

The Meaning of the Arm

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Arm of the Lord implies the support, uplifting, and strength of the Lord given to those who are wholly in line with His purpose, and it is revealed in the vindication of a course taken, the abiding fruit of a life, and the principles of the revealing of His Arm.

Scripture: Leviticus 16:16, 1 Samuel 3:19, Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 8:17, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:17, Philippians 2:9, 2 Timothy 2:12, Hebrews 1:3

Topics: "Divine Strength", "The Cross"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the profound meaning of 'the Arm of the Lord', emphasizing the importance of seeking God's support, upholding, and strength in our lives and ministries. He challenges listeners to consider what it truly means to have the Lord's support and how it relates to the vindication of our actions, the abiding fruit of our lives, and the revealing of God's mighty Arm. Through an in-depth study of Isaiah 53, T. Austin-Sparks highlights the significance of the Cross in experiencing the Arm of the Lord, the production of spiritual fruit as a result of Christ's travail, and the essential role of vindicating God's Son in our service.

Transcript

Having considered something of the meaning of the phrase 'the Arm of the Lord', and seen that it indicates the support, the upholding, the strength of the Lord, given to those who are wholly in line with His purpose, let us now ask the question: What does the Word of God show to be the real implication of this support or upholding of the Lord? What is in our minds when we think of having the Lord's support?

What Does the Arm of the Lord Imply?

We all want to have His support, His upholding, His strength. To have the Lord with us, alongside of us, with all His gracious and infinite power exercised on our behalf, is, after all, the most important thing in life, not only for us as Christians individually, but for the Church, and for the whole work of the Lord. But have we really thought as to what we mean by this? What do we expect? 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? When we see somebody standing fearfully by the side of the road, afraid to step out and cross, we sometimes proffer an arm: we say, 'Let me give you an arm and see you over'--an arm! Well, the arm is a support; it helps to the other side. Is that all we want from the Lord? We do not always speak about the Arm of the Lord; we often express it in other ways. We ask for grace; we ask for sufficiency; we ask for many other things; but it is all

included in the Arm of the Lord. What is it that we are really seeking?

Now, what does the Word of God show to be the meaning of this support, this Arm of the Lord? Before I answer that question, let me pause to say that this is a matter of the most far reaching importance and application. I am not at this time at all concerned with merely giving Bible studies. There is a very great practical background to all that is presented here. There is coming daily into one's life an almost continuous, unbroken demand for help in the problems of Christian lives, the problems of churches, the problems of Christian relationships; sometimes it seems almost day and night, without cessation. And letters are continually coming--sometimes very long letters--from assemblies of God's people in different places, telling of the deplorable conditions in those assemblies, with all their frustration, limitation, disappointment, even deadlock and defeat, and asking for counsel and advice as to what is to be done. It is over against this background of real and urgent need that these messages are presented. I want to stress that there is something very practical in this.

For after all, it just amounts to one thing: Where is the Lord? Just that: Where is the Lord? where shall we find the Lord? How are we going to know the Lord is unreservedly with us? And that contains this further serious question: How far is the Lord able to support this and that--to come in and undertake, to show His power, show Himself mighty? That really is the heart of the whole matter. Is there a limitation upon the Lord, that He cannot do these things, because of certain obstacles? It is of supreme importance, then, 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.

When, therefore, we ask the question: What does it really mean for the Arm of the Lord to be revealed? we find in the Word of God two or three things, holding a very large place there, in many forms of expression, which answer that question.--But first may I pause again to say, in parenthesis, that the message of Isaiah 53 is the answer to everything! Perhaps we think we know Isaiah 53; perhaps we could even recite it. I venture to suggest that we know very little about that chapter. It is the most comprehensive chapter in the whole Bible. If we were able to read it with real spiritual comprehension, we should find that, in that one chapter, all our questions are answered; all our needs are met; all our problems are solved! The Bible is comprehended by Isaiah 53, and in what follows I am keeping within the compass of that chapter.

(1) The Vindication of a Course Taken

Now, I find that the first thing that is meant by the Arm of the Lord on behalf of His people is this: it means the vindication of the course that they have taken. If you turn to your Bible with that in mind, you will find how much there is that gathers around it. 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. There could be nothing more terrible and tragic than that, having taken a course, and given ourselves and all that we have to it, poured out our lives in it and for it, we should find at the end that we have been wrong, and that the Lord is not able to vindicate the course that we have taken. It is plainly of the utmost importance that the course that we have taken should, in the end, receive the Divine approval--that over against everything, in spite of everything, from men and from demons, God should be able to say: 'That man was right!' That, after all, was the vindication of Job, was it not? How much that man met of misconstruction and misrepresentation! But in the end God said, 'My servant Job is right'; and it is no small thing to have God say that. In Isaiah 53 it is that: the vindication of a course taken, in spite of everything. And that 'in spite of everything' amounts to a good deal in that chapter, does it not?--an overwhelming weight of contradiction and misunderstanding; but, in the end, the Servant is vindicated; God says He was right. "To whom is the arm

of the Lord revealed?" To that One--to that One!

That thought runs everywhere through the Bible, in relation to all the great men of faith, as they walked with God. What a difficult 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: 'O Lord, that I may take such a way with You that, in the end, You may be able to stand by that way and say: He was right.' Do you want that? There is no value in anything that does not work out like that.

(2) The Abiding Fruit of a Life

A second thing that I see to be the meaning, or evidence, of the Arm of the Lord, is in the abiding, spiritual fruit of a life. In Isaiah 53:10 we read: "He shall see His seed"--that is, His abiding spiritual seed; the life that was in Him now perpetuated and established, indestructible, in new forms of expression. Of what value is it if, when we have lived our lives here, and done our work, and have gone, that is the end of everything?--a memory, growing more and more indistinct, fading into the past? It may be true to that very depressing verse 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'--

but that is pessimism to the last degree! That ought not to be our heritage. It ought not to be true of any servant of the Lord that he is 'forgotten', 'borne away', passed out, nothing left, a vapour. No, "He shall see His seed". The Arm of the Lord on behalf of any true servant of the Lord ought to mean that, when the form of service and expression, the vessel and the framework, which were only temporary, have gone, there is something intrinsic, indestructible, that goes on and ever on, and will be found in Heaven, abiding for eternity. That is the Arm of the Lord! That is the vindication of life, and that is what you and I covet, is it not? Surely, that is the only thing to justify our having lived at all! Not that we did all kinds of things, and that there was much to show even while we were here, but that, when we are gone, the work goes on, there is a seed that lives on--an imperishable spiritual seed.

That is what the Bible means by 'the Arm of the Lord'. It is the Lord giving His seal, the Lord involved in things. The Arm of the Lord establishes what is of Him, as something which cannot be destroyed. Do you not want the Arm of the Lord in that way? We all desire that there should be spiritual fruitfulness, spiritual increase, no stagnation, no end, but a going on. We can see that, can we not, in the case of all the true servants of the Lord--that the Lord came in after they had gone, and stood by their ministry. He stood by Jeremiah when Jeremiah was gone: "that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation..." (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1; Dan. 9:2). Paul has ministered to the seven churches in Asia, and now Paul is gone; but the Lord comes back to the seven churches to vindicate the ministry of His servant (Acts 19:10,26; Rev. 1-3). That is the Arm of the Lord--that He does not allow what has been of Himself in any servant's life to perish. It is established. (Compare also what is said of Samuel, in 1 Samuel 3:19-20 and 28:17.)

The Principles of the Revealing of His Arm

Now we come back to our initial question: What are the principles upon which the Arm of the Lord will be revealed? As I have said, we think we are very familiar with the fifty third chapter of Isaiah. But when we read it, we are usually so taken up with those vividly descriptive words concerning the sorrows and the sufferings and the sin bearing of the One Who is in view, with the Person and the experiences of this suffering Servant of Jehovah, that we almost entirely lose sight of the tremendous significance of that fundamental opening question: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" And yet the whole chapter would have very little value and meaning but for that question. Think about it again: Supposing all that is described there--His sufferings, His sorrows, and His sin bearing--had taken place, and then the Arm of the Lord had not been revealed on His behalf, what was the value of it all? It has happened-- but where is the vindication? What is the verdict of God upon it?

For, although the content of the chapter is so tremendous, and so overwhelmingly moving in its tragedy, it all relates to this one thing: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The answer is: To that very One Who is described here in such vivid detail. The Arm of the Lord is revealed to the One Who, with such fulness and such pathos, is here brought into view, as the object of all this tragedy, affliction, misunderstanding and misrepresentation. It is to that One that the Arm of the Lord is revealed.

The prophet is viewing the reaction of the whole world, Israel and Gentile alike, to the report, the proclamation. "Who has believed our report?" he asks. 'Who has believed the message that we have proclaimed?' It is all looking on to the day of the Son of Man. The messengers have gone out; the proclamation has been made--and what a proclamation it was! It was made on the Day of Pentecost; it went out from Jerusalem into all the regions round about. But--who believed it? What was the reaction to it, from Israel and the Gentiles? The prophet, in his wonderfully vivid, inspired foreknowledge of, and insight into, the reactions of the world to the message of the Gospel, asks the question, and answers it in the whole chapter. But he asks also: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The world has so reacted; the vast majority have refused and rejected the message; they have put a totally false construction upon the afflictions of the Suffering One. Nevertheless, it is to this One that the Arm of the Lord is revealed; it is alongside of this One that Jehovah stands.

The Servant of the Lord

And that leads us to the whole comprehensive context of the question. The wider context takes us back to chapter 42:1 "Behold My Servant, Whom I uphold; My chosen, in Whom My soul delighteth; I have put My spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles," and so on. But that phrase, "Behold My Servant," brings us also to the immediate context of our chapter 53, for we find it echoed, as it were, in verse 13 of chapter 52. There ought, in fact, never to have been a break between 52:13 and 53:1, for this whole section really begins at verse 13: "Behold, My Servant shall deal wisely, He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." We are thus brought into the wider context of the servant of the Lord, and of what real service to the Lord is: that is, what is that service that the Lord vindicates, what is that servanthood that the Lord stands by. You and I are surely very much concerned with that, to be those to whom the Lord can say: "Behold My servant, whom I uphold"--and "whom I uphold" is only another way of saying: 'to whom I show My mighty Arm'.

Now this term, 'Servant of the Lord', is used by Isaiah in a three fold way.

In the first place (e.g. in chapter 41:8; 44:1,2,21), he uses it of Israel: Israel is called 'the servant of the Lord', raised up to serve Him in His great purposes in the midst of the nations. But Israel failed the Lord as a servant, tragically failed.

Then, out of the midst of Israel, God raised up One, His Messiah, His Anointed One, and transferred the title to Him "My Servant, Whom I uphold... I have put My spirit upon Him" ... "Behold, My Servant... He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." That is the second way in which the title is used. It opens up a very profitable line of study, if you care to follow it, for you find that Isaiah 52-53 is quoted no fewer than eleven times in the New Testament, these very words being transferred to the Lord Jesus. For instance Matthew 8:17 says: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah"; then he quotes from Isaiah 53 in relation to the Lord Jesus. One might say that the whole New Testament can be bracketed into Isaiah 53, and into this title 'The Servant of the Lord', His Person and His work.

The third way in which Isaiah uses the title 'Servant of the Lord' is in a collective or plural way of faithful believers. In chapter 54:17 (compare also 65:13-14) the faithful people of the Lord are given this very title, "the servants of the Lord". There is, therefore, a sense in which you and I come within the compass of this great Divine vindication.

But here we must pause to make a fundamental distinction: the distinction between the unique servanthood, the unique work of the Lord Jesus, and that which relates to others. This must ever 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. And, thank God, no such sharing is necessary! He has fulfilled it all Himself, alone. We shall follow that through in a moment more closely. But, while it is true that we do not in any way share in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus, or come into this vicarious service, nevertheless we do come into a service, and a service that is based upon the same spiritual principles as His. That is very important: for it is upon those principles that the Arm of the Lord is revealed.

The Unique Work and Servanthood of Christ

Let us, then, spend a few minutes in looking at His unique work and service. I think it is impressive 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" (52:13). It is always good to get the end right into view at the beginning, and see how it is all going to work out. All this tragedy of chapter 53, all this terrible story--how is it going to end? Well, here God begins with His end. He says: 'This is how it is going to end: before I tell you all about the course of things, which might terribly distress and depress you, I will tell you how it is all going to end. This Servant, Whom I am going to describe in His Person and His work, in the end shall be exalted, shall be high, shall be lifted up!'

Of course, this word immediately carries us over to those great passages in the New Testament, such as Acts 1 and 2; Philippians 2: 'He became obedient unto death...' "God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow..."; and Hebrews 1:3 "He... sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high...." That is not how it is going to end; that is how it has ended! And that is how the terrible story is introduced. It is all found in this repeated phrase of two words: "He shall..." 'He shall be exalted... He shall be lifted up... He shall be very high... He shall see of the travail of His soul... He shall be satisfied'. It is established from the beginning. That is vindication; that is the Arm of the Lord! Let all this transpire--nevertheless, the Arm of the Lord will see to it that it leads to a glorious end. Before anything happens--before the Cross, before the rejection--it is

established in the counsels of God: "He shall..."

And if you and I come into 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. "If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be glorified with Him" (Rom. 8:17). "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12).

Having noted how this matter is introduced, let us now look at the story of His unique servanthood.

His Vicarious Sufferings

There are eleven expressions in chapter 53 which describe the vicarious character of the sufferings of the Servant of the Lord.

1. 'He bore our griefs' (v. 4).
2. 'He carried our sorrows' (v. 4).
3. 'He was wounded for our transgressions' (v. 5).
4. 'He was bruised for our iniquities' (v. 5).
5. 'The chastisement of our peace was upon Him' (v. 5).
6. 'By His stripes we are healed' (v. 5).
7. 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (v. 6).
8. 'For the transgression of My people was He stricken' (v. 8).
9. 'Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin' (v. 10).
10. 'He shall bear their iniquities' (v. 11).
11. 'He bare the sin of many' (v. 12).

It is very instructive to notice the three words, used here, descriptive of what He bore. The three terms are: 'iniquity', 'transgression' and 'sin'. If you turn to the Book of Leviticus, chapter 16, you will understand what Isaiah was talking about, and what the Holy Spirit, through Isaiah, was pointing to.

"He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and 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..." (Lev. 16:16).

"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" (v. 21). Here we have our three words of Isaiah 53.

"And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land: and he shall let go the goat into the wilderness" (v. 22).

"For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins shall ye be clean before the Lord" (v. 30).

"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" (v. 34).

Here in Isaiah, then, we have the work which corresponds to the work of the scape goat. That term fits into this chapter so perfectly. This suffering Servant is the 'scape goat', bearing iniquities, transgressions, sins, and driven out into the wilderness into desolation.

What are we to conclude from this as to the Arm of the Lord, in relation to His service?

The Arm of the Lord: Related (1) To the Cross

The Arm of the Lord, with all that that means, is inseparably related to the Cross of the Lord Jesus. There you have the heart and the sum of the whole matter. Do you want the Arm of the Lord? Do you want vindication? Do you want the Lord to stand by and support, to uphold, to carry through, to commit Himself, to be on your side, to be with you in your life, and with you in your company of believers, in the work of the Lord? The Arm of the Lord is inseparably related to the Cross, and none of us will ever find the Lord with us otherwise than on the ground of the Cross.

I spoke, at the beginning of this message, of the situations of spiritual tragedy obtaining in so many places amongst the Lord's people. The root cause of these situations comes to light again and again, both in personal conversation, and in the letters that one receives, in some such terms as these: 'It seems that the Cross hasn't done its work in us yet!' Yes, that is it! A deeper work of the Cross is the one answer, and the sure answer, to all this spiritual tragedy. The absence of such a work explains all the lack of support from the Lord. Isaiah 53 covers everything. The support of the Lord, the presence of the Lord, the power of the Lord, the Lord's committing of Himself to us and to the work, will only be--can only be--on the ground of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, as being the ground upon which we stand and live, whether individually or collectively. The Arm of the Lord only operates by the Cross. You may say, indeed, that the Cross is the Arm of the Lord. It is there that Divine vindication is found. "Christ crucified... the power of God"--the Arm of the Lord!

Related (2) To a Seed, the Fruit of His Travail

The Arm of the Lord is inseparably related, also, to a seed which is the fruit of the travail of this Servant of the Lord. "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". The Church is essentially the fruit of His travail, not the making or the building of men. It is something that has come right out of His own anguish and passion; something born out of His Cross. The Arm of the Lord is inseparably bound up with that.

I am sure you recognize, then, how important it is that you and I should be a part of that. I say, 'a part of that', advisedly. There is always a danger that we may make things too personal--in this sense, that very often we are not so happy to be a part of something larger; we want attention to focus down upon ourselves: if it focuses down on us we are happy! To have to say: 'I'm just a bit of something more; I am only a bit of something'--well, that is not very interesting! Ah, but the Arm of the Lord is bound up with the larger thing, of which we are perhaps only small bits, and we come into the value of the Arm of the Lord as parts of that whole. For instance, if the Arm of the Lord is with a local company, we shall only find the Arm of the Lord for ourselves as we are really integrated into that local company. If we take an independent and personal line we may not find the Arm of the Lord; the Lord will not stand by us on that ground at all. It is a very important thing that we should let go our own independence and individualism (though not, of

course, our individuality) into that in which the Lord is finding His fullest interest and concern. We should live for that, for it is there that we shall find the Arm of the Lord.

Related (3) To the Vindication of God's Son

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 is a test of our lives! Paul said: "For me to live is Christ", and God has vindicated Paul. What enemies he had in his own life time, and how many more he has had since, and still has! I think nothing has been left untried in efforts to discredit the Apostle Paul; but he has a greater place today than he has ever had in history. The Arm of the Lord is with that man! Why? Because for him to live was Christ. He had one all absorbing concern--the vindication of God's Son. Read again 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 haled men and women to prison; but now his whole being, to the last ounce of his strength, is set upon vindicating the One Whom he persecuted, and God is with him.

Remember that! A life really poured out for the vindication of God's Son will have God with it. If we are serving ourselves, or some piece of work, trying to make something go and be successful, God may leave us to carry the whole responsibility, and all the troubles associated with it. But let us have a passion for the Honour, the Glory, the Name of His Son, and God will take care of the rest.

"To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" These are a few of the things which answer the question. We shall find that Arm revealed on the ground of the Cross, on the ground of the Name, and the ground of the Glory of the Lord Jesus.

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