

The Arm of the Lord - Part 2

by T. Austin-Sparks

The arm of the Lord refers to the support, upholding, and strength of the Lord given to those who are wholly in line with his purpose, and it is revealed to those who have taken the right course and have produced abiding spiritual fruit.

Duration: 54:43

Scripture: Leviticus 16:16, Leviticus 16:21, Isaiah 52:13, Isaiah 53:2, Isaiah 53:4-6, Isaiah 53:8, Isaiah 53:10-12

Topics: "God's Work"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of seeking God's verdict on our lives rather than relying on the opinions of others or our own judgments. He encourages listeners to live each day in the light of God's ultimate verdict, striving for His approval in all things. The sermon then shifts to discussing the unique work and service of God's servant, highlighting the ultimate exaltation and high position that awaits him. The speaker emphasizes the need to keep the end in view, as it provides hope and purpose in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Transcript

We revert to the words which are guiding our thoughts at this time in the prophecies of Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 1. The second clause in the verse, to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed. To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed. Having this morning considered a little of the meaning of that phrase, the arm of the Lord, that it indicates and implies the support, the upholding, the strength of the Lord given to that and to those who are wholly in line with his purpose.

We shall go further this afternoon in considering something more of the content of the question. We might begin by asking what does the word of God show to be the meaning of the support, the upholding of the Lord. That is, what do we think of when we think of getting or having the support of the Lord.

What is in our mind? We all want to have the Lord's support, the Lord's upholding, the Lord's strength. Or in a word, to have the Lord alongside with us, on our behalf, with all his gracious and infinite power. That is, after all, as we have said, the most important thing in life, for Christians individually, and for the Church, and for the work of the Lord.

But have we really thought as to what we mean by this? What do we expect when we ask for and think of the support of the Lord? Is it just the bare support of the Lord to get us through, to carry us over, to see

that we do not collapse on the way? We see somebody fearfully standing on one side of the road, afraid to step out and cross, and we proper an arm. We say, let's give you an arm, see you over, an arm. And, well, the arm is a support, it helps to the other side.

Is that all that we want from the Lord? Is that what we mean? The Lord will give us his arm to get us through this difficulty and that trouble, over this and that phase, where we need strength from him. We have many ways in which we put this, and always speak about the arm of the Lord. We ask for grace, we ask for sufficiency, we ask for many things, but it's all gathered into this, the arm of the Lord.

But really, what is it that we are seeking? Now, what does the Word of God show to be the meaning of this support, this arm of the Lord? This is, before I answer that question, a matter of very far-reaching and very comprehensive importance and application. I trust that you will believe that I'm not, at this time, a little concerned with giving addresses and matter from the Bible. But you will believe that, with a very great practical background to anything and everything that is said here, let me pause to say what I mean.

Taking just recent months of experience, and what is coming almost daily into one's life, there has been a continuous, I could truly say, an unbroken demand made for help in the problems of Christian lives, the problems of churches, the problems of Christian relationships. It's just been, almost day and night, a continuous demand for help in all these difficulties and problems, individual and collective. And letters are continually coming.

I have now, awaiting answer, a number of very long letters from assemblies of God's people in different places, telling of those terrible conditions in those assemblies, bringing almost to deadlock, frustrations, defeats, limitations, disappointments, and asking for counsel, for advice as to what is to be done, so on and so on. It's a large background of real need, and it is over against such a background that this word is to be spoken this weekend by the help of God. I want you, therefore, to realize that there's something very practical in this.

Because, after all, you know, dear friend, after all, it all amounts to one thing, where's the Lord? Just where is the Lord? Where is the arm of the Lord? Where are we going to find the Lord? How are we going to have the Lord? That's what it amounts to, the great need of the Lord. And that contains this very serious question. How far is the Lord able to support this and that, and come in and undertake, and show his power, and show himself mighty? I'm sure you will agree that that really is the heart of the whole matter.

Does this represent a limitation on the Lord that he cannot, he cannot, because of certain things? It is, therefore, important over everything that we should know and understand the ground on which the Lord will show his mighty arm. In these days, on behalf of his people, on behalf of his church, on behalf of his work. And when we ask this question as to what it really does mean that the arm of the Lord should be revealed, I find two or three things in the word of God, holding a very large place in the word of God, in many forms of expression, which answer that question.

First of all, and may I pause again to say that Isaiah 53 is the answer to everything. You think you know Isaiah 53, don't you? Perhaps you could recite it. I venture to suggest you know very little about that chapter.

It's the most comprehensive chapter in the whole Bible. If we were able to read it with real spiritual comprehension, we could find all our questions are answered in that one chapter. All our needs are met in that one chapter.

All our problems are solved in that one chapter. The Bible is comprehended by Isaiah 53. Having said that, and I'm, of course, keeping all the time within the compass of that chapter in what I say, I find that this is the first thing that the arm of the Lord, on behalf of his people, means.

It means the vindication of the course that they have taken. Now if you like to go to your Bibles with that, you will find how much there is that gathers around it. And again you will agree that it is a very important matter that the course that we have taken should be proved at the end to have been the right one.

To be nothing more terrible and tragic than having taken the course, given ourselves and all that we have to it, and poured out our lives, and then at the end to have found we've been wrong. And the Lord is not able to vindicate the course that we have taken. It is therefore of utmost importance that the course that we have taken should in the end receive the divine vindication.

That is that God is able to say over against, over against everything, in spite of everything, from men and from devils, that man was right. You know that after all was the vindication of Job, wasn't it? Oh how much that man meant. Of misconstruction, misinterpretation, but in the end God said my servant Job is right.

And that's that's no small thing. In Isaiah 53 it's that. The vindication of a course taken in spite of everything.

And that in spite of everything is quite a lot in that chapter, isn't it? To look at that again later, but there it is. Oh an overwhelming amount of contradiction and misunderstanding, but in the end vindicated. God saying he was right.

He was right. To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? That one. To that one.

And again I say that it's a matter of the greatest, greatest importance that at the end the way that you and I have taken with God shall be proved by God to have been the right way in spite of everything. Now you look into your Bible and I'm not going to take you through it with that thought, but that it's it runs everywhere. See not only in relation to Job, but to Abraham and to them all as they went with God.

What a way they went. What a difficult way they went. What a misunderstood and misinterpreted way they went, but in the end God said, not in word only, but in very, very practical vindication.

He was right. He was right. That is the meaning of the arm of the Lord.

That is what I want when I ask for the arm of the Lord. Oh Lord, that I may take such a way with you that in the end you may stand by that way and say he was right. He was right.

Do you want that? God is the good of anything if he doesn't work out like that. A second thing that I see to be the meaning of the arm of the Lord is the abiding spiritual fruit of a life. Isaiah 53.

He shall see his feet. He shall see his feet. The abiding spiritual seed.

That is the life, the life that was in him now perpetuated and established, indestructible in new forms of expression. He shall see his feet. God is the good of anything if we live our lives here and when we go that's the end of everything.

We do our work and when we've gone that's the end of everything. It's the memory growing more and more indistinct, fading, fading into the past. Perhaps true to that very depressing, very depressing line that

some people like to sing.

Time like an ever rolling stream bears all its sons away. They fly forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day. I say that's pessimism to the last degree but that ought not to be our heritage.

That ought not to be true of any servant of the Lord. Forgotten. Died.

Born away. Past us. Nothing left.

A vapor. No. He shall see his feet.

Arm of the Lord on behalf of any true servant of the Lord. Ought to be that. But when the form of service and expression, the vessel and the framework which was only temporary has gone there's something intrinsic that goes on and ever on indestructible and we'll be found in heaven abiding eternity.

That's the arm of the Lord. Again I say that is the vindication of life and that is the thing that you and I would covet, is it not? Surely that's the only thing to justify our having lived at all. Not that we did a lot of things and there was a lot even to show while we were here but when we're gone the work lives on.

The seed goes on. It's an imperishable seed. Well that is what the Bible shows to be the meaning of the arm of the Lord.

That is the Lord standing by, supporting, carrying on, giving his seal. However you may put it it's the Lord involved in things. It's that.

That which is established. You see the arm of the Lord establishes what is of him. It's something that is established that it cannot be destroyed.

Oh do you not want the arm of the Lord in that way? Surely we all do. Spiritual fruitfulness, spiritual increase, no stagnation, no end but a going on. Well of course we can see that, can we not? In the case of all the true servants of the Lord.

But the the Lord came in. He came in afterward. Often after they were gone and he stood by.

He stood by Jeremiah. When Jeremiah was gone then that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia.

He made a decree the Lord is standing by Jeremiah though he's gone. Paul ministered to the seven churches in Asia and Paul is gone but the Lord comes back to the seven churches to stand by the ministry of his servant Paul and to vindicate. No that's the arm of the Lord.

But he does not allow what has been of himself in any servant's to perish. It is established. The arm of the Lord is the verdict of God upon everything.

The verdict of God upon everything. Dear friends I suggest to you that that's something that you ought just to take away not in your notebook but in your heart. It's the verdict of God upon everything that matters.

Not the verdict of man. Not the verdict of our own minds or hearts. What we think about is the verdict of God.

To Abraham the Lord said walk before me. That's the last thing. The final thing.

Walk before me. Live your life to get my verdict upon it. Day by day day by day see to it that at the close of the day at the close of every day you can have my verdict of approval on that what you've said what you've done the way you've lived in all things you have lived through that day in the light of the verdict of God which is to come at it then.

Walk before me. Well all that is gathered into this word the arm of the Lord. That is what we need.

Now we come back to this chapter. What are the principles upon which the arm of the Lord will be revealed? I have said that we are very familiar with this chapter Isaiah 53 or we think we are. When we read it we are usually so taken up with the sorrows and the sufferings and the sin bearing of this one in view this servant of Jehovah.

We're usually taken up so much with those vividly descriptive words of his person and his experiences that we almost entirely lose sight of the tremendous significance of this fundamental initial question to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? You see the whole chapter would have very little value and meaning but for that question think about it again. Supposing all that has happened that is described there about his sufferings and his sorrows and his sin bearing. Supposing if it all happened and then the arm of the Lord had not been revealed on his behalf what's the value of it all? It's happened.

Well where's his vindication? What is the verdict of God upon it all? You see although the content of the chapter is so impressive and overwhelmingly pathetic it all relates to this one thing. To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? The answer is to that one. To that one described here in such vivid detail.

The arm of the Lord is revealed to that one. If you want to know on what ground the arm of the Lord will be revealed it's on that ground. Just that and that ground only.

The obvious answer to the question is the arm of the Lord is revealed to the one who is here in view. With all this full descriptiveness with all this paper with all this tragedy with all this affliction with all this misunderstanding and misrepresentation it is to that one that the arm of the Lord is revealed. See the prophet is doing the whole reaction, whole reaction of the world of Israel and the Gentiles to the report, the proclamation.

Who has believed our report or who has believed that which we have proclaimed? The messengers have gone out. It's all prophetic. It's all looking on for the day of the Son of Man.

The messengers have gone out. Proclamation has been made. What a proclamation! It was made on the day of Pentecost.

It went out from Jerusalem into all the region round about. But who believed it? What were the reactions to it? Israel and the Gentiles. The prophet in this vivid, very vivid inspirational foreknowledge, insight into the reactions of the world, Jew and Gentile, to the message of the gospel.

He says, who has believed? Who has believed? He answers his question in the whole chapter. Then he says, to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? They have so reacted. They have all refused, all denied, they have all done this.

This is the construction they have put upon it. But nevertheless, in spite of all that, it is to this one that the arm of the Lord is revealed. It is alongside of this one that Jehovah stands.

And that of course leads you to the whole comprehensive context of the question. We are thrown back into this context, first of all in the wider context, of which this chapter, two or three verses before it, is the immediate context. The wider context takes us back to the earlier chapter 42.

Behold my servant whom I oppose, my chosen, in whom my soul delighted. I have put my spirit upon him. He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

And so on. Behold my servant. You see, that is the immediate context of 53.

We have pointed out that chapter 53 ought to comment that verse 13 of chapter 52. There ought never to have been a break there. The real beginning of this section is there at verse 13.

Behold my servant shall deal wisely. He shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high. We are brought into the wider context of the servant of the Lord.

And what real service to the Lord means. That is, what that service is that the Lord vindicates. What that servanthood is that the Lord stands by.

To whom he shows his arm. You and I are very much concerned with that, I'm sure. What kind of service it is that the Lord will stand by and vindicate and say, behold my servant whom I uphold, whom I uphold.

That's only another way of saying to whom I show my mighty arm. See, the term servant of the Lord is used in a threefold way by Isaiah. In chapter 41 it is used of Israel.

Israel is called the servant of the Lord. Raised up to serve the Lord in those great purposes of God in the midst of the nations. But Israel failed as the servant.

Failed the Lord. Tragically failed. And out of the midst of Israel God raised up one, his Messiah, and transferred the title to him, my servant, whom I uphold.

I put my spirit upon him. Behold my servant, he shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high. That's the second way in which the word, the title is used of the Messiah.

And that opens up a very profitable line of study if you care to follow it. Noting that eleven times in the New Testament, Isaiah 53 is quoted, the very words are transferred to the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. Matthew himself says that the word of Isaiah might be fulfilled when he quotes from Isaiah 53 in relation to the Lord Jesus.

Well you can follow that and you might say here that the whole New Testament can just be bracketed into Isaiah 53 and into this title, the servant of the Lord. He is a person and his word. The third way in which Isaiah uses the title servant of the Lord is in a collective or plural way of faithful believers.

You'll find that in chapter 54 and verse 17, 65 and verse 13. The faithful people of the Lord are given this very title, servants of the Lord. So you see there is a sense in which you and I come within the compass of this great divine vindication.

But here we must pause. We must pause to make a fundamental distinction. That is the distinction between the unique servanthood, the unique work of the Lord Jesus and that which relates to others.

I say there's a fundamental distinction there which must be borne in mind. For Isaiah 53 sets forth that unique servanthood of Christ, that unique work of Christ in which no one else shares at all. Thank God it's not necessary.

He's done it himself, fulfilled it all without our help and without leaving us in it. That has to be noted and we must follow that through in a moment more closely. While that is true and we keep that distinction, let us remember that the principles of the service of the Lord are the same principles of the service which we are to render to the Lord.

If we do not share in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus, that has to be noted and we must follow that through in a moment more closely. But while that is true and we keep that distinction, let us remember that the principles of the service of the Lord are the same principles of the service which we are to render to the Lord. If we do not share in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus, if we do not come into this vicarious service, nevertheless we come into a service and that service is based upon the same spiritual principles as his service and that is a thing that we have got to see soon because it's very important.

These are the principles on which the arm of the Lord is revealed. Let us spend a few minutes looking at his unique work and service. I think it's impressive, dear friends, to note that this section begins with the glorious end to which God is moving.

Behold, my servant shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high. It's always good to get the end right into view at the beginning. To bring the end right to the beginning and see how is all this going to work out.

All this tragedy of chapter 53 all this terrible story, how is it going to end? Not just a matter of idle curiosity, a matter of tremendous effectiveness. What's going to be the end of this? Well, God begins with his end. Because this is how it's going to end.

Before I tell you all about the course of things which might terribly distress and depress, let me tell you how it's all going to end. This servant whom I'm going to describe in his person and his work in the end shall be exalted, shall be high, shall be lifted up. Because you've just got to put right into that haven't you Acts 1 and 2, Philippians 2, he became obedient unto death, God highly exalted him, gave him the name which is above every name, in the name of Jesus every knee should bow.

And Hebrews 1, there he is exalted to the right hand of the majesty in the heavens. That's how it has ended, not how it is going to end, that is how it has ended. And that is how the story, the terrible story is introduced.

It's all found in this repeated phrase of two words, he shall, he shall, he shall. He shall be exalted, he shall be lifted up, he shall be very high, he shall see of the travail of his foes, he shall be satisfied, he shall, he shall. It's established from the beginning, that's vindication, that's the arm of the Lord.

Let all this transpire, nevertheless the arm of the Lord will see that that is how it will be at the end, he shall, it's established before anything happens. Before the cross, before the it is established in the counsel of God, he shall. You and I really do come onto the true spiritual principles of Christ's service, that is exactly how it will be with us.

God will see to it that that is how the end will be. He shall, he shall. If we suffer together with him, we shall reign together with him.

But having noted how it's introduced, let us look at the story of his unique servanthood. There are eleven expressions in chapter 53, which describe the vicarious character of the sufferings of the servant of the Lord. You might like to run your eyes down through these verses.

One, verse two, he bore our grief, he bore our grief. Two, verse three, he carried our sorrows. Three, verse four, he was wounded for our transgressions.

Four, verse five, he was bruised for our iniquities. Five, verse six, the chastisement of our peace was upon him. Six, verse seven, by his stripes we are healed.

Seven, verse eight, the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Eight, verse nine, for the transgression of my people was he stricken. Nine, verse ten, when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.

Ten, verse eleven, he shall bear their iniquities. Eleven, he bear the sins of many. Eleven expressions which describe the vicarious character of his service in suffering.

It's very interesting, and we ought perhaps not to use that word, we ought to say instructive. Notice the three words here, descriptive of what he bore. Notice the terms used are iniquities, transgressions, and sins.

Now if you like to turn back to the book of Leviticus, to chapter 16, you will understand what Isaiah was talking about, and what the Holy Spirit through Isaiah was pointing to. Here in Leviticus 16, at verse 16, he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, because of their transgressions, even all their sins. And so shall he do for the tent of meeting that dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.

Verse 21, and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins. Here we have our three words of Isaiah 53, verse 22, and the he goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land, and he shall let go the goat into the wilderness. Verse 30, for on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you from all your sins, from all your sins, ye shall be clean before the Lord.

And verse 34, and this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, because of all their sins, once in the year. He shall carry their iniquities, he shall bear their sins. Here in Isaiah then we have that which corresponds to the work of the scapegoat, and that's a word, a name, that fits into this chapter so perfectly.

Here's the scapegoat. Bearing iniquities, transgressions, sins, and being driven up into desolation, into the wilderness. Well now, what are we to conclude from this for the present? As to the arm of the Lord, and as to the service of the Lord, the arm of the Lord, with all that that means, is inseparably related to the cross of the Lord Jesus.

There you've got the heart and the sum of the whole matter. You want the arm of the Lord, you want vindication, you want the Lord to stand in and stand by, to support, to uphold, to carry through, to commit himself, to be with, however you may put it, and all that that means, you want the Lord on your side and with you, in your life, in your company, believers in the work of the Lord. The arm of the Lord is inseparably related to the cross of the Lord Jesus, and none of us will ever find the Lord with us, only on the ground of the cross.

You remember how I opened this afternoon telling of the situations in lives and in companies, so many places, situations of spiritual tragedy amongst the Lord's people. Dear friends, I have one answer, only one answer, but I have a sure answer for everyone, because again and again, in personal words, and in the letters that I have received, these terms exist. It seems that the cross hasn't done its work in us yet.

Therefore, therefore, this lack of support of the Lord, you see, Isaiah 53 covers everything. The support of the Lord, the presence of the Lord, the power of the Lord, the committing of the Lord to us and to the work, can only be, will only be on the ground of the cross of the Lord Jesus, as the ground upon which we stand and live, as the ground of God in us, individually and in us collectively. The arm of the Lord only operates by the cross.

You may say, if you like, that the cross is the arm of the Lord. It's there that the divine vindication is found. Christ crucified the power of God, power of God, the arm of the Lord.

The arm of the Lord is related inseparably to a seed which is the fruit of the travail of this servant of the Lord. He, to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed, to this one he shall see his seed. He shall see of the travail of his soul.

That church, that church which is essentially the fruit of his travail, not the making or the building of men, but the fruit of his travail, something that has come right out of his own anguish and passion, something that has been borne out of his cross. The arm of the Lord is inseparably bound up with that. Dear friends, I'm sure you recognize how important it is that you and I should be a part of that, a part of that.

There is a danger in making things too personal, in this sense, that very often we are not just so happy to be a part of something larger. We want it to focus down upon ourselves. Oh yes, if it focuses down upon us, we're very happy.

But just say, I'm just a bit of something more. I'm only a bit of something. That's not very interesting at all, to be a part of some larger thing.

Ah, but here it is. The arm of the Lord is bound up with that larger thing of which we are only perhaps small bits, but we come into the value of the arm of the Lord as parts of something more. Take any local company, the arm of the Lord may be with the local company, and we shall only find the arm of the Lord as we are really integrated into that local company.

Whereas we may not find the arm of the Lord if we are taking independent and personal lines, the Lord won't stand by us on that ground at all. But just to be wholly integrated into something that has been born out of the work of the Lord Jesus by his cross, that is the place where we shall find the arm of the Lord. It is to that he shall see his seed.

Oh, it's a very important thing that we should lose our own distinctive independent entity in that thing where the Lord is finding his fullest interest and concern. We should live for that. We should live for that.

That is where the arm of the Lord is. And finally, for the moment, the arm of the Lord, with all that it means, is inseparably bound up with the vindication of his Son. That's the test of our lives.

Paul said, for me to live is Christ. God has vindicated Paul. What enemies he's had? His own lifetime and more since.

What enemies Paul has had and does still have? I think nothing, nothing has been left untried to discredit the Apostle Paul. But he's got a greater place today than ever he has had in history. The arm of the Lord is with that man.

Why? Because for him to live was Christ. He had but one all-absorbing concern, the vindication of God's Son. Read again.

All Paul's sad, bitter words about his earlier life against the Lord Jesus. Again and again he tells us of what he did, how he persecuted the church, how he hailed men and women to prison. Again and again he speaks of his attitude.

But now, now, his whole being to the last ounce of his strength is to vindicate the one whom he persecuted. God is with him. Remember that? Life really poured out for the vindication of God's Son.

We'll have God with it. We're serving ourselves, serving some piece of work, trying to make something go and be successful. We may have to take the responsibility and let God leave us with a lot to carry and all the troubles associated with it.

But have a passion for the honor, the glory, the name of his Son. And God will take care of the rest. He will.

To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? These are a few of the things which answer the question. On the ground of the cross, on the ground of the name, on the ground of the glory of the Lord Jesus, we shall find the arm of the Lord. We leave it there, friends, for the time being.

The Lord will return to the game.

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