

Both "Arm" and "Servant"

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In Isaiah 40-66 we have a series of prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus Christ of a very striking character, the most remarkable, we think, in the whole range of the Old Testament. In them He is presented to us in a twofold way: firstly, as "the Arm of the Lord" secondly, as "My Servant" that is "the Servant of the Lord."

As the "Arm" He is the mighty Executor of all Jehovah's pleasure whether in grace or in judgment. As the "Servant" He stoops to suffer in order that He may lay the righteous basis on which the structure of Jehovah's pleasure is to be reared. He was seen as the "Servant" at His first Advent. He will be manifested at His second Advent as the "Arm."

As Jehovah's "Arm" He is particularly referred to in Isa. 40: 9-11; Isa. 51: 4-16; Isa. 52: 13 — Isa. 53: 1; Isa. 59: 16; Isa. 63: 5 and 12.

Taking a rapid survey of these passages, we learn that by His "Arm" the Lord God is coming not in weakness but in strength, not to suffer but to rule and to give reward. There will be reward in judgment for the wicked, but the same "Arm" will be gracious, acting in the tenderness of a shepherd for the smallest and weakest of the true sheep of the Lord.

Then again, on that "Arm" the godly may safely trust, for it will awake and put on strength as it did in the days of old, when it smote Egypt (Rahab) and divided the Red Sea. But now far greater purposes are in view, as enumerated in the latter part of verse 16 (Isa. 51: 16). The heavens are to be planted, the foundations of the earth are to be laid; Israel in Zion is to be acknowledged as God's people.

In the present age God is preparing to plant the heavens, by calling out saints, by forming the Church, which will have its seat in the heavens when the age of glory has arrived. Then God will set His hand to the laying of the foundations of the earth in a moral and governmental sense — in the sense indicated by the Psalmist, when he declared "all the foundations of the earth are out of course" (Ps. 82: 5)

So they are! That is just what is wrong in the earth today and a complete relaying of the foundations is needed. Recognizing this, many politicians want to smash everything up and begin all over again. Should they succeed, the result would be worse evil, for they have no use for "the Arm of the Lord," who alone can accomplish such a work that, instead of lawlessness and evil, righteousness shall reign. Then lastly Zion will be acknowledged and Israel find her proper place, so that righteousness indeed may reign. But to bring all this to pass God's holy "Arm" will act in drastic judgment as we see in Isaiah 59 and Isaiah 63.

But another line of things is presented to us when we consider the passages which deal with the "Servant" of the Lord — particularly Isa. 42, Isa. 49 and Isa. 53. There is now before us One who comes in lowly grace and humiliation, and suffering; who appears on the surface of things to fail in His mission, but who nevertheless will carry it to a triumphant issue.

He is introduced to us in Isaiah 42, and we are at once told that though He will not come like political agitators amongst men, and will not break bruised reeds nor quench smoking flax; that is, not deal in judgment with such false and offensive people as the Pharisees were (see, Matt. 12: 14-21); yet

He will ultimately bring forth judgment unto **truth**, and that will be **victory**. It may look as if He fails, when He thus comes the first time in grace, but He will not fail, nor will He be discouraged. Moses failed, and Elijah was discouraged because he appeared to fail, but this Servant will accomplish His appointed task to perfection.

Now in Isaiah 49 the same feature appears, and we hear the Servant Himself speaking in prophetic strain. He says, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." We turn to the Gospels and we see Him standing, the hour of His passion and death just ahead; and what was the apparent result of all His labours? Why, just a little handful of very humble folk: a few fishermen from Galilee's lake-side, a few women who followed Him, and here and there received Him into their homes. In high-class and intellectual circles they were conspiring to arrest Him. They could ask in contemptuous tones, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" There could be no doubt about it: on the surface His mission had failed.

But to all this the response of this perfect Servant was, "Yet surely My judgment is with the Lord, and My work with My God." In Isaiah 53 we read, "He was taken from prison and from judgment," which in Acts 8 is rendered as, "In His humiliation His judgment was taken away." In condemning Him, men violated every principle of right judgment, but He was content to maintain silence before His judges and' remove His judgment to the highest Court in the universe. He knew that His vindication in the presence of Jehovah was sure.

Therefore was He able to say, "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength." Let us take note of that! Man's thought and judgment is completely cancelled by God. The humbled Man — the discredited Prophet of Nazareth — as He trod His way to Calvary in the midst of the rabble throng, forsaken by His disciples, and the derision of men, was simply glorious in the eyes of Jehovah. He was about to lay the foundation for the superstructure of glory yet to be.

And we are permitted in this chapter to have a glimpse of the Divine purposes. To raise up Jacob's tribes and restore a godly remnant of Israel was a comparatively small matter. Wider and weightier things were in view. What were they? To be a light to the Gentiles and to be set as God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Ultimately Israel will be gathered, as we know, but here is predicted what God is doing today, and into this light and blessing have we been brought by the grace of God, for now is the accepted time and the day of salvation.

But we are not allowed to forget that this day of salvation is to be followed by the day of judgment, when the humbled Servant, once despised by men, shall be honoured and magnified. The great ones of the earth shall rise to their feet and do homage before Him.

This theme is renewed in the closing verses of Isaiah 52, which really are the opening verses of the great chapter — Isaiah 53. Jehovah's Servant is to be exalted and extolled and be very high, but the chapter proceeds to predict that He also is to be despised and rejected and brought very low. Now how are these two things to be reconciled? Gazing upon Him humbled and rejected, who is going to believe this unexpected report of His approaching exaltation and glory? Who perceives that the humbled "Servant" and the glorious "Arm" are one and the same Person?

This has never yet been perceived by Israel. Yet in their own history there was an incident that foreshadowed it. In Genesis 35 we read how the coming into the world of Benjamin was associated with death. Hence a double name was called upon him. "The son of my sorrow" and "the son of the right hand" were one and the same person. Who then sees the glorious Arm of Jehovah in the Man of sorrows and the grief-acquainted One? Do you? Do I? We answer, Yes, thank God, we do.

The rest of this marvellous chapter predicts how it all was to work out. Israel was indeed like dry ground — nothing fertile, nothing fresh, nothing living — but out of it sprang this root of all blessing, this tender plant. In the eyes of men He had no form nor comeliness — or lordliness — and hence He had not the kind of beauty that captures unconverted men. Many years ago now, the German Kaiser rode into Jerusalem in pomp, mounted on a white charger. That was the way to do it, if it is desired to impress men, and not riding an insignificant young donkey, as did our Lord.

Hence the men of His day hid as it were their faces from Him. They despised Him and thought His sorrows were an infliction from God because He was an impostor. But a day is coming when the day of atonement, spoken of in Leviticus 23: 27, will find its fulfilment, and there will be national repentance in Israel and much affliction of soul as the truth dawns upon them, and they exclaim: "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."

We anticipate that time and appropriate these words as applying to ourselves, but that is because He has been set as a light to the Gentiles and God's salvation to the ends of the earth. We turn the "our" into "my," and the "we are" into "I am;" and we cannot be too simple about it. Like good old Dr. Valpy, of a century or more ago, who wrote as his dying confession simple lines which have been used since to the blessing of many:

"In peace let me resign my breath,
And Thy salvation see;
My sins deserve eternal death,
But Jesus died for me."

So do we say with all our hearts, for we are amongst the sheep that had gone astray.

As we read down the chapter we discover how the prophet foresaw His death and burial. It is a remarkable fact that in verse 9, the word is literally "deaths," rather than "death." Remembering that "Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more," this might seem extraordinary. But we are told that according to Hebrew idiom the plural was used to express greatness and majesty. The prophet foresaw a death of such majestic proportions — ten thousand times ten thousand deaths rolled into one — that he used the plural of majesty to express it under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. Such indeed it was, and Joseph of Arimathea was specially born into the world that the words, "He was with the rich in His death," might be fulfilled.

On that majestic death will hang for eternity the glory of God, and the blessing of the uncountable millions of the redeemed.

It was not what men did as regards His death that was of such supreme importance, but what Jehovah did, as verse 10 makes so plain. Men put Him to grief, but the marvellous thing is that Jehovah did it, **making His soul an offering for sin**. There was truly the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, as we read in Hebrews, but here is something even more profound, the depth of which we shall never fathom, but out of which flow glorious results.

He is to prolong His days in resurrection. And then He will "see His seed" — His spiritual progeny — who are, in the language of John 12, the "much fruit" produced by the dying of the single "corn of wheat." Moreover all the pleasure of Jehovah will prosper in His hand. In His risen glory He will bring to pass everything that is delightful to the heart of God.

In all this He will have His own peculiar joy. In accomplishing the pleasure of Jehovah, He will see the fruit of "the travail of His soul," and it will fill up the cup of His satisfaction to the brim. A very little will satisfy us, for we are creatures of small capacities, but it will take an infinity of joy to satisfy Him. It shall all be His in that day for which we long.

This we may speak of as His **private** portion. Verse 12 speaks of **His public** portion. These are those accounted great. The once despised Servant of Jehovah is to be amongst them — chief and foremost — for "the spoil" is His, and He divides it with those who have proved themselves strong in serving Him during the time of His rejection.

But we must not fail to notice the first word, "Therefore." When He comes forth thus in splendour, it is **because of** His previous suffering in humiliation. Men might think that His sufferings were wholly contradictory, excluding any hope of His glory; whereas they prove to be the imperishable foundation on which His glory securely rests for ever and ever.

No wonder that the first word of Isaiah 54 is "Sing." Barren Israel is to break forth into singing. In Isaiah 55 a Gospel call goes out to **everyone** that thirsts, and this includes Gentiles.

While we wait for the glorious consummation it is for us Christians to maintain the song, and sound out the Gospel invitation until He comes.