

“To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

The arm of the LORD is an important picture.

Children,

let me ask you a question!

Does God have arms?

In one sense, you would say – “No! God is a spirit – he does not have a body like we do”

But then Isaiah asks, “to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

What does it mean – “the arm of the LORD”

Well, what do *your arms* do?

You pick things up – you carry things – you’d be pretty helpless without arms!

Arms are how you get things done!

God gave you arms because he made you in his image.

And your arms reflect something that is very true and important about God:

he is powerful – and he can do all things.

Therefore he gave you arms which can do *some* things.

So, does God have arms?

Not in the way that *you* have arms (that would be backward!).

God’s arms are the *real* arms – your arms are just a picture of God’s arms.

The Bible talks a lot about the arms of the Lord –

and Isaiah has been talking a lot about God’s arm in the last couple chapters.

In chapter 51, verse 5 – God says:

“My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out,

and *my arms* will judge the peoples;

the coastlands hope for me,

and for *my arm* they wait.” (51:5)

So in 51:5, the arm of God brings salvation and judgment.

And again in chapter 51, verse 9, Isaiah says:

“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord;

awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago.” (51:9)

When did God stretch out his *mighty arm* and save his people?

That’s how the Bible describes the Exodus!

The Exodus was when God brought salvation to his people –

and judgment to Egypt.

But then again, in chapter 52, verse 10, Isaiah says:

“The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (52:10)

So four times in the last two chapters we have heard of the arm of the LORD.

But now Isaiah asks:

“Who has believed what they heard from us?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (53:1)

So we have heard the promise that the arm of the LORD would judge the nations.

We have heard the cry of the righteous remnant –
pleading for the arm of the LORD to awake
and bring judgment against their enemies.

And we have heard the call for Zion to rejoice because God’s holy arm
will indeed be revealed to all nations.

But *to whom* has the arm of the LORD been revealed?!
Who gets to see it!

Chapters 41-48 spoke of the restoration from Babylon.

Cyrus of Persia would be God’s instrument in restoring the people of God to Jerusalem.
But at the end of chapter 48 we saw that the restoration from exile
would not change anything.
Israel, the Servant of the LORD, is still blind and deaf.

And so chapters 49-55 speak of a restoration beyond Babylon.

There must be a Servant who will redeem the Servant.
–a righteous remnant that will bring salvation to Israel.

The problem is that Zion’s sons have fainted in the streets.

God has called Jerusalem to wake up and stand—but
“there is none to guide her among all the sons she has borne.”

Even the house of David has failed (as we saw in chapters 1-37).
Israel is so pathetic that they needed a foreign king (Cyrus) to deliver them (41-48).

But Isaiah promises that there will be *one* to whom the arm of the LORD will be revealed!

1. The Exalted One: the Suffering Servant (52:13-15)

*Behold, my servant shall act wisely;^[b]
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted.*

You can almost hear the impatient hearers saying,
Yes, Isaiah, you've said this before!
You keep telling us that the Servant will be glorified!
You keep telling us that the day will come when Israel will be exalted.
That's great!
But right now we're suffering.

That's the point.
The Servant *must* suffer.

¹⁴ *As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—*
¹⁵ *so shall he sprinkle^[e] many nations.*

Notice how Isaiah does this.
As many were astonished at *you* (Servant Israel)
so also it will be with him (Servant Jesus).
Why did Israel have to suffer such afflictions?
Because Israel was chosen by God to be a picture of Jesus.

(read):
*Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,
for that which has not been told them they see,
and that which they have not heard they understand.*

Remember that Israel is the servant.
Isaiah is speaking to the suffering, righteous remnant.
Why are you suffering?
Because the Servant must suffer.
It is only through suffering that Israel will be exalted.
Isaiah speaks to the remnant: "as many were astonished at you...
so shall he sprinkle (or startle) many nations."
You, Israel, are the servant of the Lord.
Your suffering now – in the midst of exile –
is a participation in the suffering of the Servant.
Israel participates in sufferings of Christ *in advance*.

But the sufferings of the promised Servant—the one who was still to come—
will have a different effect than the sufferings of the present Servant.
Israel's sufferings seemed to have precious little effect!
Zion's children were passed out in the streets.
The Exile and Restoration brought about no fundamental change in the condition of Israel

Even after being restored to Jerusalem, the servant is still deaf and blind.

But when the Servant sprinkles the nations, shutting the mouths of kings,
the eyes of the blind are opened, and the ears of the deaf are loosed.

Before they are told, they see!

Before they hear, they understand!

But this prompts the question “to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

2. No Beauty/Not Desired: the Despised Servant (53:1-3)

53 *Who has believed what he has heard from us?*^[d]

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Who has believed what they heard from us?

And *to whom* has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

Isaiah, after all, was called to blind the eyes and close the ears.

Wait – you mean to tell me that someone is actually going to hear?!

Yes. Someone will.

Some *one*.

This passage speaks of the Suffering Servant.

But it also speaks of the Singular Servant.

It is emphatically *one* who believes the message of Isaiah.

It is *one* to whom the arm of the LORD is revealed.

And this one will be the most unlikely candidate.

Oh yes, he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.

But not in the way that you might expect.

² *For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;*

In the midst of the barrenness of Israel, a tender shoot shall grow.

The attentive listener will hear echoes of Isaiah 11, verse 1

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”

This one will come as heir to the kingdom—

but he will do nothing to make you remember David:

*he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.*

David was a beautiful man!

Saul had been a head taller than any other!

Israel had always wanted a king like the other nations.

If you want to see God's king, look in the opposite direction.

Do not look for one who is high and exalted.

Look for one who is lowly and humble.

The one who exalts himself will be humbled.

The one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Indeed, the singular Servant will be:

³ *He was despised and rejected^[e] by men,
a man of sorrows^[f] and acquainted with^[g] grief;^[h]
and as one from whom men hide their faces^[i]
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

If you want to see the power of God –

if you want to see the arm of the LORD –

look at Jesus.

But of course, this has been God's pattern all along!

When God called Israel out of Egypt –

God says that Israel was a weak and tiny nation –

nowhere near as powerful as the Canaanite nations

(and obviously as nothing before Egypt!).

But God worked his mighty deeds and delivered his people

“with an outstretched arm.”

Also – think of Job.

The book of Job uses a lot of similar language as Isaiah.

For instance, in Job 1, the LORD asks Satan,

“Have you considered my servant Job,
that there is none like him on the earth,
a blameless and upright man,
who fears God and turns away from evil?”

Job is a singular servant of the LORD.

And of course, Job is a *suffering* servant of the LORD.

God paints a target on Job's back – “have you considered my servant...”?

Job was a picture of what Isaiah is speaking of –

a singular suffering servant –

who, at the end of the book, intercedes for his three friends
to save them from the wrath of God!

Three friends – who had despised and rejected him –
“we esteemed him not”!

But of course, Job was merely a picture – an object lesson –
demonstrating a part of who the Singular Suffering Servant would be!

3. By His Wounds We Are Healed: the Sin-Bearing Servant (53:4-6)

In order for Servant Israel to be redeemed,
there must be one who bears the grief and sorrow of the nation.

*⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.*

This is a remarkable passage.

We have become so familiar with it that perhaps we fail to appreciate
what it said to Israel, 100 years before the Exile.

Exile is coming because you are blind and deaf.

You do not hear what God is saying.

You do not see what God is doing.

You will be carried away to Babylon.

Later, Cyrus will restore you to Jerusalem.

Nonetheless, the restoration will be a complete failure,
because you will still be blind and deaf.

But take heart, O righteous remnant,

because the LORD will raise up a Servant to redeem the Servant.

But redemption does not come through glory.

Redemption comes through suffering.

The Servant will be stricken, smitten and afflicted.

We often talk about how Jesus died for our *sins* –

but how often do we focus on how he bore our *griefs* –

and carried our *sorrows*.

This is why I love how our Shorter Catechism speaks of how the fall brought mankind
into *an estate of sin and misery*.

Misery – sorrow – grief – these are not merely byproducts of sin.

Our fallen condition is characterized by both sin and misery.

And Jesus had to bear *both*.

My observation is that conservative churches often focus more on sin –

and fail to sympathize with the misery that people endure.
On the other hand, liberal churches can so sympathize with misery,
that they never get around to dealing with sin!

But the whole Christ deals with both sin and misery!
Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...
he took our misery – he didn't just “share” our afflictions,
he *carried* them.

When you feel the dark night of the soul –
whether anxiety or depression or cancer or the death of a loved one –
it is not merely that Jesus “sympathizes” with you –
no, Jesus *bore* your grief.

Your sorrows – your miseries – were placed upon him!

If Jesus only “paid for our sins” but did nothing about our misery –
then we would remain miserable!
And if Jesus only took your misery and left you in your sin,
then you would remain sinful!

Neither option sounds very nice...

But Isaiah says:

⁵ *But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.*

The singular suffering Servant bears our misery *and* our sin.
This is the solution to Israel's problem –
to humanity's problem!

⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

The sons of Zion have fallen in the streets.
Isaiah is heading towards the conclusion that Paul reaches in Romans 3 –
“there is none righteous – no, not one.”
All have turned aside –
All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We need *one* righteous man – one who does right and turns away from evil.
We need one who can bear the weight of our sins!

Verses 7-9 then speaks of how the Singular Suffering Servant
will fare before men:

4. A Lamb Led to the Slaughter: the Oppressed Servant (53:7-9)

⁷ *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.*

The suffering servant will not talk back.

Jesus embodied this before Pilate.

Pilate was looking for a way to free him!

If Jesus had sought to persuade Pilate that he was innocent –
he probably would have succeeded!

But Jesus knew that his calling was to go to the cross.

He knew that he had come to bear our grief – our misery – our sin.

And so he opened not his mouth.

He did not seek to defend himself.

⁸ *By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?*

⁹ *And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

The righteous Servant will be cut off out of the land of the living.

He will be innocent of all charges,

but he will be put to death anyway.

Why?

Why did Jesus have to do this?

5. Offering and Inheritance: the Justifying Servant (53:10-12)

¹⁰ *Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;^[1]*

*when his soul makes^[k] an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see^[l] and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.*

Because it was the LORD's will to crush him.

This is the solution to all of the puzzles.

How can a blind and deaf Servant redeem the nations?

Only if the Servant himself is redeemed.

God must send the Singular Servant to deliver Israel,
and then, through that new, redeemed Israel,

God will deliver the nations.

The Servant must offer himself as an offering for sin.

(Isaiah speaks at the mid-way point between Moses and Christ)

All of the sacrifices of the last seven hundred years—and of the next 700 years—
are pointing to this one offering.

It is only through this offering that he shall prolong his days and see his offspring.

It is only through the anguish of his soul that he shall see and be satisfied.

The only way to glory is the way of suffering.

Indeed, it is through this path of suffering that this Servant
becomes the ONE who sees and the ONE who hears.

He is the one who sees what God is doing and hears what God is saying.

And therefore by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

Because Jesus sees what God is doing and hears what God is saying,
he knows what to do!

Because Jesus is the righteous servant,

he, alone, can take the cup of God's judgment into his hand.

He can stand there at that last Supper,

and declare with full understanding:

“This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.”

If I drink this cup of judgment to the dregs,

then this cup will become the cup of blessing.

If I bear the iniquities of my people,

then they may be accounted righteous through my death.

And so God declares (v12)

¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,^[m]

*and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,^[n]
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.*

In order to understand what this means,
we kinda need to drift over into the next chapter: (54:1-3)

*“Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;
break forth into singing and cry aloud,
you who have not been in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD.*
² *“Enlarge the place of your tent,
and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
do not hold back; lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.*
³ *For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
and your offspring will possess the nations
and will people the desolate cities.*

When the Servant redeems his people,
Zion – the barren and desolate one –
will discover that she is the mother of a great multitude!
This is an apt image.
Zion was not in labor.
She did nothing to produce these children.
Salvation is wholly the work of God’s grace.
The church cannot claim an equal part with God in the bearing of his children.
He gives her children through his sovereign work!

Seven hundred years later, the treasurer of Ethiopia was reading this passage
as he traveled from Jerusalem to Gaza.

And Philip, prompted by the Spirit of God, ran up to him and asked,
“Do you understand what you are reading?”

The Ethiopian replied,
“How can I, unless someone guides me?”

Philip then explained how Isaiah 53 speaks of Jesus.
Jesus is the Suffering Servant—the Singular Servant—
who redeems his people through his death.
When the Ethiopian heard this,
he declared:

“See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?”
Isaiah had said that the Servant would sprinkle many nations (52:15).
Here is the first.

Now, in Jesus Christ, the gospel is going forth to the nations,
by the power of the Spirit of God.

For a long time, we tended to think of this in terms of foreign missions.
And foreign missions is certainly an important part of “going forth to the nations.”
But we need to remember that we live among “the nations.”
And Jesus continues to sprinkle many nations.
Jesus continues to add many peoples –
and so we need to have confidence that he will continue to this
in and through us!
Because we are being conformed to the likeness of the Suffering Servant.
And we have the same confidence as our Lord Jesus –
that our heavenly Father will bring us through suffering to glory.
He simply calls us to walk humbly before him –
loving him before all else!
Setting our hearts and minds on Christ and his kingdom.