

The Arm of the Lord - Part 11

by T. Austin-Sparks

The cross is the instrument for dealing with disintegration and division, and it will deal with it, producing a life in the spirit and bringing about a true spiritual kind of Christianity.

Duration: 47:30

Scripture: Isaiah 53:1

Topics: "God's Work"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses how God created a beautiful vessel at the beginning of creation and filled it with His fullness. However, sin entered the world and caused disintegration and conflict within humanity. The speaker emphasizes that the solution to this problem is found in Christ, who will gather together all things and create a new order where conflicts and diversities will no longer exist. The sermon concludes by highlighting the importance of knowing and experiencing God's power, support, protection, and deliverance in our lives.

Transcript

There is one other announcement of which I have been reminded. Now we come to the close of this time, in which we have been circling round the question in the first verse of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah's prophecies, whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? We have been seeking, exploring the ground upon which the Lord will commit himself, to which he will commit himself, where he will really show his power, his presence, his support. This evening I'm going to strip the whole thing of a very great deal that gathers around it, not even taking you back very much to Isaiah's prophecies, just by way of review with a little extra word trying to sum up this whole matter.

And I think perhaps the most helpful way would be for you to draw a mental picture. That is, first of all, lay down the letter to the Romans as a background and superimpose upon it a figure of the cross. We have seen that the letter to the Romans sets forth the cross as God's instrument for clearing the ground for his building.

That is, providing a place for the foundation for the great building which has ever been in his thought and intention, the church. The letter to the Romans finds at the beginning the ground covered with very much upon which God will not build, he cannot build. The condition of things so tangled and so evil and so false and wrong, God surveys it with a view to laying the foundation for his church, his glorious church.

He says, I cannot lay it on that. We must clear all that out of the way. We must set fire to that and consume it, make a great clearing for this foundation.

And so in the letter to the Romans, the cross is superimposed there as that which on the one side disposes of that whole state of things and what a state it is. Those of you who are familiar with the letter and its early chapters know what a terrible condition is presented. And the cross is placed there to deal with it all, to get rid of it all, to consume it all.

It is like the great brazen altar with its consuming fire bringing everything to judgment and clearing the ground of it all, leaving nothing but a clearing, an emptiness, a barrenness. And then on the other side, God having his foundation laid, a new prospect comes into view with the remaining chapters of that letter. Everything now is possible for God.

And we find in chapter 8 so much said about God's eternal thoughts and counsels and conceptions, his wonderful ideas in election, in foreknowledge, in predestination, in adoption, in conformity to the image of his Son, the creation redeemed from corruption, the children of God delivered from bondage. Everything now seems to come in for realization since the cross has cleared the way. So that is where we begin.

Cross as securing the foundation for everything. That is your first figure. And then you draw lines radiating from death.

And the first line reaches to the letter, to the first letter to the Corinthians where the cross is applied to conditions not in the world now, not outside of Christ, but conditions amongst believers that do not tally with the cross. The natural man, the carnal man, with all his works and the result of his presence amongst the Lord's people, divisions. And all that horrible situation in the first letter which has come into the church amongst the Lord's people and the apostle brings the meaning of the cross to bear upon that, as he said, when I came to you, I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

You see, the first radiation from Romans is to all conditions inside the church that are not in agreement with the meaning of the cross. God cannot build, get on with the building until those things are dealt with. So in that first letter, the apostle tells us the foundation is laid, I laid a foundation as a wise master builder, but others build thereon, but let every man take heed what he builds thereon.

And these things, as we have pointed out, that we find in that letter are the things to which God says, no, you must not put those on my foundation. My foundation is worthy of something better than that. You can't have those things in our clearing.

That's only to clutter up things again and make it necessary for us to do the whole business over again of consuming because every man's work that is not according to the cross is going up in flames and in smoke with nothing left. That is what the apostle says there. And that is the first outreach of the cross as from Romans to touch conditions amongst the Lord's people that are not in accordance with what God means by the cross.

God says no to all that. I'm not going to use that on my foundation. I'm not going to build with that.

You'll get rid of that and then we'll get on with the building. Those things being dealt with, as we saw this morning, by the Corinthians themselves. Oh yes, the fire did burn amongst them.

Fire of repentance. Fire of self-judgment. Fire of clearing.

Fire of brokenness of heart. Something happened. They dealt with those things.

And then you get the second radiating line coming in the second letter to the Corinthians where the testimony that had been marred and spoiled by those things can now be recovered and have the great restoration of testimony in the church, in Corinth, in the location, in the city, and in the world. God can get on with things now in relation to testimony in the world that he can now build when he has that state of heart, that state of spirit, broken, humble, contrite, trembling at his word, very low before him. When he has that, then things begin to happen outwardly.

They happen outwardly. Doesn't require a great effort. They just do happen.

Because here is the expression of a mighty dynamic power of God in the midst. You know how the apostle puts that in that letter, God, God, who said, light shall shine in darkness, or let light be in the first creation, has shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And then the apostle says, we beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we also are transformed into the same image from glory to glory.

That's the testimony, that's the outshining when things inwardly have been dealt with. It's quite spontaneous. It's just the work, the result of a deep but very quiet work of God.

I don't think that when God first said in the chaos, let light be, that there was a very great noise about it. You know, there never needs to be a great deal of noise when God puts forth his power. There is the hiding of his power.

You remember that phrase, don't you? The hiding of his power. But that's not the minimizing of his power. Oh, God can only speak, only needs to speak, and immense things can happen.

He only said let light be, but look at the force and power of light in this creation. How terrific is the light. But just from a word, just from a word, I think it's real and it's symbolic to see here at Corinth, the light shines out when God has right conditions.

It will be like that. What I'm meaning is this, there need not be the great noise of publicity, of advertisement, of organization, of tremendous excitement and feverish activity. If the testimony is there, people will know it.

People will feel it. If it's there, it's there. If the conditions are right, well, something will happen.

If there's nothing happening, we'd better look to our conditions. Well, that is second letter to the Corinthians, the second radiating line from the cross. Then the third line radiating from the cross, as we saw this afternoon, is what we have in the letter to the Galatians.

The resultant life in the spirit. From the cross, the cross producing a life in the spirit and bringing about a true spiritual kind of Christianity as distinct from a merely professional, formal, ritualistic kind of Christianity that is all on the outside. So, this mighty thing, a true spiritual Christianity.

A life in the spirit. How real, how effective that is. That's what we reach when we come to the letter to the Galatians.

It says the cross works out in a life in the spirit like that. And that is true Christianity, a spiritual thing. Now, the additional word for just a few minutes, we come to the twin letters.

The twin letters so called to the Ephesians and the Colossians. I need not say, I think with technical data about that, I say so called because evidently it was not, it was not directly to the Ephesians. Someone tacked that on later on.

There's a lot inside the letter that shows that it was not directly to the Ephesians although probably it went in circle to the Ephesians. Well, I leave all that because after all it is only technical. But when we come to these twin letters, because they are twin letters, you can't read them without recognizing that you're covering the same ground very largely only with a distinctive emphasis in each.

And you come there. You come to some tremendous things. You must notice of course that here in these letters as in all the others, the cross is the foundation.

This so called letter to the Ephesians, you begin with the cross. That is, we who were dead in trespasses and sins did he quicken and raise together with him. The cross is there.

You come to the letter to the Colossians. You have the circumcision of Christ, the putting away of the body of the flesh in baptism. Here you've got the cross.

You've got the cross. The cross is basic. That's the point.

It is the carry over from Romans of the foundation. Then when you recognize that, you come upon two, the two greatest things that have ever, ever been disclosed by God. Wonderful things.

Things that if you really did see, really did see, not as in the Bible to be read, but if you saw them in your heart, I'm perfectly sure that you, or something would happen to you. I wonder if ever you have had something in the word of God that has just overwhelmed you and carried you away. There are some rather humorous little incidents in the ministry in the Far East recently.

On more than one occasion, I said something. Well, I thought I wasn't saying anything extraordinary, or that is anything that would occasion or cause what it did occasion. But when I said these things, my dear brother, Witness Lee, who was interpreting for me in Chinese, suddenly went off into almost roars of laughter.

My side, there he was. He lost all control of himself. He just could not stop laughing.

And the people caught him. That great, great mass of people all caught and went off into this laughing. Well, he couldn't, he couldn't get back.

He had tried and struggled, but the more he struggled, the more he seemed to lose his control. I had to wait and wonder what it was all about. I thought, well, what on earth have I said? What on earth have I said that caused this? And even a little later on, evidently while we got away from that, the film came back to him and he suddenly went off again.

That has happened more than once. So I thought, well, I don't know about this. I'll find out afterwards what it's all about.

So I, afterward I, when I got him in the room, I said, look here, brother. What on earth did I say? What did I say to cause you to go off like that and all the people you are? Did I say something so outrageous, so terrible, so funny to you? What was it? He said, no, brother, no. We've never seen that before.

That's all. It was something we'd never seen before. That's all.

Well, what I mean, dear friend, you see, the point is this, that it's possible to see something in the Word of God that just takes you right, carries you right away. It's something so absolutely fresh. And you, that's how it ought to be, surely? Oh, the Lord deliver us from that kind of familiarity with His Word that we know it all and it never provokes anything, it never stirs anything in us.

It ought to be like that, although I'm not wanting you to do that. Now, by the way, you see, when you come to these letters, really, if you had your eyes open, you'd come to things that are calculated to take your breath away, really, to carry you right out of yourself, for they are very wonderful things indeed. Perhaps when I say them to you, they'll be so familiar to you that they won't stir you at all, but I cannot at any time reflect upon them without being tremendously moved by them.

These two things, two things, the language is so well known to you, but oh, that the Lord would bring you again into something of the real impact and meaning of these words. Let us look at what is really the key to and the sum of this letter called the Letter to the Ephesians. There is, in all the wonderful fullness that's in this letter, and it is a very, very full letter, isn't it? Almost every clause carries you out of your depth, but there is something in the letter, a small fragment, which gathers the whole of the letter into itself, which just tells you what it is all about, what it all means.

It's always very helpful to be able to get a hold of something like that, which contains everything. If you see it, you see everything in it. And so we have it in chapter 1 and verse 10, unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, the things upon the earth.

In him, I say, in the fullness of the times to sum up all things in Christ. That phrase, sum up, is not fully or truly explanatory of what the Apostle really meant and was saying. It goes as far as it can, but it would be better to say to gather together all things in Christ.

To gather together all things in Christ. Now, when sin came in through Adam, a great process of disintegration commenced. First of all, it began in the man himself.

The man himself was no longer a single entity. He was a divided personality. And every child and son of Adam is a divided personality.

There's civil war in his very nature, in his very constitution. There's conflict. He is a divided man and a man who in himself is in conflict.

Isn't that true of all of us? We all know enough about ourselves to know that there is nothing that speaks of complete harmony in our natures, in our makeup, in our constitution. There's war within us. War in our makeup.

War in our temperament. War in our whole constitution. We are broken.

We are divided. We are disintegrated. That happened with the man himself.

And then it happened between the first two, the only two, the man and his wife. You can discern and trace the elements of disintegration, of disruption between them. The man blames the woman.

That's the beginning of a domestic system. And so on. They are divided.

There was a wonderful unity and harmony. They were one flesh, it says. One flesh.

But now something's come in and they're no longer like that. Division has come there between them and a strain in life. No doubt when they were driven out of the garden they were blaming one another.

I don't think there's any doubt about it. This is all your fault. Well, we know that sort of thing, don't we? So on.

And then we find in the family which came through them. You have Cain and Abel, two first children, schism, division, disintegration even to the point of murder. And out from the family the thing grew to a race till you come to the great scattering of the race and dividing of it up into its many, many parts as we have it today.

Diversity of languages where the whole race is broken to pieces and is in this condition of disharmony. Disharmony. The race.

You pursue that through and before you're out of the Old Testament you've got the whole race divided into two irreconcilable sections, Jew and Gentile. Hating each other. Jew will have nothing to do with Gentile.

Calls the Gentiles a dog or dogs and have nothing to do with them. Unclean things. And the Gentile reacting to the Jews as we know the Gentile nations have done all along and do today.

Here are all this state of things. Brokenness, scatteredness, discord, quarrelling and strife and conflict and war and hatred. That's the fate of the creation, isn't it? Am I exaggerating? Well, surely not.

It's like that today everywhere from center to circumference of this creation it's all broken to pieces and all the pieces are against each other. There is no harmony, no unity and no integration in this creation. God had a secret.

He knew all about that. He knew what would happen, He knew what would come and He devised His own way of meeting it and had a secret in His own heart as to how He would meet it and solve that problem, that terrible problem. That is what Paul calls the mystery in this letter.

How would He do it? How would He do it? He would sum up. He would gather together all things in Christ. He would make His Son the integrating center and sphere of a new creation, a new order in which all these diversities and conflicts would never again be found.

That is the sum of this letter to the Ephesians. To gather together all things in Christ. I say that surely seems a thrill to us.

And so two things come into view in that connection. First of all, I might say three things. First of all, the cross of Christ.

Because you notice here it is in the cross that Paul says, the enmity, chapter 2, verse 17, the enmity was destroyed. That is an idea about the cross. We have many conceptions and teachings on the cross, but here is one wonderful thing, that in the cross this enmity was taken hold of and destroyed.

Where there is a true work of the cross in any of us, that kind of national or international or personal or social or even Christian division ceases. It does. The cross is the instrument for dealing with all that sort of thing, and it will deal with it.

It will deal with it. If the cross really gets down into the depths of our being, the whole situation in ourselves and between ourselves and others will change. Well, of course, here in this very gathering tonight we have a demonstration of it, haven't we? How many nationalities are there here in this place tonight? How many mother tongues are there? Well, if you come on to the natural, you would find you were all in pieces.

If all you dear brothers and sisters from Switzerland, Germany, France and the Far East and others would begin to speak in your own language, what confusion there would be. That is if you did it all audibly all at the same time. Oh, what bits and pieces we should be in.

And it might be like that if we met one another on our own natural ground. But here we are. Here we are.

We're having a good time together. Real love, real fellowship, real joy. And I say, we don't want to go away.

We'd like to perpetuate this. We have perfect sympathy with Peter. Let us build big tabernacles.

But it's true, isn't it? We have got above and over our national and international and personal and social and every other kind of disintegrating element, we're above it. We're enjoying wonderful fellowship in love. Well, it's good to see that the thing does work.

Here is a little demonstration of it. There are much bigger examples of it in this world. Yes, it's happened.

First of all, the cross has done something so that we do not meet one another on natural grounds at all. We meet one another on heavenly ground, on spiritual ground, on the ground of Christ. The cross is the instrument toward that.

Christ himself is the focal center and sphere of that we meet in Christ. That's the great word to sum up all things in Christ. In Christ, notice how often that little phrase is, in Christ, in Christ, it's all in Christ.

He is the center and sphere of this wonderful new integration. In one spirit, says the apostle, were we all baptized into one body, one spirit, one and then the third thing. The church, the church is the vessel of this.

That's what comes out in this letter. God's secret was that his son would be the focal center, but that the church would be the vessel in which this unity should be displayed. Oh, tragedy that it is not more so.

And yet, and yet, as I have said, where you get a true expression of the church, this is what you find. This is what you have. These disintegrating things are outside and this mighty integration of divine love is on the inside.

You get a real testimony to what the cross has done. A true testimony to the body of Christ. The church is the vessel in which it is to be.

Very simple, I say. You're familiar with the phrases and terminology, but oh, it's a wonderful thing that that, in the fullness of the times, we haven't yet reached the fullness of the times. I think we're getting very near the fullness of the times, but in the fullness of the times, to gather together, gather together, not geographically and physically, but into that one glorious unity of spirit.

All things in Christ. It'll be a wonderful day when that happens. When that is realized.

But God has determined to do that. Slaying the enmity by the cross. Slaying the enmity.

Oh, brothers and sisters, do listen to this. If there's any enmity between you and another brother or sister in Christ, that enmity is a denial of the cross. It is a denial of Christ.

And it is a denial of the Church. That's very solemn. Any enmity.

Have you got any enmity with another brother or another sister? Have you? Listen then, it says here that in the cross enmity was destroyed. Where's the cross then? Where is the Christ then? Where is the Spirit then? Where is the Church then? If there is still that that the cross is opposed, ah yes, and in reality did put away, it has no place here. This letter Paul prays as you see in the third chapter his great prayer.

He says, I bow my knees unto the Father. Unto the Father. Now you've got the heart.

Unto the Father. Then we're a family. We're a family.

And what is the chief characteristic of a true fatherhood and a true family? It is what Paul says here. It is love. It is love.

Now listen. Listen to what he says. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith to the end that ye being rooted and grounded in love may be strong to apprehend with all saints.

Get it? With all saints strong to apprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Oh there's a love in such dimensions that can do this thing, that can achieve this end of gathering together all the broken mess in Christ. It's only going to be done by that mighty, mighty love with its breadth and its length and its height and its depth.

It's great enough to do it. It's great enough to do it. But you and I have got to be strong to apprehend with all saints that love.

Apprehend that love and God gets his end. What about the letter to the Colossians, the other half of this one thing? Well everybody knows what the great word or phrase in that letter is. It is this.

It pleased the Father that in him should all the fullness dwell and ye are made full in him. Well, what has happened? Well you can get the pictures. First of all God made so to speak a beautiful vessel.

The great potter at the beginning of the creation created molded, fashioned, shaped, produced a beautiful vessel. And as he stood back and looked at it he said it is very good. And he filled that vessel with his fullness.

What fullness? He filled into the vessel of this creation. Oh how full is this creation. Even now in its present condition how full of the beauty and glory of God.

What fullness? He filled into the vessel of this creation. Oh how full is this creation. Even now in its present condition how full of the beauty and glory of God.

But he filled it with unsullied beauty and glory at the beginning. And then a great enemy came in and struck a blow at that vessel and shattered it to pieces. Disintegrated the whole thing and all that divine spiritual fullness leaked away.

He found desolation and emptiness. It's gone. The great potter comes back to make it again another vessel as it pleases him to make it.

Here is the vessel, the church. This is the vessel, the Lord. Beautiful vessel.

A glorious church. Not a heavy spot or wrinkle or any such thing. As he looks at it according to his own thought and his own ideal and what he intends and what he will realize he says, a glorious church.

A glorious church. It is very good. And then this letter to Colossians says the vessel brought into being as in Ephesians now filled again with all the fullness.

The vessel is mended, shall we say. Gathered together all the fragments, gathered together. You can't now trace with the cracks and the joints but a beautiful hole this church as we have it here and then he fills it again with all his fullness.

That you may be filled unto all the fullness of God the apostle says. You are made full in him in whom all the fullness dwells. That is how it is to be.

Now dear friends that's all I'm really going to say this evening but what I do want to underline is this. That while this is a process God is seeking to work out an end to which he is laboring. We must remember that the achievement of this great and glorious thing this gathering together interrogation of all things in Christ this filling with all his fullness of that gathered together vessel it requires, it must have a continuous work of the cross.

That's the challenge of this conference. It's the challenge of the cross in everything in relation to the great purpose of God. Now I could have shown you all that in Isaiah if it had been our time for doing it but we can leave that.

Here it is so so patently in the New Testament I've not exaggerated I've not given you anything that is not in the word. This is it. This is it.

The cross leads on leads on to this. It leads on to a reintegration. If it has its way it will do it.

If there is anything contrary to integration to oneness it will always be traceable to something that has withstood or is withstanding the cross. You take that into your own life. Take it back into your fellowships, into your assemblies, into your companies.

If there is something that still represents disintegration, dividedness, schism, use what language you like that means that things are broken, they're in pieces, they're not one entity, one whole. If there's that condition you can trace it or it can be traced to the failure of the cross to have done its work in some direction or other. There's only one explanation.

Believe me dear friends that if the cross really does its work, this integration will spontaneously result. It will. The way of unity is not the way of patching things up from the outside.

The way of unity is the work of the cross in the night. When the church really gets the cross at work in its very constitution you'll find the problem of division solved. It's like that.

And if there's poverty, if there is scarcity, if there is spiritual penury, if there is limitation in our spiritual resources and we are not knowing this filling, this fullness. Same reason. The cross works, you'll find that

the measure increases.

It always does increase quite spontaneously as soon as you get things out of the way that are contrary to Christ. Well that's a simple message but simplicity doesn't necessarily mean that it's not important. It's a very important word.

So we finish where we began. To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? We have any interest, whatever, or concern in this matter of knowing God with us and for us in power, in support, in protection, in deliverance, in succor. This is the way.

This is the way. Forgive me repeating it. You see that question, that question was raised right at the beginning of Isaiah 53.

To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? The answer is found in that chapter. It is revealed to this one who goes to the cross. It is revealed to this one who suffers the cross, who let all go in the cross, who goes down into shame and dishonor in the cross, who loses all his own in the cross.

To him the arm of the Lord is revealed and history is the great proof of it. Oh, God's arm has been bared for his son through history and it ever will be. And for those, for those who are with his son, crucified men and women, crucified churches, a crucified church.

There's a passage that we are very fond of, very fond of, the eyes of the Lord run to and through throughout the whole earth to show himself mighty in the behalf of him whose heart is perfect towards him. The cross is the instrument of testing whether our hearts are perfect towards the Lord or whether we've got personal interests or worldly interests or dividedness of interest in any way, whether our heart is perfect. The word perfect means complete, whole.

Show himself mighty in the behalf of him whose heart is complete towards the Lord. And is not the Lord Jesus on that cross the very embodiment of our heart that is holy for God? May we find the arm of the Lord.

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