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The Back to God Hour

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THE RIGHT HANDED *COO

Thou dost show ~~me~~ the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore. Psalm 16:11

[God] raised [Christ] from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places. Ephesians 1:20

Did you know that God is right handed?

It is curious how we attach significance to whether people are right handed or left handed. Throughout the centuries, right handedness and left handedness have always carried a special significance. Right handed people were considered normal, trustworthy, and even gifted.

Look what we have done with the Latin words that mean right and left. The Latin word *dexter* means right and the Latin word *sinister* means left. In English we have the word *sinister* which means wicked, evil, and physically qualified. *Sinister* means . . . well, you know what it means. We have just taken the word over, and *sinister* means sinister-frightening, fearsome, scary. Pirate captains are sinister. So is the thief who broke into my house.

So there have been a number of irrational, almost superstition-like fears that have grown up around the idea of left handedness. For many years teachers have tried to make little left handed boys and girls into right handers. Often they have succeeded, but when they did, they failed. For left handers don't become right handers without scars. Today, most teachers accept such children with the understanding that there is not the slightest thing wrong with them-fortunately, for some people who are very dear to me.

Today we understand that there is nothing particularly significant about whether you are left

handed or right handed. We even make special tools for left handed people-like golf clubs. We know that left handed people are just as honest, just as gifted, and just as capable as right handers are. And that is that: We can forget about this matter. Well, not really, because even though we know this, the fact is that the matter of right handedness and left handedness has become a part of the past that contributes the way we think and feel nowadays.

For example, the Bible, when it talks about God talks about His right hand and His left hand. In fact, there is a sense in which we cannot know the God of the Bible until we understand that He is a right handed God. He does beautiful things with His right hand. His left hand is the hand which points the way to hell. What He does with His left hand is unpleasant and ugly.

It's the same way with us. If you are right handed and you try to write with your left, your writing will become a scrawl. The same with a left hander who tries to write with his wrong hand. The Bible talks about God that way, too.

Psalm 16 says, "Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." But look at what the Bible says about God's left hand: "[God] will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; . . .'" (Matthew 25:41).

God is right handed. You know, it could just be that this simple fact could be the one fact that would enable you to understand God better than ever.

Do you have a lot of questions about God? I do, and I have had the opportunity of reading the Bible a great deal and studying it. You see, even when one studies the Bible, he still has questions about God. I think we all have questions about

God. And I think, too, that we are all interested in finding some kind of answers for our questions.

We all feel His presence, to a certain extent, don't we? It is almost as if there is a sense of His presence in the air or as if we can feel His eyes on the back of our head. And there is so much in the universe that is evidence that there must be God behind everything. Mahalia Jackson sings, "Every time I hear a newborn baby cry, I believe." The starry heavens can make believers out of us. So can the Grand Canyon. And all the intricate detail of the Great Barrier Reef can make believers out of us, too.

But how should we think about Him? How can we? Have you ever had a child question you about God? There are some of us, as you know, who have stopped going to church, or we never did, and we are not very religious, but we have kept alive within our children a belief that there is a God. And sometimes children can come to us with their questions. Sometimes, before they go to sleep at night and they are thinking about the mystery of sleep and the fact that the lights are going out and it's dark outside, they will start asking questions that baffle and frustrate.

"Is God really here in this room?" "Does He really hear my prayer?" "How can God be here and where grandma lives, too - isn't the same home?" "Why did God let me break my arm?" "How come God doesn't give everybody enough to eat?" And on and on. You try to answer ... to say something, but finally you say, "It's late, you must get to sleep." And you leave your child and you leave the questions hanging in the darkness of his bedroom. And when you close the door, you stop and marvel that a child can have questions like these the very same questions you have always had, but you have stopped asking them because you have become more impressed with inflation

and with sex than with God. But these are your questions, too. They are mine.

God comes to us and He invites us to think about His right hand. It's the place where there is pleasure for ever more according to Psalm 16 in the Old Testament. And according to the New Testament it is the place where Jesus Christ dwelt when He ascended into heaven. Ephesians 1 describes it this way: "[God] raised [Christ] from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places. In the New Testament says, 'When [Jesus] had made purification for himself, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (v. 3).

The fact that the Bible is willing to talk to us about God's right hand can be very helpful for us as we try to respond to God properly and know Him. In the first place, and very simply, this language is an invitation to think about God as a real being.

Now, this seems obvious enough, I suppose - that God is real. But we must admit that even though this may be true we have trouble thinking about God. In one of his books, C. S. Lewis talks about the way he thought about a God child. He had been deeply impressed with the fact that God is a spiritual being, which He is. But when Lewis examined the contents of his mind when he thought about God, he had to admit that what he visualized was pretty much like a big, formless blob of tapioca pudding.

That's can happen. We can be so impressed with God's spirituality that we say to ourselves, "Of course God is not like this, and He's not like that, and He's not like that either," and finally we end up with a great big vacuum in our heads when we think about Him. And then the Bible comes and it tells that God has a right hand and He is right handed and it jolts us back to reality. God is not

just a person who is so different from anything we may use the "right hand" idea when we think know and can know that He might just as well not of God, but it is still very difficult to apply this exist as far as we are concerned, but He is a person to God. The Bible, therefore, focuses our vision on the person who wants us to think about His right hand as we look at God's right hand, and it explains further that the right hand of God is the place where Jesus Christ of Nazareth is right now.

Now, it is true of course that language like this is figurative. God does not occupy space in the same way you and I do, and He does not have a right hand or left hand in the same way we do. But this God invites us, when we think of Him, to use concepts as common as these. There is something about Him that can be properly described as His right hand. A few moments ago we noticed how the Bible declares that when Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He went to a certain place. Hebrews 1 says that after Jesus had completed the work of making purification for sin, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." A fascinating episode that involves the first martyr, Stephen, tells how this brave man, just before he died, saw Jesus, at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56).

Maybe the reason we feel somewhat uneasy when we find the Bible applying such common physical terminology to God is that we not only think of God as a spiritual being, but we think of Him as a spiritual being who is totally uninterested in material reality. Nothing could be further from the truth. God is a spiritual being, indeed, but He is that spiritual being who did not rest until He had created a material universe of massive dimensions and astonishing intricacy. And He crowned this great creation of His by creating man, in God's very image. The only true God who made the heavens and the earth, now invites you and me to think of Him as real. If you wish, He says, you may think of me as a being with a right hand and a left, and in my "right hand are pleasures for ever more."

Don't you find this encouraging? We need not have vague, meaningless, empty notions about God. And when our children ask us about Him, we can say, "O son, it is impossible to visualize God, but He is real, more real than you are and I am, and at His right hand there are pleasures for ever more."

But the Bible helps us even more than this. And better and better, his questions about God are not we need more help, because it's good to know that really answered but they become somewhat less

important. The answers ~~are~~ have about God's character about His love, and about His interest in us revealed in Jesus become so marvelously impressive that the questions that still trouble us begin to fade away.

This is why parents who know ~~Christ~~ ^{Christ}ally do not become too upset when their children ask them questions about God that they cannot answer. Such parents just pray that as their children grow older, they will learn about Jesus, too, so that their questions will be taken care of by their knowledge of Jesus.

God is right handed, and as we look at His right hand we are startled to observe a person who was born on Christmas day, who died on Good Friday, and who rose again from the grave on resurrection Sunday.

It is good to find someone we know at the right hand of God. The God who is spiritual is so kind to us that He invites us to think of Him as if He had a right hand and then He places on His right hand the person who God became flesh with. With all of this, we must be impressed with God's reality and with the fact that people like us can know something about Him. And as we look at Jesus on God's right hand, there is one message that comes across very strongly.

It is this: Jesus is Lord. The right hand of God is the supremely exalted position in the universe. There is no authority that is more sweeping than that which is exercised from the right hand of glory in the throne room of heaven. There is no power more overwhelming than that which originates in the place where our Creator was conceived and expressed. As Jesus' gaze falls on 'Us and we behold Him seated in this exalted place, you and I are required to submit ourselves to Jesus in faith and obedience.

When the Bible announces that God has a right hand and that Jesus is there, it encourages us to think realistically about God and about Christ His Son. But that is not all. All this must lead to faithful obedience in our lives. It must lead to worship. This worship must be expressed in the collective praise and adoration that occurs within the fellowship of believers, and it must also be expressed as we earnestly respond to the will of Jesus in everything we do.

Our individual lives must become more and more Christian as we become more and more sensitive to the will of Jesus. We must learn to pray and to read His holy Word and we must learn to examine our own work and play so that we make sure that they are pleasing to Jesus. We must dedicate our thoughts, emotions, and our actions to Jesus.

Those who respond to the Lordship of Jesus will try to have Christian homes where the family meets together in prayer and Scripture reading. Parents who are responsive to the rule of Jesus will also work hard to provide their children with an education that expresses the facts that God created the world, that man is the image bearer of God, and that the Bible is our ultimate authority. Furthermore, Christians who know that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God try to influence society so that Jesus' commands will be known and acknowledged.

"Oh," you say, "is all that part of what it means to know that God has a right hand and Jesus is there? Isn't that getting a little fanatic about religion? Schools that express Christian position - isn't that a little impractical ... and even a bit undemocratic? Family prayers - we really don't have time for that anymore -- what do you mean by that? Is all this really involved? And trying to influence society is that appropriate for religious

people? Don't we try to. mainh: in separation between church and state? Do you really mean that Christians should get political about their faith?"

Yes. You see, the Bible's declaration that God has a right hand and Jesus is there is not revealed so that it will become a curious religious truth to people who are fascinated by religion will enjoy. It is revealed so that you and I will understand that God is real and Jesus is real and Jesus is the King of creation. The prime minister of Canada, the president of the United States, and the prime minister of Australia, with all due respect to these men and others like them, do not exercise ultimate control over the affairs of men. The leaders of the giant multi-national corporations are not in charge, either. The right hand of God is the power center of the universe, and everything and everyone must ultimately bow in obedience to Jesus who is there.

Those who try to outrun Jesus or ignore Him or escape Him do not have a chance of succeeding. Jesus is the great authority who rules over everything whether you or I like it or not. The Old Testament Psalm 10 declared Jesus' sovereignty when it said, "The Lord says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'" (v. 1). The book of Hebrews in the New Testament announces that God has said this to Jesus His Son (1: 13).

God is right handed, and at His right hand we see Jesus the Lord of all. I wonder if you have received Jesus as your Savior and Lord. We have talked about all the questions we have about God, and these questions are real and nagging. But now we see that God, who doesn't answer our questions point for point, does approach us in terms that we can understand. He is willing to speak to us about His right hand, and then He shows us Jesus who is there. But we must respond.

We must receive this Jesus as our Lord and Savior. It is excitingly important for people to hear about Jesus and then go on with what they were doing. The Bible says that Jesus "came to his home, and his own people received him. But to all who believed his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1: 11, 12).

So, you see, it is not enough simply to read - what you have just read, but you and I are required to respond in faith. Look at the person who is at the right hand of God. This Jesus who comes to us today as the sovereign ruler is the person who has given Himself in divine love on Calvary's cross so that our sin could be taken away. He has endured the fury of hell so that the wrath of God which should have fallen upon us might be turned aside.

Now salvation is possible for people like us. You see the one who comes to us and now asks for our faith and obedience is the one who has sacrificed Himself totally for our salvation.

God has a right hand. And Jesus is there. This Jesus, who occupies the great seat of power in the universe, has approached you today as you have approached this material world. Maybe it all seems harsh, and even unpleasant. We don't appreciate being approached by an expression of authority. And Jesus has authority as no one else has. He will rule until all His enemies are subdued.

But let's not forget what Psalm 16 says about God's right hand: at the Lord's right hand there are pleasures for evermore. And this is true, too. God is right handed. This does not only mean that He has a right hand, but it means that the work of His right hand is glorious and satisfying and saving. The Jesus who summons you to believe, is the Jesus who was willing to give Himself totally for your salvation. And when you think about salvation, think about pleasure, not the sensual pleasure

that were being sold these days, but the deep abiding pleasure that a person experiences when he expresses the fulness of his personality as an image bearer of God.

The work of God's right hand, the work He does through Jesus, is marvelously wonderful. God is real. Jesus is real, and Jesus must be our Lord before you can be happy.

Confess that without Jesus you are nothing. Confess that He alone could pay for your sin. Bow before His throne, and enjoy the pleasure that can be found at God's right hand for evermore.

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