

# The Arm of the Lord - Part 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only remedy for our spiritual maladies and the key to the exaltation and vindication of Jesus Christ.*

**Duration:** 51:36

**Scripture:** Isaiah 53:1, Isaiah 53:10, Matthew 6:33, Romans 1:18, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:1, Ephesians 5:27

**Topics:** "God's Work"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not compromising the holiness of God. He shares a testimony of witnessing the power of God in the Far East, where a small group of believers grew into a large and thriving church. The speaker then discusses the new prospect found in Romans 8, where there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. He explains that God's purpose is to build His glorious church, and despite the deplorable state of the world, God is able to accomplish His plans. The speaker also mentions the life principle of Watchman Nee, who believed in keeping things small and allowing God to bring about enlargement. The sermon concludes with the question of how to respond to deterring factors and the seriousness of the situation, suggesting that we should persevere and trust in God's power.

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## Transcript

We are continuing along the line which we were pursuing yesterday with words from the first verse of Isaiah 53 as our guide to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed. The arm of the Lord. We are circling round that question seeking its fullest answer.

I take it that most of us would in some way or another say that there is a very great need for the Lord to show his power. Perhaps that would be a personal confession. We would individually say the great need for the Lord to do something in my life.

Do some new thing and to do some mighty thing in me personally. And in my position. Perhaps it might be in my ministry.

Further, many of us would say that is the need in the circle of believers with which we are connected and related. The great need for the Lord in power to move and do something. And we could still further widen the scope, say, the great need in the whole Church of God and in the whole world for the Lord to do something mighty.

I think I should be gathering most of you into such a confession and realization. To whom then is the arm of the Lord revealed? That is our question for this time. Now before I go further with that matter I am going to start to present to you a hypothetical situation.

Supposing that a very complicated and serious malady had afflicted a patient. We will let that patient perhaps be ourselves or our company or the Church or the world. Supposing such a serious condition had arisen with a patient and the doctor was consulted.

Who, after serious and patient consideration with some considerable experience, knowledge, no small amount of good authority came to quite a definite conclusion about this matter. And that he knew that he had the remedy. He had no question about it at all.

But when he approaches the situation and the patient he meets one or two difficulties which would constitute deterrence in his desire to help. Firstly, he has to explain that his remedy is going to be painful. It is not going to be pleasant.

It is going to be totally against all the predispositions of the patient. It is going to demand real cooperation perhaps over an extended period calling for much patience and faith, a persistence with him in the matter. Then he meets another thing.

The patient has heard about this remedy before perhaps many times. And the reaction is, well, I've heard so much about this. I mean, so much talk about it.

I think you're a one-tracked man who has nothing but that one thing. Perhaps you're a crank on that. Can't you vary it a bit? Can't you introduce some other lines, a little more palatable and pleasant? Must we be tied down to this one cause? And then a third thing.

Well, you know, this is not a very popular thing. Public opinion has some strong criticisms about this. And there are many different lines on the matter.

These are things with which he is confronted. What should he do? What would you say that he should do? Should he give way to these deterring factors, abandon the situation and the case, or should he get on with the job? Let us ask another question or pursue the matter along another line from the side of the patient. What should be the logical attitude of the patient in this matter? Should it not be, well, the situation is serious? There's no doubt about that.

And it is very complicated. What are the alternatives? Do I know of any alternatives? Are there prospects in other directions and ways and means? Have I really given this a thorough trial and been perfectly honest? Do I sense the seriousness of my condition sufficiently to make me brush aside all public opinion and all personal feelings and reactions and likes and dislikes and really give myself over to this matter? Now, dear friends, that is, although a hypothetical opposition presentation, that is exactly the position in which we are. There is no doubt that there's a great need in the spiritual life of God's people.

The need for someone to come in with something that will solve the problems, meet the needs, clear up this situation, straighten it out, do a real work of healing. It is true, isn't it? And yet there are all these arguments lying about, you know. There, there.

So much talk about this particular thing. We've heard it again and again. Public opinion is divided on this matter so greatly.

And this is something that goes altogether against our grain. Well, does it not depend upon these two things whether we realize that the situation is serious enough to lead us to brush aside all secondary consideration, to really give the thing a thorough chance and test, examine our alternatives. Have we got any alternatives? Are there prospects of this whole thing being better along any other line than this? And of course you are saying, what is the line? What is the remedy? What is it that you're talking about? Perhaps some of you have already drawn your conclusions.

The remedy, the only remedy, the sure remedy for the whole of our spiritual maladies is the cross. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's not nice.

It is not pleasant. It runs counter to all our likes and predispositions. It is not popular.

Christian opinion is greatly divided on this matter, of the work of the cross, and so on. But after all, we're left with our condition, aren't we? We're left with it. We're left with our needs.

We're left with the situation. And whether you realize it or not, the situation is a very, very critical one in Christianity, amongst Christians. Take it from any standpoint.

Dear friends, this whole matter of divisions amongst the Lord's people is a blight. It's an evil journey for working of a deep-seated disease. It's an evil thing.

It is undermining the whole constitution of the Church of God. And so we could go round and face this thing from many standpoints and find that, without exaggeration, the situation is really a serious one. The Word of God offers us this one remedy.

It is fully and thoroughly documented. It has the most established authority behind it. It has proved itself again and again in individual lives and in collective life to be the answer.

It is there. It's established. There are no alternatives.

The Word of God offers us no alternative, no prospect along any other line. The cross is the answer. Well, that's my introduction this afternoon, a way of approaching this matter.

We come then to Isaiah, again to this section, which is begun in the chapter previously, as we have pointed out, an unfortunate chapter division. Well, 53 ought to begin at verse 13 of chapter 52. And this section, from verse 13 right through to the end of 53, shows the cross to be the remedy for a many-sided and the most complicated situation in this world.

You see, all the things that show to make up the situation, you put them together. When you put them together and recognize what they signify, you say, my, that's a situation. Sin, sin.

The Lord hath laid on him. He bore our sin. The word there is our errors, our failures, transgressions.

Stronger word still, which means our rebellion. Iniquity, which means our perversities. Well, errors and failures and rebellions and perversities, these are the beginnings of the melody.

Sicknesses, griefs, sorrows. And so you make up the case with the words from this chapter. When you put them all together, you say, well, that patient is in very poor state.

That indeed is a serious outlook. And the chapter as a whole has as its object, this object, to show that the cross of the Lord Jesus is the remedy for it all. The answer to it all.

By the cross of the Lord Jesus, the whole thing is dealt with and cleared up. Is not that the result of this chapter? Of course it is. That lies right on the surface.

But here we must stand back for a moment to take account of two things. A question is asked at this point, and then the rest of the chapter is the answer to that question. Who is the arm of the Lord revealed? Let that arm of the Lord be God coming into this situation.

Coming in with skill, coming in with power, with wisdom, with ability to deal with and clear up this situation. That's the arm of the Lord. And the chapter says that the cross is the answer.

The cross is the arm of the Lord coming in. Coming in in power. Now, in relation to this whole situation, in all its aspects and in every detail, the cross is the arm of the Lord.

It is the arm of the Lord against this whole condition. The cross is set against this whole condition. That, of course, is perfectly obvious.

The arm of the Lord is against this state of things. It is the arm of the Lord unto a new condition. Unto a certain clearly defined end.

That end is our second thing. The end for the arm of the Lord is the exaltation and the vindication of Jesus Christ. The arm of the Lord is for that.

But the exaltation and the vindication of Jesus Christ demand that the cross clears up this situation. Because you can see that that is once again the New Testament issue. It is because the situation was cleared up at Calvary that Jesus was exalted and vindicated.

But that is the end to which the arm of the Lord is extended and revealed. In other words, that is the end which the cross has in view and secured. The exaltation and vindication of Christ in power and, note, in posterity.

Those two things bound this whole section. You notice chapter 52, 13. My servant shall be exalted and lifted up and shall be very high.

That's right at the beginning. Coming back to that in a minute. Right at the end of the chapter he shall see his feet.

He shall see the travail of his soul. In power, very high. In posterity, his feet.

In other words, his church. He is vindicated and exalted. Exalted and vindicated.

And that is by the cross. Now, dear friends, that brings matters very closely home to us. Because the first challenge of this whole thing is to our concern, our concern for Christ's exaltation and Christ's vindication.

See, that's the issue that it raises. How much are we, let us ask ourselves, individually, discretion, how much are we really concerned for the exaltation and the vindication of the Lord Jesus? I have no doubt whatever that if I approached you individually and asked you, or if I asked you to give a signal as a company on this matter, you would say I am very greatly concerned for the exaltation of the Lord Jesus.

Indeed, there is nothing that I would desire and work for more than the exaltation of the Lord Jesus.

And for his vindication, he should be vindicated. What greater thing could we live for and work for than that? You would say that. I have no doubt about it, if I put it to you.

But do you know, dear friends, that the proof of your concern and that which measures your concern is your preparedness to accept the cross. There is no other way of the exaltation and vindication of the Lord Jesus than by the way of the cross. We shall prove whether we really are concerned and how much we are concerned by how much we are prepared to accept this work of the cross in ourselves, clearing up every situation that is dishonoring to the Lord.

Oh, it's so easy for us to talk, to preach about the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, his enthronement, his glorifying. Yes, it's very wonderful to talk like that. And, of course, it is a very great thing, this Church of his, the Church of Christ.

Yes, the great masterpiece of God, the Church, which is the body of Christ, we talk about it. But the test as to whether really, really that has got a grip upon our inward life is just how much we'll let the cross work in us. Because those things are not practicable.

They are not possible of realization, his exaltation and his Church, only by the work of the cross in believers. I say that's a challenge that arises at once, and it is very certain. It will come to that as we go along, sooner or later it will come to that.

All our language and all our talk and all our pretensions and everything will be challenged by this. Yes, but are you prepared to allow the cross to work in you in this particular matter, that particular relationship, in this thing about yourself, and in this thing in your connection? Be prepared to let the cross do with that. The answer to that will just prove whether really after all we have a concern for Christ's exaltation and vindication.

Our concern for these will be shown in our estimate of the cross and by our attitude toward it. Oh, if we are going to say, well, we've heard so much about this cross. It's the one line thing.

If we can take any attitude like that to in any way belittle the cross, make the cross something less than God has made it. If our attitude can be one that underestimates the importance of the cross, we can accept any of these other arguments, then that is the proof that we have not yet become gripped inwardly by this concern for the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. He would never have been exalted but for his cross.

Don't forget that. Wherefore, wherefore, Why for? He became obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross were for God. I will exalt him.

He would never have been exalted and he never is exalted in principle only in so far as the work of the cross is wrought in his people. Well, that of course again is very simple, very clear, isn't it? If the cross is not dealt with things in you and in me, well, the Lord Jesus is not glorified. And as for his church, the church would never have been but for the cross.

It never can be but for the cross. Its beginning, its continuation, its growth, its consummation is always by the law of the cross. Every little bit of addition spiritually and numerically to the church is by means of the cross.

No other way. So it's very challenging and very testing to us. Now, here again the spirit of God shows that God's ways and means are always positive and not negative.

I don't want to say that with emphasis and I want you to underline that in your mind. God's ways are always constructive and not destructive. God's ways are always purposeful and not at an end in themselves.

And if God's inclusive way, God's inclusive, comprehensive way and means is the cross, let it be understood now once and forever that God by the cross is working to an end, a large end. The cross is never intended to end with destruction. It is never intended to end with a negative.

God is working for some great thing and he uses the cross in this positive way. In this positive way. You see, the weakness in our apprehension of the cross, the weakness in our apprehension of the cross is largely due to a misapprehension of the cross.

That is, our apprehension or our misapprehension of the cross is that it is destructive. It is negative. It is death.

We revolt against that. We don't want to always be talked to about this death of the cross. Death, death, death.

You can so preach the cross as to bring in death, to bring in a state of death, but that's a mispreaching and that is a misapprehension. That is not God's interpretation of the cross at all. Let me repeat.

The Holy Spirit here shows quite clearly that God's ways and means are always positive and not negative. They are always unto something more and not something less. Not to an end, but to a new fullness.

If only we could really grasp that. It would transfigure the cross. The Lord applies it.

The Lord challenges us with it. What do we do? We revolt. We draw back.

We don't like it. We react negatively to it. Why? Simply because we have not seen that in this application of the cross God is definitely set upon something more than there ever has been in our lives.

In our fellowship, in our company, in his church, God is definitely at work by this application of the cross to get something transcendently more than ever there has been. That is the law of God. God is not a negative God.

Other gods are negative gods, but our God is not a negative God. He is not working to bring things to annihilation, to an end. He has a very large purpose before him in all his ways and in all his means.

What we really have to see, dear friends, is that whatever the cross may negative, it will negative some things, but whatever it does negative, it is God's most positive instrument in securing spiritual, heavenly, and eternal values. The cross is God's most positive instrument in securing enlargement of that which will abide forever. But having said that, we can never have God's yes, God's yes, the arm of the Lord, until we have accepted God's no.

Because the cross in the first place does represent God's no. But if we will come and accept God's no, then the way is clear for us to come right into God's yes. I mark you, his name is not no.

His name is yea and amen. He is the God amen, the positive, the verily, the God of purpose. So it is very necessary for us to move on to the established basis that God always comes in with a mind to create or to recover, to build, and to increase.

We could believe that of the Lord even in our most devastating times, our most devastating times when everything seems to be taken away, being stripped and stripped, and all is going. It seems to be a process of reduction. We can see an end coming, we think.

If only we will believe that God is working not to bring values to an end, but to increase them. He knows why he is doing it in that way, but that must be our ground. He is ploughing, he is digging, he intends a harvest, he intends something more.

He knows, I say, why he is doing it in that way, we don't, but I can tell you one thing. God is at work by the cross to make things safe for himself. But I can tell you one thing.

God is at work by the cross to make things safe for himself. Now supposing, supposing the arm of the Lord was revealed to us, to you, to me. Supposing the arm of the Lord was revealed in the company with which we are connected, in the place where we are, in the work in which we are engaged.

Supposing the Lord came out with his mighty arm and showed that arm in prospering, in increasing, what would happen? What would happen? Oh, I know you won't agree with it because you don't feel that it would be true in your case, but that is just, you see, where the heart is deceived, where our hearts are deceived. I know what would happen. You and I would come into the picture.

You and I would begin to strut about in this thing that is growing and enlarging and prospering and becoming something, something to take note of. We'd be just walking around like peacocks with our tails all spread out. And we would, if not literally, we would be wearing a badge, superintendent.

It would be written large on us. Or general manager. We begin to talk about the things.

If people began to talk about it, how pleased we would feel. If the news of it spread, how gratified we should be. That's the infinite peril that God will not run the risk of allowing in what is wholly of himself.

I'll tell you something. I don't want you to repeat it or publish it or write about it. You know we have been out there to the Far East and we have seen the arm of the Lord revealed.

There is no doubt about it. You'll have to confess, dear friends, that if in seven short years a work has grown from eight people divided by 200 miles far down there and far up here, in seven years that has grown into 20,000 with over 50 assemblies and is still growing and still growing and has a large spiritual measure. You say that's the arm of the Lord.

You cannot touch it. You cannot see it. You cannot feel it without seeing the arm of the Lord.

Especially if you know what it has cost. And if you know how utterly dependent upon the Lord everyone is. And if you mark the deep humility, one thing that impresses you is those in responsibility are always trying to hide themselves.

Most beautiful thing to see young men who have come on and been given responsibility just all the time trying to hide themselves. Keep out of view. And never, never coming forward unless they are drawn out.

It's a beautiful thing. I'm not surprised that the arm of the Lord should be revealed. It's like that.

But the brother who is now in the place of our dear brother, Watchman Lee, responsible for that whole work under the Lord, said to me again this time, He said, Brother, I want you to know that Brother Lee's life principle was this. Try to keep things as small as you can. Try to keep things as small as you can.

And if there's going to be enlargement increase, let it be in spite of yourself. Let it be God's doing and not because you have done anything to try and make it big. Try to keep it small and let God do, in spite of you, what he wants to do.

He said, That was Brother Lee's life principle. That's the explanation of everything. He said, We never, never try to make things big.

We do nothing to make them public, popular. I beg of you not to publicize. Not to let this thing become known.

Keep it covered. Now perhaps I'm violating his request in saying this, but I say to you in confidence that you will respect and honor the principle. But it's to that that the arm of the Lord is revealed, dear friend.

See? The Lord must make things safe for himself so that if he does stretch out his mighty arm and do something, and do something, you and I will not begin to pocket the credit. Be something in it. We shall be a hidden and a covered people.

I cannot say how important that is, but here it is, you see. Here it is. Is not this perhaps one of the deepest underlying laws of the arm of the Lord where Christianity has been concerned? Why that growth, expansion which has never been paralleled through the centuries? As at the beginning? Why? Because the Church was stripped and peeled and broken and emptied and battered and bruised and persecuted because it preached Christ crucified as the wisdom of God and the power of God.

And the world would not have it. The arm of the Lord was revealed to that. The Church was not trying to avoid the offense of the cross in order to find a place in this world.

No. It preached the cross. It preached Christ crucified.

It was not ashamed of that. It cost everything. And the arm of the Lord was revealed.

Tremendous lesson for us, isn't it? So, it comes back here, you see, that this chapter in Isaiah, which is the quintessence of the New Testament and of all God's ways, shows us that the arm of the Lord is revealed to that humbled and broken and emptied and despised and crucified servant. And it's an abiding law. An abiding law.

Let there be no mistake about it. If you and I have a managerial spirit, an assertive spirit, a serene, confident spirit, or anything like that, fullness, the arm of the Lord will not be revealed. But again I say, if he is stripping and emptying and pouring out and seeming to bring to naught, he is doing it to make things safe for him to stretch out his arm.

Will you believe that? I say again, he's the God of the positive and not the negative. He will stretch out his arm if he is allowed to complete, to perfect that work of undercutting everything that would take glory from himself. You and I don't know how much there is in us of that kind, do we? We think that we've just about touched bottom.

We've come to the end. There's nothing left in us. Well, we don't know.

We don't know what would happen if the whole situation suddenly changed and took the upward road and began to enlarge. We come in again. This inveterate flesh crosses the only way of the glory.

It is the great clearing instrument. Now at that point, of course, we open up another field of tremendous importance. I want you to note that while this is in Isaiah and set in such a wonderful place in Isaiah, I suppose you know the analysis of these prophecies.

The first thirty-five chapters are occupied with a wide sweep of judgments beginning, as always, note that, beginning as always with the people of God. That's the divine law. How can he judge the world until he has judged his own people? A wide sweep of judgments beginning with God's own people.

Chapters thirty-six to thirty-nine, just a little interval dealing with Hezekiah and then on chapter forty to sixty-six, the section of restoration and rebuilding. Now, chapter fifty-three is midway in the last section. That's so significant.

Midway in this last section are twenty-six chapters which have to do with a new prospect with recovery and rebuilding. Thirteen chapters on each side of fifty-three. That's the center of building and recovery.

It gives the cross the central place in building, in recovery. That is always true, isn't it? But when you have said that about Isaiah you might react and say, well, that's ancient history, long ago and far away. But I would like here to put in a long parenthesis.

This whole thing is brought right into the dispensation in which you and I are living. And it is brought in with the letter to the Romans. The letter to the Romans.

You know that letter? The first section is the sweep of divine judgment, isn't it? Over the whole race in Adam. Sweep of divine judgment. It's God's knowledge.

It comes right up to the focal point of chapter six, the cross. And that chapter is placed there in that connection over against this whole situation which has gone before to say the cross says no forever to all that. From chapter six you move to the positive, don't you? Into chapter seven, chapter eight, you're moving out of that old situation into a new.

In chapter eight you come into an altogether new prospect, altogether new opening up. There is therefore now no condemnation. All that which was condemned has been dealt with in the cross.

No condemnation. We are in Christ Jesus. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death.

Now all this new wonderful prospect is in here. What does it amount to? It says this, God came on the scene with the object of laying the foundation for and building his wonderful and glorious church. For that was ever the movement of God.

He came on the scene and he looked at the situation in order to find a foundation for that glorious church without spot or wrinkle of any such thing. And what did he find? He found all that state of things in those early chapters of the letter to the Romans. A deplorable description of things in this.

What a description it is. You ought to go back to it and read it again. The tangle, the complication, the sin, the corruption.

Oh, what evils are in those first chapters of Romans. That's what he found when he came to lay down a foundation for his glorious church. He said, I can't put a foundation on that.

I can't found my church on that. I must clear this whole situation, burn it in fire, clear it all, of all this state of things. And the cross did it too.

So the cross, like the mighty brazen altar, the intense fires of judgment dealt with that tangled, distorted state of things. And now God has put down his foundation, Christ crucified. After that, there's a new prospect for building the church.

I've got to leave it there this afternoon, take it up there perhaps later. But you see, this is the interpretation of the cross. It's to get rid, to get rid of everything that makes it impossible for God to really get on with what he wants to do.

What he has in mind, he has come with purpose. But he finds things in the way. He says, that must be dealt with.

And his means of dealing with it is the cross, to clear the way for a new prospect. That new prospect we shall have to look at again. But I do want to finish, even at this point, on the positive note again.

Oh, do believe it. When you hear this phrase, the cross, guard your mind against that sudden uprising, oh, the cross again, the cross again. And that interpretation given to the cross, oh, it's all death, it's all crucifixion, it's all negative.

Don't you have it? Don't you have it? That is Satan's twist that is given to this most wonderful instrument of God for realizing his glorious purposes. When you hear the cross, you say, that means prospect then. That means something more, not less.

That means a clearing of the way. That means that God's arm is going to be revealed. The Lord has done it.

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