

The Situation and the Need

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the need for the revealing of the arm of the Lord in times of weakness and apostasy amongst His people, and the importance of a deepened, strengthened cry to God

Scripture: Isaiah 43:14, Isaiah 51:9, Isaiah 52:10, Isaiah 53:1, Isaiah 64:1, Jeremiah 14:9, Joel 2:28-32, Matthew 24:29-31, Luke 18:7-8, Acts 4:29-30

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "Divine Intervention"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks addresses the profound need for the revealing of the arm of the Lord, emphasizing that God's strength and support are essential in times of spiritual weakness and societal turmoil. He draws parallels between biblical events, such as Israel's deliverance from Egypt and Babylon, and the current state of the world, highlighting the urgent need for a heartfelt cry from God's people for divine intervention. Sparks encourages believers to recognize the dishonor done to God by the current state of Christianity and to seek a deeper understanding of God's purpose. He stresses that the revealing of God's arm is contingent upon a sincere cry for help from His people, urging them to intercede for both their own spiritual condition and the broader world. Ultimately, he calls for a renewed commitment to prayer and intercession as a means to invite God's power into the present situation.

Transcript

"To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

"Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at Thee; (His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men): So shall He sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at Him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.

Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the

chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of My people was He stricken. And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

The Situation and the Need

The word 'arm' is used symbolically many times in the Scriptures, to signify that upon which man relies for strength and support. The arm represents the person: sometimes the person is in weakness, and his arm is described as being weak: sometimes it is in strength. The arm is the symbol of the person, or sometimes of the people or the nation, but always indicating the state of strength or weakness. This phrase, therefore, "the arm of the Lord", when used in relation to men or nations, implies the giving of His strength and support to that which is according to His mind, the showing of Himself in power on behalf of it.

To whom, then, will the Lord show Himself in power? To whom will the Lord 'make bare' His arm (Is. 52:10)? "To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

Biblical Examples

Now, while in the Bible there are very many incidents in which the arm of the Lord is shown, there are particular occasions characterized by this phrase. For instance, in the bringing of Israel out of Egypt we find repeated reference to the baring of His arm, the stretching forth of His arm. That incident is so often referred to as being an outstanding occasion of the Lord's showing of His arm, the 'lighting down of His arm' (Is. 30:30). To bring them out, the arm of the Lord was 'revealed'. If you read and consider that whole story of God's dealings with Pharaoh and Egypt on behalf of His people, you find that it is all gathered up in this: it was the revealing of the arm of the Lord. Of course, it is but an illustration --the emancipation of an elect people from the kingdom of this world and of darkness; but, for that, the arm of the Lord is revealed.

Again, take Israel's deliverance from Babylon: that was another occasion when the arm of the Lord was revealed. How often was it so regarded: the arm of the Lord, stretched out over Babylon, brought down her rulers and overthrew her forces, in order to bring the people back from captivity (Is. 43:14). And again, that was symbolic--the recovery of a pure testimony amongst the Lord's people, a testimony that had been lost. If the question is asked: "To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" or in another tense: "To

whom will the arm of the Lord be revealed?'--the answer is there: it is for that purpose, in relation to that.

But it is in the raising of Jesus, and in His exaltation to the right hand of the Majesty in the Heavens, that we surely see the supreme example of the revealing of the arm of the Lord. And in those succeeding early days of the Church, how wonderful was this revealing of the arm of the Lord! In the events narrated in those first chapters of the Book of the Acts, we see His arm stretched out again and again. When they were suffering persecutions, a few met together for prayer, and they prayed: "Grant unto Thy servants... boldness while Thou stretchest forth Thy hand... and that signs and wonders may be done..." (Acts 4:29-30). Herod came under the impact of that arm; Saul of Tarsus came under its same impact; many things happened, in many places, because the Lord was revealing His arm.

And before we are at the end of the New Testament, the whole of the nation of Israel has met the arm of the Lord. It was revealed in the complete overthrow and scattering of Israel as a nation, and so thorough was the overthrow that her original integration has never yet been recovered. More still--Rome unleashed all her forces against the Lord and against His anointed, but met the arm of the Lord, and was completely destroyed, ceased to be an empire and a nation. These are just a few examples in history of the revealing of the arm of the Lord, in answer to this question: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

Common Features

Now you will notice that many of these instances have certain features in common.

Firstly, there was the exalting of world powers against God: the lifting up of the head on the part of the powers of this world against the Lord and against His anointed.

Secondly, there was the involvement of the Lord's glory and the Lord's purpose, through conditions of weakness or apostasy amongst His own people. It was not to the Lord's glory to have Israel in Egypt. After the covenant that the Lord had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it was altogether contrary to the revealed purpose of His heart, that He should have the sons of Israel in bondage in Egypt, giving their strength to the powers of evil. It was entirely contrary to the glory of God to have Israel in Babylon; it was dishonouring to Him and contrary to His revealed intention. How often it was like that--that the Lord revealed His arm because of a condition amongst His own people.

And then, thirdly, there was a cry from within on the part of an instrument of intercession. There was Moses, in touch with God right from the inside in relation to that situation in Egypt; there was Daniel, and a few others with him, right on the inside of the situation in Babylon, crying to God; there were those prayer meetings recorded in the Book of the Acts--the cry of the elect to be avenged. This was a feature common to the intervention of God again and again--a cry from the inside.

Some questions arise in relation to all this in our own day. Is there a situation in our time which corresponds to these situations, in that threefold connection? Is there a condition like that today? I think the answer is obvious. Are world powers lifting up their heads against the Lord? Was there ever a time when the throne of God was more challenged by world powers than today? Is there a condition in Christianity which brings much dishonour to the Lord? Is the Lord's true testimony today involved in a spiritual state which is contrary to His revealed mind? The answer again is self evident. It is impossible in these days to move about this world without meeting these two things and being almost overwhelmed by them. The tremendous force of evil that is set against God! You feel it, you meet it, it comes out at you everywhere. And if that is distressing, without exaggeration even more distressing is the state in

Christianity generally, which is such a contradiction to what God has revealed as to His purpose. Sometimes you are almost compelled to say that the greatest enemy of Christianity is--Christianity. I am speaking, of course, very generally. The honour and glory of God is deeply involved today in a condition amongst His people which is very dishonouring to Him. These two conditions undoubtedly obtain today.

What about the third feature? Is there a cry from the inside? It is difficult to say much about this-- perhaps Yes and No. There is a growing sense within the heart of many children of God that things are not right--a real sense that this is not what the Lord meant; and there is, I believe, a cry deep down in many hearts for some changing of the spiritual condition among His people. With all the very general satisfaction with so little, there is here and there a cry, even a discerning and understanding cry, born of a conviction that the Lord meant something other for His Church than this. This could never answer to God's standard! It may be that this consciousness is stronger and its expression greater than we are able to assess. The Lord must have it, if He is to be able to do anything; but even if it is only a Daniel and three or four others in Babylon, that is enough for Him. I would lay great emphasis upon this last point: the urgent need of a deepened, strengthened cry to God. I come back to that again presently.

Will the Lord Again Reveal His Arm?

These three things, then, surely do obtain today. Is it not therefore time that the arm of the Lord should once more be revealed? "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Have we in the Scriptures anything to justify an expectation that, at the end, the arm of the Lord will again be revealed, as on these former occasions? Is there something that would support our prayer and our expectation? Surely there is much! For instance, on the day of Pentecost Peter quoted from the prophecies of Joel; but he broke off the prophecy before he finished it. And the fulfilment of the prophecy on that day also stopped at a certain point: it stopped at the outpouring of the Spirit. Peter said: 'This is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel' (Acts 2:16). But Joel's prophecy, from which Peter quoted at some length, did not have its complete fulfilment on that day. If you look again at Acts 2:19-21, you will see that some mighty things were included in that same prophecy, which were suspended on the Day of Pentecost for a later day. Those things are held in reserve for another time.

Again, you remember the incident when the Lord Jesus, returning from the wilderness in the power of the Spirit, went to Nazareth and entered into the synagogue on the sabbath day (Luke 4:16-19). The roll was handed to Him, and He opened it at Isaiah 61, and began to read. But at a certain point, before He had finished the prophecy, He stopped. At the words: "...the acceptable year of the Lord", He broke off, and sat down. He did not finish with: "and the day of vengeance of our God"; He left that part of the prophecy unread. That is suspended; that has yet to be.

Then we have a passage such as Matthew 24, from verse 29 onwards, pointing to what will happen at the end, at the day of the coming of the Lord. It is full of the marks of the baring of the arm of the Lord, the intervention of God at the end time. It is impressive, is it not, that some of the statements in that passage are identical in language with the remainder of Joel's prophecy. These things have not all been fulfilled yet; they are suspended for a later day.

And what are we to say about the Book of the Revelation? Whatever interpretation you accept of that Book, historicist, futurist, or whatever it might be, you cannot get away from the fact that it all focuses upon the Day of the Coming of the Lord. It is full of interventions of God--in the life of the Church, in the life of the nations, and in the kingdom of darkness. Yes, I think there is much in the Word that would justify an

expectation that, at the end, there is going to be a very great revealing of the arm of the Lord.

The Need for the Revealing of The Arm of the Lord

(1) Among His Own People

Later, we are going to ask the question: What will be the principles upon which the arm of the Lord will be revealed, at any time, for any people, or against any situation? For the moment we confine our attention to the fact of the very great need for the revealing of the arm of the Lord in our time. That need exists, firstly, very strongly and urgently amongst the Lord's own people. Indeed, it becomes a personal and individual matter. It is of very great consequence whether the Lord can stand with each one of us, individually--stand alongside of us with His power and with His might; show His arm on behalf of you and of me, personally. It is of tremendous importance whether the Lord can commit Himself to you and me, and say, 'I can be with that man, I can be with that woman, with My strength. I can put My power alongside of them.'

Again, it is a very important thing whether the Lord can put His power behind us as local companies of His people--whether He can stand with us in strength, and say: 'This is something I am going to look after; this is something that I am going to defend; this is something for which I am going to exercise My power: I am with this; I am in this.' That is an ultimate question. What is the good of anything at all--all our striving, all our teaching, all our expenditure of time and energy--if the Lord is not with us, not free to exercise His power, to show Himself mighty on our behalf?

And what is true for the individual, and for the local companies, is true for the people of God in this world. For the entire people of God are involved in this world situation, and nothing but the arm of the Lord can save them. Only one thing can meet this present need and situation amongst the Lord's people, and that is, that He should make bare His arm; that there should be the 'lighting down' of His mighty arm.

(2) In the World

But if that is true in these three senses amongst His own people, what about this world, this iniquitous, evil world? Perhaps it is just there that we sometimes get nearest to having our greatest controversy with the Lord. I confess that, as I have moved over great ranges of this world, and seen things, sometimes the question has arisen in my own heart: 'Oh Lord, how can You bear to allow this to go on? How can You, being in the position that You occupy, tolerate this?' I am not exaggerating. In a few hours from London I could show you something that would so horrify you as to make you cry out, 'Oh, God, bring this creation to an end soon!' The evil, the suffering, is such that nothing but the arm of the Lord can meet it.

This is a word for the hour, and we are going to ask this question, and seek to answer it, as far as possible, later. What are the principles upon which the arm of the Lord will be revealed? For we must recognize that that arm is, in a sense, governed; its baring is conditional. There are times when the arm of the Lord is, as it were, paralyzed; it is bound, it cannot move, it is not free. It was the cry of the prophet that He was like a bound man in the midst of His people, unable to move (Jer. 14:9). There are principles, spiritual laws, which govern the arm of the Lord. And whether it be our own personal need of the arm, or the need in local companies, or in the Church, or in the world, we must understand the ground upon which the Lord will exercise the might of His arm; the conditions upon which He will lift it, stretch it out, and perform His mighty acts.

As I have said, I am not answering that question immediately; that will come later. For the present I just want to bring into view the whole matter of the need of the arm of the Lord to be revealed. I want you to be gripped afresh by that need. This word was exercising me for many weeks, especially as I moved about in the Far East: 'Arm of the Lord, awake!' (Is. 51:9). How great is the need for the arm of the Lord in this many sided world situation. It could be put in other ways: Oh, that the Lord would do something--really do something! If the Lord would bring upon His people in these days a new sense of this need for the revealing of His arm, and move us, firstly to send up a cry, and then to get into line with those laws which govern the moving of His arm, this message will have been worth while, of very real consequence.

The Need for a Heart Cry

First of all, a cry against spiritual iniquity on this earth. I would that I could tell you just a little of what I have seen and heard resulting from the spiritual iniquity that is at work in this world--the lives stripped and rent and harassed; the families broken up--oh, it is a terrible story. It is sheer, diabolical evil--nothing but Satanic ingenuity and cunning; and it is all concentrated upon ridding this world of God, and of all that is of God, as represented in men and women. It is utterly evil. The sorrow and the suffering that we have met and touched day after day, and that we know is still going on in parts of this world today, is indescribable--utterly inhuman. Language cannot express the devilish character of that which is at work on the earth today. Oh, for a cry to Heaven that will bring the Arm of the Lord against this spiritual iniquity--for it is spiritual iniquity. I do not think that man, even at his worst, could, if left to himself, conceive these things.

Then, for a cry against the dishonour of the Lord in the general spiritual state of those who bear the name 'Christian'. There again is a terrible story. Yes, the real difficulty for the Lord is amongst those who take upon them that name 'Christian'. There needs to be a cry raised to Heaven against the dishonour done to the Name of the Lord by that which is called the 'Christian Church'.

And then, a cry against the too easy satisfaction that goes with a superficial apprehension of the great purpose of God. Again and again, my soul has been stirred with anger at the superficial and easy going attitude that prevails towards the great purpose of God. Here is revealed this immense purpose of God 'from eternity to eternity', and yet the attitude toward spiritual things so often is: 'Oh, well, a modicum is sufficient.' The most limited measure seems to be all that is required to bring a great deal of gratification. If you have any idea at all of the greatness of God's purpose, and give expression to it, it is heart rending to find how it can be all carried away by the most superficial, glamorous kind of Christianity; as though this noisy, jazzy thing corresponded in any way to that vast purpose of God concerning His Son. It makes you indignant; it stirs you to the depths. There needs to be a cry against that which would become a substitute for, would usurp the place of, God's great purpose, in the hearts of His people.

When the Prophet Isaiah became oppressed with the evils found among the people of God, Israel, and with the evil in the nations outside, he cried with a great cry: "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence.... When Thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, Thou camest down..." (Is. 64:1,3). "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens"! You have only to move about in this world, sensing things, sizing things up, for that cry to be born in you. But ask the Lord to put within you such a cry, to make you a part of this 'inside' cry, for the glory of God in a day like this. Ask Him to make you part of that essential instrument and vessel, like the Daniel company, or Esther, or Moses, or the 'prayer meeting' in Jerusalem, or many other such vessels, that will reach Heaven with a cry, and bring forth that Arm. For that is a vital principle: "For this... will I be

enquired of by the house of Israel" (Ezek. 36:37). The Arm of the Lord will not just 'happen'; the Arm of the Lord will only be revealed in response to something that is crying to Him. "Shall not God avenge His elect, that cry to Him day and night...? I say unto you, that He will" (Luke 18:7-8). He will--but He must have a crying elect.

The Lord make us like that. This is, I know, a solemn word. But this is a day for being serious, a time for facing the real situation, not just going on in a fool's paradise, as though all were well. God must be reached with a cry in these days; I can only say this out of very close touch with this great need. No one who has seen something of conditions in the Far East could help being stirred in this way, or come back other than with this in their heart: Oh, that the people of God would get to crying to God about this situation! I therefore bring this emphasis at the outset, and afterwards we may see something of the ground on which the Lord will move.

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