

THE FINGER OF GOD

~Other Speakers A-F: Richard E. Bieber:

“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, house falls upon house and if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Luke 11: 17a-20

When Jesus talks about casting out demons by the finger of God he is describing his ministry—and ours. Every follower of Jesus is called to a ministry in which the finger of God is operative.

Most of us have a watered down idea of the ministry to which we've been called. Even our Christian heroes are often weak specimens compared with the “finger of God” ministry to which Jesus calls us.

Who do we picture as a really a successful Christian worker?
Often it's somebody who starts a new church and in no time they have a 1000 members, or somebody who begins a new movement, or opens a new mission field, then later on they write a book about their life.

Praise God for all these accomplishments, but we have been called to more: we have been called to minister with the finger of God.

When we minister with the finger of God, we are moving in a realm which is not visible to the human eye, does not receive human glory.

Once you get a taste of ministering with power, in the name of Jesus, and you see the flow of redemptive life
healing people,
breaking their chains,
who needs glory in the eyes of men?

The only thing that matters now is to be so alive to God that you find yourself again and again in the right place at the right time.

You have begun fitting in with the mysterious movements of God's kingdom in such a way that each person who comes your way is seen as sent from God. And you are able to touch their lives with healing “to drive away evil with God's finger.

That is the kind of ministry our Lord had. It was not flashy. Even though healings took place in abundance, he sought to keep a low profile.

Jesus was so sensitive to his Father that he always found himself in the right place at the right time, making the most of every opportunity that came his way ---right up to the cross.

Jesus gave this ministry to his apostles. He taught them to fit in with God's movements in their ordinary, simple, down to earth daily rounds, accomplishing supernatural things in the process.

Our conception of ministry has been distorted by “modern,” slick Christianity.

As an aid to restoring our vision of ministry, consider those strange communities of Jewish people who appeared in eastern Europe several hundred years ago when Jews were suffering severe persecutionâ€”from nominal Christians.

Their property was seized.
 Their synagogues were burned.
 They were beaten and often killed.

In the midst of this suffering appeared the Hasidim, the â€œpious onesâ€•,
 who would be clustered around one man
 called a â€œZaddikâ€•, a â€œrighteous oneâ€•.

The Zaddik, it was believed,
 had only one thing on his heart: God.
 His mind was fixed on Heaven.
 He awaited with a burning heart the coming Messiah.

This man didnâ€™t care whether people admired him or hated him, or even what happened in the world around him. His only passion was to serve God.

It was believed that wherever this man went angels opened the way.
 He always seemed to be at the right place at the right time.
 If he ended up alone in the middle of a forest, he knew that God sent him there.

The Zaddik could read hearts,
 and heal,
 and drive away evil.

Now the Hasidim, the followers who surrounded this man, were delighted to simply serve him. They were there to be taught by the Zaddik, and to support him with their love and prayers.

But what if,
 instead of one Zaddik surrounded by a group of Hasidim,
 we have one Hassid surrounded by a group of Zaddikim?

I.e. Jesus becomes the Hassid, (or Hessed, â€œmercy incarnateâ€•).
 He is the Merciful One in our midst.

As we draw our strength from him,
 Jesus transforms each of us into a Zaddik, a righteous one.
 And he sends us forth to touch human lives with the finger of God.

â€œYou did not choose me I chose you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit.â€•

â€ˆDonâ€™t just sit in the pew
 â€ˆDonâ€™t just go to Bible studies
 â€ˆDonâ€™t just say your prayers before you go to bed

But go out and accomplish the redemptive work of the Lord in the time thatâ€™s left.

â€ˆand that your fruit should remain.â€•

Jesus sends us forth
 to do exactly what the legendary Zaddik was to do.
 To be at the right place in the right time.
 To so touch human lives, that the broken image of God in their hearts is restored.

If this sounds far-fetched listen again to Mark 16:

â€œAnd these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover.â€•

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God has indeed given us grace that brings life to people,
that brings peace to the sin-sick heart.

Once we taste the hidden glory, which the Spirit imparts to those whose names are hidden in God, who cares about "glory" before human eyes?

So we turn our backs on slick "churchianity"
and get on with the ministry which is covered by the hand of God.

But we need to know that the same Jesus,
who calls us to the ministry of the finger of God,
also warns us that there are certain areas that will threaten this ministry.

Areas where we have to be on our guard.
If we mess up in any of these areas,
we may build churches
and draw crowds
and write books,
but we will not be able to touch human lives with God's finger.

First, if you really want touch people with the finger of God,
pay attention to this area of your life—the relationship between woman and man.

Before you come into the kingdom of God and are given this ministry
maybe you were married five times,
maybe lived in the gay bars,
maybe were a porno addict, or
you read True Romance every night before you went to bed.

But now that you've come into the Kingdom, this area of your life—"your relationship between man and woman must be pure in the sight of God.

Your past is under the blood. Don't worry about your past.
Get it under the blood and leave it there.

But now you are either
a eunuch for the kingdom of God (living a single life sustained by God's grace),
or you are married,
or on your way to marriage.

If you are married, your love for your mate is sanctified by your love for God.
God always comes first.

Under God you
love your mate with the same merciful,
forgiving,
self-giving
love that has been shown to you in the Lord.

You are thoughtful.
You honour this person.
Your relationship with your mate is utterly pure,
even in your imagination and your thoughts.

If we allow ourselves leeway in this area,
then our ministries become infected and will ultimately be destroyed.

The second area to which we must pay attention,
if we are to minister with the finger of God,

is the area of the way we handle money.

“He who is faithful in very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve to masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this and they scoffed at him. But he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” Luke 16:10-15

Jesus watched the widow putting her offering into the treasury of “institutional Israel” and he did not condemn her for it.

He honoured her.

In his parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus makes it clear that the Samaritan not only spent time on that wounded Jew, he spent money.

Two pence, which is the equivalent of two days wages in those days is given to the innkeeper to pay for the wounded man’s stay.

“If you spend more”, he says to the innkeeper, “when I come back, I will repay you.”

How many ministries are stunted because we are irresponsible,
unfaithful to God
in our use of money?

And how many ministries suffer because we allow ourselves to be deceived by money?

We think that money is the answer.

“If we had more money, we can do more good.”

We start to beg for it.

We worry about it.

We put stock in it.

We think of money as our security.

We will not minister effectively with the finger of God,
if we are irresponsible in our use of money
or if we are sucked in by money and begin to lust after it.

The third area to guard if we are going to minister with the finger of God,
is the area of our temptation to anxiety about tomorrow.

There are two ways that you can face tomorrow.

1. With anxiety, which is natural to us.
2. With faith in God.

When we are anxious about tomorrow, we start to worry about the details.

What we shall eat.

What we shall drink.

What we’re going to put on.

What’s going to happen to us?

Maybe I’ll get sick! maybe I’ll have an accident! maybe I’ll get caught in one of those tornadoes! maybe there’s going to be a war.

Who knows?

Maybe all of it is going to happen.

The Lord doesn’t promise us specifics about tomorrow except that
he will be with us tomorrow if we walk with him.

Whatever you are going to need tomorrow,
you’ll have tomorrow,

if you walk with Jesus.

If we face tomorrow with anxiety, our ministry evaporates.
But if we face tomorrow with the help of the Lord,
admitting our anxieties and fears to him
crying out to him to increase our faith, we receive help from above.

“Lord I believe. Help my unbelief!”
....a valid prayer for all of us.

The fourth area where we have to be on our guard if we are to minister with the finger of God is the area of the critical attitude.

The Lord who says, “Judge not and you will not be judged; condemn not and you will not be condemned,” means what he says.

When we indulge in the habit of being cynical,
critical,
sour
we put ourselves out of the ranks of disciples and
into the ranks of the scribes and Pharisees.

“Why do you see this speck that is in your brother’s eye and fail to behold the log that is in your own eye? Take the log at first.”

For some of us it's a compulsion.
Every time we go to somebody else's fellowship we have no peace until we find something we can tear apart.

For some of us it's a habit.
We seem to think that there's nothing to talk about at the dinner table unless we can find somebody to make fun of or
rip up or
tear apart or
bicker about.

For some of us it's an inner disposition.
We're not happy until we find somebody we can belittle.

If we're going to minister with the finger of God, this must change.

The mercy the Lord has shown to us must rule our attitude toward all people.

Finally, if we are going to minister with the finger of God,
the last area, and perhaps the most important of all, is the area of the unforgiving heart.
Again, and
again, and
again our Lord hammers home on our need to forgive.

“Forgive us our trespass as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Forgive and you shall be forgiven.
If you don't forgive men their trespasses, says Jesus, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses.

What is our gospel but a gospel of forgiveness?
What is the finger of God, but the finger that lifts the guilt from us,
puts it on himself,
and drives the evil away?

How can we effectively minister with the finger of God, if we have closed the door of our hearts to God's mercy, by refusing to be forgiving toward one other soul?

This is why the Body of Christ always manifests itself as
a mixed congregation,
an assembly of people from many different backgrounds,
different customs,
which invariably clash: in order that we might learn to be forgiving.
We irritate each other,
rub each other the wrong way and
try each other's patience.
....And now we learn to forgive.

God doesn't send us off on the roads of this world like lonely Zaddicks.
He sends us forth as members of each other,
brothers and sisters who have learned at home how to forgive.

The more effective we become at forgiving one another,
the wrongs that are done to us, or that we think have been done to us,
the more freely and mightily the grace of God flows out of us to others.

“If I cast out demons by the Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

“And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover.”

“So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message with signs that attended it.”

If you, the reader of these words, are hearing the call of the Lord to rise up and minister with the finger of God, don't be afraid to answer it.

Let God touch you with his finger.
Let God lift you up to the cross and,
merging you into the body of his dying Son,
raise you up alive as a new person.

The Lord Jesus desires to send you forth to minister with the finger of God
to the wounded
broken
forgotten
lonely
troubled
hungry
thirsty souls that surround your life.

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide.”