

Advent 2019: He Shall Be Called, Wonderful Counselor, Isaiah 9:6, 12/1/19

Well, we have officially entered the Christmas season. We have a strangely controversial topic that seems to be a modern phenomenon of when you should begin to listen to Christmas music...and people have very strong emotions. Some feel like it can start before Thanksgiving Others say- Black Friday....Others say, "Nope. Not a day before December 1." Some of you are like, "Immediately after Labor Day." But one thing we can all agree on, it is now OK to play Christmas music.

Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 9. We are beginning our Advent series for the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas. We are going to be exploring one verse from the Prophet Isaiah 9:6 for Advent. One of the reasons we can have confidence in the veracity of our Bibles is all the fulfilled prophecy. There are somewhere in the ballpark of 300 prophecies from the OT that are fulfilled by Jesus...some so specific down to the town of his birth, how many pieces of silver he would be betrayed by and his method of death, crucifixion which had not even been invented yet. One of these advent prophecies, that speak of the birth of the Messiah is here in Isaiah 9, over 700 years before the arrival of the Jesus Christ. In His birth announcement in Isaiah 9 we see four royal titles that encapsulate the nature and work of the Messiah. My hope is that as we study these titles of Jesus that He will become more amazing and real and worthy of your worship this Christmas season.

Now, let's understand the context of this prophecy. The first thing I want you to realize is that this prophecy was not first made at Christmastime. It was spoken into a real, troublesome situation. The year was 730 B.C. and King Ahaz, King of the southern Kingdom of Judah was nervous because the seemingly invincible world power known as Assyria was forming an army to attack Jerusalem and Ahaz was worried, and you can understand why. Big, powerful kingdom, little Jerusalem, odds are not very good. And so when you are the little guy what is your strategy? Form an alliance with a bigger world power that can protect you. But before he does, God sends the prophet Isaiah to him and tells him, "Don't worry about alliances. I will protect you if you trust me, if you turn to me." And God promises help and hope by giving them a sign:

Isaiah 9:6-7

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Now here's where biblical prophecy can be a bit tricky. The question is: **Who fulfilled this prophecy?** Some have seen this passage as being purely messianic and speaking of the birth of Jesus Christ. Others see this as being fulfilled by King Ahaz's son, Hezekiah who would be one of the great kings of Judah's history. We don't have time today to get into all the reasons for both.

But there are also many Biblical scholars and I agree with them, who would say both/and, not either/or. **King Hezekiah will partially fulfill this prophecy, but it will ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.** It is like God is saying, “if you turn to me now, I will send help and hope...a protector, a savior and king now. But it is only temporary. The ultimate protector, savior and king is coming in the future.” I believe the nature of the titles point to this. No mere human can truly be called Mighty God, Everlasting Father, who has a kingdom that never ends. In fact, while Jesus has begun to fulfill this prophecy, we await the second advent, when he will return to ultimately restore all things and reign on the throne of David forever and ever.

I believe this view more accurately reflects the nature of how God brings help and hope in the lives of his people. If Ahaz is worried that they are going to be utterly destroyed by the Assyrians, and is seeking help and hope from God...and God said, “Sure thing Ahaz, here’s the help and hope- the Messiah is going to be born 700 years from now, and he is going to ultimately one-day restore all things.” Ahaz may say... “Um, that’s great but I don’t think the Assyrians are going to wait that long to destroy us. We need help now!” Illustration- You know the Eagles haven’t looked so good this year. Imagine the fans saying to the GM, “Tell us what you are going to do to give us some help and hope to save the season and Howie Roseman said, “Don’t worry 700 years from now, we are going to have the most amazing team you’ve ever seen and we are going to be a dynasty.” That’s not going to alleviate our concerns now.

Instead what God does, he provides something tangible to meet the immediate need, in this case physical protection, but that’s not lasting...and it’s not what humanity ultimately needs. What God does is say, “I’m going to also provide the true help and hope you don’t even know you need. I’m going to deal with the root of all your problems- your spiritual condition of the separation and sin.” And God does that through Jesus Christ as we have been studying in Romans. **God meets us in our felt need, but provides for our ultimate need.** And friend, I hope this resonates in your hearts this advent. Like Ahaz, we have some problems. And when we are in the midst of our problems sometimes we can’t see anything but what is right in front of us and so we say...God get me out of this! We cry out to be delivered from bad health; God sometimes answers that prayer in the present....but God wants to deliver us from the curse of death that causes bad health, and he has done that through Jesus. We cry out to be delivered from broken relationships; and sometimes God answers that cry through restoration and peace...but God wants to deliver us from the sin and selfishness that breaks those relationships, and he has done that through Jesus. We are always thinking about the short game, God has the long game in mind. We are thinking about the battle, He will meet us there...but God is most concerned about the war.

And so this is the lens through which we look at this prophecy of Jesus the Messiah who he calls by four titles. These titles are royal titles, but we are going to see that they are also relational titles...these are four things Jesus would become to us in our need, offering real help and hope.

The first one is **Wonderful Counselor.** This comes from the construction of two Hebrew words- the first one means **“beyond understanding.”** It is a word that you use when you run out of words. Magnificent, glorious, spectacular...wonderful. The second translated **counselor means**

one who instructs and guides...and here is the key- from a position of authority. Don't think of "counselor" like the friend whom you call late at night and you pour out problems to them and they say, "Oh that stinks. Yeah, I hate her, too. Good luck with all that."

Instead, there are at least two aspects of Jesus as the wonderful counselor that we see in Scripture:

1) Wisdom: Think King Solomon. That word "Counselor" is used of him. People brought their problems to him, and he had the wisdom to know the solution and the power to enact the solution. This is someone to whom you bring your worst problems and he shows you the way out. He's one like Solomon, but he is not just a wise counselor, he's the wonderful counselor.

This marked Jesus' ministry. The word that was used most in the Gospels when people heard him speak was "astonished". That means jaw-dropping, speechless. Maybe we might say, in wonderful of his counsel and wisdom. And then in John chapter 7, the temple guards were sent to arrest him. They came back empty handed. And when their bosses said, well where is he? You know what they said? They shook their heads and said, "never a man spoke like this." Never a man spoke like-- it was wonderful what he had to say. He spoke words of life. But it's not just that Jesus has wisdom and truth in his words. The second way to think about Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor is:

2) Experience:

Hebrews 4:15-16

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

He's not just a king who rules over us he's like an older brother who lived among us, who has walked through everything we have walked through. There is nothing you experience that he has not also experienced. You've dealt with poverty and lack of resources, so did he. Born into poverty in a nowhere town...his parents were nobody teenagers and he was considered "illegitimate." You have to work in hard conditions? So did he- worked with his hands likely as a stone mason. Blue collar. You have a dysfunctional family or deal with rejection? So did he. He had half siblings, most of who didn't even believe in him at first and abandoned him. He was rejected by his own people. You deal with depression and anxiety? So did he. Known as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief...So anxious before he was betrayed and sent to the cross, he was sweating drops of blood...

Jesus listens sympathetically because there is no suffering or pain or confusion I go through that he himself has not gone through, and he can guide me with expert advice and deep understanding. What I love about the name, **WONDERFUL COUNSELOR: It means that Jesus came for people with problems.** He said he came not for the healthy, but for the sick. He came not to reward the righteous, but save the sinner.

So here's the question- Are you, as Hebrews says, "Confidently **drawing near**" to the **Wonderful Counselor**...are you going to Him with your deepest and darkest problems, questions, and struggles? There are lots of people that claim to be wonderful counselors but none like Jesus. And some of us are all too eager to go to them for advice and guidance in our problems, before we even consider what Jesus has to say, before we draw near to him to receive grace, mercy, help. In fact, in the days of Isaiah, the people were seeking counsel, but going to the wrong places to get it. Isaiah admonishes them just a chapter before this prophecy.

Isaiah 8:19-20

¹⁹ When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?²⁰ Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

Some of us are going to **counterfeit** people, places and things to get help with and fix our deepest problems and pains. It might not be a spiritist, but you are relying on someone who doesn't speak for Jesus and according to God's Word...and Jesus is asking, "Why should you not inquire of your God?" Or your counsel, the thing that you run to for comfort or to ease the pain might be the bottom of a bottle or using substances. Some of you are going to a relationship with someone you have no business being with and their words and actions are luring you away from God's counsel instead of toward it. All of these are counterfeits for Jesus, the **Wonderful Counselor**.

Some of us are going to counselors that might not always contradict God's Word, but are **cheap substitutes for Jesus**. Let me be clear, we ought to seek out counsel from others, especially those who align with God's counsel. In fact, Scripture tells us that plans fail for lack of counsel but with many advisors they succeed. And we are to speak counsel into one another's lives. Absolutely. And if you don't seek counsel, that is a sign that you think YOU are the wonderful counselor. The question is, are we going to these sources as substitutes for Jesus and His Word? My concern is not that you have a counselor, or read books, or listen to podcasts, or follow certain people on Twitter to receive counsel. My concern is more about priority and proportion. If you can quote more of Rush Limbaugh, Ben Shapiro than you can Jesus...that's a problem. If you have read all of Warren Buffet's books on investing but you haven't ever read through the Bible...that's a problem. If you can't miss an episode of Dr. Oz, but you don't mind missing a quiet time...that's a problem. If you face a relationship problem you run to Facebook to seek affirmation, or run to your friend or call your counselor before you pray and seek the Lord...that is a problem.

The Wonderful Counselor is waiting for you, longing to be with you, he wants you to come to him when you are weary and burdened and tired. He has comfort, he has wisdom, he understands.... Story of Dan and Steph.

For Communion- I enjoy counseling...one of the things you get to do at the end of the session, you get to give advice, exhort, listen, pray...but at the end of the day, they have to do all the work. But the thing about the wonderful counselor- at the end of the day- he does all the work.