



## Wonderful Counselor - Isaiah 9:6

### Advent Week 1 - Hope

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We are going to start in Isaiah 7 today to start.

Today begins Advent, the historical four-week Christmas season, a time of waiting for the coming of Jesus on Christmas.

And there's no command to observe advent in the bible, so we can take it or leave it without sin, but we all mark time by something, we all make holidays out of something, and the historic christian calendar has been a guide to many as they do that. So these four weeks of waiting and anticipating and remembering the coming of Jesus are a good thing to mark our time with.

And also observing Advent helps answer the age-old question of when to start listening to Christmas music. Not till the advent season. Stores may start Christmas right after Halloween, but that's obviously too much. So now is the time. If you started last week or in October, well you can always do better next year.

For our family, we re-institute our efforts at nightly bible reading and prayer together. We always try to do that, but like you, we drift a bit throughout the year, and working through some advent readings and a plan can be helpful to get us back in gear and consistent. It's a time of focused togetherness and bible reading for us, followed by opening a door on the advent calendar (which somehow hasn't gotten old, even for the teenagers.)

So I'd encourage you as individuals or if you have a family to make this time unique and Christ-centered and focused, and consider making this time of every year special.

Especially this year when nothing is normal or reliable, old traditions can be really rooting and important.

For our Advent season this year, we are taking a break from Luke's Gospel on Sundays and zeroing in on part of Isaiah. Each week we will be in Isaiah 9:6, where four names of Jesus are given to us, and we will dive in to what each of those names means for us, for our relationship to Him, and to our lives.

But to grasp what was going on in Isaiah 9:6, we really need to start with a little background. Isaiah was a book that was written about 730 BC. So that means that the things it tells us about Jesus are prophetic, written more than 700 years before he walked the earth.

And as you read through Isaiah, you come upon this prophesy in Isaiah 7:

**“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14)**

This is a famous Christmas passage, Matthew quotes it in the New Testament to refer to the coming of Jesus.

But if you were reading through Isaiah in 500 BC, you would have thought of something else.

We might be familiar with the Christmas story and be really quick to see this verse in Isaiah as a clear prophecy of the coming of Jesus, and clear evidence of the thoughtful and gracious plan of God to send us our Messiah. Which it is.

But that wouldn't have been so clear if you read it before the coming of Christ.

In fact, you read through Isaiah and this seems to be the prophecy about another baby. The passage in Isaiah 7-9 is set in the days when Ahaz was king of Judah (this was the southern kingdom - Israel had been divided into two kingdoms (Isaiah 7:1).

Syria and Israel (the northern kingdom) were in league to attack Judah (Isaiah 7:1) and the people of Judah and their king, Ahaz, were filled with fear (7:2). They were wondering, “Will God protect us? Should we make some other alliances so we can be ok? And Ahaz

was not a good and faithful guy, but there are no atheists in foxholes, so he wanted to know what God had to say about it all.

So the prophet Isaiah comes and says, “God will protect you in this conflict. You are secure. No need for other alliances right now. God is securing his people. Even though you are a failed and unfaithful king, you have a faithful God who says you actually shouldn’t take matters into your own hands and make those alliances. And to prove that, I’ll give you a sign.”

Ahaz says, “I don’t want a sign.” Which is strange, but Ahaz was a mostly wicked king, and if he got a sign from God he’d probably have to obey God, and wanted to do what he wanted to do. So he said “Don’t give me a sign,” as a way of putting his fingers in his ears and not listening to God.

So Isaiah says, “Bro, you’re getting a sign anyways. And goes into Isaiah 7:14 **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).**

And then you keep reading in chapters 8 and 9, and it looks like, though it isn’t certain, that the fulfillment of that prophecy is the birth of a baby who in Isaiah’s day. In case you’re a scrabble player, that baby’s name was Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

So you read through this, and so far it seems like a miracle for Isaiah’s day. And it was a good miracle. Despite Ahaz’s failure to understand the security God promised his people and his failure to obey God’s command to ask Him for a sign, God promised Immanuel in Isaiah 7:10 “so that even where the ... kings fail, [God] continues to provide his people with security symbolized in the child” (Firth 542).

But then we keep reading, and we get to Isaiah 9 and we read this after God has fulfilled that prophecy and protected His people:

**Isaiah 9:2-7 The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.  
<sup>3</sup> *m*You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you**

as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.  
<sup>4</sup> **For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as <sup>5</sup>on the day of Midian.**  
<sup>5</sup> **For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.**  
<sup>6</sup> **For to us a child is born,  
to us <sup>v</sup>a son is given;  
<sup>w</sup>and the government shall be <sup>x</sup>upon<sup>4</sup> his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called<sup>5</sup>  
Wonderful <sup>y</sup>Counselor, <sup>z</sup>Mighty God,  
<sup>a</sup>Everlasting <sup>b</sup>Father, Prince of <sup>c</sup>Peace.  
<sup>7</sup> **Of the increase of his government and of peace  
<sup>d</sup>there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
<sup>e</sup>with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
<sup>f</sup>The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.****

So you read this, and if we're celebrating the birth of Maher-shalal-hashbaz, some of it makes sense. Plenty of parents have a baby and with exaggerated language praise their child:

"I think she's a genius. He's gonna be president someday! She's so talented! She is speaking in full-sentence at 6 month! He's walking before he ever crawled!"

But we move beyond just regular proud parents if they start saying, "I'm gonna call my son Mighty God!"

That's a little over the line.

He's going to live forever!

No, he's not.

And so you would read this passage in Isaiah's day and say "I thought we were talking about Maher-shalal-hashbaz. But this seems extreme." And it was probably really mysterious - what are we talking about here?

But then you get to Matthew.

**Matthew 1:18 "18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:**

**23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"**

**(which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.**

So Matthew quotes the Isaiah prophesy to refer not to Maher-shalal-hashbaz, but to Jesus. If you thought those labels in Isaiah 9:6 were a little over the top for that merely human boy, you were right. Those were for another baby. A true and better Maher-shalal-hash-baz. That those labels in Isaiah 9:6 were an indicator that God had more up his sleeve than just a baby in Isaiah's day.

*This is an example of double-fulfillment. This happens with a number of biblical prophecies. And to illustrate how this works, imagine a video projector shining its light through a room. You could hold a piece of paper up close to the projector in the light stream and see a small picture. But you could put a screen across the room and see a much larger picture.*

*In the same way, God planned and predicted the coming of Jesus by making a prophecy that was fulfilled in Isaiah's day (the small version), and that was later fulfilled in it's large*

*and ultimate “big-screen” sense in Jesus. God prepared us for the coming of Christ more than 700 years before His birth, by allowing the baby to be born in Isaiah’s day to be a “smaller version” of the true and greater gift we have in Christ.*

*The baby in Isaiah’s day was called “God with us,” a name that reminded them that God was with His people. But in our day we know more of the story, and we know that Christ truly was God with us. What God fulfilled in a small way then, He fulfilled in a big and ultimate way in Jesus.*

This week in advent is traditionally a week we emphasize hope. And we won’t force those themes on our passages, but this gives us something huge to hope in:

God is so gracious that He over-delivers on His promises. Not only was a baby born as a sign in Ahaz’s day, but this new baby born in a manger would completely fulfill all of the Messianic hopes that greeted the birth of the baby in Isaiah’s day. When God makes a promise, He never over-promises and under-delivers. It’s always the opposite - He under-promises and over-delivers.

Jesus is God over-delivering on that promise.

The nature of God is not only to keep every promise, but to over-keep every promise.

So think of what that says about what we can expect from God going forward. Take any of his promises,

**Romans 8:28 “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**

Sometimes we wonder if we will ever see this promise fulfilled. Especially in 2020, when it seems like one bad thing after another. We wonder if God could ever put the events of today in anything that anyone could call a good outcome for his people.

But because of what He did in Jesus, we know He overfulfills his promises. So there is coming a day, I don’t know when, when we will look even at how He used the events of this year, in our community, in our church, in our nation, and not only still managed to lead it all to a good outcome. But He will overfulfill.

Someday, we will stand, jaws dropped, looking at history, even zooming in on this year in this place, and say “God was not kidding when He said he would work all things for good.” In fact, that promise was understated.

When we can see how it all worked - maybe we’ll catch a glimpse at the end of covid this spring, but certainly at the end of history, we will see Him overfulfill every promise.

Over-fulfill his promises to answer our prayers.

Over-fulfill his promises to give wisdom when we ask.

There are so many promises of God and because of what He did in Jesus we can be confident he won’t just deliver, but over-deliver. So he is worth hoping in.

This is reason for hope.

And when He over-delivered in Jesus, He provided a baby whose name would be called, Isaiah 9:6 “ **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**”

So what does it mean that Jesus is a *Wonderful Counselor*?

We might read this in our day and think it means Jesus is an amazing therapist. Because to us a counselor is a therapist. Now, no knock against therapists, but that wasn’t what was meant by a counselor. So if you think Jesus is a wonderful counselor, you shouldn’t picture Sigmund Freud sitting on a chair next to our couch, psycho-analyzing us. (There are a lot of reasons not to think of Freud when you think of Jesus!)

This word counselor was used to describe someone who was reliable and strong with great wisdom. It could be a king’s most trusted advisor, and was also used of a wise king who spoke great wisdom to his people.

**Micah 4:9 “Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you?Has your counselor perished?”**

Back in the days of Solomon, Israel had a wise king who was the source of wisdom and strength for the nation. But the kings since him disappointed. And the prophet says, “You’ve got no king, you’ve got no counselor” - this is bad!

They knew that good and wise leaders existed, but they just couldn't seem to come up with one to lead them anymore. (This is ancient history though, so we obviously can't relate.)

They had this longing: where is a strong and wise one to lead us?

And the answer came in Bethlehem.

He is the Wonderful Counselor. The wise king to lead the people.

And God over-delivers. Not only was Jesus wise like Solomon, but was a true and better Solomon. Solomon failed toward the end of his life, he worshipped false gods, he married what seemed to be an excess of wives, he ended up failing in the end.

But Jesus came with wisdom and power, and was faithful to the end.

And the wisdom of Jesus was far beyond the wisdom of even Solomon. He is wisdom personified - He is the true and final wisdom that the book of Proverbs speaks of.

Throughout his life as recorded in the Gospels, people remark on his wisdom:

Remember in Luke 2, Jesus is 12 years old, sitting with the most learned scholars of his day, and it says in verse 47:

**Luke 2:47 “And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.”**

Luke describes his growth like this:

**Luke 2:40 “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.**

**Matthew 13:54 “and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?”**

To hear him speak was to be astounded at the wisdom. This is why his words for two millenia have shaped nations and cultures. His words are the bedrock of so many lives and families.

We sing about the wisdom of Jesus every year at this time. In O Holy Night, one of the later verses says

*“Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is Love and His gospel is Peace;  
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,  
And in his name all oppression shall cease,  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful Chorus raise we;  
Let all within us praise his Holy name!”*

You may not have heard that verse, it's not in the Mariah Carey version, but it is in the original His words and his law are something to sing about. He's the wonderful counselor, the wise and powerful king that they and we longed for.

The reason we feel so nauseous anytime we look at the ballot for president and our options is because we know there is such a thing as a wise and strong and just leader. When we consider our leaders today, It's like we at at the fanciest restaurant last night and here we are perusing the Macdonald's menu - and everything just kind of seems gross. So we order something, knowing it will probably kill us, but we gotta eat.

Jesus is the true wisdom and the powerful leader who reigns with justice that we all want, but never find here.

And his words have ruled nations, freed captives, established justice.

He's the wonderful counselor. He's reigning on high with perfect strength, justice, and wisdom.

So we go to His word to guide our lives and decisions, to shape our attitudes and actions, because Jesus is true wisdom.

It's so easy for us to try to get true wisdom from other sources, and then try to make Jesus's words fit into that scheme. So we learn what justice is supposed to be from our

culture, and try to find some of Jesus's words to fit it. We learn wisdom for our marriages from the culture first, and maybe find some verses to fit into that wisdom.

We will sometimes take wisdom from the culture, say about marriage, and we will notice that this doesn't line up with Christian teaching from scripture. And so often, we are tempted to say, "Then let's change Christian doctrine based on what we all accept as prevailing wisdom now."

We do this with politics, we do it with social issues, we do it with our own lives. We live often like Jesus is not the wonderful counselor, but one advisor, whose words are kind of old and subservient to the real wisdom we learned in 2014.

But if Jesus is the wonderful counselor, we will learn wisdom from all sources, all truth is God's truth and there's much to be learned from all kinds of places in the world God made. But when we see that the prevailing wisdom of the day doesn't line up with the teachings of Jesus, we don't say "the problem is the teaching of Jesus." Not if He's the wonderful counselor.

Not if His wisdom is the jaw-dropping, astounding wisdom that drew those who heard it to follow Jesus even if those who didn't recognize the wisdom ALL BAILED.

There was a time when Jesus had just taught huge crowds of followers some really hard things, and many didn't recognize the wisdom in it. (The fact that He is true wisdom doesn't mean everyone has eyes to see it.) So as Jesus offended just about everybody, this was the scene:

**John 6:66-69 "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."**

Jesus is the Holy One of God, the only one with the true words of life. Everyone else thought he didn't seem wise anymore because what he said didn't fit their preconceived notions of who Jesus should be and what wisdom is. But those who knew him said, "Where else could we possibly go? These are the words of eternal life."

Sure, most didn't think so. And most don't think so today.

**1 Corinthians 1:18** “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

To those with eyes to see it, there is nothing like the wonderful counsel of Jesus.

But remember, God over-delivers.

He doesn't just reign on high and issue wisdom from the clouds.

**Hebrews 4:14** “**14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **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.

By becoming incarnate, by being born in Bethlehem, by taking on flesh and living among us, He experienced it all.

Our family walked through some tragedy this year, it was a terribly sad set of circumstances. And there was a lot I didn't know how to handle, but I have a friend who is a pastor in another city who had experienced the same thing, and I knew I had to talk to that guy.

There was a lot of good counsel I could get, but the best counsel came from the one who has been there.

And Jesus, the wonderful counselor, doesn't only have the wisdom of God on which the earth was established. He has the experiential knowledge from having been there. And when we pray, when we seek Him, when we go to His word for wisdom, we aren't just hearing from a disconnected deity like a Roman god that didn't have very much interaction with people.

We are going to a God who became a man.

In this season, we know that for awhile we don't think we can safely have services. (I'm recording this on November 19th - so nothing has been decided yet, but if I had to guess it looks like we will be having some hopefully shorter term cancellations of services,

probably by the time you hear this message.) And I've already gotten some emails from people who don't like that.

And I'm with them and agree with most of them. The gatherings are vital, there are consequences to cancelling that are negative, this shouldn't be this way. I'd rather we didn't cancel. Amen across the board to all of that. We have to weigh everything as we make these decision.

But some of what I've heard has a hint that some expect the gathered church to be for them what only Jesus can be for them. That without the church gathered there is no hope for our loneliness, for our drift, for our temptation, for our guidance. And we planted this church because we believe the church plays a huge roll in helping with all of those things.

But we help the most by pointing to Jesus as the wonderful counselor for all of those needs.

People are often lonely around the holidays, and if that's you, I'd imagine you may be experiencing an almost unspeakable darkness this year especially. And while we wish we could fix that, it isn't just sentiment to say that Jesus can really meet that need.

He experienced loneliness far beyond what any of us experience. So when you go to Him with it, He says, "I know - I really know. I don't just know about loneliness. I've been to the depths of loneliness - I can comfort you. I've been there. I know what it's like."

Or if you are tempted. You are praying to Jesus who was tempted in every way, but made it through without sin. So if you're tempted to give in to despair and pessimism, so was He. If you're tempted to give up your integrity for some more money or comfort, so was He. If you're tempted with pride, He was all the more. If you're tempted to give in to lust, Jesus has actually really been there.

He knows by experience what we feel and where we are, and He knows by experience the way through it.

And when you've personally been through something, you know you are more eager to be helpful toward those going through it now. You feel their pain a little more. So if you've experienced a job loss, you get it when someone tells you about their job loss, and you are extra eager to help. If you've been the victim of a crime, you are more eager to help other people like you.

So Hebrews 4:16 again says, “ **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.**”

If that's who He is, let's draw near to Him for help!

If His counsel is so wonderful, let's learn his word.

If He is a wonderful counselor, than He came for those who need counsel - who go to Him empty asking for wisdom and guidance.

If He can comfort us when we need it because He's been there, let's go to Him for that comfort. Let's cast all the loneliness and temptation and anger and sorrow on Him - He can handle it - He delights to handle it.

Again, in the non-Mariah Carey version of O Holy Night, we sing:

*“Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming  
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand  
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming  
Here come the Wise Men from Orient land  
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger  
In all our trials born to be our friend  
He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger  
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend  
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend”*

But remember, God over-delivers.

Jesus has experienced everything we've experienced, with one exception. Jesus is without sin.

**2 Corinthians 5:21 - For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

He is such a wonderful counselor that He not only speaks brilliant law to guide us, He not only experiences all that we experience, but then He took on Himself all of our sins and failures, and gave us His righteousness.

This is the promise for all who would believe.

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