

“Wonderful Counselor”

Isaiah 9:6

FCF: Stressed because we don't really see who this Child is

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor,
(anchor) we have no need to fear and are freed to follow Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Listen to this introduction of a timely and helpful resource. Countering an overly rosy assessment of the holiday season and answering the question, “What could possibly go wrong?” ([READ Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook: Holidays, p.12](#)):

Consider this: More suicides, car accidents, family arguments, and food and alcohol poisonings take place during the months of November and December than any other time of the year. Add travel mishaps, kitchen disasters, snow- and ice-related injuries, electrocutions, tree-trimming catastrophes, and gift-related traumas – there's no such thing as a silent night when it comes to the holidays.

Recognizing such things are out of our control, we should then be prepared. Hence, the [Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook: Holidays](#). One interesting entry is entitled, “How to Overcome Holiday Depression.” Here are the suggestions, each one listed as something to be avoided ([READ WCSSHH, p.47](#)): *overwhelming social commitments, increased spending and financial burdens, poor eating habits and nutritional deficiencies, increased consumption of alcohol and sugar, increased stress*. Increased stress? Certainly, there is some common sense to most of these solutions, but to just say “try to avoid increased stress” and expect that to have some effect is surely a bit lacking.

But that is what we hear all the time – not just for holiday pressures but life's pressures the whole year round. Exercise, plan wisely, get rest, eat a better diet, read this book, attend this seminar, think positively. All good advice, given certain circumstances. But we need more than that. We need a birth announcement. Who is it that has come?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Isaiah 9:1-7](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Those of you following world events know that an important figure recently passed from the scene – Yasser Arafat. He is remembered differently by differing parties – part folk hero, part war legend, part terrorist guerrilla. Many experts, not just of the West but the East as well, tend to see him as the latter. So much so that, despite the instability his absence will bring, some say there is a chance his passing may well be the greatest opportunity for peace that region has seen in years. Such were the ways of this man that in his death hope is being found. It is in his passing that a new day might dawn.

In our text this morning, Isaiah writes of a whole different scenario. While it is still the change of players that brings about a change in expectations, here it is birth of a ruler and not his death that brings such encouragement – the birth of Jesus, the Christ.

Let me summarize the historical setting of Isaiah's prophecy. Darkness and gloom abound. The LORD's people had broken with Him – their worship was full of hypocrisy and empty formalities, justice and righteousness had been forgotten. They were a fruitless vineyard ready to be torn down. Which is certainly what the LORD was now promising to do. And yet, in His wrath there would also be mercy. All through Isaiah, we find this beautiful tension between the holiness of God on the one hand that rises up against His people's rebellion – a love that cannot just be spurned. And then on the other hand, we see a rising of grace – an assurance that a remnant would still be preserved and that a salvation was coming. Of a greater kind than they could imagine.

For at that moment (about 733 B.C.), at the time Isaiah 9 was written, the only thing the people of Judah could see was the Assyrian army massing on their northern borders. The deportations had begun. Fellow-Israelites were being carried off, homelands literally alienated. This is the context of verse 1. This is the darkness and shadow of verse 2. But was that the “real” reality? Was that all there was – their bleak circumstances? Would they look at the darkness, the hopelessness, the dreams shattered and conclude the LORD had forgotten them, forsaken them, and cast them off? Or would they remember His mercies past, His promises present, and take heart? Was all lost?

No. All was not lost. And to assure them of that, Isaiah spoke of this Child who was to come. It is the image of the long-lost heir, coming to the throne, returning to claim His own – King Jesus, the Messiah, the One whose birth we celebrate even today. But Isaiah does more than just announce this king. He describes Him as well with a list of names. It was a common practice for kings in the ancient Near East to take upon themselves titles describing their qualities and accomplishments. But notice – this king isn’t taking these titles; they’re given to Him. And not after He’d taken the throne but long before. This is clearly no ordinary king. And, in fact, no other king in Israel’s history could be described in these ways without this passage being understood as just ridiculous bombast. This is none other than the King of Kings Himself. And He comes not just for Judah’s sake but for the world’s. And His coming is so sure that, even well over 700 years before it happened, it’s being spoken of as already having happened.

And it has. Dear ones, I do not know the source of your anxiety and stress this morning – holiday or otherwise. But I do know the answer. King Jesus has come. Look with me now at the first of these titles and you’ll see it as well. Who is this Child?

I. WHO HE IS – WONDERFUL

Isaiah begins with, “Wonderful Counselor.” “Wonderful” – what does that mean?
A) *Explanation*

Our typical understanding of the word would be, “causing wonder; astonishing, admirable, excellent.” Which is partially right. But not quite. There’s much more to it.

1. Usage of the term

The Hebrew word being used here has the connotation of something you would marvel at because it is “supernatural, beyond human capacity.” That is to say, it is a wonder through and through. Describing the miracles God performed in the exodus, (**READ Psalm 78:12**). In making clear His divine identity, the Angel of the Lord queries Samson’s father, Manoah (**READ Judges 13:18**). This is what “wonderful” means here.

2. Applied to context

It is an attribute most often associated with God Himself. Quite a claim to make about this Child to come. Which means that while the darkness spoken of was real, it was not the whole reality. All was not lost. There was still yet hope. For He was coming.

Illustration:

That’s the sort of message people need to hear in countering their fears. “Don’t give up. Help is on the way.” In fact, it was about this time three years ago our family most needed to hear it. Sarah was pregnant and laid low in the throes of morning sickness. Household duties and the needs of other little ones do not disappear just because Mommy is sick and so I was doing double duty between my labors at the church and home. We were stretched quite thin. And then the message came – my parents

would make the drive from Virginia to come and stay as long as we needed them. And that was a message that helped me to hold on for at least just a few days more.

B) Implications

Now, the throes of Isaiah's day were obviously far worse. And, in fact, they were but a glimmer of the darkness shrouding the whole world. And into this came a Child.

1. What we read

Isaiah told people what to expect. The writers in the New Testament tell us how to understand it. The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians ([READ Colossians 1:15-20](#)). John begins his gospel with similar reflections ([READ John 1:1-5](#)).

2. What we see

This is all being spoken in regards to this Child. He is Himself a "Wonder." And as such He is truly "Wonderful." His birth an absolute miracle – God showing us in His working outside His normal ways that He alone is the Author of our salvation. The One who existed eternally as the second member of the Trinity – born – given a beginning! As J. I. Packer notes in his classic, *Knowing God* ([READ Packer, p.50](#)), "*The mystery of the incarnation is unfathomable. We cannot explain it; we can only formulate it.*"

Application:

We cannot exhaust it. We can only describe it. Little wonder the chorus strikes the chord in our hearts, "O Come, Let Us Adore Him." "His Name Is Wonderful." Can we not then turn to Him? Can we not then trust in Him? In our helplessness, is there really then anything truly hopeless? Is not the true state of things, the real reality, that God is real and that He has come? Yes, we may be at the end of our strength, our cleverness, our understanding, our resources, our wit – but are we at His?

II. WHAT HE IS – COUNSELOR

Which takes us to the other half of this name – "Wonderful Counselor."

A) Explanation

Again, it's worth considering what Isaiah meant by this. We might imagine such things as someone who you meet at a camp, or one who gives advice for an hourly fee.

1. Usage of the term

But there's more to it than that. This word, "counselor," in the Hebrew implied a wise planner, one who administers with wisdom. Such a one has the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and the highest of goals and the knowledge as to how to attain them. We see the two brought together again in Isaiah 28 ([READ Isaiah 28:29](#)).

2. Applied to context

This Child, Isaiah says, is just this – "wonderful in counsel." Which means, again, as their enemies were massing and the darkness was all the people could see, that darkness was not the whole truth. All was not lost. He was coming – a ruler whose wisdom is beyond human capabilities, a ruler who has the very wisdom of God. He has no need of being surrounded with other counselors and advisors. He Himself is the Counselor.

B) Implications

1. What we read

And do we not see that very thing unfolding in the Gospels? We read in Matthew at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount ([READ Matthew 7:28-29](#)). With His stories, with His insight into the human heart, with what He said and how He said it – He intentionally and effectively pulled at some and pushed at others. His name is Counselor!

2. What we see

And is this not how He continues to work, as Wonderful Counselor? So often not just in ways our wisdom can appreciate but in ways our wisdom can not fathom as well? And should that surprise us? No – for He is a Counselor wondrous in His counsel.

Illustration:

I mentioned that time when my family so desperately needed to hear those words, “Hang on – help is on the way.” And we did need such help. More than we knew. We lost that child to a miscarriage. It was a painful time – not just for Sarah physically but for us all emotionally. And my parents were there to help. We hadn’t planned on that being the reason for their visit. But the Wonderful Counselor had.

Application:

And that has worked to deepen my trust in Him. I mean, wouldn’t it be a bit foolish not to? To not trust in the Wonderful Counselor? Would there not be great folly in such wisdom? Remember what we read in Colossians and John. He was there at the beginning. He knows how things are wired to work – how we are wired to work – for He Himself wired us. Can we not trust Him? Even when His commands, His laws, His counsel seems to cut against the grain of our desires and inclinations? Again, His is wonderful divine counsel. Do we really think our ideas will always match exactly with His? But does it not make sense that it would be best if they did? (**READ Psalm 1**)

CONCLUSION:

Let me push on this and bring these two things together just a bit more – “Wonderful” and “Counselor.” The Child spoken of here by Isaiah, this Child we see lying in the manger, this Child who grew to walk among us, die for us, and rule over us is God, the all wise One – truly a wonder of a counselor. Which means that, as the stresses, pressures, and questions mass themselves on our borders, as we feel their threats and wonder what could become of us, while we may not know what the outcome will be in all its details to our satisfaction, we can know that there is One who does and we are not beyond His care and control. His name is Wonderful Counselor.

I mentioned J. I. Packer. Later in that chapter, he writes (**READ Packer, p.86**):

Perhaps He means to strengthen us in patience, good humour, compassion, humility, or meekness, by giving us some extra practice in exercising these graces under specially difficult conditions. Perhaps He has new lessons in self-denial and self-distrust to teach us. Perhaps He wishes to break us of complacency, or unreality, or undetected forms of pride and conceit. Perhaps His purpose is simply to draw us closer to Himself in conscious communion with Him; for it is often the case, as all saints know, that fellowship with the Father and the Son is most vivid and sweet, and Christian joy is greatest, when the cross is heaviest...Or perhaps God is preparing us for forms of service of which at present we have no inkling.

The possibilities are as endless as the cracks in our character, the lackings of our souls.

Now, can we trust Him to do such work? Well, no, not if He doesn’t know what He’s doing. If such surgery was being carried out by an amateur, we would indeed have grounds to panic. I can remember being “doctored” on no few occasions by my children with the Sesame Street Elmo’s Doctor Kit. Organs were removed and replaced, bones were broken and reset. All fine when nothing is really on the line. Then it doesn’t really matter who’s doing the work. But listen. This is the Wonderful Counselor. Dear ones, what do we have then to be afraid of? He knows, oh He knows. And He has come.

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor,

(anchor) we have no need to fear and are freed to follow Him.