

The Lord's Wonderful hands. Mark 6. 1-3.

I am going to commence this evening's message with an extract from Corrie Ten Boom's book, 'He Is More Than Able'.¹

When encouraging us to put everything we have in the Lord's hands, she wrote, "The first time a cowboy heard the story of Jesus riding on an unbroken colt, he exclaimed, '*What wonderful hands He must have had!*'" The cowboy of whom she wrote, would no doubt have been accustomed to controlling unsaddled horses with his hands. Although the cowboy was clearly wrong in his understanding of how it was the Lord Jesus was able to ride an unbroken colt, I do agree with his exclamation and am going to take it as my 'text' for this evening – '*What wonderful hands He must have had!*'

It may seem hard to believe but there are well over 30 references to Jesus' hands in the gospels.² This evening, we read just one of those references from Mark 6 ; 'Such mighty works are wrought (performed) by his hands?'

And, in his gospel, Mark draws attention to the healing power of Jesus' hands no less than seven times. In chapter 1, we read that Jesus took Simon's mother-in-law by the hand and dispelled her fever, v. 31, and, separately, moved with compassion, He put forth his hand and touched the leper, v. 41. In chapter 5, He took Jairus's daughter by the hand and raised her to life, v. 41. In our chapter, He 'laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them', v. 5. In chapter 7, they brought to him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to put his hand upon him...and he put his fingers into his ears, and touched his tongue', vv. 32-33. In chapter 8, He took a blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, He put his hands upon him ..., v. 25. And, in chapter 9, He took the hand of the seemingly-dead, once demon-possessed boy at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, and lifted him up, v. 27.

Yet to the men in the synagogue He was just '*the carpenter*'. As Justin Martyr wrote in the middle of the second century, 'He was deemed a carpenter, for He was in the habit of working as a carpenter when among men, making ploughs and yokes'.³ And, the men in the synagogue naturally associated His hands only with 'works' such as those. In their eyes, He was more likely to construct a pulpit than He was ever to occupy one! Hence their astonishment at His wisdom, His teaching and His works of power.

I have neither time nor inclination to go through the 34 gospel references to our Lord's hands this evening. Indeed, I intend to develop our subject in an entirely different way.

Back in Exodus 4, at the Bush, the Lord asked Moses, "What is that in your hand?", Exod. 4. 2. Moses had had the temerity to flatly contradict the Lord. When the Lord told him, 'Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, The Lord God of your fathers...appeared unto me, saying, I...will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt ...unto a land flowing with milk and honey...they shall hearken to your voice', Moses had 'answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice!' 'And the Lord said unto him, What is that in your hand? And he said, A rod'. In one sense, I want to turn this question back on the Lord Himself tonight and to ask *Him*, "What is that in *Your* hand?" That is, I want to imagine that we are able to ask the Saviour to list some of the items which, according to the gospels, He once held in His 'wonderful hands'. In the time available, I can hope to do no more than take a brief look at each of these, but, as we shall see, each has something important to tell us about His *wonderful Person*.

We ask, What is that in your hand? And first He says :

1. "A whip of cords". We are in John 2. 15 : 'When he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple'. The word translated 'scourge' comes from the Latin word 'flagellum', describing a lash or whip of cords. With this whip He drove *out* the oxen, drove *out* the sheep, poured *out* the money of the money changers, and ordered those that sold doves to take them *out*. Out...out...out...out! 'Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise', an emporium, a place of trade, He demanded. In John 14 He used the same expression again, 'My Father's house', but there to refer to something infinitely grander and more glorious than Herod's temple. And there, praise God, His operative word was not 'out' but 'in' – 'In My Father's house are many abiding places'. And, if in chapter 2 the house was emptied of all that defiled and was unfitting, there the house is to be filled – with saved sinners such as us. For one day, as promised, He will 'come again' to escort us to His Father's house to be forever with Himself.

'And his disciples remembered', John added, 'that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up (devoured me)', v. 17; a straight lift from Psa. 69 (v. 9) – one of the messianic psalms – and, indeed, more of Psalm 69 is quoted in the NT than any other psalm – no less than six passages from the psalm being said there to have been fulfilled.

So I have the highest authority for saying that the whip of cords in His hand tells me something of His *consuming zeal* for God and His house.

Again we ask, What is that in your hand? And He says :

2. “A book of scripture”. Luke 4. 16-22. ‘As his custom was, he went into the synagogue (of Nazareth, that is) on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. (Presumably by prior arrangement with the Ruler of the Synagogue – as was the normal synagogue procedure.⁴ In all likelihood, the miraculous sign at Cana, just four miles, distant was now well known – as, clearly from verse 23, were some of His previous miraculous works at Capernaum which may well explain the Synagogue Ruler’s readiness to let our Lord read and speak.) And there was delivered to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable (the favourable) year of the Lord’ – which section struck, of course, the keynote to the whole of His public ministry. And there – with the trumpet-blast announcement of God’s gracious ‘Year of Jubilee’ in a world of misery – He broke off – stopping in mid-sentence – for, in full, Isaiah wrote, ‘To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God’ – but ‘the day of vengeance’ had not yet come. ‘Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened (were fixed, riveted) on him. And he began to say to them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.’⁵ And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words (the words of grace) which proceeded out of his mouth’ – consistent with what is said of Messiah in Psalm 45, ‘grace is poured into thy lips’, v. 2 – grace poured ‘into’ His lips and therefore proceeding ‘out of’ His mouth.

So the book of scripture in His hand tells me of His *gracious mission* He had come to accomplish at His first coming, vv. 18-22.

Again we ask, What is that in your hand? And He says :

3. “A loaf of bread”. Now John 6. 10-11 : ‘Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down’. We read of loaves of bread in His hands on five occasions : not only on the occasion of the feeding of the 5,000 but of the 4,000; at the institution of the remembrance supper, ‘taking a loaf, he gave thanks, broke it and gave to them, saying, this is my body’, Luke 22. 19; in the house of Cleopas and his companion at Emmaus, ‘as He sat at the table with them, He took a loaf, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them’, 24. 30; and then on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, when He summoned His seven disciples, ‘come and dine’, and then ‘came and took the bread and gave it to them’, John 21. 13.

When I read the account of His feeding the crowd of 5,000 men, I am reminded of an incident in 2 Kings 4, where ‘a man from Ba’al-shalisha’ came to Elisha the prophet and brought him, we read, ‘twenty loaves of barley, and newly ripened grain in his sack. And he (Elisha) said, Give to the people, that they may eat. And his servant said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus says the Lord, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof, 2 Kings 4. 42-44. In the case of the feeding of the 5,000 men, John records the words of Andrew, ‘There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?’, and John continues, ‘Jesus said, Make the men sit down...when they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain...they filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which were left over by them who had eaten’, John 6. 9-13. Not 20 barley loaves to feed 100 men – but five barley loaves to feed 5,000 men – together with many women and children, Matt. 14. 21 – and, again, with much left over.

So the loaf of bread in His hand tells me of His *abundant provision*.

Again we ask, What is that in your hand? And He says :

4. “A towel”. John 13. 4 : ‘He rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself’. These words stand in marked and deliberate contrast with what was said in the verse immediately before : ‘Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands’. For, back in chapter 3, we read that ‘The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand’, 3. 35. But now in His hands, John tells us, He has not only ‘all things’ but ‘a towel’. The word translated ‘towel’ comes from the Latin term for a linen cloth, which, according to the Roman historian Suetonius, was worn by a slave. Previously John the Baptist had acknowledged himself unworthy to kneel and unloose the straps of the Lord’s sandals – in all likelihood to remove them with a view to washing His feet. In scripture, it was normal for a person to wash his or her own feet. In New Testament days, however, the task was often performed by a slave – although to the Jews of those days, feet-washing was regarded as such a menial and demeaning task that no Jewish slave could be required to wash the feet of his Jewish master. That duty was reserved for gentile slaves.⁶ In chapter 5 of his first epistle, Peter exhorted his readers, ‘Be clothed with humility’, v. 5. The word ‘clothed’ has the idea of tying on securely – and, it is claimed, refers to the overalls which slaves wore to keep themselves clean while working. Thank you, Peter. We’ll follow your suggestion ...‘Be clothed with *humility*.’

So the towel in the Lord's hand tells me of His *lowliness* – that which, in the light of His statement at the time, 'I have given you an example', we can safely call His *exemplary lowliness*.

Again we ask, What is that in your hand? And He says :

5. "A reed". Matt.27. 29 : 'When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him'. The soldiers of the governor summoned the whole garrison/band/company into the Praetorium, where they had their moment of fun and sport at His expense. They arrayed Him in a purple cloak and a thorny crown, bowed the knee before Him, and thrust a reed into His hand to serve as a mock sceptre. I suspect this reed was anything but slight and flimsy. From the use of the word in the Greek OT, it seems likely that this was a thick and sturdy reed, capable of being put to use as a walking cane and staff⁷. For example, in 2 Kings 18, 'the king of Assyria (Sennacherib) sent (three of chief generals), the Tartan, the Rabsaris and the Rabshakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And when they were come up, the Rabshakeh said, Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this in which you trust? Behold, you trust upon the *staff* of this bruised *reed*, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him', vv. 17-21. Interestingly the same picture is painted of Egypt in Ezek.29. 6-7, "they have been a *staff* of *reed* to the house of Israel". But after all, the reed was an eminently suitable picture of Egypt because the Nile, the river of Egypt, has always been rich in sturdy reeds. It was with this thick reed then that Pilate's men kept beating – repeatedly, the tense is, our Lord's head – on which they had placed the crown of thorns. Twice in the context Matthew tells us they 'mocked' Him.

The reed in His hand therefore tells me of His *deep humiliation*.

Again we ask, What is that in your hand? And He says :

6. "A nail". John 19. 17-18 : 'Bearing His cross, He went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they *crucified* Him'. 'They *pierced my hands*', He cried prophetically in Psalm 22. 16. In the summer of 1968, in a tomb in the north east of Jerusalem, archaeologists discovered an ossuary (a small coffin-like structure filled with the bones of the dead). The ossuary carried the name Jehohanan, and contained the bones of a young man in his 20s. These bones were dated by scholars to the first century. The young man's remains were distinguished by a single 7-8 inch iron spike driven through both ankle bones. He had been crucified – nailed, with his feet together, to an olive tree. It is by no means unlikely that our Lord was crucified in an identical manner.⁸ As the carpenter of Nazareth, Jesus had been no stranger to pounding nails. Many times He had swung the mallet and driven nails hard into wood. And I cannot help wondering – when He had swung His mallet – if He thought of the day when Roman soldiers would smash 7-8 inch nails into some splintered wooden beam – through His own flesh. For men gave Him – not only for His back the *cross to bear* and for His head the *thorns to wear* – but for His hands the *nails to tear*.⁹

In her hymn 'Oh, make me understand it', well did Katherine Kelly pose the question, 'Was it the nails, O Saviour, That bound Thee to the tree?', only to answer her own question, 'Nay, 'twas Thine everlasting love, Thy love for me, for me'. Yes, the nail in His hand assures me of His boundless *love for me*.

Again we ask, What is that in your hand? And He says :

7. "A scar". John 20. 20, 25-27. It is interesting that, when Luke and John record how, following His resurrection, the Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples – both tell us – in the very same words – that He 'showed to them his hands'. The disciples told Thomas – who was absent at time, 'We have seen the Lord. So he said to them, Unless I see in His hands *the print of the nails*, and put my finger into *the print of the nails*, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe. And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came and said, Peace to you! Then He said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and behold My hands'.¹⁰

1 Samuel 17 records how, following his spectacular victory over Goliath, David emerged unscathed from the valley of Elah. The chapter concludes by telling us, 'So David prevailed over the Philistine...and as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand'. In the young man's hands that day was the evidence – the proof – that the battle was over – the people need cower in fear no more. This fight would never need to be fought again. And, in a similar way, the wound and nail-print in our Lord's hand declares, in the language of Revelation 5, that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has 'prevailed' – has overcome and conquered!

So the scar in His hand tells me of His *mighty victory*.

Again we ask, What is that in your hand? And He says :

8. "A scroll". Which brings us properly to Rev. 5. 6-7 : 'I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain...And he came and took the scroll

out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne'. His sacrificial death – as the slain Lamb – is His credential and qualification for opening the scroll and loosing its seals. For in spite of the universal challenge issued by the strong angel, no-one else had been 'found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it', vv. 2-3. The four living creatures and 24 elders fall before the Lamb to exclaim, 'Thou art worthy to take the scroll, and to open the seals thereof : for Thou wast slain'. The nature and content of this particular scroll – '*written inside and on the back*, sealed with seven seals', seems clear from Ezek. 2. 9-10: 'Lo, a roll of a book *written within and on the back* (LXX) ... and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe'. The scroll which the Lamb takes from the open palm of the awesome but unnamed Throne-sitter signifies the right to implement and execute God's well-deserved judgements on the earth – and when in chapters 6 to 8, the Lamb opens the seven seals, the sparks really begin to fly as those judgements fall!¹¹ For then *does* dawn the 'day of vengeance of our God'!

So the scroll in His hand tells me of His unique and universal *authority*.

Again we ask, What is that in your hand? And He says :

9. "A sceptre". Heb. 1. 8 : 'To the Son he (God) says, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness (uprightness, straightness) is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness'. This time, it is the real thing – this is no reed, mock-sceptre. This sceptre stands as the true insignia and emblem of royalty. The writer quotes from Psalm 45 as one of his seven proof texts in chapter 1 to demonstrate the Son is in every way superior to the angels. This divine Son loved righteousness and hated lawlessness – and He lived for what He loved and died for what He hated! 'Therefore God, thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness' – has invested You as 'King' – a word occurring no less than seven times in Psalm 45. For God has decreed that 'He must reign'.

And the sceptre in His hand tells me of His *royal exaltation*.

Once more we ask, What is that in your hand? And He says :

10. "One of my sheep". John 10. 27-28 : '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*'. This afternoon, we saw from earlier in this chapter that, when the hireling sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and flees - and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling, and doesn't care about the sheep'. That word translated 'catches' there means 'to seize, to snatch', and is the same as that rendered 'pluck' now in verse 28. Though it *didn't matter* to the hireling about the sheep – and to *save* His life, he willingly let the sheep be *snatched* away – it *mattered* to the good Shepherd about His sheep – He *gave* His life to *save them* – and no-one – but no-one – shall ever *snatch* them from His hand!

So the sheep in His hand tell me of His *care and keeping power*.

This evening the Saviour says to each of us – as once to Thomas, 'behold my hands'. [Hold up hands] And I want us to take home with us this evening at least a few of the ten things we have seen in His wonderful hands – one, you note, for each digit.

- A whip of cords – speaking of ***His consuming zeal***.
- A book of scripture – speaking of ***His gracious mission***.
- A loaf of bread – speaking of ***His abundant provision***.
- A towel – speaking of ***His exemplary lowliness***.
- A reed – speaking of ***His deep humiliation***.
- A nail – speaking of ***His boundless love***.
- A scar – speaking of ***His mighty victory***.
- A scroll – speaking of ***His universal authority***.
- A sceptre – speaking of ***His royal exaltation***.
- And one of His sheep – speaking of ***His keeping power***.

And I trust one day – along with you – to see, not only His beautiful face, but those "wonderful hands".

Footnotes

¹ Page 94.

² There are 34 to be precise.

³ 'Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew', chapter 88 - written about 150 AD

⁴ A. Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book 3, Chapter 10.

⁵ This day - a Saviour, Luke 2.10; this scripture, 4.21; is salvation come, 19.10.

⁶ See G. R. Beasley-Murray's comment on John 13. 4-5 in the Word Biblical Commentary.

⁷ See NIDOTTE, 3, 942.

⁸ Methodist noticeboard proclaimed, '1 cross + 3 nails = 4-given'.

⁹ 'An instrument of the tortures which were inflicted only on slaves and strangers, became an object of horror in the eyes of a Roman citizen; and the ideas of guilt, of pain, and of ignominy, were closely united with the idea of the cross', Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, chapter 20, part 2. 1. It seems that it was the Persians who invented this mode of execution. Herodotus tells us that King Darius (mentioned in the Bible) had 3,000 Babylonians crucified in about 519 B.C. (Herodotus 4:43.2,7; 6:30.1; 7:194.1). The feelings of the Roman world for crucifixion were well expressed in the words of Cicero, the great statesman of the first century BC, whose eloquence and oratory was admired throughout that world. Crucifixion was, he said, 'the most cruel and hideous form of punishment ... the most extreme penalty ... 'to bind a Roman citizen is an outrage; to scourge him a crime; it almost amounts to parricide to put him to death; how then shall I describe crucifixion? No adequate word can be found ... the very word 'cross' should be foreign not only to the body of a Roman citizen, but to his thoughts, his eyes, his ears'.⁹ The Roman jurist Julius Paulus listed crucifixion as the worst of all capital punishments, listing it ahead of death by burning, death by beheading, or death by being thrown to the wild beasts, and the Jewish historian Josephus, who witnessed many crucifixions himself, called it 'the most wretched of deaths'.

¹⁰ 'I shall know Him, I shall know Him, When redeemed by His side I shall stand, I shall know Him, I shall know Him, By the print of the nails in His hand'. (Fanny Crosby).

¹¹ See Rev. 6. 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8. 1.