

## “God in Hand or In God’s Hand?”

Based on message from Rev. Dr. James I. Lamb, Executive Director of Lutherans For Life

*Job 12:4-10 “I have become a laughingstock to my friends, though I called upon God and he answered— a mere laughingstock, though righteous and blameless! Men at ease have contempt for misfortune as the fate of those whose feet are slipping. The tents of marauders are undisturbed, and those who provoke God are secure— those who carry their god in their hands. “But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.*

● There is a contrast in this text between those who carry their **god in their hands** and the true God, who has all things in His hand. So, what will it be for you, **god in hand** or in God’s hand? The answer seems easy enough, but before you piously reject as out of hand the idea of having god in hand, you might want to check out those with god in hand in our text. They are kind of appealing!

**Those who have their god in hand are at ease** (v 5). They **laugh** at those who are weak, whose “feet are slipping.” They have **contempt** for those who are suffering any kind of misfortune. So how many of you are that much at ease—no worries, no suffering, no struggles—so that you can just sit back and laugh at those who do have problems?

**Those who have their god in hand are undisturbed** (v 6a). How many of you can say that? How many of your homes, especially those with children, were undisturbed this morning as you were getting ready for church? How many of you kids are undisturbed when your parents never let you stay out as late as your friends get to? How many of you parents are undisturbed when your kids come in two hours past curfew? How many would be undisturbed if your daughter announces she is pregnant or you receive a frightening diagnosis? **These people** may be “marauders,” robbers, and thieves, but at least they are undisturbed.

**Those who have their god in hand are secure** (v 6b). How many of you can say that? How many of you have no financial worries and have everything you ever dreamed of? How many are satisfied with your jobs and your income and the outlook for your future? How many of you feel secure enough in the truth of God’s Word about life to stand up and speak out for the innocent in the womb and the defenseless in the nursing home? How many of you are secure enough not just to speak but to do, and reach out to young women in crisis pregnancy situations or to women

who have had abortions and offer them the love, forgiveness, and support? **These** folks in our text may “provoke God,” but at least they are secure.

**At ease**, undisturbed, secure—how many of you can boast of those things? It all seems to be possible because they “**carry their god in their hands**” (v 6c). You have to admit, that would be pretty convenient. It implies that you are in control of your god. You can shape him (or her) any way you want. **You could exchange your god** if you found one you liked better.

**Think of the convenience!** With god in hand, when you are not at ease because some form of suffering has come into your life, you can find a god who says suffering is your enemy and no possible good could ever come from suffering, a god who says that **you have a right to end suffering** by killing the sufferer and you have a right to have your physician assist you in doing that. **You can find a god** who will put you at ease by calling this compassionate.

With god in hand, when daughter comes and announces she is pregnant, you don't have to be disturbed. **You can shape your god** into one that allows abortion, who says it really is the only option available. That certainly is the deceptive message of this god we turn to so readily for rescue from a crisis pregnancy. Women are deceived by it every day. **As one stated** after her abortion, “Abortion was available and real accessible. I told the people at the clinic my fears, but they never offered any alternatives. All I could think of was abortion. I couldn't really see beyond the moment.”<sup>1</sup> Women feel pressure from boyfriends, husbands, and parents and they end up making a decision that they really do not want to make. The god carried around in the hands says there is absolutely no other way out.

Since the majority of women who have abortions are Christian, this could very well describe someone here this morning. If so, I welcome you here with all these other sinners! It's not the sin of abortion that separates us from God, it's sin! We all stand equally guilty before God. So, please understand, you are not alone, and please stay tuned! God has some good news for all of us this morning.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Michels, *Helping Women Recover From Abortion* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1988), 15.

**With god in hand**, you don't have to risk your security by speaking up or reaching out when it comes to life issues. You can find a god who says,

- “These are political and divisive issues.
- Let someone else risk their security by speaking out for the innocent and defenseless.
- Let Lutherans For Life take care of that.
- Let someone else reach out to the women who are hurting because of abortion.
- These things do not belong in the church.”
- You can find a god who says, “Don't rock the boat, be secure.”

So, you see, **having a god in hand** can be pretty convenient. You can always be at ease, undisturbed, and secure. I would recommend such a god very highly . . . except for one thing. Such a god, a god in hand, **would** have to be very, very small. Such a god would never be able to hold you in his hand. But there is a God who can!

**All of creation knows that!** Job says, “Ask the animals, talk to the birds or the fish, they will teach you. Speak to the earth itself, it will inform you. They all know that in God's hands is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind” (v 7-10). The only ones who do not realize this are those focused on their own little hands carrying around their own little god. Everyone else, indeed, everything else, knows that God has everything in His hands; and if God has everything in His hands, God controls everything!

**That is Job's main point** with his three friends who have come to comfort him in his grief and suffering over all the bad things that have happened. But they weren't much comfort! They figured Job must have done something wrong to deserve these bad things. Job continues to proclaim his righteousness. He is convinced that he isn't being punished by God for some specific sin. **He tries to get his friends** to understand that being good is not always the basis for freedom from suffering. **Neither is being bad** always the basis for the presence of suffering. But whether the good suffer and the bad don't, or the other way around, **everything is in God's hands!** If everything is in God's hand, God is in control!

Now that all sounds well and good. That's helpful for us when we look at our world as a whole and see the good and the bad, justice and injustice, joy and sorrow. We can say, “Well,

everything is in God's hands. He can work it out." However, when it comes down to a personal level, things are not always as clear. Sometimes we end up saying, "Well, if everything is in God's hands then why is my life such a mess?"

**That's why it is good to be reminded** frequently that if God is big enough to have everything in His hand, He has you in His hand! **"In His hand** is the life of every creature"—that includes you. **In His hand** is the "breath of all mankind"—that includes you.

**As you look at the Scripture** passages where God has His "hands in things," you realize that His hands have been involved quite a bit. In fact, you were always in His hands. His hands **"knit you together"** in your mother's womb. (Those who carry their god in their hands only see this as cell division.) God's hands **"shaped" you and "formed"** you in the womb. (Those who carry their god in their hands only see this as tissue growth.) God's hands **"brought you forth"** from the womb. (Those who carry their god in their hands think it was just the doctor who did that.) Of course, there is the human factor involved in this bringing forth. Because of that, you were also "brought forth in iniquity." Even with God's hands involved, birth couldn't do anything about that.

**But rebirth can!** And God's hands are involved in that as well. Those invisible, hard to imagine, spiritual hands of God, became visible in the person of Jesus. Jesus had **real hands** that touched and healed, hands that raised up and blessed, **hands that folded** in prayer and—most terrible of all, most wonderful of all—**hands that were pierced and bled**. Jesus' hands bled and that blood cleanses you from your sin. The hand of God's wrath—something frequently seen, and always feared, in the Old Testament and that we all so readily deserve—came down upon Jesus. **Now God's hand of grace** reaches down to you and through the waters of baptism, through the Word of Scriptures, and the sacrament of His body and blood, brings you forth again to new life and sustains you in that life. "In His hand is breath and life" your breath, your life. You are in God's hands, and Jesus reminds us, "Nothing can snatch you out" of those hands.

**Does this mean you will always be at ease**, like those who carry their god in their hands and that no suffering will ever come into your life? **No**. But it does mean that your God is with you in your suffering, and remember, He is a God who knows about suffering. **He is there** to get you

through suffering. **He is there** to help you endure suffering that seems to have no end. **He is there** to work in and through suffering, not to kill the sufferer, and to accomplish His good and gracious will. Even in the face of suffering—when you don't feel at ease—you are in His hands.

**You're in God's hands.** Does that mean you will always be undisturbed, like those who carry their gods in their hands? **No**, disturbing things are going to happen. But it does mean that when your daughter comes to you and announces she is pregnant, you are in God's hands. She is in God's hands. Her baby is in God's hands. **They are hands of love**, hands of support, hands of forgiveness. What if she doesn't come to you, but gives in to the lies and pressure of those with their gods in their hands and has an abortion? You are in God's hands. She is in God's hands. Her baby is in God's hands. They are hands of love, hands of support, hands of forgiveness, hands of healing and hope. Disturbing things will come into our lives, sometimes by our own choosing, but in it all one thing remains undisturbed, you are there—in His hands.

**You're in God's hands.** Does that mean you will always feel secure, financially or otherwise, like those who carry their god in their hand? **No**, but it does mean you have a source of security far greater than finances can provide. You are in God's hands, the “hollow of His hands” the Bible says, the inner, protected, and secure part. **It is a “strong hand”** that holds you, a “mighty hand” and “powerful hand.” **From His hand** you can draw strength to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, to be bold in sharing the positive For Life message of Scripture and how it applies to the life issues. You can find the strength to understand these are spiritual issues. The Gospel compels us to be neighbors to those not yet born, to love them as the work of God's hands in creation and redemption. We have the greatest message in the world to offer to those struggling with a crisis pregnancy or a frightening diagnosis or a past mistake. So, you may not always feel secure in your life or in dealing with life, but you are secure—in His hands.

**I suppose it can be kind** of appealing to carry your god in your hand, to have him be whatever you want him to be. It would be worth checking out except for that one thing. **Such a god** would have to be very, very small. **Such a god** could never hold you in His hand.

But there is a God who can. And He does! **To help you think about** this in the days ahead, I have provided devotion books “In the hands of God” at the front of the church for those who would like to use them.