

GOD IS HOLDING YOUR HAND

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

When asked if she had one favorite verse of Scripture a discerning young lady mentioned Psalm 139: 10. "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me."

The hand of God is said to do two things. It both "leads" and "holds."

"Leading" calls to mind a Scriptural passage that is favorite to millions. "He leads me beside the still waters." "He leads me in the paths of righteousness." (Psalm 23). It also calls to mind a memorable scene from the Gospels. Jesus "took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town" (Mark 8:23).

Leading out of a town is one kind of rescue. More dramatic was the instance in which Simon Peter was sinking in the water. "Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him" (Matt. 14:31). The leading can be a lifting up from the very shadow of death. A twelve year old girl lay lifeless on a bed, and Jesus "took her by the hand and called, saying, 'Little girl, arise.'" (Luke 8:54). She heard the voice calling her, and she felt the hand of Jesus drawing her back to life.

"I give unto them eternal life," said Jesus. He was speaking of his sheep, and he added, "They shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). The idea of being in God's hand is simply expressed in the song, "He's Got the Whole World In His Hand."

In 1939 a dark time of uncertainty for England, King George VI began his Christmas speech to his people with a quotation that goes like this:

"I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.'"

"And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light, and safer than a known way.'"

Emanuel Swedenborg taught that God's leading is "as if by the hand, permitting and withholding as far as one is willing to follow in freedom." It is at a deeper level than holding one's physical hand. It involves holding the things of the mind and heart. He holds us in hope. He holds us in trust. He holds us in resolve.

Swedenborg speaks of two things going on in God's care for us. Reminiscent of that verse in Palm 139, they are 'holding' (or "keeping") and "withholding." The assertion is that we are being kept in good and are withheld from evil. To quote: "By virtue of the mercy of the Lord we are withheld from evil and kept in good, and this by a mighty force."

Our own free response is vital. We may in our lives willingly put our hand in the hand of God, and cherish that promise God gave through the prophet of old, "I will hold your hand" (Isaiah 42:6).

Though we take the wings of the morning and dwell beyond the sea, we may say in trust, "Your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me."

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