am your God.

I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you. With my righteous right hand. And again it makes perfect sense.

God's hand is powerful. Therefore he is able to protect his people. And so when there is a threat. To the safety of God's people.

[22 : 33] Whether that is in the Old Testament. In terms of the real life physical. Conflicts that they had with surrounding nations. Or whether it is with us. With the greater battle. Between the kingdom of God. And the kingdom of evil.

And the attacks of Satan. That he has in their lives. When we face conflict. The place of protection. Is God's hand. And this is so wonderful for us.

Because God's hand is incredibly strong. And he uses that strength. To protect his people. He uses that strength.

To protect you. We see that throughout the Old Testament. You look through it. When Israel faced an enemy. They were protected by God. They were delivered by his hand. And that is pointing us to the bigger truth.

The fact that we as God's people now. Need protection as well. Protection from sin. From Satan. From the kingdom of evil. And God. Is protecting us. The devil wants to separate us from God.

[23 : 31] The devil wants to isolate us. The devil wants to cut us off. And to leave us exposed. But he can't. Because we are in God's hand.

And Jesus speaks so beautifully. And powerfully about this. When he says in John 10.27. And my sheep hear my voice. And I know them. And they follow me.

I give them eternal life. And they will never perish. And no one will snatch them out of my hand. My father who has given them to me.

Is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them. Out of the father's hand. Now that verse is actually giving us an image of double protection.

Because it talks about us being in Jesus' hand. And in God the father's hand. And that means that nothing. Nothing can get us.

[24 : 30] Nothing can really threaten us. And nothing can ever snatch us away. Yes we face trials. Yes we face struggles. But ultimately. If you are a Christian.

If the devil wants to get you. He has got to go through God. And that's impossible. And this raises two points I just want to highlight.

First of all. It reminds us of our security as God's people. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ. You are so secure.

You are so secure. Because you are in God's hand. Now think of how strong God's hand is. Now remember. What's the measure? What's the ultimate measure of the strength of God's hand?

It's the universe. In all its absolute massiveness. That's the measure of God's strength. And so that is also the measure of your security.

[25 : 31] That's the measure of how secure you are. In God's hand. That hand that is so strong. Is holding you.

But it raises another really important point. That we must emphasize. A lot of people can think. I want to be a Christian. A lot of people think.

I want to go to the prayer meeting. A lot of people can think. I want to go forward. And to become a member. A lot of people think. I want to become involved in some activity in the church.

I want to do something for the Lord. I want to give my life to him. But we have this question in our minds.

Grace. what if I work for you? What if I muck it up? What if I muck it up? What if I can't keep it up? What if I make a mistake?

[26 : 29] it's so easy to think like that and there might well be somebody sitting here tonight thinking I would love to go forward but what if I can't keep it up what if I can't well that kind of thinking is easy to think but it's a big big misunderstanding of biblical teaching because being a Christian is not about you keeping it up it's about God keeping you when Jesus says no one can snatch you out of his hand he means no one not even yourself he is holding you now we are guaranteed to slip and to stumble and to make mistakes as Christians we are guaranteed to do that but there is another guarantee as well that nothing can take you out of God's hand

God's hand is the strongest power known to man and that hand is holding you and that hand will hold you that's why Jude writes in that wonderful doxology now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time and now and forever dealing with the stumbling is God's job when you're walking along with a young child who's just learned to walk you hold their hand and they trip and they stumble and you just hold your tight and up they get again and they press on that is how God is holding us so God is protecting us keeping us safe in his hand the third P is provision because God's hand is a very clear image of God's provision towards us

Psalms 104 verse 28 when you give it to them they gather it up when you open your hand they are filled with good things God's hand is an image of his willingness and his ability to provide for us and one thing that the Bible makes incredibly clear is that God is a God who provides he provides for the sustaining of creation Psalm 65 you visit the earth and water it you greatly enrich it the river of God is full of water you provide their grain for so you have prepared it God provides for creation God provides for us daily 1 Timothy 6 17 as for the rich in this present age charge them not to be haughty nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy God's hand is open towards us in the sense that he willingly and generously provides for our needs and again it makes perfect sense

God's hand is powerful therefore it is able to make provision and that works in lots of ways but perhaps more than anything else it works in terms of our salvation God provides so that we can be saved and that's a truth that runs right through the Bible goes right back to what God what Abraham said in Genesis 22 God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering and that's exactly what God did when he sent his son he sent his own son to provide for our salvation and the message of Christianity is not that we provide something to God it's that God has provided something for us Jesus has died so that your sins can be forgiven Jesus rose again so that you could have eternal life and every single ounce of provision that is necessary for your salvation and mine has been made by God in Jesus Christ in him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace now at the heart of Christianity there's two words substitution and satisfaction these are big theological words but they're wonderful theological words because they teach us how the gospel works

Jesus has come and died as our substitute that's a very simple wonderful picture he is there instead of us and in doing that he satisfied everything that is required for our salvation and it's a reminder that God does not do half measures and God does not do half promises God's hand God's hand is powerful incredibly powerful and that means he has the power to deliver on every single promise that he makes and that's amazing because so often in life we have to accept broken promises because things are out of people's hands how often do you hear that?

[31 : 56] we have a manifesto promise from a particular party and then when they get in power they can't deliver it something has happened it's out of their hands we're trying to get home and we're stuck in Alakul or in Uig because the weather's bad and it's out of the hands of the crew of the ferry they can't deliver what we're expecting because of something that is out of their hands but that never applies to God when God promises something with his mouth his all powerful hand guarantees that his promise will be kept and God's promise of salvation to you and to me is based on the fact that he has provided everything needed for us to be saved God is not offering us

possible salvation he is offering us perfect salvation because that is what his hand has provided not a half-hearted salvation not an optimistic salvation not a hopeful salvation not a potential salvation but a perfect finished complete salvation because that's the kind of work that God's hand does that's the kind of provision that God's hand makes

God does not use the language of might he uses the language of will be and there's a big big difference believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved and so when God offers you mercy and grace and love these are not empty words of optimism they are real concrete guaranteed promises he will be merciful because his son has taken your place as your substitute he will be gracious because his son Jesus Christ has accomplished everything in his death and his resurrection to bring satisfaction to all that was required and he will love you and how do we know that because he already does that's the whole reason why Jesus came in the first place that's the whole reason why we have the cross the gospel is the greatest promise that has ever been made that if you believe in the Lord Jesus

Christ you will be saved that is the greatest promise ever and it is backed up by the provision made by the all powerful hand of God he can deliver what he promises and he will so God's hand is an image of his presence an image of his protection an image of his provision and last of all and very briefly God's hand is an image of his possession possession hand in the Bible speaks of possession you see that quite a lot in Joshua they said to Joshua truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands it's a picture of possession that's what they were doing in Joshua going in to possess the land to make it their own it belonged to them God gave it into their hands so it's an image of possession and so that truth applies to God's hands why is it that God wants you in his hands it's because he wants you to be his his own possession his special people his beloved children in fact if you put your trust in Jesus

Christ you will go into the hand of God and what are you going to find there you're going to find that your name has already been written on his palm I have engraved you in the palm of my hands is what it says in Isaiah 49 God's hand is a picture of possession and that's what we are if we are Christians we are his now just think about that you're his his son his daughter his precious precious people and that's all you're saying at the

Lord's table when you go there you're saying I'm his and if you're thinking about professing faith that's the question to ask yourself do I want to tell everyone that I'm his it's not about what you are but what you aren't it's about just being his possession that's what professing faith is all about and so God's hand is an amazing image teaches us about God about how strong he is and how he uses that strength for the benefit of his people and in particular about how he's present with us always never out of his reach we're protected by him we can never be taken out of his hand he's provided for us in that everything we need is there and we are his own possession with our names written on his hand

[38 : 22] God's hand is an amazing image and the question that we have to ask ourselves is this whose hands do you want to be in do you want to be in your own or do you want to be in God's and if you want to be in God's hands Jesus has given us the perfect prayer Father into your hands I commit my spirit let's pray Lord our God and our Father we thank you for your hand upon us and around us and underneath us holding us sustaining us leading us and Lord we just want every moment and every part of our lives to be in your hands and we thank you for the security that that gives us

Father hold us in your hands and keep holding us and draw every one of us to that place where we are able to say that we are in God's hands Lord be at work in our midst and we just thank you that you promised to never take your hand away because that is what we would dread we don't ever want you to take your hand away from us but we just want your hand to be upon us more and more and more Lord into your hands we commit ourselves and all that we are in Jesus name Amen our closing singing is from mission praise number 1164 mission praise 1164 come oh fount of every blessing tune my heart to sing your grace streams of mercy never ceasing call for songs of loudest praise songs of

God's abundant treasure sung by angel tongues above songs that tell the boundless measure of my Lord's unchanging love and the very very last few lines I think tie in so well prone to wander Lord I feel it prone to leave the God I love we often relate to that but yet God never lets us out of his hand take my heart take and seal it seal it from your courts above let's stand and praise our God now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the

presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time and now and forever Amen