

Weekly Bible Study Series, Vol. 6, No. 31: 18 December 2005

© I. Chris Imoisili

Please, send Questions, Feedback and Comments to: E-mail: imoisilic@hotmail.com

GRAVEN ON GOD'S PALM

Today's Text: Isaiah Chap. 49

Extracts:

Can a woman forget her nursing *child*, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet *I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands* [Is. 49: 15,16]

Allen Iverson is one of the top stars in the NBA (America's National Basketball Association) league.¹ He plays for the Philadelphia Sixers. Since joining the league during the 1996/97 season, he has set some unassailable records. For example, in April 1997, he scored 40 points in five straight games to set an NBA rookie record. By February 2004, he had scored 40 points in a game 50 times! He was the Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the 2001 All-Star Game and the 2000/01 MVP in the whole league. He is leading the rest of the pack in the 2005/06 season on average points per game.

Of interest to us is his love of tattoos. When he joined the NBA from college, he had only one. However, by the third year, he had seven! He put them on his left and right arms, from top to bottom, neck, chest and legs. Interestingly, his third year was a breakout season when he became the league's top player and took the Philadelphia Sixers to the playoffs for the first time in eight years. When sports writers criticized his tattoos, he said, "I have things on my body that are just tattoos to others but mean a lot to me, about my mother, my grandmother, my kids, my fiancée."

In today's lesson, God says that He has "tattooed" us on the palms of His hands. To my knowledge, I am yet to see anyone who has a tattoo on his or her palm. People have put rings on their tongues or bellies but not on the palm. I cannot explain why. Allen Iverson has said that the tattoos on his body mean something to him, that whenever he needs inspiration, he just looks at his tattoos and remember that he is fighting for his beliefs. When God looks at the palms of His hands where He has graven us, don't you think that He sees more than the mark, that He has a purpose for putting us there? That is what we shall find out in today's lesson.

¹ Based on "Allen Iverson Live," www.nba.com/playerfile/allen_iverson/

1. There is more to the palm than meets the eye!

Have you ever taken time to look at your palms (on the right and left hands of your body)? Look at those intricately designed lines on the palm and the five fingers of each hand. Imagine how useful your palms are for your daily chores—cleaning, washing, eating, wearing your clothes, etc. They are indispensable. If that was all there is, the palm would not be such a fascination to Satan who uses palm readers for his evil designs on humans. There is more to the palm than meets the eye.

Among so many uses, the palm (in deed the whole hand it is part of) represents the following:

a) *An identity card*

When policemen are looking for a criminal, they use his fingerprints. When you apply for your national passport, or driver's licence, they take your fingerprints. Since 9/11, most foreign passport-carrying visitors to the United States are fingerprinted at every port of entry. Therefore, the palm contains information that can identify our total person.

The word of God says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and *the firmament shows His handiwork*” [Ps. 19: 1]. In other words, God's fingerprints can be found in His creations. A scientist, Professor Nathan Wood², took up this challenge in the 1930's and found a geometric analogy between the characteristics of the universe and the Godhead of the Trinity, that God is in deed three-in-one as revealed in the Scriptures, namely, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit [Gen. 1: 2-3, 25; Is. 48: 16; Matt. 28: 19; Lk 3: 21-22]! For example, Wood found that the *universe* (one) consists of *space, time* and *matter* (three). Space consists of *length, breadth* and *height*, just like the Bible you have in your hands right now! We may also note that the sun we see everyday consists of *light, heat* and *radiation*, each distinct and yet there is only one sun. Therefore, God's palms are also a symbol of His identity.

b) *A symbol of power and authority*

When Jesus was going to ascend to heaven, He gave the disciples signs that shall follow those who believe in His name, and one of them was, “they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover” [Mk 16: 18], a practice that was in common use during His three-year earthly ministry. When Peter and John came to Samaria, to those who had just been baptized by Phillip, “they laid hands on them *and they received the Holy Spirit*” [Acts 8: 5-17]. When Paul and Barnabas were being sent on Paul's

² Nathan R. Wood, *The Secret of the Universe*, 10th Edition [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1936]

first missionary journey to Europe, leaders of the church at Antioch “fasted and prayed and *laid hands on them*” [Acts 13: 1-3]. When Moses handed over the leadership of the children to Joshua, he laid his hands upon him [Deut. 34: 9]. We see from the forgoing examples that power and authority flows through the palms of the hand. Can you then imagine how much of that flows through God’s palms?

2. How has God graven us on His palms?

When tattoo lovers like Allen Iverson want more tattoos, they go to a clinic where specialists use lasers to do so. They can also go back there if they want to remove them. In God’s case, He has graven us on His palms and it is an indelible mark. You cannot remove it! How has He done that? Let us hear from Him through the book of the prophet Isaiah:

a) *He offered us salvation by His only begotten Son*

The nation of Israel is used to represent modern believers who have through Christ become a chosen generation, God’s own special people, called out of darkness into His marvelous light [1 Pet. 2: 9, 10]. The prophet Isaiah received God’s promise of the Messiah not only for the nation of Israel but also for the Gentile nations. Speaking to His Son, God said [Is. 49: 1, 6]:

It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles; that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.

In deed, the Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world [Rev. 13: 8], came in flesh as Jesus to die for our sins, to demonstrate God’s love for us while we were yet sinners [Is. 53: 5; Jn 3: 16; Rom. 5: 8]. His Father has made His mouth “like a sharp sword (and) *in the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me*, and made Me a polished shaft” [Is. 49: 2].

With Jesus already graven on the palms of His Father’s hands, can you see the company that God wants us to keep? You will then understand Paul when he revealed the components of the armour of God [Eph. 6: 11, 13-17]. Your right hand is carrying the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” [v. 17]. Your left hand is carrying the “shield of faith” [v. 16], and faith comes by hearing the word of God [Rom. 10: 17]! When the risen Christ appeared to John in the island of Patmos, “out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength” [Rev. 1: 16], like a polished shaft in the words of Isaiah 49 verse 2! Therefore, God wants us to join an elite club. That is why He has graven us on the palms of His hands.

b) *He made us sons of God*

When the people of Israel complained to God that they had been forsaken and forgotten, God replied, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely, they may forget, *yet will I not forget you. See, I have stricken you on the palms of My hands*” [Is. 49: 14-16].

Some people do divorce their spouses (even when God hates it). People can break up friendships or business relationships. They can change nationality or religion or denomination. But parent-child relationship is *for life!* The rest of us may hate a convicted heartless murderer who is facing a life sentence, but to his mother, he is innocent, a victim of an unfair justice system! A young lady may be wayward, a drug addict and a prostitute but to her mother, she is a misguided darling. You may be 60 years old but to your parents you are still a child. The bond can hardly be broken by success or failure or age.

Of course, we do know that parent-child bonds can break under social or economic pressures. For example, young single mothers may give up their children for adoption or abandon them in dump sites. Children from abusive homes can run away and never come back. That is why the word of God says, “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me” [Ps. 27: 10]. This is the point reinforced by God Himself, that earthly parents may forsake their children but He would never *ever* forsake nor forget His [Is. 49: 15]. Who are the sons³ of God?

God has only one begotten Son, Jesus the Christ [Jn 3: 16], and Jesus says that *no one can come* to His Father without passing through Him [Jn 14: 6]. In some religions, they claim that God has no Son. They have chosen to go to God directly. Since “no one has seen God at any time,” how can you approach the nebulous? How can you know Him and what will satisfy His sense of righteousness? It seems easier to go through the One who has come from God, “the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father (and) has declared Him” [Jn 1: 18].

What does going through Jesus mean? First, you have to believe in Him as the only begotten Son of God who has died for your sins. When you make Him your *personal* Lord and Saviour [Jn 1: 12], and it takes the Holy Spirit to show you [1 Cor. 12: 3], then Jesus recommends you to His Father as His brother. God then makes you an *adopted* son, a joint-heir of God and *joint-heir with Christ*. Then, you will be able to call God, “Abba, Father” [Rom. 8: 14-17]! That *entitles* you to the promises and blessings meant for His only begotten Son.

³ In spirit, we are all sons of God, neither male nor female, but one in Christ Jesus [Gal. 3: 28]

c) *He grants us our inheritance*

Having accepted us as His sons, He extends to us the rights due to Christ alone. God said of His only begotten Son, “In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You as a covenant to the people; *to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages*” [Is. 49: 8].

So, what ails you at this time that you cannot turn to Jesus who has obtained His Father’s mandate to offer relief to His brothers in the Lord? Have you just been devastated by hurricanes or storms or war? God says “your destroyers and those who laid you waste shall go away from you. ... For your waste and desolate places and the land of your destruction will even now be too small for the inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away” [vv. 17, 19].

Have you just lost your children in a plane crash or fire or gang warfare? The Lord has promised that “the children you will have, after you have lost the others, will say again in your ears, ‘The place is too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell.’ Then you will say in your heart, ‘Who has begotten these for me, since I have lost my children and am desolate, a captive, and wandering to and from?’” God will say to you, “They shall not be ashamed who wait for Me” [vv. 20, 21, 22, 23].

Are you a victim of ethnic or racial or gender or political discrimination that you do not deserve? The Lord says, “Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you... All flesh shall know that I, the Lord, am your Saviour and your Redeemer” [vv. 25,26]. You are graven in the palms of God’s hands!

3. Lessons: Do you feel trapped or thrilled?

Are you thrilled like Isaiah who burst out saying, “Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out into singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted” [v. 13]? Or, are you still in doubt like the people of Israel, saying, “The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me” [v. 14]? Well, the choice is yours. There are some people who can never be satisfied. They never show any gratitude for anything good but will complain to high heavens for the slightest inconvenience.

God appreciates gratitude, and those who do so He will answer promptly when they call upon Him in the day of trouble [Ps. 50: 14-15]. For example, after ten lepers whom Jesus had sent to go and show themselves to the priests found themselves healed on the way, only one of them came back to glorify God. Jesus

was disappointed and said to the hearing of His listeners, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?” Then, he turned to the grateful Samaritan and said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you whole” [Lk 17: 17-18]. From the words of Jesus to that foreigner, gratitude is an expression of your faith, especially when you do so under adverse circumstances [1 Thes. 5: 18].

4. Conclusion

By virtue of having graven us on the palms of His hands, God has accepted us as sons that He can no longer forsake or forget, and “if we are faithless, He remains faithful (because) He cannot deny Himself.” However, if we deny Him, He will also deny us [2 Tim. 2: 13]. We deny Him when we lack faith in Him or His Son for, without faith, it is impossible to please God [Heb. 11: 6].

As we approach Christmas, when we mark the birth of Jesus, the source of our grafting to the palms of God’s hands, it is a unique opportunity to renew your commitment. I suggest the following:

- ❑ *Do an audit of your relationship with God and His Christ this past year.* Are you happy with yourself? Did you hide in the palms of God’s hands to perpetuate evil and wickedness? Or did you use every privilege that God gave you to glorify His name? Remember that if you misuse other people’s resources, such as time, good name, money or talents, God will not give you your own [Lk 16: 12];
- ❑ *Be genuinely sorry for your sins of omission and commission.* This is the time to “rend your heart, and not your garments; (to) return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness” [Joel 2: 13];
- ❑ *Be thrilled that God has graven you on the palms of His hands.* That also makes you the apple of His eye and “he that touches you touches the apple of His eye” [Zech. 2: 8].

If you are thus anchored to God, who can separate you from the love of Christ? Tribulation? Distress? Persecution? Famine? Flooding? Economic hardship? Terminal illness? *Nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord [Rom. 8: 35, 37-39].*

You are graven on God’s palm!