

John 12: 37-41; “The Arm of the Lord Revealed”, Sermon # 68 in the series – “That All May Honor the Son”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 2nd, 2023, in the Morning Worship Service.

What does it mean in verse 37, when the question is asked – “And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? What does the word, “arm” mean here? I believe that the term – God’s arm being revealed, refers to Christ, who is His right hand Man. God’s right hand and His holy arm, who is Christ, has gained the victory of our salvation, in Him. (Psalm 98: 1) A further question that should come to us then, is this – Why must the arm of the Lord be revealed if a person is to be saved, and to really come to know God? I want to give you two answers to that question.

1st of all – The arm of the Lord must be revealed because without this revelation, God’s way of salvation in Christ will be rejected. (verses 38 & 39) And 2nd – The arm of the Lord must be revealed because of man’s need to receive efficacious grace, which will bring him to faith in Christ. (verse 41) Let’s see if we can come to understand these things in the way that God would have us to understand them.

1st of all – The arm of the Lord must be revealed because without this revelation, God’s way of salvation in Christ will be rejected. . .

I believe that I can prove this statement in relation to both Jews and Gentiles, but let us start with the Jews. The proof that the arm of the Lord must be revealed to men is clearly seen for us in the reaction of the Jews to Christ’s coming to them to tell them that the way of salvation was not in themselves, but in Him. Their reaction is seen in verse 37 of our text. “But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him.” In other words, God had revealed His arm to them in His sending Christ to them. He sent Him forth from heaven to be their promised Messiah, their Savior, and their Lord. But they did not receive Him.

He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him, it says in John 1: 11. God the Father had the Lord Jesus do many mighty miracles to show forth this fact, that He was the One promised to them, in the Scriptures. But they did not want to receive His words of truth to themselves, so as to savingly believe in Him. Instead they thought of Him in the worst possible terms, as a liar and a blasphemer when He claimed to be the Son of God. This showed the greatness of their self-deception. And it leads me to say that there is always a terrible accountability that comes to all such men for what has been revealed to them about Christ.

If Jesus was able to heal the sick and even raise the dead, then surely He ought to have been believed in. He ought to have been received by His own people the Jews. Having seen His miracles, they ought to have affirmed His identity; that He was the Son of God, and their Messiah. But they did not. The explanation for this rejection of Christ is worded in this way in verse 38 – “Who has believed our report?” “And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” In other words, not many believed. The report that is mentioned here is the report concerning Christ. It was the report of the gospel which was preached to the Jews concerning Him from the lips of John the Baptist and from Christ Himself.

This report concerning Christ is written down for our instruction as Gentiles as well, in the Bible. The gospel concerning Jesus Christ is the same gospel which we preach today. I want you to see that your being saved, and coming to know Christ as your Savior, is not ultimately simply a matter of your own personal decision. Yes, you most certainly do have to make a decision about Christ. You must decide whether you will believe the report of the gospel. And yes, you will most certainly be held accountable for your believing or not believing the report concerning Christ.

But your being saved is more than what you are doing on your own initiative in relation to the gospel report. The saving grace of faith is something which must begin with God’s having mercy on you. He must open your eyes so that you can see the truth of your need of Him. When you see this, it is because God the Holy Spirit is circumcising your heart to take away the hardness and the resistance that you naturally have, to receiving grace and the truth of the Bible. When you believe you are then being given the power by God to embrace the truth, and to be set free from the sin which has bound your mind and

your heart all of your life. It is that you come to believe the report concerning Christ in relation to God's having revealed it to you. That is, you believe the truth of your need for Christ to save you. You see your need of Him. God must reveal this to you personally. This truth that you cannot save yourself, but that you must have God save you through Christ is hard for many to receive, especially the self-righteous. It is a truth which all men by nature do not like to hear.

This is why it says in Romans chapter 3, verse 11 – “There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.” All men by nature like to believe that they are discerning enough to see the truth of what God requires of them. They think that they are wise enough to be able to figure out what pleases God. They believe that they have strength enough to be able to keep God's commandments and to do them in a way which will please Him. This, God knows, is not true. He is looking for perfection. And He does not find it in any person who has ever lived, either Jew or Gentile. He knows that He can find it only in His Son.

The report that you must believe is that Jesus is the only perfect Man. He is the only Man who has ever lived who has kept God's commandments perfectly in every respect. No one else will ever be able to do it. The people of the Jews at the time when Christ came to them, many of them truly believed that they were being saved by their own works. They believed that their own arm was what was bringing them salvation. But the comment of John in our text is – To Whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? The implication is that it is only by the arm of the Lord Christ, being revealed to any person, that they will be saved and eventually brought to heaven.

I want to speak to you now, for a few minutes about the native spiritual blindness of all men unless God reveals His arm. In John chapter 9, we have the account of Jesus' healing of the man who was born blind. You will remember that the Jews had already agreed that if any man confessed Him, he would be put out of the synagogue. Jesus did give him his sight, and so he freely confessed Him. But the Jews did not like it, and so they reviled him because he was confessing that it was the power of Jesus which took away his blindness and gave him sight. He said to them in John 9: 30 – “Why this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from ; yet He has opened my eyes!” “Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.” “Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind.” “If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.”

This was good reasoning. The Jews should have been able to receive it, but they could not. And so they answered this man upon whom the miracle had been performed – “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?” And it says that they cast him out. The term – God's arm being revealed, refers to God's power in Christ. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. God has an eternal purpose in salvation. His purpose is to have mercy upon all sinners who will believe in Jesus. But He knows that no one will seek for Christ by nature.

Listen to what Jesus said to the man born blind, whom He had healed, after he was put out of the synagogue. John 9: 35 - “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’” “He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him.’” “And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’” “Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’” “And he worshiped Him.” “And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.’”

You see, this statement of Jesus' shows us something that goes beyond this particular man who was healed. It applies to everyone who would be saved and given spiritual sight. Those persons who come to realize that they were born blind by nature spiritually and that they need Christ to open their eyes spiritually, they will be healed of this blindness when they believe the report of Jesus, and when the arm of the Lord is revealed to them. That is what happened to this man. Jesus passed by, it says in John 9: 1, and he stopped to heal him. He did this to “work the works of God; that those works should be revealed in him.” (John 9: 3) But Jesus also knew the hearts of those men of the Pharisees who were not believing in Him. They were blind. They who thought that they could see were made blind by their own sinful conclusions, and their rejection of Jesus as the Son of God. This is why it says in John 9: 40

and 41 – “Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, ‘Are we blind also?’ “Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ “Therefore your sin remains.”

You see, our Lord knew that because of their native spiritual blindness, they would not want to believe in Him. Rather, they would only want to believe in their own wisdom, their own ability, and pursue their own righteousness. And so God sent His Son into this fallen world as the One who would through His life, death, and resurrection, be the demonstration of His power and His wisdom. Our Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who will come to Him. But those who say that they see, they shall be made blind. They are leaning to their own understanding.

And therefore, they are made blind in a judicial sense as it says in verse 40 of John 12. “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.” The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes it says in Romans 1: 16. But we must warn people not to trust in themselves; their own wisdom, or their own righteousness, thinking that they will be saved by these, rather than by Christ. No, the arm of the Lord must be revealed to them.

2nd – The arm of the Lord must be revealed because of man’s need of efficacious grace.

(verses 39-41 41)

By efficacious grace I mean the powerful working of God’s grace which brings salvation. In terms of this grace which brings salvation, it is often referred to by Calvinistic Theologians as Irresistible Grace or Effectual Calling. In terms of these verses that we are looking at, we can begin to realize how much we are dependent, as sinners, upon the Lord opening our eyes that we might see spiritually. And we can even see here something of the truth of the necessity of God’s effectually calling us to salvation. The Father must draw us to Christ. The Spirit must take away our resistance. He must illumine our darkness and show us the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But both the drawing and the effectual call and the opening of eyes of the sinner to behold Christ’s glory is done in relation to the preaching of Christ. How much we need the Holy Spirit to give us understanding in our minds so that we should be healed of the guilt, and the defilement, and the wounds of sin. Our conscience must be cleansed by faith in His promise. God is perfectly sovereign over the giving of grace. Verse 39 says – “Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’ “These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.” John is referring to Isaiah’s having seen the glory of Christ as a saved man.

What he is telling us, and what I would have you to see from this text is that it is only when you receive efficacious grace that you will behold the glory of Christ. When you receive saving grace, you will see Christ’s excellency. You will think often of His perfections. You are suddenly seeing His desirability as a Savior. You want this Man to rule over you because You see His gentleness and His love for you, the sinner. You want to call upon His name. You want to come to Him. And in beholding that glory, when you then exercise faith in His Person and His work, you will be saved.

The quote that John uses here is from Isaiah chapter 6, and I would have you turn over there to look at this mighty text for a few minutes with me. Verse 1 says – “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.” “Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.” “And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’ “And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.”

“So I said: ‘Woe is me, for I am undone!’ “Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” “Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar.” “And he touched my mouth with it, and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken

away, and your sin purged.” “Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ “Then I said, ‘Here am I!’ “Send me.” “And He said, ‘Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’”

“Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy.” “And shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.” “Then I said, ‘Lord, how long?’ “And He answered: ‘Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate, the Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.’ “But yet a tenth will be in it, and will return and be for consuming as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump remains when it is cut down.” “So the holy seed shall be its stump.”

So Isaiah was given this mighty vision of the glory of Christ. It was of Him, high and lifted up as the greatest of Kings on a great throne. The greatness of His majesty and glory are portrayed in the vision by the train of His robe filling the temple of heaven. Or perhaps the temple here represents in visionary language the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. For if these six-winged seraphim are angels, the actual setting must be heaven. If they refer to “angels” who are ministers of the gospel, as they undoubtedly do in Revelation chapter 5, it must be a vision of the church. But in this vision Isaiah is receiving his commission as a prophet. And because of the overpowering holiness of Christ, he immediately senses the greatness of his personal sins. And specifically, he feels completely unworthy to become a prophet of the Lord. He confesses the uncleanness of his lips.

We see here how important is conviction of sin in relation to our beholding the glory of Christ, and our being saved. And also becoming a useful servant to Him. But the moment Isaiah confesses his sin, he is ministered to by one of the seraphim who takes a live coal from the altar with tongs and touches his mouth with it. We should understand that the prophet is representing any sinner who is aware of how great a sinner they are. And the seraphim represents the minister of the gospel who brings the good news of pardon by the blood and sacrifice of Christ. The live coal is the gospel preached. The seraphim goes to Isaiah with this coal from the altar held in a pair of tongs, and he touches his lips with it. And his sin is pardoned and purged away.

He was then in a position to receive the words of his commission, brought to him in the form of a question: Who will go for Us? Meaning who will go for Us, the Triune God, to preach the gospel for Us. And Isaiah says – Here I am, send me. I think that Isaiah thought that his would be a positive and fruitful ministry. But he is told – Go and tell this people, keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy.” Now, this is not mentioned in the gospel of John.

But here we see that the way that God would blind their eyes and harden their hearts. It would be by simply having His ministers preach Christ to them. Isaiah represents all ministers of the gospel of Christ in this regard. But it especially refers to Christ Himself, in His coming and preaching to His own people during the time of His earthly ministry. This is why John quotes this passage. The Jews (the great body of them) could not believe, for they did not believe that they needed to be saved by Him. And they did not see that they dishonored the Father when they dishonored the Son. God therefore, blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts so that they would not see His glory. And so they would reject Him, and have Him to be crucified.

You see now, don't you, that His rejection by His own people led to His going to the cross. The guilt of the Jews was very great. But Christ's love for sinners was also very sure, very great, and very definite. He would go to the cross and most definitely atone for all of the sins of all who would believe in Him. He would purchase efficacious grace for all of His elect people. Their eyes would be opened in God's time, to behold Christ's glory; the glory of His blessed Person, His willingness to take their place in judgment. And by His resurrection from the dead, He would give them the power to become children of God. The arm of the Lord, I hope you see it now, must needs be revealed to all who will be saved. The power of Christ as God's arm is seen at the cross, and in His resurrection on your behalf if you will believe. So do not hesitate. Only believe.

