

## LET US DRAW NEAR - Biblical Worship and the Warming of the Soul - Part 15

Teaching #2108 - Sunday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019, 10:00 a.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

### **NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH (Part five) - Lifting Holy Hands with Full Minds and Hearts**

Remember the myth we're seeking to wipe from our minds in these last two messages. The myth is raising hands to the Lord in worship is a charismatic anomaly. If that's true we don't need it. But it isn't true. And this practice, like **all** the practices of worship in the New Testament church, needs anchoring in the teaching of the Scriptures.

Last week we considered the first of **five Scriptural purposes** for the raising of hands in worship. Reason number one was **the lifting up of hands was a pledge - a sign of resolve of will before the Lord.**

The text we considered was **Genesis 14:17-23** - "After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). [18] And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) [19] And he blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; [20] and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. [21] And the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.' [22] But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, [23] that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'"

The lifting up of hands to the Lord is a **presentation of the life - the offering up of the will** - in dependence upon the Lord. It is an action that speaks of my **determination** to follow through on my words. I present my whole being - including my physical body - to the purposes and plans of the Lord.

Our wills, at best, are **divided and half-baked**. They are not easily trained and subdued. We are all **Romans 7** people - **Romans 7:15, 19** - "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate....[19] For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."

In our Genesis text Abraham helps his invisible will with his visible raised hands. This was the first Scriptural reason we studied. As in Abraham's case, the **action of lifting hands** should call to mind the **words** and **decisions** made and uttered in times of worship - times where I have sung about the Lordship of Jesus, recognized His claim upon my life, vowed faithfulness, or forsaken sin. The action of lifting my hands **reminds me** of my constant weakness and my constant need to **keep promises to the Lord.**

But there are other reasons for the lifting up of hands in Scriptural worship. Today we'll consider four more - continuing our numbering with point number two:

#### 2) **THE LIFTING UP OF HANDS IS AN EXPRESSION OF RECOGNITION OF RELIANCE UPON THE LORD IN THE SPIRITUAL BATTLES OF LIFE**

There is a place in the Bible where this principle is made with vivid clarity:

**Exodus 17:8-16** - "Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. [9] So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." [10] So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. [11] **Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.** [12] But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur **held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side.** So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. [13] And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. [14] Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." [15] And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord is my banner, [16] saying, **"A hand upon the throne of the Lord!** The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

Why wasn't it enough for Moses (and Aaron and Hur) to be up on the mountain **praying**? Why the lifted hands? Why was victory down on the battle field tied so directly, not just to Moses **praying**, but to Moses' **hands being lifted** to heaven?

We'll probably never be totally certain. But at least we know this: It **was** very important to God that these leaders, in some practical, obvious way, were pointing to heaven in their intercession. This **outward reminder** was needed to keep their **inward hearts and thoughts** focused on the real arena of struggle.

This happens repeatedly in the Scriptures. Why did God command **Jehoshaphat** to send out the singers and worshipers in front of the army to sing praises to His Name? Why did God tell **Joshua** to have the people shout to the Lord on the seventh day of walking around the walls of Jericho? Everyone knows **singing** doesn't win battles. Everyone knows **shouting praise** doesn't make the walls fall down.

Yet, in all of these things, God was **giving object lessons to His people**. He was using **outward, physical actions and gestures** to integrate **inward, spiritual realities** in their minds and hearts.

And here's the key point here. I'm as certain of this fact as I am of my own name. It's a **gigantic mistake** to think the church has somehow moved beyond the need for this kind of thing. Jesus commanded people to be **outwardly baptized** to picture their immersion into His new Kingdom life.

I wonder how many Christian people are listening to me right now, who are finding their lives all gummed up in repeated sin and bondage, who find the presence and power of God **distant** and **academic**, all because they've mistakenly concluded **baptism is just another empty religious ritual where I get my clothes wet**.

Or consider the **Lord's Supper**. Jesus commanded His church to remember His death on the cross by the physical act of eating and drinking. **Why?** Because He knew we are more than just **spiritual beings**. We are **physical beings** too. **Truth becomes ingrained on a deeper level when the body is involved in Scriptural expressions of worship and devotion**.

So one of the things the lifting of hands does is the **calling to mind of commitments I've made to the Lord**. I **always** try at some point to lift my hands to the Lord whenever I come to His table for communion. I'm there, in a very real way, acknowledging a covenant I've made with Him.

In the same way, the lifting up of hands in prayer is directly linked with **receiving help - divine help** - from the Lord: **Psalm 28:2 - "Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary."**

### 3) **THE LIFTING UP OF HANDS IS A MEANS OF PLEASING AND BLESSING THE LORD**

**Psalm 134:1-2 - "Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord! [2] Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!"**

This shifts, just slightly, the emphasis of the first two points of this message. In a very real sense, **we** are not the focus of the worship. Our **needs**, while graciously and frequently ministered to while we worship, are not the focus of the worship in the sanctuary. In very plain language, King David marks out the **primary** reason for lifting hands to the Lord: **God likes it**. Period. It is a source of **blessing** to Him. He is **pleased** with it.

Please ask yourself this question. Ought that not be enough? Shouldn't that close the issue forever? Do I honestly need some **other** reason - something **on top** of that fact that God is **pleased** with the lifting of our sincere hands in love and devotion? Do I have a better reason for **not** lifting my hands than this simple reason **to** lift them? Does the fact that it makes me a bit uncomfortable trump the fact that it brings my God delight? Plainly, such logic is ridiculous.

It is interesting to note that Solomon, David's son, **remembered** the importance of this practice. Look at his practice, years after David's words, at the **dedication of the Temple**:

**1 Kings 8:22 - "Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven...."**

Where did Solomon get that idea? No one **commanded** him to lift his hands. Yet somehow he just feels it is right and appropriate.

### 4) **THE LIFTING UP OF HANDS TO THE LORD IS A SIGN OF THE EARNESTNESS WE BRING IN CONFESSION**

## AND REPENTANCE OF SIN AND WICKEDNESS

**Lamentations 2:17-19** - "The Lord has done what he purposed; he has carried out his word, which he commanded long ago; he has thrown down without pity; he has made the enemy rejoice over you and exalted the might of your foes. [18] Their heart cried to the Lord. O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite! [19] 'Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street."

This is not a pretty picture. But it's a necessary one. I think you can see that the thought pattern, the mind-set we bring as we lift our hands to the Lord, *isn't always the same*. This holy gesture requires *thought* and *alertness* to keep it full of meaning and life.

There's a basic principle here. Hands should frequently be raised but never without a living connection to the *mind raising them*. Raised hands *deepen* the use of the mind. They never bypass or lessen it. They should never be related to a mere trancing out.

Here the prophet urges the people to a *depth of petition and intercession* that they weren't used to. They had taken the Word of the Lord lightly. They had been careless and indifferent in their approach to him. Now they were to come *lifting hands*. They were to come with a deeper *intensity*, a more *impassioned hunger - like the hunger you would express for the life of your own child* - "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street" (Lamentations 2:19).

There is something here we need to digest about worship in these words. Worship isn't always about *celebration*. Celebration is *one form* of worship that is being renewed in the church. It is most *prominent* because it is the most *musical*. It is far and away the most *pleasant* aspect of worship. But celebration is not always what is most *appropriate*, or most *necessary*. Celebration, while Biblical, is being *overworked* in today's worship.

Jeremiah describes a powerful paradox for us to think through. *Lift* your hands when your heart is *heavy*. Lift your hands when your soul is *desperate*. Lift your hands when the battle is strongest and you feel weakest. Lift your hands when you're *bleeding in your soul for more of God*.

### 5) THE LIFTING UP OF HANDS TO THE LORD IS A SIGN OF SURRENDER AND CONSECRATION

**Psalm 141:2** - "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!"

What beautiful words! Let me tell you what I think David calls to mind in this verse as he lifts his hands unto the Lord:

*First*, unlike us, David lived in a day with the morning and evening sacrifices were still repeated as an absolute necessity. As David prayed these words, and taught the people to pray them in their worship, he knew that in just a few hours a young lamb would be slaughtered before the sun went down. And he knew that while the people slept another young lamb would be prepared for fresh slaughter first thing when the sun came up:

**Exodus 29:38-39** - "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. [39] One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight."

Now, we don't offer those sacrifices anymore. But the significance of the lifting of our hands to the Lord remains the same. *David called to mind the necessity of those sacrifices when he lifted his hands to the Lord*. In that 141<sup>st</sup> Psalm, right after his mentioning of his lifted hands "*like the evening sacrifice*," he immediately concerns himself with issues of personal holiness and purity before the Lord:

**Psalm 141:3-4** - "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! [4] Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies!"

Here's what David's lifted hands are all about: *Holiness requires mercy and forgiveness*. Cleansing comes at a price. There is nothing casual or man-made about God's righteousness. As David lifts his hands toward heaven, he thinks about that little lamb giving up its life as the sun goes down. He thinks about *all the young lambs* that had

been slain since the days of the Tabernacle and the Exodus.

This is why the practice of lifting hands has such obvious abiding meaning. We, who no longer offer lambs every morning and every night, ***still come into this house of worship, still seek mercy and grace, still make strides in holiness and purity of life - all because of the blood of the Lamb of God.*** We lift our hands ***thinking about the reality, the finality, and the permanence of the sanctifying blood of Jesus Christ.***

As I see it these are the reasons, these are the ***Scriptural reasons***, Paul says, “When you pray as the church, when you come to the throne of God in worship and praise, when you come with petition and intercession, when you come overwhelmed by your sin and guilt, when you want to please God in a special way, ***lift your hands unto the Lord.***” And when it’s done with ***understanding***, God still longs to see this among His people.