



Date: December 7-8, 2019
Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: Isaiah 9:6 - Mighty God

We have this fascination with superheroes in our culture today, have you noticed? Perhaps the best evidence for this is the overwhelming success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) films. MCU is a series of 23 films that have been produced since 2008 that have grossed over \$22 billion at the global box office.

This includes *Avengers: Endgame* that was released this year and is now the highest grossing film of all time. Other movies in the series feature superheroes such as *Thor*, *the Hulk*, *Iron Man*, *Spider Man*, *Captain America* and *Hawkeye*. Although these films are highly entertaining, that does not tell the whole story of why they are so popular in Canada, the US and around the world. There is something more at play here and it has to do with the image of the “superhero” itself. What is it that makes a superhero so popular today? Why do they have such a grasp over our collective consciousness that we cheer for them and in some cases even aspire to be one? They haven’t always been this popular.

Superhero comics, TV shows and movies have always had a bit of a cult following but they have never been as huge in the public imagination as they are today. Do you know what changed that according to some cultural experts? It was “9/11”. It all changed after the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001.

In 2002, *Spider Man* starring Toby Maguire was released to universal acclaim, breaking box office records which eventually led to the first phase of the *Marvel* series with the release of *Iron Man* in 2008.

The year 2001 is an important marker because the fall out of the 9/11 attacks left the US and the world feeling a little vulnerable and insecure. We had a reminder of that this week with the stabbing attacks

on London Bridge in England, which was dubbed another terror attack.

In a post “9/11” world where insecurity, threat of invasion and paranoia have been drilled into our psyches, we like to believe in the existence of someone who takes justice into their own hands, punishes the bad guys and gives us all safer and more secure lives.

With the current popularity of superhero movies, now may be one of the best times for our culture and for us to truly grasp the significance of the Prophet Isaiah’s words in the bible.

Isaiah 9:6

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

Last weekend we launched our Christmas message series as entered into the season of Advent. Let me do a little review of what we talked about since many of you were not able to be with us because of the weather. Our series is entitled...*and he shall be called*....and our anchor passage for this series is Isaiah 9:6, which I just read.

It is a very familiar passage of scripture and one that we have heard often, especially during the Christmas season. It was written about 700 years before the birth of Jesus, during a pretty bleak time in history of God’s people. They were not being led well by their kings.

The people had become apathetic and turned away from God. They were worshipping other gods and idols and they were on the cusp of being overtaken

by their enemy to the north. There is despair and hopelessness in the land. But God has the prophet Isaiah share a word of hope with the Israelites that one day, a saviour will come and rescue his people. *And he will be called:*

This is a very important line in this passage. Why? Well just as names are important in our society today, they were especially significant in biblical times. To speak of someone's name in the ancient culture was to refer to their character, their personality and their reputation. To know the name of someone was to know some essential truth about their nature.

Names were vitally important to God and that is why every time He attaches a name to himself or someone in scripture, we have to take notice. That is why this series is important. God is speaking through his prophet Isaiah to give names that represent the character and nature of the one he is sending, the Messiah who will save his people.

*And he will be called.....listen to it again....
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Last week, we unpacked the significance of the first name, *Wonderful Counselor*. We looked at how we have watered down the meaning of *wonderful* in our society today and made everything wonderful. *Isn't that wonderful*, but is it really?

Is the fact that I called to cancel a medical appointment, really wonderful? That is what the receptionist who took my call told me this week. *I need to cancel my appointment and will reschedule later.* *Wonderful*, she replied. No, it was just responsible.

In the time of Isaiah however, wonderful was a powerful word used to describe something beyond comprehension and truly miraculous.

Counselor was a word used in Isaiah's day to represent someone who leads and guides. It is a very significant role. That of a counselor, but the problem was that those who were leading and guiding the people at that time of Isaiah were doing a terrible job.

That's why these words, *Wonderful Counselor* used to describe this coming Messiah would have been such good news to the people. They anticipated

someone to come who would have these qualities and that is exactly what Jesus did. He had all the qualities of a wonderful counselor.

We read in the gospels that whenever someone came to him for advice, counsel or wisdom, he always knew not just what to say but how and when to say it. He truly is the wonderful, beyond comprehension counselor who we can fully trust to lead not only our lives but also govern the world.

Today we come to the second name, *Mighty God*. What image does this adjective, *mighty* conger up for you? For most of us, we think of displays of power, don't we? It was a *mighty storm*, means intimidating flashes of lightning, thunder, rain and gusts of wind. She is *small but mighty* indicates that although petite in stature, this person projects a lot of power and strength.

That is very similar to what *mighty* it would have meant in the time of Isaiah.

"Mighty God" in the Hebrew language of Isaiah's day would have been *El Gibbor* and both parts of the name need to be understood.

El is the singular form of the word, *Elohim*. *Elohim* is one of the most frequently used names for God in the scriptures and it means the one true God who is supreme and mighty.

Similarly, *Gibbor* means strong, powerful and mighty, like a champion or hero.

So let's recap. *Mighty God*, is the one true God who is supreme, mighty, strong and powerful, like a champion or hero. Now it is important to understand that these words were also used to describe other people in the bible.

Joshua 1:14

The soldiers of Israel are described as mighty men of valor.

1 Samuel 17:51

The giant Goliath is called a champion.

2 Samuel 23:8

King David's top soldiers were known as his mighty men.

When Isaiah reiterates this name, *Mighty God* one chapter over in Isaiah 10:21, it just reinforces that the one who is to come to save the Israelites will be

God himself, a valiant hero and champion. This King will have God's true might around him being so powerful so as to absorb all that the world and evil can throw at him and utterly defeat it.

Long before the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) film series and way before the *Avengers*, *Iron Man*, *The Hulk* and *Thor* there was God. *Mighty God*. He is the ultimate superhero who is at work in our unstable world. Where insecurity, sin and despair seeks to overwhelm us, he takes justice into his hands and fights for humanity, punishing evil and providing us all with a secure, hopeful and eternal future.

Not only is he the *Wonderful Counselor*, but he also has the power and might to carry out the divine purpose and plans.

Can you image the hope these words, *Mighty God* must have brought to the Israelites of Isaiah's day? When times seem so bleak, despair so close at hand, evil and chaos are ruling the day, Isaiah speaks a word that brings light to the darkness. *Take heart everyone, a super hero is on his way.*

These words continue to bring hope to us today when our world can seem so dark. Have you ever noticed that superheroes all seem to have their particular strength, their superpower?

Iron Man has the brainpower but he also has his suit which is like a fully loaded armory capable of flight and energy blasts.

Thor has incredible strength, speed and endurance but he also has his hammer which gives him control over the elements of thunder and lightning and helps him fly.

The *Hulk* is brilliant but when he gets angry, he morphs into a massive green "he man" with limitless strength and power.

While he is not superhuman *Captain America* has strength, agility and leadership skills but he also has his shield which it is a potent defensive and offensive weapon.

Spider Man not only has a "spidey" sense but also superhuman strength and agility allows him to cling to most buildings, fling spider webs and travel rapidly from place to place usually along the sky scape.

All of these are supernatural powers that allow these superheroes to ward off evil but they are not infallible. There are susceptible to limitations. They have their kryptonite for sure.

What about this coming Messiah, this mighty God? How would we expect him to be revealed when he makes his debut on the world stage? When he comes to earth? Given that *Iron Man*, *Thor*, the *Hulk* and others all had their distinct power source, we would certainly expect that the Saviour of the world would come with some blaze of glory, wouldn't he?

Maybe with ripped physique and a cross around his neck that not only reflects his faith but also deflects bullets and shoots out lasers. Or maybe a bible that doubles as a mighty sword when you throw it to the ground. That's superhero stuff isn't it?

But no, we find this *Mighty God* in the least likely of places. He is found in human flesh as a baby in a manger. He is found walking the dust strewn roads of Galilee as a lowly carpenter. He is found as a criminal crucified on a cross.

If you were to look for a mighty God, those are not the places you would expect to find him. We can relate more to God coming in glory and riding on the clouds to bring justice to the world. Everyone loves a superhero. This baby stuff seems a little beneath him because as we know, a baby is the most helpless of all human beings. It has been fascinating to watch my own grandson grow and develop over the past year.

My daughter posted a picture on Instagram this week of a throwback to Beau last Christmas. Only a month and a half at the time, he was laying under the Christmas tree looking up. Still unable to turn over or move or do much of anything, his eyes were just taking in the lights and glitter. Then she posted a picture of Beau taken this week. Standing in his little snow suit, looking like a little boy.

A lot has change over the last year. Beau has gone from being breast fed in his mother's arms to sitting up in a high chair and attempting to feed himself. He has gone from laying around to running around. Well almost. He has gone from crying to babbling, from being read to, to holding the book and flipping the pages himself. This would not have been possible without his mom and dad and others,

caring for him and encouraging his progress everyday. A baby could not survive on its own without the care and protection of an adult.

Think of Jesus in the manger. In this tiny and vulnerable baby is *Mighty God* himself. Jesus is weak and mighty all rolled up into one and come to think of it, maybe that is where his true power lies. In the unexpected. Maybe that is why so many people miss him, *Mighty God*. We are looking for him in all the wrong places. We are not looking in the places that he is found. On the night Jesus was born, only a handful of shepherds took note of him. The Wise Men didn't go off the beaten track to visit this newborn "King of the Jews". The first place they thought to look for *Mighty God* was in the palace in Jerusalem because of course that is where you find a King. But no, they had to be rerouted to the unexpected.

On the surface, Jesus may not have seemed like much. He certainly didn't look like our idea of a superhero. Maybe that is why so many people dismiss him as the answer to their problems or the problems of the world, today. We think, there has to be more. There has to be a better solution. What could a baby, born into poverty more than 2000 years ago in an obscure part of the world possibly do for me? What can he do for my problems? How can he restore my marriage, fix my money woes, cure my cancer, alleviate my loneliness and depression or remove my guilt? What can he do to give my life meaning and hope?

As we go to the bible and the New Testament in particular, we see the fullness of the *Mighty God* that Isaiah predicted, in the most unexpected ways. The power of Jesus is displayed not just during the time he walked on earth but also before and after. Jesus, was *Mighty God* before he was even born. The bible clearly states that Christ displayed his might by creating the world before he even entered it.

John 1:3

*In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.*

All things were made through Christ.

Colossians 1:15-16 reinforces this idea,

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

¹⁶for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

Christ's power in the act of creation distinguished him from mere mortals, humanity. Oh, we have the ability to create things. Well most of us. Are any of you handy? I have a big dilemma approaching in the next few months. My daughter is getting married in May. One of her requests is that I make her an arbor for the wedding ceremony. Some of you may be thinking, *wow that is nice that you daughter wants to include you in her big day, Paul*, but here is the thing, I can't make anything. I have no carpentry skills at all. Oh, I have a tool belt that I carry my hammer around in but it is mostly for show. When I need to boost my manhood, I snap on the belt but it's all outward appearances. All show and no go and my daughter knows this. She has spent 23 ½ years with me. She is well aware of her dad's shortcomings, and making things is right at the top of the list. She is up to something!

Some of us have the ability to make things, but we require basic raw materials. I am told that for me to make an arbor, I will need stuff, like wood and nails. Christ demonstrated his power and might in the ability to create, to make something out of nothing. He created the universe. His power and might was on display before he ever set foot on earth. Now think of the ways that Jesus was *Mighty God* during his earthly life.

Throughout the course of his public life and ministry, Jesus revealed his divine might in ways that were undeniable.

1. *Jesus demonstrated his power over nature.*

Just think of it, he turned water into wine. He walked on water and calmed the seas. He fed the crowd with two loaves of bread and five fish. He cursed the fig tree and it withered and died. He told the disciples to cast their nets over the other side of the boat and they landed a record haul of fish. He transfigured and became a radiant glory on the side of the mountain in full view of his closest followers.

2. *Jesus demonstrates his power over disease.*

He healed the blind, deaf and lame. He healed those with leprosy. He healed the bleeding woman and many others who suffered from an assortment of ailments and infirmities.

3. *Jesus demonstrated his power over demons.*

In the gospels, we see that he drives out evil spirits that have possessed both adults and children. Perhaps the most well know example is found in Mark 5, where Jesus comes across a man who is possessed by a multitude of demons who give the collective name of *Legion*. Jesus casts the demons out of the man and sends them into a herd of pigs, who rush into the sea and are all drowned.

4. *Jesus demonstrated his power over sin.*

Remember the paralytic man who is lowered from a rooftop to the feet of Jesus by his friends? Seeing their faith, Jesus says to the paralyzed man,

Mark 2:5

My child, your sins are forgiven.

Ultimately, he would give his life to suffer and die on the cross to rescue humanity from their sin but death could not contain him. Jesus' power over sin is also demonstrated in his power over death.

5. *Jesus demonstrated power over death.*

Not only did he bring others such as Lazarus and Jairus' daughter back to life but death could not contain him. His resurrected life represents new life for those who choose to place their hope and trust in Jesus, the *Mighty God*.

Here is the thing. Jesus didn't use his power over the physical realm, sickness and disease, the demonic, sin or death to bring chaos and destruction to world like the evil characters in the superhero movies we watch today. No, his displays of power were for our good. He used his might with love and kindness to benefit those around him and draw them and us, to himself.

Let's make no mistake about it. Jesus was not just some milquetoast, long haired, bearded hippy who flashed love and peace signs wherever he went. He came to earth to fight for humanity. Mary gave birth to Jesus in the confines of a humble, unassuming manger. Although *Hallmark* has made the scene tender and rustic, it was the birth of a fighter, *Mighty God*. Jesus came to fight for the people of God and to win the battle over the darkness of evil that we could not win on our own. He is the greatest superhero the world has ever known although, his methodology was somewhat unorthodox. Jesus was *Mighty God* before he was even born. He was *Mighty God* during his earthly life and he continues to be *Mighty God*, even today. Jesus, *Mighty God* is at work in our midst even now. Are you familiar with the words the prophet Isaiah wrote just two chapters before he wrote,

Isaiah 9

And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace in

Also referring to this child that would be born one day, Isaiah gives him another pretty important name.

Isaiah 7:14

The prophet says, *All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').*

This child will be called, *Immanuel. God is with us.* The birth of this child, Jesus means that God is with us. The mighty kingdoms of the world may come and go. Kings and Queens will all die one day. All the great leaders, industry tycoons and media moguls will return to dust. All the great accomplishments and discoveries will be forgotten and each of our days are numbered but *Immanuel*, he will remain. *Mighty God* is with us always.

In the gospel of Matthew 28, after his death and resurrection, Jesus appears to his followers and gives them their mission. They are to go and teach the people of the world about Jesus and the Kingdom of God and then he says this to them,

Matthew 28:20

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

God is with us. Then just before Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right side of his heavenly father, he bestows a gift upon his disciples. He says in,

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." I will be with you always.

It is such a hopeful statement. For those who declared to be followers of Jesus, we are not alone, *Mighty God* is always with us. How? Through his spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in us and his Spirit in us reminds us of three things:

1. **That he is the source of our power.** We don't have to do life on our own. The same *Mighty God* that fights for us, will give us the power to be his representatives in our world. To live Godly and holy lives in a corrupted world and to fight for those who can't fight for themselves. To stand against injustice and evil and promote the values of the Kingdom of God. He is the source of our power. We see amazing things done in the name of Jesus by ordinary people all the

time. How? The power of *Mighty God* is in them. What are you struggling with today? What battle are you facing? You have the power of *Mighty God* in you, are you tapping into it?

2. **He is the strength of our lives.** In

Philippians 4:13, the Apostle Paul states,

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. It was also Paul who said, I am glad to boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ can work through me. When I am weak, then I am strong.

Do you know when *Mighty God* is found in our lives? More often than not, it is in our weakness. It is in our brokenness, our vulnerability, grief and failure. It is when we truly understand our need for God that he becomes mighty for us. It is when we are at our weakest that we become strong because those are the places that we rely on God the most. It is in the places that I feel strong and mighty under my own strength that I no longer have room for God in my life and I push him out. Maybe you know that feeling. But when I am empty and vulnerable, there is plenty of room for Jesus. He is all that I need.

The third thing that the spirit of the *Mighty God* living in us, reminds us is:

3. **He has secured our future.**

Jesus has ultimately won the victory over sin, death and evil. There are no more sequels needed. There is not a greater and more evil force than supervillain *Thanos*, from Marvel Cinematic Universe coming after us. Jesus doesn't have to regroup and search out a team of superheroes to help him and add to his might. No, he is all we need.

What great assurance and hope we have in knowing we are safe and our future is secure not because of our own ability but because of the power that is holding on to us, and leading and guiding our lives. The one the prophet Isaiah tagged, *Mighty God*.

With this I will close. Author Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote the classic book, *Treasure Island* is credited with telling this story. If you have ever felt like you are being tossed around in a sea of despair or the uncertainty of life is crashing like waves all around you and you wonder if you will ever feel safe and secure again. This story is a good reminder.

One day, a mighty storm caught a sea-faring vessel just off a rocky coast. The wind and waves threatened to drive the boat to its destruction. In the midst of the terror, one daring passenger, contrary to orders, made his way across the ship. Groping along the passageway, he eventually found the captain's bridge.

When he flung open the door, he eyes beheld a rather intriguing sight, the ship's captain was bound to his post. Secure against the raging elements, he held the wheel fast, turning the ship, inch by inch back out to sea. The captain saw the passenger and he smiled.

The daring passenger found his way back below deck where the other passengers were huddled together in fear.

Encouragingly, he said to them, "I have seen the face of the captain and he smiled. Everything will be okay"

There are times when we need to hear that isn't there? Especially when we feel like our world is a dark place and our lives are out of control. It helps to remember that the captain smiles. That *Mighty God* is in control and we can trust that he is at work in our lives, to fight for us, to guide and direct us, to draw us close to him and to give us a safe and secure future. He is the ultimate Superhero, the hope of the world and his power that lives in us to enable us to battle anything that comes our way.

Points to Ponder

...and he will be called...Mighty God

Isaiah 9:6 ~ Advent Theme: Hope

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Who is your favourite Superhero? Why?
2. What are some things that you would describe as "mighty"? What is it about them that fits that description?
3. Why is it so countercultural that Jesus was born in a manger? Where would we expect to find someone of Jesus' importance in our world today?
4. Has there ever been a time when you have missed Jesus because you were looking for him in the wrong place? Looking back, where has been the most unexpected place that you "found" Jesus at work in your midst?
5. As you ponder the gospels, what story of the demonstration of the power of Jesus has impacted your life the most?
6. Can you share an example of when you have experienced the power of Mighty God at work in your life? Describe a time when you have experienced that power in you, to deal with a difficult situation.
7. Share some thoughts about "hope" with your group. How does Jesus being given the name, "Mighty God" bring hope to your life?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray that the power of "Mighty God" would be evident and at work in your life, bringing you and those you encounter each day, hope.