The Arm of the Lord

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The Arm of the Lord

***by T. Austin-Sparks
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Chapter 1 - The Situation and the Need

***Reading: Isaiah 52:13-53:12.
"Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"***

**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 persecution, 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 selfevident. 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 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 recognise 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, paralysed; 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 easygoing 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, which 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.

Chapter 2 - The Meaning of the Arm

**Having considered something of the meaning of the phrase 'the Arm of the Lord', and seen that it indicates the support, the upholding, the strength of the Lord, given to those who are wholly in line with His purpose, let us now ask the question: What does the Word of God show to be the real implication of this support or upholding of the Lord? What is in our minds when we think of having the Lord's support?**

**What Does the Arm of the Lord Imply?**

We all want to have His support, His upholding, His strength. To have the Lord with us, alongside of us, with all His gracious and infinite power exercised on our behalf, is, after all, the most important thing in life, not only for us as Christians individually, but for the Church, and for the whole work of the Lord. But have we really thought as to what we mean by this? What do we expect? Is it just the bare support of the Lord, to get us through, to carry us over, to see that we do not collapse on the way? When we see somebody standing fearfully by the side of the road, afraid to step out and cross, we sometimes proffer an arm: we say, 'Let me give you an arm and see you over' - an arm! Well, the arm is a support; it helps to the other side. Is that all we want from the Lord? We do not always speak about the Arm of the Lord; we often express it in other ways. We ask for grace; we ask for sufficiency; we ask for many other things; but it is all included in the Arm of the Lord. What is it that we are really seeking?

Now, what does the Word of God show to be the meaning of this support, this Arm of the Lord? Before I answer that question, let me pause to say that this is a matter of the most far-reaching importance and application. I am not at this time at all concerned with merely giving Bible studies. There is a very great practical background to all that is presented here. There is coming daily into one's life an almost continuous, unbroken demand for help in the problems of Christian lives, the problems of churches, the problems of Christian relationships; sometimes it seems almost day and night, without cessation. And letters are continually coming - sometimes very long letters - from assemblies of God's people in different places, telling of the deplorable conditions in those assemblies, with all their frustration, limitation, disappointment, even deadlock and defeat, and asking for counsel and advice as to what is to be done. It is over against this background of real and urgent need that these messages are presented. I want to stress that there is something very practical in this.

For after all, it just amounts to one thing: Where is the Lord? Just that: Where is the Lord? Where shall we find the Lord? How are we going to know the Lord unreservedly with us? And that contains this further serious question: How far is the Lord able to support this and that - to come in and undertake, to show His power, show Himself mighty? That really is the heart of the whole matter. Is there a limitation upon the Lord, that He cannot do these things, because of certain obstacles? It is of supreme importance, then, that we should know and understand the ground on which the Lord will show His mighty Arm in these days, on behalf of His people, on behalf of His Church, on behalf of His work.

When, therefore, we ask the question: What does it really mean for the Arm of the Lord to be revealed? we find in the Word of God two or three things, holding a very large place there, in many forms of expression, which answer that question. But first may l pause again to say, in parenthesis, that the message of Isaiah 53 is the answer to everything! Perhaps we think we know Isaiah 53; perhaps we could even recite it. I venture to suggest that we know very little about that chapter. It is the most comprehensive chapter in the whole Bible. If we were able to read it with real spiritual comprehension, we should find that, in that one chapter, all our questions are answered; all our needs are met; all our problems are solved! The Bible is comprehended by Isaiah 53, and in what follows I am keeping within the compass of that chapter.

**(1) The Vindication of a Course Taken**

Now, I find that the first thing that is meant by the Arm of the Lord on behalf of His people is this: it means the vindication of the course that they have taken. If you turn to your Bible with that in mind, you will find how much there is that gathers around it. You will agree that it is a very important matter, that the course that we have taken should be proved at the end to have been the right one. There could be nothing more terrible and tragic than that having taken a course, and given ourselves and all that we have to it, poured out our lives in it and for it, we should find at the end that we have been wrong, and that the Lord is not able to vindicate the course that we have taken. It is plainly of the utmost importance that the course that we have taken should, in the end, receive the Divine approval - that over against everything, in spite of everything, from men and from demons, God should be able to say: 'That man was right!' That, after all, was the vindication of Job, was it not? How much that man met of misconstruction and misrepresentation! But in the end God said, 'My servant Job is right'; and it is no small thing to have God say that. In Isaiah 53 it is that: the vindication of a course taken, in spite of everything. And that 'in spite of everything' amounts to a good deal in that chapter, does it not? - an overwhelming weight of contradiction and misunderstanding; but, in the end, the Servant is vindicated; God says He was right. "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" To *that* One - to *that* One!

That thought runs everywhere through the Bible, in relation to all the great men of faith, as they walked with God. What a difficult way they went! But in the end, God said, not in word only, but in very, very practical vindication, 'He was right, he was right.' That is the meaning of the Arm of the Lord. That is what I want when I ask for the Arm of the Lord: 'O Lord, that I may take such a way with You that, in the end, You may be able to stand by that way and say: He was right.' Do you want that? There is no value in anything that does not work out like that.

**(2) The Abiding Fruit of a Life**

A second thing that I see to be the meaning, or evidence, of the Arm of the Lord, is in the abiding, spiritual fruit of a life. In Isaiah 53:10 we read: "He shall see his seed" - that is, His abiding spiritual seed; the life that was in Him now perpetuated and established, indestructible, in new forms of expression. Of what value is it if, when we have lived our lives here, and done our work, and have gone, that is the end of everything? - a memory, growing more and more indistinct, fading into the past? It may be true to that very depressing verse that some people like to sing:

'Time, like an ever-rolling stream, Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream Dies at the opening day'

but that is pessimism to the last degree! That ought not to be our heritage. It ought not to be true of any servant of the Lord that he is 'forgotten', 'borne away', passed out, nothing left, a vapour. No, "he shall see his seed". The Arm of the Lord on behalf of any true servant of the Lord ought to mean that, when the form of service and expression, the vessel and the framework, which were only temporary, have gone, there is something intrinsic, indestructible, that goes on and ever on, and will be found in Heaven, abiding for eternity. That is the Arm of the Lord! That is the vindication of life, and that is what you and I covet, is it not? Surely, that is the only thing to justify our having lived at all! Not that we did all kinds of things, and that there was much to show even while we were here, but that, when we are gone, the work goes on, there is a seed that lives on - an imperishable spiritual seed.

That is what the Bible means by 'the Arm of the Lord'. It is the Lord giving His seal, the Lord involved in things. The Arm of the Lord establishes what is of Him, as something which cannot be destroyed. Do you not want the Arm of the Lord in that way? We all desire that there should be spiritual fruitfulness, spiritual increase, no stagnation, no end, but a going on. We can see that, can we not, in the case of all the true servants of the Lord - that the Lord came in after they had gone, and stood by their ministry. He stood by Jeremiah when Jeremiah was gone: "that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation..." (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1; Dan. 9:2). Paul has ministered to the seven churches in Asia, and now Paul is gone; but the Lord comes back to the seven churches to vindicate the ministry of His servant (Acts 19:10,26; Rev. 1-3). That is the Arm of the Lord - that He does not allow what has been of Himself in any servant's life to perish. It is established. (Compare also what is said of Samuel, in 1 Samuel 3:19,20 and 28:17.)

**The Principles of the Revealing of His Arm**

Now we come back to our initial question: What are the principles upon which the Arm of the Lord will be revealed? As I have said, we think we are very familiar with the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. But when we read it, we are usually so taken up with those vividly descriptive words concerning the sorrows and the sufferings and the sin-bearing of the One who is in view, with the Person and the experiences of this suffering Servant of Jehovah, that we almost entirely lose sight of the tremendous significance of that fundamental opening question: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" And yet the whole chapter would have very little value and meaning but for that question. Think about it again: Supposing all that is described there - His sufferings, His sorrows, and His sin-bearing - had taken place, and then the Arm of the Lord had not been revealed on His behalf, what were the value of it all? It has happened - but where is the vindication? What is the verdict of God upon it?

For, although the content of the chapter is so tremendous, and so overwhelmingly moving in its tragedy, it all relates to this one thing: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The answer is: To that very One who is described here in such vivid detail. The Arm of the Lord is revealed to the One who, with such fulness and such pathos, is here brought into view, as the object of all this tragedy, affliction, misunderstanding and misrepresentation. It is to that One that the Arm of the Lord is revealed.

The prophet is viewing the reaction of the whole world, Israel and Gentile alike, to the report, the proclamation. "Who has believed our report?" he asks. 'Who has believed the message that we have proclaimed?' It is all looking on to the day of the Son of Man. The messengers have gone out; the proclamation has been made - and what a proclamation it was! It was made on the Day of Pentecost; it went out from Jerusalem into all the regions round about. But - who believed it? What was the reaction to it, from Israel and the Gentiles? The prophet, in his wonderfully vivid, inspired foreknowledge of, and insight into, the reactions of the world to the message of the Gospel, asks the question, and answers it in the whole chapter. But he asks also: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The world has so reacted; the vast majority have refused and rejected the message, they have put a totally false construction upon the afflictions of the Suffering One. Nevertheless, it is to this One that the Arm of the Lord is revealed; it is alongside of this One that Jehovah stands.

**The Servant of the Lord**

And that leads us to the whole comprehensive context of the question. The wider context takes us back to chapter 42: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles," and so on. But that phrase, "Behold my servant," brings us also to the immediate context of our chapter 53, for we find it echoed, as it were, in verse 13 of chapter 52. There ought, in fact, never to have been a break between 52:15 and 53:1, for this whole section really begins at verse 13: "Behold, my servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." We are thus brought into the wider context of the servant of the Lord, and of what real service to the Lord is: that is, what is that service that the Lord vindicates, what is that servanthood that the Lord stands by. You and I are surely very much concerned with that, to be those to whom the Lord can say: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold" - and "whom I uphold" is only another way of saying: 'to whom I show My mighty Arm'.

Now this term, 'Servant of the Lord', is used by Isaiah in a three-fold way.

In the first place *(e.g.* in ch. 41:8; 44:1,2,21), he uses it of Israel: Israel is called 'the servant of the Lord', raised up to serve Him in His great purposes in the midst of the nations. But Israel failed the Lord as a servant, tragically failed.

Then, out of the midst of Israel, God raised up One, His Messiah, His Anointed One, and transferred the title to Him: "My servant, whom I uphold... I have put my spirit upon him" ... "Behold, my servant... he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." That is the second way in which the title is used. It opens up a very profitable line of study, if you care to follow it, for you find that Isaiah 52-53 is quoted no fewer than eleven times in the New Testament, these very words being transferred to the Lord Jesus. For instance Matthew (8:17) says: "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah"; then he quotes from Isaiah 53 in relation to the Lord Jesus. One might say that the whole New Testament can be bracketed into Isaiah 53, and into this title 'The Servant of the Lord', His Person and His work.

The third way in which Isaiah uses the title 'Servant of the Lord' is in a collective or plural way of faithful believers. In chapter 54:17 (compare also 65:13,14) the faithful people of the Lord are given this very title, "the servants of the Lord". There is, therefore, a sense in which you and I come within the compass of this great Divine vindication.

But here we must pause to make a fundamental distinction: the distinction between the unique servanthood, the unique work of the Lord Jesus, and that which relates to others. This must ever be borne in mind. For Isaiah 53 sets forth that unique servanthood of Christ, that unique work of Christ in which no one else shares at all. And, thank God, no such sharing is necessary! He has fulfilled it all Himself, alone. We shall follow that through in a moment more closely. But, while it is true that we do not in any way share in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus, or come into this vicarious service, nevertheless we do come into a service, and a service that is based upon the same spiritual principles as His. That is very important: for it is upon those principles that the Arm of the Lord is revealed.

**The Unique Work and Servanthood of Christ**

Let us, then, spend a few minutes in looking at His unique work and service. I think it is impressive to note that this section begins with the glorious end to which God is moving. "Behold, my servant... shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high" (52:13). It is always good to get the end right into view at the beginning, and see how it is all going to work out. All this tragedy of chapter 53, all this terrible story - how is it going to end? Well, here God begins with His end. He says: 'This is how it is going to end: before I tell you all about the course of things, which might terribly distress and depress you, I will tell you how it is all going to end. This Servant, whom I am going to describe in His Person and His work, in the end shall be exalted, shall be high, shall be lifted up!'

Of course, this word immediately carries us over to those great passages in the New Testament, such as Acts 1 and 2; Philippians 2: 'He became obedient unto death...' "God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow..."; and Hebrews 1: "he... sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high..." That is not how it is *going* to end; that is how it *has ended!* And that is how the terrible story is introduced. It is all found in this repeated phrase of two words: "He shall..." 'He *shall* be exalted... He *shall* be lifted up... He *shall* be very high... He *shall* see of the travail of his soul... He *shall* be satisfied'. It is established from the beginning. That is vindication: that is the Arm of the Lord! Let all this transpire nevertheless, the Arm of the Lord will see to it that it leads to a glorious end. Before anything happens - before the Cross, before the rejection - it is established in the counsels of God: "He *shall*..."

And if you and I come into the true spiritual principles of Christ's service, that is exactly how it will be with us. God will see to it that that is how the end will be. "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17). "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:12).

Having noted how this matter is introduced, let us now look at the story of His unique servanthood. **His Vicarious Sufferings**

There are eleven expressions in chapter 53 which describe the vicarious character of the sufferings of the Servant of the Lord.

1. 'He bore our griefs' (v. 4).
2. 'He carried our sorrows' (v. 4).
2. 'He was wounded for our transgressions' (V. 5).
4. 'He was bruised for our iniquities' (v. 5).
5. 'The chastisement of our peace was upon Him' (v. 5).
6. 'By His stripes we are healed' (v. 5).
7. 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (v. 6).
8. 'For the transgression of my people was He stricken' (v. 8).
9. 'Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin' (v. 10).
10. 'He shall bear their iniquities' (v. 11).
11. 'He bare the sin of many' (v. 12).

It is very instructive to notice the three words, used here, descriptive of what He bore. The three terms are: 'iniquity', 'transgression' and 'sin'. If you turn to the book of Leviticus, chapter 16, you will understand what Isaiah was talking about, and what the Holy Spirit, through Isaiah, was pointing to.

*"He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins: and so shall he do for the tent of meeting, that dwelleth with them in the midst* of *their uncleannesses..." (Lev. 16:16).*

*"And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins" (v. 21).* Here we have our three words of Isaiah 53. *"And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land: and he shall let go the goat into the wilderness" (v. 22).
"For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins shall ye be clean before the Lord" (v. 30).
"And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make atonement for the children of Israel because of all their sins once in the year" (v. 34).*

Here in Isaiah, then, we have the work which corresponds to the work of the scape-goat. That term fits into this chapter so perfectly. This suffering Servant is the 'scape-goat', bearing iniquities, transgressions, sins, and driven out into the wilderness, into desolation.

What are we to conclude from this as to the Arm of the Lord, in relation to His service? **The Arm of the Lord: Related (1) To the Cross**

The Arm of the Lord, with all that that means, is inseparably related to the Cross of the Lord Jesus. There you have the heart and the sum of the whole matter. Do you want the Arm of the Lord? Do you want vindication? Do you want the Lord to stand by and support, to uphold, to carry through, to commit Himself, to be on your side, to be with you in your life, and with you in your company of believers, in the work of the Lord? The Arm of the Lord is inseparably related to the Cross, and none of us will ever find the Lord with us otherwise than on the ground of the Cross.

I spoke, at the beginning of this message, of the situations of spiritual tragedy obtaining in so many places amongst the Lord's people. The root cause of these situations comes to light again and again, both in personal conversation, and in the letters that one receives, in some such terms as these: 'It seems that the Cross hasn't done its work in us yet!' Yes, that is it! A deeper work of the Cross is the one answer, and the sure answer, to all this spiritual tragedy. The absence of such a work explains all the lack of support from the Lord. Isaiah 53 covers everything. The support of the Lord, the presence of the Lord, the power of the Lord, the Lord's committing of Himself to us and to the work, will only be - *can* only be - on the ground of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, as being the ground upon which we stand and live, whether individually or collectively. The Arm of the Lord only operates by the Cross. You may say, indeed, that the Cross *is* the Arm of the Lord. It is there that Divine vindication is found. "Christ crucified... the *power* of God" - the Arm of the Lord!

**Related (2) To a Seed, The Fruit of His Travail**

The Arm of the Lord is inseparably related, also, to a seed which is the fruit of the travail of this Servant of the Lord. "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" To this One: "He shall see his seed"; "He shall see of the travail of his soul". The Church is essentially the fruit of His travail, not the making or the building of men. It is something that has come right out of His own anguish and passion; something born out of His Cross. The Arm of the Lord is inseparably bound up with that.

I am sure you recognise, then, how important it is that you and I should be a part of that. I say, 'a part of that', advisedly. There is always a danger that we may make things too personal - in this sense, that very often we are not so happy to be a part of something larger; we want attention to focus down upon ourselves: if it focuses down on us we are happy! To have to say: 'I'm just a part of something more; I am only a bit of something' - well, that is not very interesting! Ah, but the Arm of the Lord is bound up with the larger thing, of which we are perhaps only small bits, and we come into the value of the Arm of the Lord as parts of that whole. For instance, if the Arm of the Lord is with a local company, we shall only find the Arm of the Lord for ourselves as we are really integrated into that local company. If we take an independent and personal line we may not find the Arm of the Lord; the Lord will not stand by us on that ground at all. It is a very important thing that we should let go our own independence and individualism (though not, of course, our individuality) into that in which the Lord is finding His fullest interest and concern. We should live for that, for it is there that we shall find the Arm of the Lord.

**Related (3) To the Vindication of God's Son**

And finally, for the moment, the Arm of the Lord, with all that it means, is inseparably bound up with the vindication of His Son. That is a test of our lives! Paul said: "For me to live is Christ", and God has vindicated Paul. What enemies he had in his own life-time, and how many more he has had since, and still has! I think nothing has been left untried in efforts to discredit the Apostle Paul; but he has a greater place today than he has ever had in history. The Arm of the Lord is with that man! Why? Because for him to live was Christ. He had one all-absorbing concern - the vindication of God's Son. Read again Paul's sad, bitter words about his earlier life against the Lord Jesus. Again and again he tells us of what he did: how he persecuted the Church, how he hauled men and women to prison; but now his whole being, to the last ounce of his strength, is set upon vindicating the One whom he persecuted, and God is with him.

Remember that! A life really poured out for the vindication of God's Son will have God with it. If we are serving ourselves, or some piece of work, trying to make something go and be successful, God may leave us to carry the whole responsibility, and all the troubles associated with it. But let us have a passion for the honour, the glory, the Name of His Son, and God will take care of the rest.

"To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" These are a few of the things which answer the question. We shall find that Arm revealed on the ground of the Cross, on the ground of the Name, and on the ground of the Glory of the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 3 - The Ground of the Revealing of the Arm

**In this fifty-third chapter of Isaiah (with which we include the last three verses of chapter 52), we believe there are to be found certain Divine thoughts, Divine laws, Divine principles, of abiding and universal application, upon which the Arm of the Lord can be revealed. We continue our investigation to discover what these Divine thoughts are. There are certain things which lie clearly upon the surface, as we have the record before us.**

Man's Attitude to the Servant

**First of all, one thing which is very apparent is the difference between the attitude of man and the attitude of God to this suffering Servant of the Lord. These two attitudes are very clearly defined, and represent two entirely different realms. What is said as to the attitude or judgment of man concerning this One - 'My Servant' - falls into two parts: firstly, that of the Gentiles; secondly, that of Israel.**

(1) The Gentiles

**The reaction of the Gentiles, on hearing the report and receiving the description, is found in those last verses of chapter 52: *"Like as many were astonied at thee, (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men) so shall he startle"* (for that is the word, not 'sprinkle') *"many nations; 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."***

**The 'report' of Him (mentioned in the next verse, ch. 53:1) which has gone forth, has caused the nations and the kings to be startled. They shut their mouths in horrified consternation. The description produces an attitude of dumb amazement and incredulity. '*Who* has received the report?' Not these! They are incredulous - *this* could never be the Servant of the Lord! Such an one! 'Do you tell us that this is the servant of Jehovah? - that such a weakling stands within the pale of Divine approval? Never!' They shut their mouths; their jaws are fixed. That is the Gentile reaction.**

(2) Israel ***(a) As to His Life***

**What is the attitude of Israel? His whole career is here brought before us. First of all, as to His birth and youth, He is described as "a root out of a dry ground". There was a sense in which this was a true description, for the seed of David had seemed to have become very dry; and yet the nation is discrediting Him in this way. "When we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him". There is no shining glory or splendour perceptible in His coming into this world. Who is He, after all? Where did He come from? Of course we know more, but you must remember that Matthew and Luke wrote their records of His birth long years after He had gone to glory. They had set themselves with pains to trace His ancestry, and to find out all the circumstances of His birth, and we have them in their Gospel narratives. But these were not common knowledge in Israel. "Search", they said, "and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52). "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). No, there was no carry-over of human glories and grandeurs into this life naturally; He was born with no human prestige. As to His life - well, in the description here, there are more negative things than positive; there are more handicaps than advantages. He had "no form", He had no "comeliness"; He had "no beauty that we should desire him". We must not attempt mental pictures of the appearance of the Lord Jesus, but this is how *they* looked upon Him. He had a heritage of woes - "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief". In His life, linked as it was with the tragedies of human inheritance and experience, there were only sorrows, griefs and woes - that is how they viewed it; that was man's judgment. In their view there was not one positive factor about Him that would attest Him as the chosen and anointed Servant of the Lord, the Redeemer and Messiah.**

***(b) As to His Death***

**What is Israel's judgment on receiving the 'report' of His death? How does Israel look upon Him? "A root out of a dry ground". There is nothing beautiful or attractive about that: it is the sort of thing that you might find in the way and kick out of your path. That is their estimate of it. "Despised and rejected" - that is Israel's judgment. "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". 'Tell us that is the Messiah! Tell us that is the Anointed of the Lord! Tell us that is the Servant of Jehovah! Tell us that is the Redeemer of Israel! No, never, a thousand times never!' "As one from whom men hide their face he was despised, and we esteemed him not." It is not difficult to visualise the gestures, the attitudes, the looks on these faces. "We did esteem him smitten of God..." ('Smitten of God! *That* is the meaning of His Cross - He deserved it! God has smitten Him!') "...smitten of God, and afflicted." 'God has put upon Him the judgment which He deserved and earned.' "They made his grave with the wicked" - that is, no doubt, what would have happened, had Joseph of Arimathaea not intervened and begged His body from Pilate. He would have been flung into the common grave with the malefactors.**

**What a full description there is of His death! "He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth." He was like something for the slaughter - terrible, horrible word! Slaughter! "Smitten of God" - that was the interpretation of the Cross. "From... judgment he was taken away". The fact was that at that time the judgment was being exercised by Him over His oppressors: but their view was, 'He is rightly deprived of judgment; all his franchise is removed, all His rights are eliminated, and deservedly so.' "He was cut off out of the land of the living": 'God has just cut Him off - God has done it!' This is the judgment of Israel, the judgment of man. Man's judgment of Divine things, Divine Persons and Divine works, is based entirely upon objective consideration, without any knowledge of inward reality.**

Why These Strange Ways of God?

**Now, when we take all these reactions together, we find ourselves in the presence of the deep ways of God as He moves toward revealing His Arm. How deep are His ways! how mysterious! how past finding out! And oh, how startling, when you begin to recognise them! As we consider this interpretation and judgment of the human mind, the mind of this world about this One whom we know to be the Divine Son of God, the Redeemer of men, we have to recognise that these are the profound ways of God, as He is moving - moving steadily, moving with determination, moving resolutely - toward the point of revealing His Arm. Is it not tremendous, that this should be His way?**

Now, two questions arise here. First, why this universal reaction of the world of men to this Servant of Jehovah? From our standpoint, as Christians, it is an astonishing thing that such judgments and reactions should be possible on the part of men universally, but we know they were there, for a fact. What is more, we know that they are still a fact. The mind of this world sees nothing desirable in this Crucified One.

Second - and this question perhaps goes even nearer to the heart and root of the whole matter: Why this deliberate method of God, making this reaction on the part of man inevitable? It is such a strange thing. It seems as though God has gone out of His way to produce such a reaction from man. Why did not God give One "altogether lovely", whom all would appreciate; One who would stand in a position of acceptance with all men at first sight? Why did He not bring Him into the world in state, in grandeur, in glory? Why was He not at the beginning embellished with all the signs of Heaven, for all men to see? Why did God deliberately, it would seem, take a line that would produce reactions of this kind? They would be inevitable. Draw this picture, as it is drawn by Isaiah: "his visage... marred more than any man" - distorted "more than the sons of men", and all the other details - and then hold it up and say, 'That is your Redeemer!' It would seem that God has deliberately taken a course to upset and to scandalize.

*And so He did!* But why? **Because of Man's False Standard of Values**

We are getting very near now to the real point. *Man's standard of values is an entirely false one,* and God knows it. It is utterly, utterly false - because it is the result of man's pride. It is offended pride, is it not, that speaks like this: 'Tell us that we have got to come down to that! That we have got to accept *that* for our salvation! That we have got to condescend to that level! No, never! It is contrary to human nature!' Yes, it is, because human nature has an utterly false standard of values, produced by man's pride. So the idea of the Suffering Servant is an affront to human pride, an offence and a scandal to man's standard of things. For this very reason, neither Jew nor Gentile would receive the report - pride would not allow it. We sing:

'When I survey the wondrous Cross I... pour contempt on all my pride.' That ought to be the effect of the Cross. But no. Man being what he is, his pride will not accept that; and therefore 'He is despised, rejected'; 'He has no beauty that we should desire Him.'

The Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ represents the deep undercutting of all false glory. It goes right to the very root of man's self-esteem and self-importance. It goes to the very root of life that is based upon man's own prestige and value. Even though, from this world's standpoint and by this world's standards, a man may be something and have something; even if, by birth, or by acquisition, by his brains or his cleverness, by his hard work or study, he may have acquired some position, some glory, some success, some prestige: if you or I base our life, before God, upon anything like that, we are numbered with those here who are in absolute contradiction to the Divine standard of values.

**Man's Pride Emptied by the Cross**

The fact is that, when we come to the Cross, even our rightful glories, as this world regards them, are going to be emptied out - just poured down the drain. Look at Saul of Tarsus - had he something to glory in? He tells us of all his advantages by ancestry, by birth, by upbringing and by training, by acquisition and by success. He had climbed to the top of the ladder. What did he think of it when he came into the presence of the Cross of the Lord Jesus? He called it just 'refuse'! For him, life was not based upon that at all. He knew quite well that that was out of the Divine court as the basis of any standing with God. And if you or I are coming into the 'fellowship of God's Son' - God's Servant - in heart, in spirit, in truth, that is the way all our natural values will go. We are destined to come to the place where everything that we have, whether from before birth, or at birth, or since birth, as something that we might glory in, will become nothing to us. We shall see that that thing always contains a threat to our spiritual life, if we are not very careful.

I am speaking, of course, about *basing our life before God* upon that sort of thing. I am not saying that there are no values in those things; but if we should begin to bring them into the presence of God, and to calculate with them, and make something of them, it is clear, is it not, in whose company we find ourselves? We do not come into account with God; God has discredited all human pride. In the Cross of the Lord Jesus, He has utterly undercut all man's glory. The picture that is painted here of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, with all the agony, all the distortion, all that is so terrible, is a portrait of what sin does - what pride does - in the eyes of God. That is how God views man. These people who would not receive the report, because of pride, are here depicted as they are in the sight of God, in the person of that Man hanging on the Cross. He bore *our* sins, *our* iniquities, *our* transgressions; all that we are was put upon Him. That is how we are in God's sight. He was not brought into that position because it was true of Him, but because it was true of *us*; that is the whole argument of the chapter.

But it is not only life based upon things that in their own realm are legitimate and true, upon merits and values either inherited or acquired, that has no standing with God, but life based upon *assumed* importance. This may be more subtle, and it is certainly more terrible: when a person, who has no natural rights to be anything, begins to assume that he is something, to display self-importance, to take position and strut about in the very house of God. How contrary to the spirit of this Servant of the Lord! "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard" (Is. 42:2). There is nothing about Him that is assertive, loud, noisy. Yet people can assume positions, even in the very house of God, making themselves noisy and assertive, drawing attention to themselves. This is something that is very horrible to God.

The Psalmist says: "Thou desirest *truth* in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6). What is *true* of us, after all? What is true of you, what is true of me, before God? For it is before God that things are weighed rightly (1 Sam. 2:3). The Apostle said: "Love... is not puffed up" (1 Cor. 13:4). What a phrase, 'puffed up'; - full of air and nothing else! Love is not 'puffed up'; there can be no inflation of man in the presence of God. When we come into the presence of God, we become completely deflated. It always was so - "When I saw Him, I fell on my face" (Ezek. 1:28; Dan. 8:17; Rev. 1:17).

So we see man's standard of values, and God's in contrast. What a difference! This disfigured, marred Servant is God's way of showing us what we are in His sight. There is something very deep in the ways of God. Man has ever, since the day of the Fall, sought to draw attention to himself, to be something in himself, to have glory for himself; and at the heart of the whole thing was pride. It brought Satan from his high estate, and it brought man from his. And God has repudiated the whole thing in the Cross of the Lord Jesus. "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Not to anybody who has anything of that about him. Here are your principles of Divine committal. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit" (Is. 56:2). "The haughty he knoweth from afar" (Ps. 138:6). "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination unto the Lord" (Prov. 16:5).

On the one side, therefore, the Cross of the Lord Jesus is the undercutting of all our pride, all our self-importance; of life based upon a false standard of values. But on the other side, the Cross is the uncovering of that which is God's standard of values. What is His standard?

**God's Standard of Values**
Paul's Letter to the Philippians is the great letter of the Cross, is it not? The second chapter of that letter is the most perfect complement to Isaiah 53. Listen to how this part of the letter begins:

*"If there is therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself".*

What a challenge! Would that not undercut all our criticism, even of those in whom we feel we have something to criticize? That brother, that sister, may have some very glaring faults - but, God only knows, I may have very much worse!

*"Each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you"* - notice how frequently this word 'mind' occurs *- "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be held on to, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondslave, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross".*

This is the complement, I said, of Isaiah 53. What immediately follows is the complement of the end of Isaiah 52 ("My servant... shall be very high"):
*"Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name..."*

What is the basis of the Arm of the Lord being revealed? To whom...? To these, to these, described or addressed in this second chapter of the letter to the Philippians. When you pass into the third chapter, you find a list of those things in which man glories, of which man takes account, on which man builds, as exemplified in the past life of Paul. But God did not at that time look toward him in this way of approval and blessing; He did not say, 'I will stand by that man.' He first met him and laid him low in the dust, broke him and shattered him; and then, afterward, He lifted him up. The principle is so clear. *The chief evil with God is pride! The chief virtue with God is meekness!* So this is but a confirmation of what we have in this great chapter in Isaiah. To whom will the Arm of the Lord be revealed? To this One, and to those like Him - to those who are of 'this mind that was in Christ Jesus.'

But are we not ever more and more amazed, when we think of this Servant of the Lord - knowing beforehand, as He did, what He was going to experience and suffer, and all that it was going to mean
- being willing to take that course, in order to redeem us from our pride - the *iniquity* of our pride? The root of that word 'iniquity' in the Hebrew means 'perversity'. It was in order to deliver us from that perversity - really an inward alliance with Satan, in his pride of heart - that the Servant of the Lord went down to the depths of degradation! This gives us a true estimate of pride: we see what pride is in the eyes of God, as well as man's utterly false standard of values. And surely there opens up to our eyes the infinite value of self-emptiness, of 'having no confidence in the flesh' (Phil. 3:3), of the "meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet. 3:4).

So then, if we want the Arm of the Lord *for* us, and not against us; if we want its girding, its support, its strength, in our lives, in our fellowships, our assemblies, and in our service - this is the ground. Nothing that is a contradiction to this will find that Arm lifted up on our behalf. He will leave us to wallow in the mire of our own creating, until, at the Cross, we are prepared to 'pour contempt on all our pride', and to find what it means to be 'dead to all the world' - most particularly the world of our own hearts.

Chapter 4 - The Cross

**Most of us, as the Lord's people, would probably agree that there is at the present day a very great need for the Lord to show His power. That might be a personal confession: we would each say, individually, 'There is a great need for the Lord to do something in my life - to do some new thing, some mighty thing, in me personally, and perhaps in my ministry.' Further, many of us would confess that such a need exists in the circle of believers with whom we are connected and related - a need for the Lord to move in power in a new way. But could we not widen the field to the farthest limit, and say that there is a very great need for the Lord to do something mighty in the whole Church and in the whole world?**

**To whom, then, is the Arm of the Lord revealed in this way? Before going further with that matter, let me present a hypothetical situation.**An Imaginary Situation

**Suppose that a very complicated and serious malady has afflicted a patient - let that patient be ourselves, or a company, or the Church, or the world - and a doctor is consulted, who, after serious and careful consideration, with some considerable experience and knowledge, and no small amount of good authority, comes to a quite definite conclusion about this matter, and says he knows he has the remedy. He has no question about it at all. But certain factors present him with considerable difficulty in his desire to help.**

**Firstly, he has to explain that his remedy is not going to be pleasant - indeed, it is going to be painful; it will go against all the predisposition of the patient; and it will demand real co-operation and persistence, perhaps over an extended period, calling for much patience and faith. Then, he meets another thing. The patient has heard about the remedy before, perhaps many times, and the reaction is: 'I have heard such a lot about that cure; there has been so much talk about it. I think you are a onetrack man, who has nothing but that one thing; perhaps you are even a crank. Can't you vary it a bit? Can't you introduce some other line a little more palatable? Must we be tied down to this one course?' A further objection is: 'You know, this is not a very popular thing. Public opinion has got criticisms about this; there are many different minds on the matter.'**

**These are things with which he is confronted. What should he do? Should he give way to these deterring factors, and abandon the case, or should he get on with the job? Let us look at the matter from another angle - from the standpoint of the patient. What should be the logical attitude of the patient in this matter? Should it not be - 'Well, the situation is serious, there is no doubt about that, and it is very complicated. What are the alternatives? Do I know of any alternatives? Are there prospects or ways and means in other directions? Ought I not to be fair and honest, and give this a thorough trial? Do I sense the seriousness of my condition sufficiently to make me brush aside all public opinion, all personal feelings and reactions, likes and dislikes, and really give myself to this matter?'**

**Now, that is exactly the position in which we are. The great need in the spiritual life of God's people is widely acknowledged. And yet there are all these arguments flying about: that there is so much talk about this particular thing - we have heard it again and again; that public opinion is so greatly divided on this matter; and that this is something that goes altogether against our grain. But does not the crux of the matter lie, firstly, in whether we realise that the situation is serious enough to warrant our brushing aside all secondary considerations, and really giving the remedy a thorough chance and test; and, secondly, in whether we have any alternatives - whether there are prospects of this whole thing being bettered along any line other than this?**

The Only Remedy

**Of course, you are saying: What is the line? what is the remedy? what is it that you are talking about? Perhaps you have already drawn your conclusion. The remedy, the only remedy, but the sure remedy, for the whole of our spiritual maladies, is the Cross - the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not pleasant to our flesh, it runs counter to all our likes and predispositions; it is not popular; Christian opinion is greatly divided on this matter of the work of the Cross. And so on... But, after all, we are left with our condition; we are left with our need; we are left with the situation; and whether you realise it or not, the situation in Christianity, amongst Christians, is a very critical one. Take, for instance, the whole matter of divisions amongst the Lord's people. It is a blight; it is an evil thing; it is the working of a deep-seated disease; it is undermining the constitution of the whole Church of God. So we could go round the need, facing it from many standpoints; and we should find that, without exaggeration, the situation is a serious one.**

**The Word of God offers us this one remedy. It is fully and thoroughly documented; it has the most established authority behind it. Again and again, both in individual life and in collective life, it has proved itself to be the answer. The Word of God offers us no alternative, no prospect along any other line. The Cross is the answer.**

**Let us look again for a moment at the prophecies of Isaiah. This section that we have been considering, from verse 13 of chapter 52 to the end of chapter 53, shows the Cross to be *the* remedy for a many-sided and most complicated situation in this world. You see here all the things that go to make up the situation. Sin! sin! "He bare the sin of many" - the word there is 'error', 'failure'. Transgressions! - a stronger word still, meaning 'rebellions' - "He was wounded for our transgressions". Iniquity! - which means 'our perversity' - "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Errors and failures and rebellions and perversities - these are the beginning of the malady. Sicknesses, griefs, sorrows - so you can fill in more and more details of the case from the words of this chapter; and when you put them all together, you say: 'That patient is in a very poor state; that indeed is a serious outlook!' And the chapter as a whole has just one object: to show that the Cross of the Lord Jesus is the remedy for it all, the answer to it all. The whole thing is dealt with and cleared up by the Cross.**

The Exaltation and Vindication of Christ

**But here we must stand back for a moment to take account of two things. At this point a question is asked, "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" and then the rest of the chapter is the answer to that question. That Arm of the Lord is God coming into this situation, coming in with skill, with power, with wisdom, with ability, to deal with it and to clear it up. And the chapter says that the Cross is the Arm of the Lord, coming in against this whole condition. The arm of the Lord is against this state of things. That is the first thing.**

**But there is something further. The arm of the Lord comes in with a new condition, a certain, clearlydefined end in view, which is nothing less than the exaltation and vindication of Jesus Christ. That is our second thing. The Arm of the Lord is for that, but His exaltation and vindication demand that the Cross shall clear up this situation. Of course that gathers the New Testament into it: it was because the situation *was* cleared up at Calvary that Jesus was exalted and vindicated. Note that the exaltation and vindication of Christ is in power and posterity. Those two things bound this section. Right at the beginning (52:13) we have: "My servant... shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." And then, towards the end of the section (53:10,11): "He shall see his seed... He shall see of the travail of his soul..." In power: "very high"; in posterity: "His seed" - in other words, His Church.**

**Now, that brings matters very closely home to us, because the first challenge of all this is as to our concern for Christ's exaltation, and Christ's vindication. That is the issue that is raised. Let us ask ourselves, individually, this question: 'How much am I, personally, really concerned for the exaltation and vindication of the Lord Jesus?' If you were asked this question, personally, in private conversation, I have no doubt you would say: 'I am very greatly concerned about it. Indeed, there is nothing that I would desire and work for more than for His exaltation and vindication. What greater thing have we to live for or work for than this?' You would say that, I am sure. But do we realise that the proof of our concern, and that which measures our concern, is our preparedness to accept the Cross? There is no way to the exaltation and vindication of the Lord Jesus other than the way of the Cross. We shall prove whether we really are concerned, and, if so, how much we are concerned, by the extent to which we are prepared to accept in ourselves this work of the Cross, clearing up every situation that is dishonouring to the Lord.**

**The Cross the Only Way to This**

It is so easy for us to talk or preach about the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. His enthronement, His glorifying - it is wonderful to talk about these things; and of course, this Church of His, the Church of Christ, the Church which is His Body, is a very great thing - the great Masterpiece of God. Yes, we like to talk about it. But the test as to whether all this has a grip upon our inward life is just how much we will let the Cross work in us: for these great things - His exaltation and His Church - are not possible of realisation, except by the work of the Cross in believers.

This is a challenge which arises at once, and it is very searching. It will come to that, sooner or later, in any case, as we go on with the Lord. All our language, all our talk, and all our pretensions, will be challenged by this. The Lord will say: 'Yes - but are you prepared to allow the Cross to work in you in *this* particular matter, and in *that* - in that particular *relationship,* in this thing about *yourself,* and in that thing in your *connections?* Are you prepared to let the Cross deal with *those things*?' The answer to that will prove whether after all we have a concern for Christ's exaltation and vindication. Our concern for these will be shown in our estimate of, and our attitude toward, the Cross.

If, on the other hand, we take the line: 'Oh, we have heard so much about the Cross; it is this onetrack thing' - if we can take any such attitude as that, in any way to belittle the Cross, or make it something less than God has made it; if our attitude can be one which under-estimates the importance of the Cross: then that is proof that we have not yet become inwardly gripped by this concern for the exaltation of the Lord Jesus.

Do not forget that He Himself would never have been exalted, but for His Cross. There was that mighty "*Wherefore...*" Wherefore? "...Becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. *Wherefore...* God highly exalted him..." (Phil. 2:8,9). But for the Cross, He would never have been exalted; and, in principle, He never is exalted, except in so far as there is a work of the Cross in His people. It is so clear, is it not, that, if the Cross has not dealt with things in you and in me, the Lord Jesus cannot be glorified in our lives. And as for His Church - the Church would never have come into existence but for the Cross, and, but for the Cross, it can never have a present expression. Its beginning, its continuation, its growth, its consummation, are always by the law of the Cross; and every bit of addition to, or increase in, the Church, whether spiritually or numerically, is by means of the Cross. There is no other way. So it is a very real test and very real challenge to us.

**The Cross** ***Positive*, Not Negative**

Now here, again, the Spirit of God shows that God's ways and means are always positive and not negative. I want to say that with emphasis; let us underline it in our minds. God's ways are always constructive and not destructive; they are purposeful, and not just ends in themselves. And if God's inclusive, comprehensive means is the Cross, let it be understood, once and for ever, that by the Cross He is working to an end - a large end. The Cross is never intended to end with destruction; it is never intended to end with a negative. God is working for some great thing, and He uses the Cross in this positive way.

You see, the weakness in our apprehension of the Cross is largely due to a *mis*apprehension of the Cross. Our idea of the Cross is that it is destructive, it is negative, it is death. We revolt against that; we don't want to be always talked to about this death of the Cross - death, death, death. It is indeed possible so to preach the Cross as to bring in death; but that is a mis-preaching. That is not God's interpretation of the Cross at all. Let me repeat: the Holy Spirit here shows quite clearly that God's ways and means are always positive and not negative; they always have in view something more, and not something less; not an end, but a new fulness.

If only we could really grasp that, it would transfigure the Cross. When the Lord confronts us with the challenge, what do we do? We revolt, we draw back - we don't like it! Why? Simply because we have not seen that, in this application of the Cross, God is set upon securing something more in our lives - in our fellowships, in our companies, in His Church - something more than there has ever been before. That is God's law. God is not a negative God. Other gods are negative gods, but our God is not a negative god. He is not working to bring things to annihilation, He has very large purposes before Him in all His ways and in all His means.

What we really have to see is that, whatever the Cross may negative - and it will of course negative some things - it is God's most positive instrument for securing spiritual, heavenly, eternal values. The Cross is God's most positive instrument for securing the enlargement - not the annihilation - of *that which will abide for ever.* While it is true that the Cross, in the first place, does represent God's 'No', and that we cannot have God's 'Yes' - the Arm of the Lord - until we have accepted His 'No': yet once we are willing to come and accept God's 'No', then the way is clear for us to come right into His 'Yes'. And, mark you, God's Name is not 'No'! His Name is 'Yea and Amen' (2 Cor. 1:20) - He is "the God of Amen" (Is. 65:16) - the Positive, the 'Verily', the God of purpose.

So it is very necessary for us to move on to this settled basis, that God always comes in with a mind to create (or to recover), to build and to increase. If only we could believe that of the Lord - even in our most devastating times, when everything seems to be taken away, and all is stripped from us, when everything seems to be going, and we think we can see an end coming: if only we could believe then that God is working - not to bring values to an end, but to increase them! That must be our ground - that He is ploughing, He is digging, He intends a harvest; He intends something more. He knows why He is doing it in that way - we don't. But we can be sure of one thing: God is at work by the Cross to make things safe for Himself.

**The Cross Makes Things Safe for the Lord**

Now, just supposing the Arm of the Lord were revealed to you or to me; supposing the Arm of the Lord were revealed in the locality where we live, in the place of work where we are engaged, or in the company with which we are connected; supposing the Lord came out with His mighty arm, and showed that arm in prospering, in increasing: what would happen? Perhaps you will not agree with this, because you feel that it would not be true in your case; but that is just where our hearts are deceived. I can tell you what would happen. You and I would come into the picture; you and I would begin to strut about in this thing, now that it is growing and enlarging and prospering and becoming something to take note of. We should be walking round just like peacocks, with our tails all spread out; we should be metaphorically, if not literally, wearing a badge with 'Superintendent', or 'General Manager', or something like that, written large across it! We should begin to talk about the thing; and if people began to talk about us, how pleased we should be!

That is the infinite peril, and God will not run the risk of allowing that in something that is wholly of Himself. The Lord must make things safe for Himself, so that, if He does stretch out His mighty arm and do something, you and I will not begin to pocket the credit; we shall be a hidden and a covered people.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this. Has this not been perhaps one of the deepest underlying laws of the revealing of the Arm of the Lord through the whole course of Christianity? Why was there that growth, that expansion, at the beginning, which has never been paralleled through the centuries since? Because the Church was stripped and peeled and emptied, broken and battered and bruised and persecuted, because it preached Christ crucified as the wisdom of God and the power of God - and the world would not have it. The Arm of the Lord was revealed to that. The Church was not trying to avoid the offence of the Cross in order to find a place in this world. No, it preached the Cross; it was not ashamed to preach Christ crucified. It cost everything - but the Arm of the Lord was revealed.

What a tremendous lesson for us!

We are brought back to this chapter in Isaiah. This chapter, which is the quintessence of the New Testament and of all God's ways, shows that the Arm of the Lord is revealed to that humbled, emptied, despised, broken and crucified Servant. It is an abiding law. Let there be no mistake about it
- if you and I have an assertive spirit, a self-confident spirit, a 'managerial' spirit, or anything like that, the Arm of the Lord will not be revealed. But if we find that He is stripping, emptying and pouring out, seeming to bring to nought, we may be sure He is doing it to make things safe for Him to stretch out His arm. Do you believe that? I say again - He is the God of the positive and not of the negative; He will stretch out His arm if only He is allowed to complete, to perfect, that work of undercutting everything that would take glory from Himself. You and I do not know how much there is in us of that kind, do we? We think we have just about touched bottom, we have come to the end; there is nothing left in us. But what would happen if the whole situation suddenly changed - took the upward road, and began to enlarge? *We* should come in again - our inveterate flesh would at once begin to assert itself! The Cross is the great clearing instrument; it is the only way of the glory.

**The Central Place of the Cross**

Now, I want you to note what a wonderful place this chapter occupies in Isaiah. You will recall the analysis of these prophecies. The first thirty-five chapters are occupied with a wide sweep of judgments, beginning, as always - note that - with the people of God. That is a Divine law: how can He judge the world until He has judged His own people? Chapters 36 to 39 form a short interlude dealing with Hezekiah; and then the final section, chapters 40 to 66, is occupied with restoration and rebuilding. Now, midway in the last section, which has twenty-six chapters, and is occupied with the new prospect, with recovery and rebuilding, comes this chapter 53. Is that not significant? It gives the Cross the central place in building, in recovery; and that is always true, is it not? But perhaps you might react, and say, 'Isaiah is ancient history - far away and long ago!' I would therefore like to put in here a long parenthesis.

This whole sequence that we have just considered is carried right into the dispensation in which you and I are living. It is brought in, or introduced, in Paul's letter to the Romans; and (as we shall see in the next chapter) it is completed in that same Apostle's first letter to the Corinthians. You remember the letter to the Romans. The first section opens up the sweep of Divine judgment over the whole race of Adam; it is God's 'No'. It leads up to the focal point of chapter 6: the Cross. That chapter is placed over against the whole situation which has gone before, declaring that the Cross says for ever 'No' to all that. But when we pass from chapter 6, through chapter 7, into chapter 8, we find we are moving out of that old situation into a new, from the negative to the positive. In chapter 8 we come into an altogether new prospect, an altogether new opening up. "There is therefore now no condemnation..." All that which was condemned has been dealt with in the Cross. We are "in Christ Jesus"; and 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death'.

This new and wonderful prospect, then, is in view. What does it amount to? It says this: God, who ever had in view the building of His wonderful and glorious Church, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing", looked at the situation among men, in order to find that which would serve as a foundation for His building. But what did He find? He found the state of things that is described in those early chapters of the letter to the Romans. What a description it is - the sin, the corruption, the tangles, the complication - a hopeless picture of human depravity. That is what He found when He came to lay a foundation for His glorious Church, and He said: 'I cannot put a foundation on that; I cannot found My Church upon that. I must clear the ground, clean up this whole situation, burn it in fire' - and so the Cross did that. The Cross, in the intense fires of judgment, like the mighty Brazen Altar, dealt with that twisted, distorted tangle of human nature. Now God has His foundation - Christ crucified. Now He can proceed to build His Church.

This is the interpretation of the Cross. It is God's means of getting rid of everything that makes it impossible for Him to do what He wants to do, to carry out what He has in mind. He has a mighty purpose in view, but He finds things in the way, and He says: 'These must be dealt with.'

Let us, however, in closing this chapter, return to the positive note again. When we hear the phrase, 'The Cross', let us guard our minds against that sudden uprising - 'Oh, the Cross again, the Cross again, the Cross! It is all death, it is all crucifixion, it is all negative!' That suggestion must be resolutely refused - it is Satan's twist given to God's most wonderful instrument for realising His glorious purpose. When we hear 'The Cross', let us say: 'Ah, that means prospect! That means a clearing of the way; that means something more, not less; that means that God's Arm is going to be revealed!' Let us join with Paul in saying: 'God forbid that I should glory in anything, *save* in the Cross...' (Gal. 6:14).

Chapter 5 - Building Upon God's Foundation

**We have seen that, with chapter 54 of Isaiah's prophecies, there commences a movement of God toward recovery and rebuilding. The Cross has cleared the way for this new prospect. From chapter 54 onwards, a number of bright, hopeful notes are struck. For instance, at the beginning of chapter 60:**

***"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."***

**The way having been opened, the ground cleared, and the foundation laid by the Cross, the Lord is facing the whole matter of the recovery, restoration, and rebuilding of His people. There is a new prospect, a new hope, a new message of encouragement. But, with it, a new note is struck. In these later chapters of Isaiah, there are both lights and shades in this new prospect. The sun shines: "Thy light is come... the glory of the Lord is risen" - it is like the sun rising on an early summer day; and then it is as if a heavy cloud comes over the face of the sun. It may be only passing over, it may be only temporary, but you wonder whether the whole prospect is going to change; whether the bright time is passing, if that is the end.**

**It is just like that in these later chapters of Isaiah. The sun - the glory of the Lord - has risen; there is a bright prospect; but then, here and there, you come on darker things, such as chapter 58, beginning: *"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto my people their transgression..."***

**From time to time there are these dark clouds, that seem to pass over the face of the sun, even in the presence of this new prospect; and they bring to the heart a feeling of uncertainty. Is this 'radiant morn' too soon to pass away? We are conscious of mixed feelings: we do not yet feel assured that all is going to follow through on this new prospect, to work out according to the seeming promise.**

**From the Lord's side, of course, there is no question: the Lord has for Himself His new ground, and He shows Himself as One who means to be positive. *He* is not of two minds , there is no shadow cast by His turning or changing. Everything from the Lord's side shows Him to be One who is out for something - really after a new day, a new situation. Yes: for His part, the Lord is positive.**

A Check on the Arm of the Lord

**But it would seem that He is having to go carefully. He wants to go right out, to have no reserves, but... but... there seems to be something that is still holding His Arm in check; He just cannot go right ahead, as He indicates He would do. The old ground has suffered a fiery purging in the Cross; all that stubble, all that tangle and network of thorns and briars, has been dealt with by the fires. He has come in and got His foundation: but... there seems still to be a question. You cannot read through these chapters without feeling: 'We are not through this business yet; we are not right out on the other side; we are not sure how it is going to work out yet.' The Lord is pretty sure; the Lord is encouraging; the Lord is saying that, as for Himself, *He* is not holding back for any reason from *His* side; but there is something that He is encountering.**

**Let me put it like this. The ground has been cleared, and the foundation has been laid; but now comes the question: What is going to be built upon that foundation? And that is just where the uncertainty comes in, not as to the foundation, for that is settled in the Cross - but as to the superstructure: what is going to be imposed *upon* the foundation? The Lord is not sure what His people are going to put upon *His* foundation.**

**So far as the Old Testament is concerned, the more immediate answer to the question as to the new building on that new ground is found in what we call the post-exilic prophets, the prophets after the Exile - Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi. We see there what the people would put upon the foundation; the new building, 'of what sort it was'. But if you should raise the objection, again, that that is 'Old Testament', let me remind you that I said in the previous chapter that the counterpart of this can be found in the New Testament, in our very own dispensation. We saw that Isaiah 53 finds its parallel in the letter to the Romans, where the Cross encounters all the rubbish and evil and tangle, deals with it in fiery judgment, and clears the ground for a new prospect. That new prospect is brought into view in chapter 8 of Romans; God has now got His foundation. But what is the counterpart of these later chapters of Isaiah?**

Right and Wrong Building Illustrated in 1 Corinthians

**The counterpart - so patent as you look at it - is in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Writing of his first arrival in Corinth, the Apostle said: "When I came unto you... I determined" - the language is: 'I deliberately made up my mind' "not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1,2). The foundation has been laid: "As a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation" (3:10), and the foundation is Christ crucified. The Cross, as Paul so clearly sets forth in his letter to the Romans, has provided the foundation; and that foundation has been laid in Corinth. But as you read on in this verse (3:10), your heart almost stands still. You hear Paul saying: "I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon." He shows that it is possible to build on this, either "wood, hay, stubble", or "gold, silver, costly stones"; and that every man's work is going to be tried by fire, to discover what sort it is. If any man's work is burnt up - what happens? Well, "he himself shall be saved" - he will just get in - "yet so as through fire"; he will have lost everything.**

**So there comes this very big question: What are you going to put upon that foundation? what are you going to superimpose upon that ground of the Cross? Are you going to bring back things that are absolutely contradictory to the Cross? If so, you see what happens.**

**Now in this first letter to the Corinthians there is much about building, in many connections. It is perhaps a little unfortunate that, in a number of passages in the New Testament, and consistently throughout the letters to the Corinthians, the original words for 'build' and 'building' have been rendered 'edify' and 'edification' - although the Revised Version often gives 'build' or 'build up' in the margin, and the compound verb, 'build upon', is usually - for example in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 translated thus. But during the 300 years since our Authorised Version was made, the word 'edify' has lost some of its force, and present-day usage might tend to give us the idea of the acquisition of head-knowledge, which of course is not Paul's meaning at all. The root meaning of the word survives in our word 'edifice', and Paul is all the time talking about spiritual *building* the building up of true spiritual character.**

I would suggest to you that you should follow through the nine occasions in this first letter where the words 'edify' or 'edification' are used. The whole matter of spiritual gifts, for instance, is summed up in that one word - Do they build up? If they do not, they are of no value in the purpose of God; they can be ruled out; they have missed their point - for even Divine gifts can miss the point or be sidetracked; we shall have to touch on that again. It is the spiritually constructive side of things which receives such emphasis in this first letter to the Corinthians. The foundation - Christ crucified - is laid. Now for the building!

**What God Will** ***Not*** **Allow on His Foundation**

And, when you come to the building, a real battle starts up. The question is: What is God going to *allow* to be put on His foundation? For right through this letter we find a long series of 'No's' - things to which God says: 'No, not *that* on My foundation, please; I have no place for that. You may spend your whole life on that, but it will all go up in smoke. It is not suitable to My foundation; it is not according to the Cross of the Lord Jesus.'

Now, it would take a long time to consider all the things in this letter to which God says: 'No'. We will just touch on two or three, as representative of much more. As we read the letter, with this in mind - Will God allow anything like that to be put on His foundation? - and as we see the answer, surely our reaction must be: Very well, let us have the Cross deal with that immediately. We don't want that to be held over until it is too late, and we just scramble into Heaven, without anything that we can take with us of a lifework - for that is the issue. We don't want to postpone or refuse the operation of the Cross until it is too late to save our life-work, to save the fruit of all our energies.

**(1) Carnality**

We begin with chapter 3: *"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not yet able to bear it: nay, not even now are ye able; for ye are yet carnal: FOR"* - this is the description of carnality - "*for whereas there is among you* *JEALOUSY..."* Let us weigh it, even if it be to our own judgment and condemnation; it is better that the Cross come right in now. 'There is jealousy among you'? God says 'No' to that: 'I cannot have that on My foundation. My foundation is the Cross, and it says No to that.'

Paul continues: *"There is among you jealousy AND STRIFE..."* Strife! We must think this through and face it honestly. It may seem very elementary, but we are not facing the world, the unconverted, here; we are right in the Church, amongst believers; we are dealing with those amongst whom God's foundation has been laid; with those who are "called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2); that is, who are regarded by God as His own people. Strife? God says 'No' to that on His foundation. Is that found among us? You know what is going to happen? Sooner or later, it is going to be exposed as wood, hay and stubble - that is the value of it - and it is going up in smoke.

*"Are ye not carnal, and walk after the manner of men?"* You are not allowed to walk after the manner of men on God's foundation - you are just not allowed. God says 'No' to "the manner of men" on His foundation. *"For when one saith, I am of... and another, I am of..."* Here we must fill in the appropriate names ourselves: names that are right up to date; names right in our own circle, in our own assembly; names of our own Christian world, or historic religious names. 'One says, I am of... and another, I am of...; and yet another, I am of...' They all express human partialities, human preferences, human likes and human dislikes, which produce divisions. God says: 'No, not on My foundation; that is not My Church, not My building. I never build with material like that, and neither may you. You may have a wonderful set-up - of your own making - with stuff of that kind: but it is all going up in smoke. However much you may have seemed to have, in the end you will have nothing.'

**(2) Worldly Wisdom**

And how much there is here in this early section about "the wisdom of the world" (1:20) - the wisdom of man, man's mind about things. God says: 'None of that on My foundation; there is no place at all for your mind on My foundation, there is only place for the mind of the Spirit.' If we have not got the mind of the Spirit, we have no right to be doing anything on God's foundation. But after all, are not these the very things, the very troubles, that are blighting Christianity today? They are! And do not let us think of Christianity in a detached, objective way. This comes very close to home. These very things may be causing mischief, even amongst ourselves: we may be bringing on to God's foundation a mind, a mentality, which is not the mentality of the Spirit. For that is what it amounts to
- a mentality. *"Who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God" (2:11).* These are two different mentalities, you see - the natural mind and the spiritual mind. God says: 'None of the natural mind or mentality at all on My foundation.'

Paul here calls this the 'world' coming in, and constructing something upon God's foundation; and God says: 'There is no place for the world in any form on My foundation.' If you look at it closely, you find that this searches out so much: the world's standards or judgments or values - how the world thinks, how the world does things. These Corinthians were trying to make an impression, and moreover by natural means. The Cross of Isaiah 53 is not a very 'impressive' thing, judged by worldly standards, is it? There is nothing there that would popularise the Gospel - rather does it cause offence.

**(3) Soulish Appeal**

Are you trying to make the work of God successful by an appeal to the natural man? Now, I hold no brief for ugliness or for crudeness; I believe that God is a God of beauty. But if we think we are going to make God's work successful or acceptable by display, by appeal to the soul of man artistically, aesthetically, and so on - we are on wrong lines. Let me put it another way: the source of any 'appeal', any 'impression', any 'grip', any 'overwhelming', must lie *essentially* and *only* in spiritual values, of an inward kind, not in what captivates or gratifies the natural fancies of people. The Arm of the Lord will not be revealed to the 'natural man' or to the 'world' in any way for its good; only against it.

As we move on in this letter, we find that the Cross touches so many other things. It touches our feelings - our natural emotions, our natural passions, there is much about that here. And, as with our mentality, so also with our emotions, the Lord says: 'None of that on My foundation, none whatever.' There is so much here to which the Cross says 'No', as to building. I invite you to look at it more closely; it is not my purpose to give an exposition of the letter to the Corinthians. I want to come to the positive side.

For there is a positive side to this letter. What is it that God says *may* be put on His foundation? It would be very pathetic, would it not, if the letter were all negative, all: No, no! never! Take note of that, because you may recall that I said, earlier, that you can never come into God's 'Yes' until you have accepted God's 'No'. But there is a very mighty 'Yes', in this letter. What is it? Perhaps we think we know it. Well, maybe we do know it, as to the words; but I suggest that we know practically nothing of the thing itself.

**Misapplied Spiritual Gifts**

Let us look, then, at Chapter 13. Here the Apostle writes off everything that is not spiritually constructive. It may have been something that God gave, but it has been taken hold of by man and used for man's satisfaction, gratification, pleasure, or even glory. The mentality and emotion of the natural man have been brought to bear upon Divine things - spiritual gifts, such as tongues, and so on
- and have robbed them of their value to build up, and made them just occasions for display. There has been glorying in these spiritual gifts. The Apostle here writes that all off, and says that they were never given for that; even though given of God, they amount to 'nothing' - that is the very word he uses here - when it comes to building. "If I... have not love, I am nothing." Paul dismisses these things; but notice that he is all the time reaching after the positive through the negative.

*"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal." Exeunt* spiritual gifts which have failed to fulfil their purpose in building the House of God. Let us not cling to anything that does not serve that purpose.

*"And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains..."* That is quite scriptural - that is what the Lord Jesus said: "if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove" (Matt. 17:20). That is perfectly scriptural; and yet you can be perfectly scriptural and have faith like that, and it can mean nothing. If it fails to build up the House of God, if it does not result in this scriptural structure, it becomes negative. *Exit* all knowledge of mysteries, and secret lore, and faith that removes mountains. 'Out you go if you do not build up! That is the value of you nothing!' "If I have all faith... but have not love, I am nothing". With all that, I am nothing!

*"And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned..."* If I am a philanthropist, and am most charitable, even sacrificial, in my giving; even if I am a martyr, and give my body to be burned; that can all be done without any constructive value in the building of the House of God. If I do all these things, *"but have not love, it profiteth me nothing".*

That, then, is the showing out of court of things - wonderful things in themselves - but which have failed to serve the purpose for which they were given, namely, 'spiritual building'. **What God** ***Will*** **Allow on His Foundation: Love** Now for the positive. Let us bring in that to which God says: Yes! He says 'No' to that, and to that, and to that; but now, where does His 'Yes' lie? Here it is *- Love!*

*"Love suffereth long..."* There were some who, because their rights were injured or taken from them, dragged their brethren before the magistrate, right away. *"Love suffereth long, and is kind..."* You may put that on the foundation; that is something constructive, is it not? *"Love envieth not..."* When you quietly work your way, like this, into and through every clause, do you not want to stop and say: 'Say no more - that finds me out too much'? But we must go on, for, after all, it is what God is calling for.

*"Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up..."* Go back to the beginning of chapter 8, and you will read this: "Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up". There is a great deal of difference between 'puffing up' and 'building up'. 'Love is not puffed up': there is nothing false, artificial, make-believe, pretend, about love. The false thing is like a rubber balloon: you can blow it up pretty big, but you have only to put the tiniest point of a needle in it - and where is it? It is gone. Paul says it is no use putting that on God's foundation.

*"Love... doth not behave itself unseemly..."* Unseemly behaviour: we could spend much time on that, could we not? Is this seemly? does it become a Christian? does it become the Lord Jesus? does it become that holy House of God? does it become the Cross of the Lord Jesus? Love is seemly; it does not behave itself unseemly. *"Love... seeketh not its own"* - does not want its own way, does not work to its own ends; does not draw to itself; *"is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth..."*

You may think that I am not saying very much, but I am saying a great deal. I would like to give you that passage in a translation which I think a classic:

*"I may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but if I have no love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal; I may prophesy, fathom all mysteries and secret lore, I may have such absolute faith that I can move hills from their place, but if I have no love, I count for nothing; I may distribute all I possess in charity, I may give up my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I make nothing of it. Love is very patient, very kind. Love knows no jealousy; love makes no parade, gives itself no airs, is never rude, never selfish, never irritated, never resentful; love is never glad when others go wrong, love is gladdened by goodness, always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best, always hopeful, always patient. Love never disappears."*

You may put that on the foundation, for God says *Yes* to all that. To whom is the Arm of the Lord revealed? To that; just to that.

There is a most pressing need that we should face this matter of what the Cross sets aside, and what the Cross brings in; what may be put on God's foundation, and what may not. It concerns every one of us quite seriously, as to what there will be at the end: not what there is now, however showy and popular, and however enjoying of man's approval and applause it may be. God is moving to build up: He shows what He cannot and will not use in His building, and then He says: *'This* is what I will use; *this* is the material for the building of My Church. This is what really builds: "*Love* buildeth up".'

May the Lord smite our hearts, if need be, to enlighten us as to what the real values are. Not even spiritual gifts are the real values, *unless* the effect of them is real spiritual increase amongst the believers. That is the test. It is not the things themselves, not their presence, not even the fact that the Lord gave them. The test of every gift is: Does it really build the Church? does it really build the House? is it really resulting in a larger measure of Christ?

For these things may be an obstruction to Christ. This letter to the Corinthians makes it so clear that the possession of spiritual gifts is no guarantee of spiritual maturity. Here you have the most immature of the churches - Paul says: 'I have fed you with milk; you are still babes' - and yet characterized by all these gifts. It is not that the gifts are wrong, but that they have been sidetracked; they have not served the purpose for which they were given - that is, bringing to the full measure of Christ. That is the object, and that object is only achieved by love.

May the Lord give us that kind of love! This is not natural love; this love springs out of the Cross. It is the love which comes right out of the work of the Cross *within us.* We cannot get it by striving after it; but, as the Cross does its work in our hearts and in our natures, it will rise and grow. The Lord increase our love!

Chapter 6 - Resurrection

**When we come to chapter 54 of the prophecies of Isaiah, we have what we may call a sample chapter of resurrection - a sample of the conditions which the Lord would have as characterizing His 'New Day'. We find in this chapter eight features, or characteristics, of the New Day; eight, as you know, being the number of resurrection. Let us cast our eye down the chapter, and note them briefly in order.**

**(1) In verse 1, we see the movement from barrenness to fruitfulness. *"Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord."***

**(2) Verses 2 and 3: from straitness to enlargement. *"Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not: lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt spread abroad on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall possess the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited."* How true that was of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus!**

**(3) Verses 4 and 5: from shame to honour. *"Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth..";* and so on.**

**(4) Verses 6 and 7: from forsakenness to fellowship. *"For the Lord hath called thee as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee."***

**(5) Verses 8 to 10: from wrath to mercy. *"In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy redeemer."* You see the look back to the Cross, in which all those things were true; but now it is resurrection, and they have passed. It is a mighty and wonderful change.**

**(6) Verses 11 and 12: from affliction and desolation, to comfort and glory. *"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will set thy stones in fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy border of pleasant stones."***

**(7) Verses 14 and 15: from oppression to security. *"In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they may gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall because of thee."***

**(8) Verses 16 and 17: from reproach to vindication. *"Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the fire of coals, and bringeth forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness which is of me, saith the Lord."***

**Is this not a wonderful sample of resurrection life, power and glory? As in other connections, so in this, we carry it all over from Old Testament history into New Testament, into this very dispensation in which we live - the Day of Resurrection. How true all this was - and is - of the Lord Jesus, in the first place. There had been the negative side - all the straitness of which He spoke: "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50); the stripping, the barrenness and desolation of the Cross; the shame and ignominy; the forsakenness, even of His own Father and God - the very wrath of God rested upon Him; He suffered affliction, oppression and reproach. All those things were true, as we saw in chapter 53. But now the whole scene has changed. What fruitfulness has taken the place of barrenness! Yes, the 'corn of wheat, falling into the ground and dying', has indeed borne very much fruit - fruit out of many nations. What a great joy it is to us to know, and in so many cases to know personally, something of the fruitfulness of His sufferings, in the 'seeing of His seed'. Out of barrenness into fruitfulness; out of His straitness, against which He groaned, into the great enlargement which has come to Him - and what enlargement! - out of shame into honour: multitudes and multitudes ever since, and multitudes today, all over the world, are just heaping honour upon Him. And so we could go on.**

**But you can see also how true this became of that little band of disciples. You can say that, at the time of the Cross, these negative and dark things were in a certain sense true of them. Yes, everything was gone, the trees were stripped bare; it was barrenness indeed. In their hearts they were saying: 'What has it all been for? It has all gone; we have lost everything.' But see the change from the Day of Pentecost onwards. From barrenness to fruitfulness- again you go through this list of characteristics - from straitness, as a little band, a little handful of men, hedged up in a few miles of Jerusalem, of Judaea, of Palestine, a little country - unto what? "Their sound", said Paul, "went out into all the earth,... unto the ends of the world" (Rom. 10:18). What enlargement! it was the lengthening of cords, the strengthening of stakes in resurrection. Their aloneness - the terrible loneliness that had come over them when He, as they thought, was dead - has given place to a marvellous fellowship, that is being established in relationship with an evergrowing company of fellow-believers. All these things came about: this wonderful change-over was true for the disciples.**

But does it stop there? No! The same thing became true in every new believer; and it has been true from then on until now. These are the things which are the characteristics of the true believer's life - a *believer's* life! If you are living on the other side of the Cross, or even if you are living in the day of His death, just living with Christ dead, these things are not true. But if we are living, as true believers should, on the ground of His resurrection, then all these things are true. It is a very blessed thing for us to be able to say, without any hesitation or reserve, that He has changed our life from barrenness to fruitfulness; from straitness to enlargement; from shame to honour; from forsakenness and aloneness to fellowship; and so on. This is the heritage of every true believer.

**Immediate Effects of Christ's Resurrection**

In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, there is struck and sounded forth this wonderful note - a new life, a new hope, a new assurance! We see it clearly in the New Testament. It is worth noting the marvellous effect that His appearances had upon the people concerned. As far as we can see, there were about ten appearances of the Lord after His resurrection. Five of them took place on one day, between sunrise and perhaps a little after sunset; the other five were scattered over a period, in different places. But it is most impressive, most instructive, to see the tremendous change that came over the people, and over the whole situation, between the time before He appeared, and the time He disappeared. Let us run through some of those appearances.

The first, undoubtedly, was with Mary Magdalene, who came early to the tomb, with spices, to anoint His body (Mark 16:9; John 20:1-18). What a poor, sad, desolate, empty sort of person she was that morning! What a plaintive note there is as she beholds Him without recognising Him, and takes Him for the gardener: 'Sir, if you have borne Him away, tell me where you have laid Him'. Jesus only speaks her name - "Mary" - and the whole situation is transformed, transfigured! She hurries from the tomb - hurries away to tell the disciples. It would seem, too, that there were other women nearby, and that, as they were going, she and they, to tell the disciples, Jesus met them on the way - another transforming scene and experience (Matt. 28:8-10; Mark 16:10,11).

And then, we are told, He appeared to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). It does not need very much imagination to picture what kind of Simon he was when Jesus appeared to him. He was not a very happy sort of man! If ever there was a man who felt he was bereft - bereft of everything, stripped, stark, alone, forsaken, and in utter despair - it must have been Simon Peter. And then Jesus appeared to him - gave him a private interview! Ah! that changed the whole situation, completely transformed the whole outlook for Simon.

Then there were the two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35; Mark 16:12,13). What sad, doleful, desolate men they were! As they walked those three miles, it must have seemed the longest three miles that two men had ever walked! But then Jesus appeared... Their eyes were opened, they saw... He went... and those three miles back were the shortest three miles that ever men had run! I don't know what their time was for the course! - but I am quite sure they were not conscious of those three miles. Distance and time lost all their meaning as they raced back, fleet of foot, to Jerusalem, to tell the others. And as they came in, before they could get out anything of what had happened to them, they were met with this from the other disciples: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon"! They were changed men, and it was a changed scene in Jerusalem into which they came.

And He appeared to the apostles themselves, and to James, and to "above five hundred brethren at once" (1 Cor. 15:6,7). His appearance - that is, His coming in resurrection - brought about a marvellous change on every occasion, in every situation. It represented a very real fulfilment of Isaiah 54 - Isaiah 54 is resurrection!

**Can This Be a Present-day Experience?**

Now, the big question that arises for us is: Have we any ground for believing that this can be our own up-to-date experience? And I want to say that the New Testament presents us with very solid ground for just that. We find very much, in the experiences of men and women after the Lord had gone to glory, that had this effect. I need only turn you to the book of the Acts, and remind you of that Ethiopian on his way home, disappointed and desolate, sorrowful and perplexed. Surely we may say that, through His servant Philip and through the word of Isaiah 53, the Risen Lord met that man. The whole scene was changed. The last thing we hear of him is: "he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). Here is a transfigured life, a transfigured situation, because one has come into touch with the Risen Lord. That incident is typical of the marvellous transformation that took place when the Spirit of the Lord touched people, came into their lives, came into their midst. They met sometimes in much perplexity and oppression, in much affliction and suffering with the threats of the rulers, and they went away changed people, full of joy, full of confidence.

Has the dispensation changed since the time of the Acts? That book has never had a conclusion; it is just broken off. The Holy Spirit never intended Luke to write the end of the story, because it had to go on and on and on to the end of the dispensation. What was true then is to be true in our experience now. Yes, we have plenty of ground and evidence for this. But then, you say, 'On what ground can this experience be mine?' If the Scripture gives that which justifies an expectation that it should be true in our case, if we really have it in the Word that it ought to be like that with us, then the question arises, 'How can this be true of me?' Let me therefore try to say, as concisely as possible, how it can be - how we really can know this.

**The Need for (1) A Positive Stand Upon the Ground of the Cross**

Firstly, we must take our stand most positively on that ground which God has provided for us through the Cross of the Lord Jesus. That is, we must appropriate all the values of Isaiah 53, as being provided for *us*. Isaiah 53 tells us all that has been done for us. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him". "He bare the sin of many". Our whole state and condition, under condemnation and judgment, was put on Him by God Himself. 'He, *He* made His soul an offering for sin.' That was on the Divine side. If you and I will still linger on the ground of question or doubt as to whether the Lord Jesus has done that, for us, as men and women, for our sins, past, present and future, there is no hope of this transforming experience of resurrection! If you are still nursing condemnation, still opening your heart or your mind to accusations, you are, in effect, denying the work of the Lord Jesus on the Cross, and God cannot show you His mighty arm.

"To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Never to the man or woman who brings in any question as to the work of the Lord Jesus in His Cross! Never! You must get right off that ground in every way. If you are so fond of doubting and questioning, if you will so tenaciously hold on to condemnation, can you not swing right over in the opposite direction, put all that capacity for doubting and unbelieving round the other way, and say about your condemnation: 'I don't believe it! Isaiah 53 says that He took all that for me: then I definitely do not believe, I will not believe - the Cross of the Lord Jesus forbids me to believe - that there is condemnation.' Yes, put your strong and mighty capacity for unbelieving the other way round - let it be converted! Put it over against all the work of the accusing spirits, the accusing conscience and the accusing heart. Meet the whole thing in reverse!

No, we shall never know this mighty, many-sided transformation and transfiguration of life, until we quite positively take our stand upon the values which we see secured for us in Isaiah 53. We shall once again, and in the simplicity of a beginner, have to sit down with that chapter, and, as has been so often said, put our own name in there: 'He was wounded for *my* transgressions; He was bruised for *my* iniquities; the chastisement of *my* peace was upon Him; with His stripes *I* am healed.' We shall never experience resurrection glory until we have our feet firmly planted on that ground. You see, it is *we ourselves* who constitute the ground of death: it is in us - it is not in Christ; we must therefore repudiate our own ground. We must say, when the Accuser would bring all our sins to remembrance: 'Yes, I know them well, and thousands more; but... there is One who died in my place.' Faith must credit God and Christ with the full meaning of the Cross.

**(2) A Positive Drawing Upon the Power of His Resurrection**

Next, we must take a positive attitude at all times to "the power of his resurrection" (Phil. 3:10) - the attitude of faith in 'God who raises the dead' (2 Cor. 1:9). We must really reckon upon that 'extra', and that 'other', which is represented by the power of His resurrection. It is all true - that this is this and that is that, and things are as they are; it is all true. We are not putting on blinkers, trying to make believe that we are not as bad as we are, or things are not as bad as they are: we know that they are just as bad as they can be, inside and out. *But...* there is something more than that - an altogether transcendent factor: and that is, the power of His resurrection. We must take a very positive attitude at all times toward that.

**(a) For Personal Life**

This means, in practical terms, a definite drawing upon His risen life. But it does not mean that we are thereby entitled to break the laws of God. For instance, if you speak at three or four or five meetings a day, for something like eleven weeks, without one day's rest, you are breaking the laws of God, and God will not protect you. That is exactly what I have known to happen. How long it takes us to learn these lessons - sometimes a whole lifetime! We get drawn out by need and appeal and so on. I believe the Lord is very sympathetic, but, nevertheless, He does not set aside His laws. So I have to say, that, while avoiding breaking Divine laws, the laws of nature, the laws of our bodies (and you can never speak of the laws of nature without meaning God, for the laws of nature are an expression of God, and God is Himself the supreme Law of Nature: that is not Pantheism, but it does mean that the laws of nature bring you right into touch with God) - I say, while not violating God in His laws, in the body and so on, we must deliberately at all times draw upon His resurrection life. We *must* do it; we must keep a tight hold, so to speak, on the risen life of the Lord, and draw upon it; make a very practical thing of it.

When I was a small boy, I remember my mother telling me something that has remained with me to this day. She was describing to me the death of my grandfather, an old man of eighty-four. She was sitting by his bed, holding his hand, as he was slowly, very slowly passing away. He had been a very strong man, physically, and this is what she told me. 'He had hold of my hand', she said, 'in a tremendous grip: I was praying for him, but he was gradually sinking away: but I felt as though he was drawing the very life out of me; I felt my very vitality being sapped; he was pulling something out of me, to hold on to life: and at last I could stand it no longer - I just had to wrench my hand out of his; and when I did so, he went.'

Well, I do not know how much scientific truth there is in that; but to me it is an illustration. We have literally got to draw on the vitality of our Lord. It is an attitude, a grip of faith: we must 'lay hold on life', as Paul said to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:12). It must be something that we *do.*

I fear we are far too indefinite in this matter of our relationship to our Risen Lord. We believe in the resurrection; we believe in resurrection life; and we believe that it is for us: but we are not definite enough about it. We must first ask ourselves: 'Do I need resurrection life? Am I in need of the power of His resurrection?' Of course, if you have no sense of need, you will not be definite about it, but if, in any way, you really feel your need of the power of His resurrection, that the Arm of the Lord should be revealed to you in that way, then ask yourself the further question: 'Are there any Scriptures, any statements in the Word of God, which justify me in believing that that life is for me?' Then, if you believe the answer to that to be in the affirmative, say to yourself: 'Let me get to the Word, and find out what it says about this; let me gather up, search out, all that the Word of God says about this matter of resurrection life - *for me!'*

Do it as an exercise, not just picking out random texts; get a strong foundation of Scripture under your feet. *"If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11).*That is in the Bible! *"Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus... that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:10,11).* That is Scripture! Gather up in this way all that you can find, take it to the Lord, and say: 'Lord, your Word clearly says...' (and here you can quote Scripture to Him, if you like: it is a very healthy thing to remind the Lord of His Word). 'Now, Lord, you have said that the power of the resurrection is to be known in Your people, in believers, as a present experience: here is Your Word about it.' Bring it to the Lord; present it to Him, all that you can find; be very definite in this matter. We might see marvellous things, wonderful things, have a far greater testimony of resurrection life, if only we would be more definite about it. It is not just going to 'happen'; it is not going to be casual. Any dillydallying about this thing will not find us coming into the good of it. We must be positive; we must be definite; we must make this a very real matter.

For it is not just personal, for our own private good; the whole testimony of our Risen Lord is bound up with this. There is, of course, thank God, the personal application, and this may be either spiritual
- for we are surely all, individually, in constant need of new accessions of life spiritually - or it may be physical. Blessed be God, that we can take life for our bodies! We may know resurrection life carrying us through impossible situations, physically. Or it may be that we need a new accession of life, the 'baring of His arm', in our ministry: for all ministry, if it is to be true spiritual ministry, has to be fulfilled in the power of His resurrection.

**(b) For Corporate Life**

But then, widening out beyond personal, individual need, it may apply to a company of the Lord's people of which we are a part, or in which we may have some responsibility. Things are going down into death, straitness and dishonour; the situation is not glorifying to the Lord; and we are greatly burdened with the need - Oh, that the Arm of the Lord might be revealed! Oh, that the power of resurrection might be manifested! What are you going to do about it? Well, it requires the same exercise. This resurrection of the Lord Jesus is for every aspect of the life of the believer and the Church.

But... it does not just happen. I say once again: we have got to take a very definite and positive attitude to this matter. If we will, and if we do, there are those who can testify, from a long history, that this really does work - that repeated miracles of sustenance and enablement and supply, of raising up and carrying on, will result again and again, from a definite laying hold of the fact that Christ is risen for us. He died for us - He is risen for us. He died in our place - He lives in our stead. He is the Living One!

Chapter 7 - Recovery of Lost Testimony

**As we move into the next and succeeding chapters of Isaiah - being now, as I have said, on the positive, the resurrection side, the constructive side of the Cross - we find that one thing comes very much into view: namely, the recovery of God's testimony in the City and in the nations. That is the key to this section of Isaiah from chapter 54 onward. You will notice that Zion is much in view here. If you run through and circle the words 'Zion' and 'Jerusalem', you will see that that is the centre, the focal point of the testimony; but again, the nations are very much in view also. This will come out more fully as we proceed.**

**We come, then, first, to chapter 55, and we notice two things that mark this chapter.** Abundant Grace, and God's Sure Word

**In verses 1-9, we see the freeness and the abundance of grace released to the people of God on this resurrection ground - free and abundant grace. *"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price..."* How much of the New Testament could be crowded into that!**

**Then, from verse 10 to verse 13, we have God's sure word: *"My word... shall not return unto me void"*. Nowadays, we usually claim that promise from the Lord when we are going to give a message, that His word shall not return to Him void. Of course, the principle is of general application; we are not wrong at any time in taking hold of that, provided that it really is the word of the Lord that we have to deliver. But I want to point out that that is not the particular meaning of the statement here. You will notice the sequence in verses 11 and 12: *"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. FOR* *..."* (you must not stop there) - *"FOR* *ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills...",* and so on. The immediate meaning of the promise of the sure and effectual word is: This people had been promised by God deliverance; they had been assured that the Lord was going to bring them back from captivity. (Compare Is. 35:10; 48:20; 52:12). He had given His word that they should go out with joy and in peace, in these conditions. That was the word, and that word was not going to fail.**

The House of Prayer, and the Need for Meekness

**When you come to chapter 56, you find that everything centres in the House of Prayer for all peoples. *"Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar: for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all peoples"* (verse 7). This is still related to the recovery of the Lord's testimony, and it is to be found in His House - 'My house of prayer'.**

**In chapter 57, we find some further warnings to the Lord's people against any recurrence of that which had destroyed the testimony before. It seems always necessary for the Lord to say, and to say again: Be careful of the coming back of those old things which wrecked your testimony in the past; the things which (to use Jeremiah's phrase from the potter's house) 'marred' the vessel of testimony. (See Jer. 18:4.) So He gives here admonition concerning such ever-present perils. Then, in verse 15, the ground of the Lord's presence and committal is mentioned. *"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."* These are the conditions of the Lord's presence, those in which His testimony will be reconstituted.**

**Chapters 58 and 59 are full of more warnings, more admonitions, more instructions, by way of clearing the skies of the clouds that would obscure the testimony. Notice chapter 58, verse 8: *"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning..."* It is the shining out of this testimony that is governing everything with the Lord. These warnings and admonitions are given in order to bring about the removal of the clouds that are lingering about the sky and trying to obscure the clear shining.**

A Clear Shining Testimony Recovered

**We are thus led into chapter 60. All that has gone before has prepared the way, always with this in view: *"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."* Here, then, we come to this matter of the recovered testimony; the shining light of the Church in the midst of dark conditions, in a very dark world. *"For*... *darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee."* That is the thing that is uppermost in this last section of Isaiah's prophecies. When the testimony is restored (verse 1), the nations are affected by it: *"Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: they all gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be carried in the arms. Then thou shalt see and be lightened, and thine heart shall tremble and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee, the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee"* (verses 4,5).**

When the testimony is clear, when the shining is undimmed, when God has in His House, in His people, conditions answering to all that the Cross means, then you have this effect all around: the nations are affected, the peoples are touched; something happens, and a wealth, an enrichment, a fulness comes back to the Church itself. If the Lord has things according to His mind: in other words, if He really has His testimony in fulness, undimmed, without cloud, without shadow, in the midst of His people, in the vessel of His House: then the nations feel the effect, the impact, of it, and the Church itself is greatly enriched. *"Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, for the name of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee" (verse 9).*

**The New Testament Counterpart**

Now this, we know, is Old Testament prophecy. We recognise that the prophet was saying more than he knew - that his utterances contained and combined two interwoven elements. On the one side, as far as Israel was concerned, there was history in the making; but on the other side, all the way through this, there was (as in chapter 53) a pointing on to the Messiah - to the Lord Himself; to the Cross, and to all that was to follow the Cross in resurrection. There was the temporal and the passing, but there was also the spiritual and the eternal, which the Holy Spirit always saw and had in view in history.

Thus, in every connection, as we have seen, we are so to speak 'handed on', by these prophecies, to the New Testament. And the New Testament counterpart of what we have been seeing in Isaiah about the recovered testimony is found particularly in one of Paul's letters, namely, in his Second Letter to the Corinthians.

**Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians**

The great issue of both the letters to the Corinthians was that of the testimony of the Church in the city of Corinth and in the world. When we read these letters, of course we become very much taken up with all the details: in the First Letter, with the miserable details; the many things that are being dealt with. It is, for the greater part, not a happy or pleasant letter to read: perhaps you have given it up many times before you have got to the end, not understanding very much, and not liking a good deal more. But we need to stand back from it, and ask: What is it all about, after all? Let us not upset ourselves about all the details, for the moment; they all go to make up one particular issue. What is the issue?

Well, as I have said, the issue of the letters to the Corinthians is the Lord's testimony in the Church, in the city and in the nations. Let us be clear about that. In the First Letter, there is, as you know, very much said about the world, and how the church in Corinth was failing to overpower the world, because the world had already overpowered it from the inside. The testimony was destroyed from within, and therefore there was no real impact upon the world. The natural, the carnal man had found his way into the church, and the church had therefore lost its testimony. It will always be like that. If anything of the natural man and the carnal man makes inroads, in any locality, into the church, that will be the end of the testimony in that church, and in that locality, and, so far as that company is concerned, in relation to the world. When the natural man comes in the testimony goes out.

**Testimony Destroyed by Carnal Elements**

In the First Letter, then, the whole question was one not merely of local conditions, but of the local conditions destroying the testimony of the Church in the city. And therefore all those conditions had to be dealt with, had to be exposed, uncovered, and brought to the Cross of Christ. Of course, what we have in 1 Corinthians is Satan's second great strategy toward paralysing the Church's testimony. His first strategy, his first line with the Church, was open persecution, to try to destroy, to obliterate the Church's testimony in the city of Jerusalem and in the nation. As we know, it failed! But now Satan comes back along a second line of strategy: that is, he insinuates, into the very ranks of the church, men according to his own mind - carnal elements - the natural man, the carnal man. They serve the Devil's purpose so well; they effect the very thing he is after. When he finds he cannot succeed by open persecution, he comes round, as it were, to the back entrance, and introduces carnal and natural elements in by that door - and that has done it! The testimony goes out; it is destroyed.

But in between these two letters to the Corinthians, something happened. In chapter 7 of the Second Letter we read: *"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye were made sorry unto repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly sort, that ye might suffer loss by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret" (7:9,10)*. The Apostle has a good deal to say about what had evidently taken place after his first letter. There was repentance; there was judging of themselves and of the conditions; there was, as he said, 'a clearing of themselves' (v. 11). There was a real distress and exercise about their condition, and this had taken place between the two letters. We may say that they had brought the situation to the Cross, and that had changed everything. And now that things had been dealt with on the inside, the whole matter of the testimony to the world, in the city, could be reconsidered, and a counter-attack could be made by the church upon the enemy.

So that is what is in this Second Letter - the recovery of the testimony in the locality and out to the world. It all brings out into very clear relief the constituents of effective testimony - or, to use Isaiah's figure, the shining forth of the light. Let us look at some of the things that Paul says about this.

**The Value of Triumphant Love**
*"For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be made sorry, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (2 Cor. 2:4).*

The first thing that we see is the value of triumphant love. That is a constituent of effective testimony, of clear shining. This clearly had its two sides in the Apostle. If ever a man might have found his love exhausted, the Apostle might well have been that man, as far as these Corinthians were concerned; for he did say: "If I love you more abundantly, am I loved the less?" (12:15). Surely that is enough to put any man off - to find that all his outpouring and outgoing and giving in love only means that love is being withdrawn; that less and less love comes back. What a situation he had to meet! yet his love triumphed. But it seems to have had an effect in them too: something of what he had written in his First Letter, chapter 13, seems to have come about. Yes, the triumph of 1 Corinthians 13 can be traced in this Second Letter to some very real degree - the love that "suffereth long, and is kind", and so on - the quality of triumphant love.

That, we might very well say, is the first and primary factor in effective testimony. The Lord Jesus said that: "By this shall all men know... if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). This is the testimony; this is how it will be known - if we have love one for another. It matters very much whether the world is affected by what it sees. We cannot close the doors on ourselves, and say: 'Oh, well, the world in any case is inimical, it is always hostile, it is always unsympathetic; why take any account of it? Let us shut ourselves in and get on with our job.' You cannot do that; you cannot ignore the world. We are here to affect the world - that is one of the chief reasons why the Lord leaves us here. We are not just to live here, cloistered and closed in, indifferent to the world, coldly detached from it.

Moreover, the world is going to find out, sooner or later, what is happening inside the church - what is happening in your local assembly! Make no mistake about it. The world will know the condition of the church: you cannot close doors and windows on that, and keep it in! All around will know; it will become known. And I repeat - it is a most important thing that the world should be affected, not by what it hears us say, but by what it sees in us. And the only thing it can really see, that will affect it, will be the mutual love which we have one for another. "By *this* shall all men know... if ye have *love* one to another." One of the most effective ways of testimony is - not preaching, but - *loving*! If that is there it will do far more than our preaching. But it will at least give a great backing to our preaching. All our preaching must be supported by this one thing - a strong triumphant love in the midst of the Lord's people.

**The Value of Suffering With Christ**

The second thing in testimony is the value of suffering with Christ. There is much about this in the Second Letter to the Corinthians. For instance: *"The Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, even so our comfort also aboundeth through Christ" (2 Cor. 1:3-5).*

First of all, suffering with Christ brings a wonderful return in our discovery of the consolations of Christ.

It is a very important thing, in a world like this, that we should have some comfort to give. Both in the Church and outside of the Church, there is a great need of a ministry of comfort. You come back to Isaiah: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God" (Is. 40:1). But you cannot fulfil a ministry of comfort in mere platitudes; by coming into difficult and troubled situations and just saying nice things. If people are in real trouble, in real distress, and you begin to talk to them, the first thing they have a right to say to you is: 'Well, what do you know about it? Have you ever been in my position, my condition? have you ever had any deep, deep suffering? What do you know about it?'

Perhaps, therefore, it is one of those sovereign, providential ways of God, that He allows His people to know much suffering, so that they may derive this wonderful value of the consolations of Christ, in order that they may have that with which to comfort or encourage others - the tried, the suffering, the sorrowing. And what have we to give? Well, the word is: "that we may be able to comfort... through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." And if there is anyone reading these lines, who is having a painful, suffering time, going through a 'dark patch', as we say, might I try to transfigure it for you, in this way. Just look at it like this. Say to yourself: 'This gives me an opportunity to make a discovery of the Lord which will be stock-in-trade for future service. In my distress and trouble I can find comfort and help from the Lord, which may be tremendous value to some others in the future.'

**Ministry Made Through Experience of Resurrection**

For that is how ministry is made. The man or the woman who is ambitious to be 'in the ministry' - to be speaking and preaching, going about taking meetings and all that sort of thing - but who has not gone through deep places, and found the Lord there, and brought up some treasure from the depths, some 'pearl of great price': that one's ministry is not real; it is artificial, it is merely professional. The true minister of Jesus Christ will be taken down to the depths, to discover there, right down there, and to bring up thence, these pearls, these precious things, for the sake of the Church. Did you notice that phrase in Isaiah "the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee" (Is. 60:5)? Yes, but the sea can be a very deep place, a very dark place, a very terrible place: and yet there are treasures there. That is the way of testimony.

Notice what Paul writes at the beginning of his letter. *"For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life: yea, we ourselves have had the answer of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead"* (2 Cor. 1:8). This is how ministry is made - when you have a real experience of and testimony to the power of His resurrection. When everything seemed hopeless in your own personal situation; when everything seemed hopeless in your company of believers; and the providence of God led you to make a discovery of the power of His resurrection, 'that you should not trust in yourself but in God who raises the dead': this is a constituting of ministry. If you have gone that way, you are a true 'minister'; you need not take the name, you need not be set apart or anything. If you have a knowledge of the mighty power of His resurrection, you *are* a minister; you have something which is most greatly needed.

**The Value of Brokenness** The third thing in effective testimony is the value of brokenness and weakness.

*"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves; we are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet of not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:7-12).*

We should continue reading down to verse 18. You will notice that this section has as its real message the tremendous value of the quality of brokenness and weakness. That is a vital thing in effective testimony. We, perhaps, do not naturally put much value on brokenness and weakness; but here, very much value is put upon it. "We have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay." What the Apostle is saying, in effect, is this: 'We are broken men; we are weak vessels. The one thing about us, more than anything else, is our capacity for being broken - it seems that we have just been made to be broken.' And then he is saying that there is an infinite value attached to that.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, the church was not broken. It was hard; it was trying to hold itself intact; it was proud; it was judging; it was cruel; it was unkind; it was anything but broken. But now, as we read this Second Letter, we find there is about the church a softness. It is soft - it is melted - it is broken! You can talk about 'ministry' now; you can talk about 'testimony' now; you could not do so before. No: until the vessel is broken, nothing can flow out; if anything is to flow out, it will only do so when the vessel is broken. The Apostle is saying that that was how it was with him personally (and of course he is, by inference, passing it on to the church in Corinth). Our weakness, our brokenness, is of the greatest importance and value, for it is only then that the real treasure can be manifested.

Do you talk about 'the testimony'? have you got a phraseology of 'testimony'? Do you talk about 'ministry'? have you got ideas about 'ministry'? My dear friend, the Holy Spirit would say, both to you and to me, that testimony and ministry are only real when they come from broken men and women. Let us make no mistake about it. I know it is the hard way, but it is the only way. You and I have no right to minister, no right to talk about 'the testimony' or about 'the Church' or about 'the vessel ' or any such things, unless we know something of this brokenness, this weakness.

You see how true this is to what we read in Isaiah. The Lord says: "Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all peoples" (Is. 56:7); - "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Is. 57:15). You find Him at humbled Corinth, chastened Corinth. There is something new in this second letter - something that was missing from the first. You feel the unction of the Spirit, the beauty of the Lord. Yes: the Lord is here now, because they are broken. That unction of the Lord is only found with men and women who have really had a weakening, a breaking, an emptying, who have lost all "confidence in the flesh", whose own self-strength has all gone. That is the way of the shining; that is the way of recovered testimony.

**Love the Way of Enlargement** There is one more passage to which I would like to refer you.

*"Our mouth is open unto you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own affections. Now for a recompense in like kind (I speak as unto my children), be ye also enlarged" (2 Cor. 6:11-13).*

What was the cause of the lost, broken-down testimony in Corinth? They were too small; they were too little. Paul said that he had to treat them like babes - they were peevish! Children can be like that, can they not? Trifles have far too much importance. Paul says: 'Be enlarged, be enlarged! Let your hearts be enlarged! Be *bigger* people - be too big to come down to all these mean things. Have big thoughts, have big feelings - of course without self-importance or self-inflation; have a large heart - a heart of *love!'*

What does love do? Love "rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth". Love "believeth all things": it takes a large heart to do that, does it not? It is never ready to believe an unfavourable report, but always ready to believe that there may be something that can be set off against it - that there may be another explanation. Love rejoices not when one who has committed a wrong suffers for it - that is paltry. This is where David is such a rebuke to us. Just consider him: what a life Saul gave him during those years! He hunted him, he said, like a flea, like a partridge (1 Sam. 24:14; 26:20); chased and pursued him from rock to rock, from cave to cave, in the wilderness, if only he might get him and destroy him; gave him no peace day or night. He was determined, implacably determined, that David should die. And the day came when, in one of these pursuits, Saul, with his 3,000 chosen men - an army to catch a man! - arrived in a certain place at night, and lay down to sleep. And, unknown to him, David was very near, right on the spot (I don't think he would have slept if he had known!); and David came with his men and looked on him; and David's men said: 'Now is your chance - the Lord has given him into your hands!' (1 Sam. 24:4).

You know, if only we can imagine we have got Divine support for something, that is all we want. We only want someone to say, 'It is the Lord's will', and, if it is something that serves our own interests, something that we would naturally very much like, how we will go for it! It is a very strong temptation, is it not, when it appears to be supported by the Lord?

But here, David - as on another such occasion, when his companion said: 'God has delivered your enemy into your hands this day; now is your chance! Let me smite him, and I won't have to smite him twice! One blow, and I will finish the whole thing for you!' (1 Sam. 26:8) - David replied: 'No, no; God forbid that I should touch the Lord's anointed!' Ah, that is bigness; that is real greatness. He forebore, to his own hurt. He knew not how many more years of suffering he would have, but he accepted them. He could have ended all that at one blow, but he said: 'No, I must not touch the Lord's anointed. I may be in the right, and the Lord's anointed may be altogether in the wrong: nevertheless, it is not for me to touch him. I leave him with the Lord; I must not lift my hand against him. God forbid that I should touch the Lord's anointed.' I repeat: that is bigness, that is spiritual greatness! And so Paul appeals to the Corinthians: "Now for a recompense in like kind... be ye also enlarged." The Lord make us big people, in this spiritual sense.

**The Constituents of Recovered Testimony** Let us now try to summarise the constituents of recovered testimony, whether that testimony be local or to the world.
It must be born, firstly, as we have seen, out of what we know of Divine comfort in suffering. Secondly, it must be born out of what we have known of resurrection (whether individual, or collective and local), when all has seemed to be hopeless.

Thirdly, it must be born from what we have learned of Divine love through our own failure. I am sure that this was a great factor in Corinth. How deeply they recognised their failure! They went down, right down in the dust, under the sense of what a miserable failure they had been as a local company. And then, smitten with this realisation of their own failure, they discovered that there was love pouring to them, through this Apostle, from the heart of God; and that discovery constituted their new testimony.

Fourthly, it must be born from the brokenness and enlargement of heart that comes through the consciousness of weakness. I suppose, if any people ought to have been conscious of their own weakness, it was those people at Corinth. There are, in fact, indications in this Second Letter that they came almost to the point of despair about themselves. I think this realisation of their own fallibility and untrustworthiness just overwhelmed them, overflowed them. But through it they came to this enlargement of heart. If you and I are groaning under the consciousness of our own failure, we are not going to be petty and mean toward the failures of other people; we are going to be very much more patient, very much more understanding - altogether larger of heart. We are going to say: 'Well, I have had to walk very carefully myself, just there. But for the grace of God, there goes myself!' That is largeness of heart, true brokenness.

Fifthly, and finally, what utterness for the Lord should result from a sense of responsibility for His honour in the locality and in the world. I think that is what arises here. If that is not present, then all the other means nothing. It must have been brought home to the Corinthians that they were letting the Lord down in the locality. Their condition, the situation among them, was just bringing dishonour to Him. And that provoked a sense of responsibility: 'Oh, we cannot afford to let the Lord down! For the Lord's sake, for the sake of the Name of the Lord, we must put things right amongst ourselves, whatever it costs.' There is much in Isaiah's later chapters about the Name of the Lord in Zion, when recovered. And so, in the church at Corinth, this sense of responsibility for His Name and for His honour, in that vicinity and in that city and in the world, produced a new utterness for the Lord.

We come back to our question: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Well, to those, such as we have seen, who accept the implications of the Cross. This is all the outcome, the outworking of the Cross. This all comes out of Isaiah 53. Recovered testimony of this kind can only be as the result of the Cross. The Cross is the basis of everything in all testimony.

Chapter 8 - The Cross and the Holy Spirit

***Reading: Isaiah 61:1-62:1a.***

**We come now to yet a further aspect of this so many-sided fruit of the Cross of the Lord Jesus. We remember that the first three verses of this sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, so full, were taken up by our Lord Jesus Himself. After His baptism the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended and came upon Him: it was the great moment of His anointing as the Servant, who had just passed, symbolically, by the way of the Cross, as represented by His baptism. Now, anointed, He meets the enemy in the wilderness, and worsts him completely on all points; then, returning from the wilderness in the power of the Spirit, He comes to Nazareth, where He has been brought up.**

**On the Sabbath day, He enters into the synagogue, and the Scriptures are handed to Him. He opens them at this point in Isaiah's prophecies, and reads these verses; and, when He has read them, He hands the roll back to the Ruler of the synagogue and sits down. (This, contrary to our custom, was a sign that He had something to say. If we have something to say, we usually stand up; but in the synagogues, if they had something to say, they sat down.) And it says that 'the eyes of all' that were assembled 'were fastened upon Him' - because He had sat down; they saw He had something to say. assembled 'were fastened upon Him' - because He had sat down; they saw He had something to say. 21).**

**We thus see that the Lord Jesus was appropriating this part of Isaiah to Himself. All along we have recognised that there is a relationship of these prophecies to the Lord Jesus and to this dispensation, as well as a connection with the history of Israel. And this is what we now come to.**

The Anointing of the Head Flows Down to the Members

**But notice as we begin, that this anointing, resting first of all upon 'the Lord's Servant' - for that is the title of Christ in Isaiah: "Behold my servant" (Isa. 42:1) - while this anointing of course rests upon Him and relates, fully and supremely, to Him, as the Head, the language of the prophetic narrative immediately afterwards makes an abrupt transition to 'they', 'them'; 'ye', 'you', 'your'. After this declaration concerning the anointing of the Servant, it goes on "And *they* shall build the old wastes, *they* shall raise up the former desolations, and *they* shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations" (61:4). The people of God derive the values, come into the good, of this anointing. It is as though the anointing upon Him, as Head, just flowed down and embraced the whole of His membership - the members of Christ.**

**That is why we read the first fragment of the next chapter: "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace..." As I said in the previous chapter, there is so much, in these later prophecies of Isaiah, about Zion - about the good of the anointing being found in Zion, Zion inheriting all these values. And Zion, as we know, is the Old Testament figure of the Church. We were speaking, in that chapter, about Zion's light: "Arise, shine, for thy light is come" (60:1) - this is the testimony recovered. Here, in chapter 61, we move into Zion's life and Zion's liberty.**

"To Proclaim Liberty to the Captives"

**You notice, first of all, that this is a message *to* Zion, *to* the Church. All this has to have its fulfilment, its realisation, in the Lord's people. Israel, at this time, were in exile in Babylon, in a state of bondage and spiritual death, and the prophecies have to do with their deliverance, their liberation from that bondage, from that death, the bringing of this people out into life and into liberty. Now I have said that Jesus took to Himself this Scripture about the anointing of the Lord being upon Him, "to proclaim liberty to the captives", and so on. But you remember that the earthly Zion, the earthly Jerusalem - in other words, the Jewish people - never did come into the reality of this liberation. They missed all these values. *That* Zion did not inherit the values of His anointing. But the Church has inherited it all. This has become the inheritance of the *spiritual* Israel, the *spiritual* people of God. Judaism - 'Israel after the flesh' - was the supreme antagonist of the anointing. By their weapon of legalism, they slew Him. It must be a people who answer to all this that is said about the anointing, who come into these further values of the second part of this chapter.**

**That is, it must be a people who can appreciate the Good Tidings, because they are meek: that was not true of Israel after the flesh. It must be a people of a broken heart, and that was not true of Israel after the flesh. It must be a people conscious that they really are captives, and that was not true of the Jews in our Lord's day. They thought, they believed, that of all people on the earth they were the freest, the ones who knew least about bondage: that was one of the points of controversy with them and the Lord Jesus (John 8:33). It must be a people who feel that their state is one of imprisonment, if they are to enjoy the "opening of the prison to them that are bound"; and so on. The values of the anointing can only come to people who realise, in all these ways, spiritually, their need of this Servant of the Lord, working, under the anointing, for their good, for their advantage.**

The New Testament Counterpart

**We now follow the same course as we have followed in every connection. This part of Isaiah's prophecies, and this chapter in particular, carries us to the New Testament counterpart. We have seen that there are parts of the New Testament which answer distinctly and clearly to the different phases and movements in these prophecies of Isaiah. And the New Testament counterpart of this sixty-first chapter is undoubtedly Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Let us look at a few fragments from that letter. You will see how they bring in Isaiah 61, the anointing of the Spirit.**

Paul's Letter to the Galatians

***~~"This only would I learn from you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh? ...He therefore that supplieth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ...Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law... that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:2,5,13,14).~~***

***~~"And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (4:6).
"For we through the Spirit by faith wait for the hope of righteousness" (5:5).~~***

***~~"But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would. But if ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law... If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk" (5:16-18,25).~~***

*"For he that soweth unto his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life" (6:8).*
All that, as you notice, has to do with the Spirit - which is, of course, another way of speaking of the anointing. We will now take another brief series, which follows the line of the Cross. *"I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (2:20). "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?" (3:1).
"And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof" (5:24).
"But far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (6:14).*

These two series of extracts from this brief letter "to the churches in Galatia" (1:2) make it clear that two of its major themes are the Cross and the Holy Spirit. It is the bridge that is passed over between Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 61.

**The Essentially Spiritual Nature of Christianity**

Now we all know that this Letter to the Galatians contains Paul's tremendous battle. Yes, Paul was out for a fight when he set himself to write this document. There is no more vehement product of the pen of Paul than that which we have in this letter. But what is the battle over? what is it all about? Of course there are theological and doctrinal answers to that question; but it may be said, with a good deal of support both from the letter itself and from other parts of the New Testament, that this battle of Paul's all related to the essentially *spiritual* character of Christianity. The Christianity which is the true Christianity is an essentially spiritual thing. That is what the battle is about. It shows so clearly, in every connection, that the Cross leads to a spiritual position, to a spiritual condition.

The great enemy, who had very useful instruments in the Judaizers, was fighting to make of Christianity something other than a spiritual thing; to bring it on to an other than spiritual basis. Both then, and ever since, he has sought, either to resolve Christianity into a matter of rites and ceremonies - ritual, formalism, earthly and temporal symbols, representations, figures, and so forth; or, failing that, to substitute for it the false spirituality sometimes dignified by the name of 'mysticism'. That was Satan's object, and Paul saw that the issue was nothing less than the real *meaning,* the *essential nature,* of Christianity - what it is. And Paul was not giving it away, because he had had a tremendous experience on this very matter. He therefore set himself to fight this thing with all the strength at his command, to make it perfectly clear that Christianity is not in any respect an earthly system - it is a heavenly life. Christianity is essentially a life in the Spirit, and the Cross is intended to produce that. If it does not produce it, there is some reason for it in those concerned. It means that the whole nature of Christianity has been changed, and the meaning of the Cross subverted.

So Paul lunges at this subtle move of the enemy with all the force of the Cross, and brings in every weapon to which he can lay his hand. What are some of those weapons?
**Paul's Weapons Against the Debasing of Christianity *(1) His Personal History***

Well, first of all - and this is a very powerful weapon, as you will notice from this letter - he brings in the weapon of his own history and his own experience. There are few places in all his writings perhaps only Second Corinthians - where he refers to himself more than he does in this letter. He brings his own history and his own experience right forward; it is one of his masterstrokes. And he was the man to do it! Just look at Saul of Tarsus: look at his history - what he tells us about himself. Was there ever a man who had put this whole Jewish system more thoroughly to the test than he had? He had committed himself to the observances, to the performance of every part of the Jewish ritual, right up to the hilt; indeed, he tells us that he was far more zealous in this matter than many of his own age. "I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of mine own age... being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14). This man had gone all the way with this system, with its ceremonies and rites, its types and figures, its symbols and forms; he had gone the whole way.

What did it do for him? Where did it land him? He had exhausted it most thoroughly, most conscientiously, most sincerely: because one thing that we have to say about Saul of Tarsus is that he was a man who did not believe in half measures - he was a man who meant business, and he was a man who was sincere in what he did. He tells us: "I verily thought... that I ought to do" - 'I thought that I *ought* to do' - "many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). It was a matter of conscience with this brilliant young Pharisee, who had climbed so high on the ladder of Judaism. But, where did it land him? We have his own exclamation; he says: 'This is where it landed me!' - "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). You could not get very much lower than that, could you? That is the last word in anything. In his own experience, in his own history, the whole thing had failed. In effect, he says: 'That is where it landed me; that is all it did for me. And it is not going to do anything better for anybody else, however devoted they may be to it.'

***(2) The Meaning of the Cross***

But then, having come to that end, to that ignominious end, crying for deliverance - 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me? Nothing and nobody, over all this long history, has proved a deliverer for me!' - then he found the Lord Jesus; and the Lord Jesus did for him all that this tremendous sum of things had entirely failed to do. He found the Cross, and he said: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). You notice the change from the thought of 'death' to the thought of 'life'. He is a dead man made alive, come to life. He is a man who has known an altogether new beginning, a new history, a new experience, which has sprung out of the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

Moreover, he found the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit did for him what this vast system of Judaism, to which he had given himself so utterly, could never do. That is why he gives such a large place to the Holy Spirit in this letter. That is why the Cross and the Holy Spirit are here brought together as the ruling lines of this whole testimony. The Holy Spirit, on the ground of the Cross, has reversed the whole experience, changed the whole situation.

***(3) The Meaning of Christ***

And then - here we could go through the letter with another ruling line - he discovered the real meaning of Christ. The name of Christ occurs forty-three times in this little letter, which can be read in ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. That itself is significant; indeed, it just shouts at us as to what it is all about. Paul is really seeking to show here what is the true meaning of Christ. What is the true meaning of Christ? Just this: that all that system has been - in Himself - completely fulfilled. The vast system of the law and all its ordinances has been fulfilled in and by Christ, in the Cross; all righteousness has been fulfilled. As He came to His baptism in the Jordan, typifying His death on the Cross, Jesus had said: "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). That was the question at issue, and it was all fulfilled in the Cross of the Lord Jesus; Christ crucified has fulfilled it all. The Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ. That is what we have been saying about Isaiah; and what is true of Isaiah is true of all the Old Testament. We cannot attempt to show here how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ, but that is what Paul is saying. 'I have been crucified with Christ: and so I am united with Him in that writing off, that fulfilment, of all the requirements of God; and, by the Spirit, I come into the good of all that Jesus is.'

***(4) The Meaning of Grace***

There is yet another theme in this letter which would repay our study: it is the meaning of grace. That is a great thing in the Letter to the Galatians. Grace puts us on to an entirely new basis. All the ritual, all the forms, all the demands of the law, only served to accentuate the evil conscience. Paul makes that so clear. As we know, this Letter to the Galatians was written before the Letter to the Romans: probably Paul, when he had written to the Galatians, said to himself, 'I must write something more about this', and so took the opportunity of enlarging upon it when writing to the Romans. But the point is that the whole thing related to this matter of *conscience.* "I had not known sin... except the law had said, Thou shalt not..." (Rom. 7:7). 'The very saying of that thing only gave me a bad conscience: this whole system was only keeping my conscience alive - it was not saving me from an evil conscience. But grace has done that; grace has put me on to an altogether new and different basis, where the evil conscience is dealt with.' Yes, grace deals with the conscience. It is a wonderful word over against a bad conscience: 'The Grace of God'.

***(5) The Meaning of the Holy Spirit***

Lastly, Paul discovered the meaning of the Holy Spirit. What does Paul say preeminently about the Holy Spirit here? "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). "Ye received the Spirit of sonship, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). Paul sets that over against servanthood. And there he gets right to the heart of the matter. For if we recognise, as it is easy to do, the difference between a servant and a son, we have the secret of everything.

A servant is one who simply has to do what he is told: he is told that he must or he must not, and, whether he likes it or not, whether he agrees with it or not, it is for him to obey, that is all. Whatever may be his own reactions, he cannot help himself: he is merely a servant. Inwardly he may be in positive revolt against the whole thing, but he can do nothing about it. I am speaking, of course, about a servant of those days. A servant of the present day would just give up his job and go - that is how it is in our time. But you could not do it there in the Roman Empire in Paul's day. A bondslave had no power of choice whatever; he could not say: 'I am resigning. I am going to find another master' - he just could not do it. He was bought, body, soul and spirit; and, though he might be in revolt with every fibre of his being, there was nothing he could do about it. He just was the bondslave of this law.

***The Spirit of Sonship***

That is a servant, a slave. What is a son? Well if he is a son in the true meaning of Christian sonship, his service is a delight to him. There is in him the dynamic of love: he delights to do those things that please his Father, and that love gives him the incentive and the power to do them. He has another spirit, the Spirit of Sonship, working in him, making it possible for him to respond to every requirement: for that is the meaning of the Holy Spirit - an inward power, and that of love, which makes everything possible. As we all know, if we have a mighty love for something, nothing is impossible! Would that we had more of this love - the love that does not irk, that does not wait to have things pointed out, to have its attention drawn to them, but is all the time on the alert, anxious and keen, watching to see what needs to be done. We need that spirit, do we not?

That is something that is so impressive in certain companies known to us in the Far East. It is referred to here by way of illustration and example, not by way of condemnation or criticism of others. One great meeting hall, for instance, with its internal capacity of 1,600, and provision all the way round for up to 3,000 more, and with its 1,000 panes of glass, needs, as you can guess, a lot of looking after - what with the cleaning, the care of all the electrical installations, the amplifiers, and so on. There is so much connected with even one centre like that. After every meeting you see an army of men and women, prepared, and getting down to it, sweeping and cleaning and mopping up, adjusting and seeing to things, so that everything is clean and wholesome and in its place, for the next meeting. As you look at these people doing these jobs, perhaps you ask about someone, busily working away in his old clothes: 'Who is that brother?' 'Oh. that is Major-General So-and-So!' You see another younger man getting down to it, really getting down to a dirty job: 'Who is that young brother?' ' He is the Managing Director of the biggest textile factory on this island!' And so you go on
- General, Colonel, Director - but they are all 'going to it'. One of these high officers has made it his business to clean those one-thousand panes of glass once every week!

How do they go about it? Well, before they start on their work, they all meet together and pray and sing. They pray all together, this great army of workers, then they have a good sing; and then they get down to the work. It is all done in a spirit of joy like that. That is the spirit of sonship! That is not bondslavery; it is the true spirit of sonship. We need far more of that. That is the meaning of the Holy Spirit. You are not surprised that these people are radiant, and you are not surprised that the question is answered in their case: "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" It is indeed revealed there. Suffer the illustration; it is very wholesome to have seen these things really working. They can work; they really can work.

This, then, is the meaning of the Spirit, the meaning of Christ: the real spirit of sonship. That is what Paul is saying here. Satan is against that - Satan just hates that. He will try to break it up, he will try to spoil it, at all costs. That was the battle that Paul was in. He was not just contending with the Judaizers, but with the direct antagonism of the great enemy against a testimony of that kind - against the real fruit of the Cross.

**Freedom from Law Means Government by the Spirit**

Now, if Satan is thwarted along one line, he does not give up - he tries another. Satan is a great master of strategy, and one of his favourite lines is that of pushing things to extremes. Among the Galatian believers, he had sought to push legalism to an extreme. But now he is thwarted along that line; Paul wins the battle - there is no doubt about it. What is the enemy's next line of attack? 'Very well then', he says, 'if you won't have the law, then don't have any law; discard all law.' "You are no longer under law, you are under grace" - you can do as you like! Just behave as you like; just carry on as you like; you must know no limitations, no restrictions. Any kind of restriction is law repudiate it! Go to the other extreme - licence instead of law!' I believe that, if Paul were alive today, he would be just as vehement against this as he was against the other: for here is a work of Satan indeed. If Satan cannot bind by the law, and change the whole nature of things in that way, he will seek to dismiss all law and make us wholly lawless.
But remember, if this Letter to the Galatians is the letter of the liberty of the Spirit, it is also the letter of the government of the Spirit. We are only free when we are governed. In George Matheson's wellknown words, that we sometimes sing:

'Make me a captive, Lord, And then I shall be free'

A paradox - but how true. We are not free when we are giving way to licence, when we take liberty that far. No: this Letter, and the Letters to the Romans and to the Hebrews, are not documents of lawlessness. Even if they do set aside the whole of the Jewish system, they do not introduce a regime of lawlessness. But they do most clearly bring in the life and government of the Holy Spirit. Remember - no child of God who is governed by the Holy Spirit, who is really living a life in the Spirit, will infringe any Divine principle. Indeed, a life governed by the Holy Spirit will be the more meticulously careful about spiritual principles.

**No Change in Divine Principles**

You see, the change is not in the law; that is where a great mistake has been made. Christ crucified does not alter the law; Christ Himself does not alter the law; the Holy Spirit does not alter the law. The change is not in the law - the change is in the man. Grace does not say that, because you are not under the law, you may now murder, and get away with it; that you can steal now, you are not under law; you can commit adultery now, you are not under law; you can be covetous now, you are not under law. Grace does not say that; you are horrified at the suggestion.

But carry that right through to anything and everything of Divine principle - and remember that the Law of Moses is only the embodiment of Divine principles. Now the Lord Jesus took up that and said: 'Moses said, Thou shalt not kill; I say to you that if you are angry with your brother, you are not less in danger of judgment' (Matt. 5:21,22). The Apostle John goes further, and says that if you hate your brother you are a murderer: if you hate him, without taking any step to kill him, you are already a murderer in your heart (1 John 3:15). Take the words of the Lord Jesus again: 'Moses said, Thou shalt not commit adultery; I say to you, you have only so much as to look with evil intent and you have broken the commandment' (Matt. 5:27,28). It is the principle of the thing, you see. This is terribly searching.

No, neither Christ, nor the Holy Spirit, nor the Cross, changes the nature of the law, the principle of the law - it is the man who is changed. That is how the law becomes lifted from us, because we become changed people. The Spirit, who keeps the law, has now entered into us, and if we walk by the Spirit, in the Spirit, we do not fulfil the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16,25). It is a question of the changed person.

**To Walk by the Spirit is to Keep the Law**

So grace does not say: 'You are not under the law, therefore you need not observe the Sabbath.' We have to recognise that the Sabbath is the embodiment of a principle: it is not a day - it is a principle. It is a principle upon which God has constituted the creation, in every realm, that there must be a period of rest for something new. In all nature there has to be a period of rest, in order to prepare for something new. In our bodies there has to be a period of rest in order that there may be something new. In spiritual matters, in spiritual service, there have to be periods of rest, during which the Lord can speak and give us something new - that is the principle of the Sabbath. But even there, the Lord has very graciously made it possible for many to have a day a week still, in which to let other things go, to keep it sacred for the Lord, for spiritual renewal.

So, you see, it is the principle that matters, not the outward form. Nothing changes the principle. The principles of all Divine laws are abiding: they are never abrogated, never set aside, never nullified they still hold good. Jesus went behind the code, and put His finger on the principle of every part of it; and He said: You may not now be governed and ruled by an outward system of 'Thou shalt' and 'Thou shalt not'; you are to be ruled by the Holy Spirit who observes those things. The Spirit is the Spirit of *holiness:* no one who lives in the Spirit, therefore, will persistently, habitually, do unholy things, be unholy. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of *love:* no one who lives in the Spirit will have any other than the Spirit of love, will fail to observe the laws of love, will violate love. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of *truth:* no one who lives in and by the Spirit will be untruthful, in any sense - and untruthfulness covers not only the saying of things that are not true, but everything in the life that is not absolutely true and real and genuine and honest and transparent. The man or the woman who lives in the Spirit will be a man or a woman of truth, one who is real. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom, and those who live in the Spirit will have a Divine wisdom governing their lives.

It is life in the Spirit, through the Cross, that is here in view, and it is the crucified man, the crucified woman - or the assembly or the church - who walk and live in the Spirit to whom the Arm of the Lord is revealed. Do we want to know the power of God - God with us, God for us? Then it must be like this - the Cross our ground, the Spirit our life, walking and living as sons of God.

Chapter 9 - Re-integration of All Things Through the Cross

**In this concluding chapter we shall make little further reference to Isaiah's prophecies. We shall seek first of all to sum up, or review, the whole matter that we have been considering, and then to present a few additional thoughts arising out of the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians.**

**I would like you to draw a mental picture. Imagine, first of all, the Letter to the Romans laid down as a background, and then, super-imposed 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, providing the place for the foundation of that great building which has ever been in His thought and His intention - the Church.**

Romans

**The Letter to the Romans finds the ground covered at the beginning with very much upon which God will not build - upon which He cannot build. As God surveys the human scene, with a view to laying the foundation for His Church, His glorious Church, He finds a condition of things so tangled, so evil, so false and so wrong, that He says: 'I cannot lay My foundation on that; we must clear that all out of the way. We must set fire to it, consume it, and make a great clearing for this foundation.' And so, in the Letter to the Romans, the Cross is brought in and set forth as that which, on the one side, disposes of that whole state of things. And what a state it is! What a terrible condition is presented, in the early chapters of that letter! 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 leaving nothing but a clearing, an emptiness, a barrenness.**

**But then on the other side, God having laid His foundation, with the remaining chapters of that Letter a new prospect comes into view. Everything now is possible for God. We found in chapter 8 so much said about God's eternal counsels and foreknowledge, His wonderful thoughts and conceptions in election, 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 have come in for realisation, since the Cross has cleared the way.**

**That, then, is the first thing in the mental picture that I am asking you to draw: the Cross, as God's means for securing the foundation for everything else.**1 Corinthians

**Now, from that Cross you draw radiating lines. The first line reaches to the First Letter to the Corinthians. Here the Cross is applied - not now to conditions in the world, not to those outside of Christ - but to conditions amongst believers that do not tally with the Cross. The Apostle brings the meaning of the Cross to bear upon the natural man, the carnal man, and all his works, upon all that has resulted from his presence amongst the Lord's people - the divisions, and all the rest of that horrible situation in the Church that is described in the First Letter. He says: 'When I came to you, I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified' (1 Cor. 2:1,2). So 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 get on with building until those things are dealt with. We find the Apostle telling the Corinthians in that First Letter that the foundation is already laid: 'I laid the foundation, as a wise masterbuilder, and others build thereon; but let every man take heed what he builds thereon' (1 Cor. 3:10). The things that we find in that letter, as we have pointed out, 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. We cannot have those things in our clearing - they will only clutter everything up once more and make it necessary for us to go through the whole business of consuming all over again. Because every man's work which is not according to the Cross is going up in flames and smoke - there will be nothing left.'**

**That, then, is the first outreach of the Cross as from Romans, to touch conditions amongst the Lord's people which are not in accordance with what God means by the Cross. God says 'No' to all that. 'I am not going to use that on My foundation; I am not going to build with that. You get rid of that, and then we will get on with the building.' As we saw in a previous chapter, those things were dealt with by the Corinthians themselves. The fire did burn among them - the fire of repentance, the fire of selfjudgment, the fire of clearing, the fire of brokenness of heart (2 Cor. 7:11). Something happened, and they dealt with those things.**

2 Corinthians

**The second radiating line leads to the Second Letter to the Corinthians. Here you have the great restoration of testimony in the church in Corinth - in the location, in the city and in the world. The testimony that had been marred and spoiled can now be recovered. When God finds that state of heart, that state of spirit - broken, humble, contrite, very low before Him, 'trembling at His word' (Is. 66:2) - He can get on with things in relation to testimony in the world. That is, He can now build. When He has that, then things begin to happen outwardly - it does not require a great effort, they just do happen - because here is the expression of the mighty dynamic power of God in the midst.**

**The Apostle says in that letter: "It is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness" (or, 'Let light be', in the first creation), "who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). A few verses previously he says: "We... beholding... the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (3:18). That is the testimony: when things inwardly have been dealt with, the outshining is quite spontaneous. It is just the result of a deep, very quiet work of God. When God spoke into the first chaos His fiat: 'Let light be!', I do not think that there was a very great noise about it. There never needs to be a great noise when God puts forth His power. There is the 'hiding of His power', to use Habakkuk's phrase (Hab. 3:4). But that is not the minimising of His power. God 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! - and just from a word. It is symbolic.**

**But here at Corinth, the light shines out when God has right conditions; and that is how it will be. 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 the conditions are right, something will happen. And if there is nothing happening, then we had better look to our conditions.**

Galatians

**The third line radiating from the Cross, as we saw in our last chapter, takes us to the Letter to the Galatians, where we are shown the resultant life in the Spirit. The Cross produces a life in the Spirit: it brings about a true, spiritual Christianity, as distinct from a merely professional, formal or ritualistic kind of Christianity that is all on the outside. This mighty thing, a true spiritual Christianity
- a life in the Spirit: how real, how effective it is! That is what we reach when we come to the Letter to the Galatians. It says that the Cross works out in a life in the Spirit, and that true Christianity is a spiritual thing.**

'Ephesians' and 'Colossians'

**With that brief resumé of what has gone before, we now turn to a few additional thoughts from the twin letters, 'To the Ephesians' (so-called), and 'To the Colossians'. It is quite evident that they are twin letters: you cannot read them without finding that you are covering very largely the same ground, only with a distinctive emphasis in each. And in them you come to some tremendous things.**

**Notice, first of all, that in these letters, as in all the others, the Cross is the foundation. In Ephesians, we are told that 'we who were dead in trespasses and sins were quickened and raised together with Him' (2:1,5,6): the Cross is there. In the Letter to the Colossians, we read of "...the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism" (2:11,12) here you have the Cross again. The Cross is basic, that is the point. It is the foundation carried over from Romans.**

**Then, when you recognise that, you come upon what I think we may say are the two greatest things that have ever been disclosed by God. They are such wonderful things that, if we really see them, not as in the Bible to be read, but as a reality in the heart, something is bound to happen to us.**

**Have you ever come upon something in the Word of God which has just overwhelmed you, carried you away? Perhaps I can illustrate this by a humorous little incident that occurred during ministry in the Far East. I was speaking in a meeting one day - of course by interpretation - when suddenly the dear brother at my side, who was interpreting for me into Chinese, went off into fits of uncontrollable laughter! There he was - he just could not stop laughing: and then the people caught it, and went off into laughter likewise! Well, this dear brother could not get back; he tried and struggled, but the more he struggled, the more he seemed to lose his control. I was not conscious of having said anything extraordinary - at least; nothing that would occasion such mirth. I had to wait, and wonder what it was all about - wondering what on earth I had said to cause this. And even a little later on, when he had recovered somewhat, and we had got away from that, the thing came back to him, and off he went again; and this happened more than once.**

So afterward, when I had got him alone, I said: 'Look here, brother, what ever did I say? what did I say to cause you to go off like that, and all the people too? Did I say something so outrageous, so terribly funny to you?' He said: 'No, brother, no, nothing like that. It was just something we had never seen before, that is all, we had never seen that before!'

The point is this: it is possible to see something in the Word of God which carries you right away - it is so absolutely fresh, so new! The Lord deliver us from becoming so familiar with it all that it never provokes anything, it never stirs anything in us. It ought to be with us as it was with those dear Chinese friends. But that is by the way. When we come to these letters, if we have our eyes really opened, we come to things that are calculated to take our breath away, really to carry us right out of ourselves: for they are very wonderful things indeed. Perhaps when I mention them they will be so familiar that they will not stir you at all; but I cannot at any time reflect upon them without being tremendously moved. The language of them is indeed familiar, but may the Lord bring home to us something of the real impact and meaning of these words again. Let us, then, see what is the key to and the sum of this letter, that is called the Letter to the Ephesians.

**Ephesians: "All Things in Christ"**

Amidst all the wonderful fulness which is in this letter - and it is a very full letter indeed; almost every clause carries us out of our depth - there is a small fragment, which gathers the whole of the letter into itself; which really reveals what it is all about, what it all means. It is always very helpful to be able to get hold of something like that which contains everything. Here it is: *"...the mystery of his will... which he purposed in him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in him, I say..." (1:9,10).* "To sum up all things in Christ". That phrase 'sum up' does not perhaps fully convey what the Apostle really meant and was saying. It goes as far as it can, but it might be better to say: 'to gather together (or better still: to subsume) all things in Christ'.

**Human Disintegration**

When sin came in through Adam, a great process of disintegration commenced. First of all, it began in the man himself: the man was no longer a single entity, he was a divided personality. And every child and son of Adam is a divided personality; there is civil war in his very nature, in his very constitution. He is a divided man, a man who is in conflict within himself. Is not that true of all of us? We know enough about ourselves to know that there is nothing in our natures, our make-up, our constitution, that speaks of complete harmony. There is war within us - war in our make-up; war in our temperament; war in our whole constitution. We are broken; we are divided; we are disintegrated. That happened in the man himself.

And then it happened between the first two - the only two - the man and his wife. You can discern the elements of disintegration and disruption between them: the man starts blaming the woman, and that is the beginning of a domestic schism. There had been a wonderful unity and harmony; they were "one flesh", it says (Gen. 2:24), but now something has come in, and they are no longer like that. When they were driven out of the garden, they were no doubt blaming each other, saying, 'This is all your fault!' We are familiar with that sort of thing - recriminations and so on. Division has come between them; there is a strain in life.

And then what of the family which came through them? Here you have Cain and Abel, the first children, involved in schism, division, disintegration, even to the point of murder. And out from the family, the thing spread to the race, until there ensued the great scattering, the dividing up of the race into its many, many parts, with all its diversity of languages, as we have it today. The whole race is broken to pieces, in a condition of utter disharmony. You pursue that through, and, before you are out of the Old Testament, you find the whole race divided into two irreconcilable sections, Jew and Gentile, hating each other with bitter hatred. The Jew will have nothing to do with the Gentile, calls the Gentiles 'dogs' - unclean things - and will have nothing to do with them. And the Gentile nations react against the Jews, as we know they have done all along and continue to do today. The present state of the human race is one of brokenness, scatteredness, discord and hatred, quarrels and strife and conflict and war. From centre to circumference it is all in pieces, and all the pieces are against one another. There is no harmony, no unity and no integration in the human race.

**God's Secret**

But 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. He had a secret in His own heart as to how He would solve this terrible problem. This secret is what Paul, in this and other letters, calls 'the mystery'. How would God do it? He would 'sum up', He would 'gather together all things in Christ'. He would make His Son the integrating Centre and Sphere of a new creation, 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, surely that is something to send a thrill through us, however often we may have heard it before.

And so, in that connection, three things come into view.

First of all, the Cross of Christ. You notice here that Paul says: 'the enmity was slain' (2:16). 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. The Cross is the instrument for dealing with all that - and it will deal with it. If the Cross really gets down to the depths of our being, the whole situation, both in ourselves and between ourselves and others, will change. The Cross does something, so that we no longer meet one another on natural ground at all. We meet one another on heavenly ground, on spiritual ground, on the ground of Christ.

Secondly, Christ Himself is the focal centre and sphere of that. We meet 'in Christ' - that is the great word: "to sum up all things in Christ". notice how often that little phrase 'in Christ' occurs: everything is 'in Christ'. He is the centre and sphere of this wonderful new integration. "In one Spirit", says the Apostle, "were we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).

Thirdly, as clearly emerges from this letter, the Church is the vessel of all this. God's secret was not only that His Son would be the focal centre, but that the Church should be the vessel in which this unity should be displayed. What a tragedy that it is not more so! And yet, as I have said, where you get a true expression of the Church, this is what you find - that these disintegrating things are outside and the mighty integration of Divine love is within. You get a real testimony to the Body of Christ.

We are so familiar, of course, with the phrases and terminology. But it is a most wonderful thing to realise that, in the fulness of the times (we have not yet reached the 'fulness of the times', but I think we are getting very near to it), God purposes to gather together - not geographically and physically, but into one glorious unity of spirit - all things in Christ. God has determined to do that, and it will be a wonderful day when that purpose is realised.

'Slaying the enmity by the Cross' (2:16). Dear brother, dear sister, do give heed to this. If there is any enmity between you and another brother or sister in Christ, that is a denial of the Cross; it is a denial of Christ, and it is a denial of the Church. That is very solemn. Have you any enmity with another brother? or another sister? *It says here that in the Cross enmity was destroyed!* Where is the Cross where is Christ - where is the Spirit - where is the Church - if there is still present that which the Cross is supposed to have - yes, and in reality *did* put away? It has no place here.

In the great prayer that Paul prays in the third chapter (vv. 14-19), he says: *"I bow my knees unto the Father..."* Then we are a family! There you have the heart of things. And what is the chief characteristic of a true fatherhood and a true family? It is what Paul says here - it is love. 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 the saints"* - note that - *"strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge..."* There is a love in such dimensions that can do this thing, that can achieve this end of gathering together all the brokenness in Christ. It is only going to be done by that mighty, mighty love, with its breadth and its length and its height and its depth. That love is great enough to do it; but you and I have got to be strong, with all saints, to apprehend it. *Apprehend that love,* and God gets His end.

**Colossians: The 'Fulness' Restored**

We can only look briefly at the second of these 'twin letters' - the Letter to the Colossians. What is the great word, or statement, in that letter? It is this: *"It was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell" (1:19); "and in him ye are made full" (2:10).* What has happened?

First of all, at the beginning of the creation, the great Potter created, moulded, fashioned, shaped, so to speak 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 fulness - what fulness He filled into the vessel of this creation! How full is the vessel of this creation, even now in its present condition - how full of the beauty and glory of God! But at the beginning it was filled with unsullied beauty and glory. And then, a great enemy came in and struck a blow at that vessel and shattered it to pieces: all that Divine, spiritual fulness leaked away - it has gone; and in its place you find, by comparison with what once was, only desolation and emptiness.

Now the Great Potter comes back, to 'make it again another vessel' as it pleases Him to make it (Jer. 18:4). Here is the vessel - the Church. This is the vessel of the Lord: a beautiful vessel, "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). As He looks at it according to His own thought and His own ideal, pondering all that He intends and all that He will realise through it, He says - 'A glorious Church! It is very good.' And in this Letter to the Colossians we see the remade vessel now filled again with all the fulness. The vessel is mended, all the fragments are gathered together; you cannot trace the cracks and the joins; this Church as He has it here is once again a beautiful whole; and now He fills it again with all His fulness. "That ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:19), is the prayer of the Apostle. "In him dwelleth all the fulness... and in him ye are made full" (Col. 2:9,10). That is how it is to be.

One thing that must be underlined is this: that, while this is a process which God is seeking to work out, an end to which He is labouring, we must remember that the achievement of this great and glorious thing - this 'gathering together' again of all things in Christ, this filling of that 'gathered together' vessel with all His fulness - requires, and must have, a continuous work of the Cross. That is the challenge of all that we have been seeing in the foregoing pages: the challenge of the Cross in everything, in relation to the great purpose of God. This re-integration, if the Lord is allowed to have His way, will be effected by means of the Cross. If there is anything contrary to integration, to oneness, it will always be traceable to something which has withstood, or is withstanding, the work of the Cross. That applies in our own lives, and it applies in our assemblies, our fellowships, our companies. If there is something that still represents disintegration, dividedness, schism, if things are broken, are not one entity, not one whole, it can be traced to a failure to allow the Cross to do its work in some direction or other. That is the inclusive, and the only, explanation. If the Cross really does its work, this integration will spontaneously result.

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 life. When the Church really allows the Cross to get to work in its very constitution, the problem of division is solved. And if there is spiritual poverty, if there is scarcity, if there is limitation in our spiritual resources, and we are not knowing this fulness, it is for the same reason. If the Cross works, you find that the measure increases, quite spontaneously: it always does so, when you get things out of the way that are contrary to Christ.

**Conclusion**

And so we finish where we began. "To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" If we have any interest in, or concern for, knowing God with us and for us in power, in support, in protection, in deliverance, in succour, this is the way. The answer to that question in Isaiah 53 is found in that same chapter: it is revealed to *this* One who goes to the Cross, who suffers the Cross; to the One who lets go all in the Cross; who goes down into shame and dishonour in the Cross; who loses all His own in the Cross: to Him the arm of the Lord is revealed. And it is revealed to all those who go that way with Him. History is the great proof of it. Throughout history, God's arm has been, and ever will be, bared for His Son, and for all those who are with His Son as crucified men and women - crucified churches - a crucified Church.

There is a passage of which we are all very fond: "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9). The Cross is the instrument for testing whether our hearts are perfect toward the Lord, or whether we have personal interests, or worldly interests, or divided interests in any way. That word 'perfect' means 'complete' or, 'whole': the Lord will show Himself mighty on behalf of him whose heart is complete toward Him. And where could we find a greater embodiment of one whose heart was completely, wholly for God, than in the Lord Jesus on that Cross?