

Wonderful Counselor: The Unexpected Wisdom of God

Isaiah 9:1-7 • FCBC • 12/03/23

Good morning church, it is a privilege to be worshipping with you this morning. If you are visiting with us for the first time my name is Ryan and I am the pastor for worship and counseling and one of the elders here at FCBC and I have the privilege of introducing our Advent series this year. Advent is this word we use around Christmas time in the church that literally means “*the coming or the arrival*” and what we’re celebrating and focusing on is the first coming or the first arrival if you will of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. That’s what the word incarnate means, it means “the act of being made flesh” and that is what the church focuses on traditionally in the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas. It’s what John declares in John 1:14 when he says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” So we get to spend the next 4 weeks looking at the first arrival of the incarnated Christ to earth. And we say first arrival because He “Christ” is coming again soon as the writer of Revelation says in some of the final words of all of scripture. So, Advent is an important time in the life of the church. The last 4 years of Advent we’ve looked at the direct implications for us of Jesus’s coming to earth. PRAISE GOD because the greatest implication of the incarnation for us is God’s glory through the salvation of our souls! However, as I sat down with some of our worship ministry to think through advent this year, Natalie Nelson said “What if we looked longer at the person and character of Christ in the incarnation?” I had already planned on introducing Advent with Isaiah 9:1-7 (one of my favorite advent passages and the passage we’ll be looking at this morning) and it jumped out at us, “There’s our series, messages, and titles for those messages: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” I started praying and thinking through passages that might highlight these particular characteristics of God and how the passages might connect. And so our Advent series this year is entitled *His Name Is Jesus: A look at the Character of Christ in Advent* and we’ll be looking at the nature of God in Christ as a **Wonderful Counselor** this morning through Isaiah 9:1-7 (and the unexpected Wisdom of God), as a **Mighty God** in Philippians 2:5-11 (that it took a mighty God to condescend to his own creation that he might save her and rescue her from her own sin), as an **Everlasting Father** in Ephesians 1:3-10 (which highlights the Triune Eternal God’s EVERLASTING plan of redemption), and finally as a **Prince of Peace** through Matthew 1:1-17 (how the prince of peace would come through one of the most broken and violent lineages recorded in history). And we’ll wrap up our advent series with our Christmas Eve evening service in Luke 1:26-38 and the promise of a child who Isaiah calls Immanuel which is the promise of God with us. So, I’m excited to get into this series and hope you are as well and my prayer for you this month is that by staring at God, beholding His glory, His plan, and His character, your soul would come alive again to the beauty and excellencies of Christ because HE IS WORTHY OF ALL OUR ADORATION, AND PRAISE, AND ATTENTION, AND AFFECTION! HE IS WORTHY! So let’s begin this morning by looking at Isaiah 9:1-7 and our *Wonderful Counselor: The Unexpected Wisdom of God*. Let’s open our Bibles and read Isaiah 9:1-7: **Pray**

This is one of my favorite passages in scripture regarding the coming of Christ and as I said, we are going to look at Christ specifically as a Wonderful Counselor by highlighting the unexpected wisdom of God this morning. The plan of God is glorious. It is beyond our wildest dreams or comprehension. As Scripture says His ways are not our ways nor His thoughts our thoughts. This morning I want you to see three things from our passage that will hopefully put the unexpected and glorious wisdom of God on display to capture your hearts and here they are:

1. The unexpected light
2. The unexpected rescue
3. The unexpected gift

These are going to be our three main points this morning and we'll begin with this first one:

- ***The unexpected light*** - In order to do this I want to paint for us the bleak and really dark backdrop by which this unexpected light bursts on the scene by looking at where we are up to this point in the general story of redemption and then narrow in on where we are exactly in this book up until this point and it's a pretty bleak picture on both accounts. Since the fall we have creation hanging in the balance waiting for its promised redeemer. Generation after generation of God's people wandering in and out of His merciful provision because they go after idols. Countless accounts of Family dysfunction, of brothers killing each other, and selling each other into slavery. We have God's own people splitting up into two kingdoms, good kings and really bad kings, judges warning people not to do what is right in their own eyes, and prophets calling God's own people back to God's ways and laws, and an impending exile for the people of God. And that's just the general backdrop of where we are in the story of redemption. Now as we come to our text more narrowly this morning, we look at the bleak backdrop Isaiah is writing to us in. If we back up just one verse prior in chapter 8:22 we read this, "And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness." What's this thick darkness they were thrust into? Here's a quick history lesson. You see the twelve tribes of Israel had split into two kingdoms a Northern kingdom made up of the 10 northern tribes who were known as Israel or Ephraim and a southern kingdom made up of the two southern tribes who were known as Judah and that's where we find Isaiah, in Judah. Judah had a king named Azariah who is also known as Uzziah who Isaiah mentions in chapter 6 when we read the words "*in the year king Uzziah dies.*" Uzziah had been succeeded by his son Jotham who was succeeded by a really bad dude named Ahaz. Now, even though Uzziah had an unfortunate ending (he was touched with leprosy by God and died because of his arrogance), Uzziah was a decent king whose reign had been long and prosperous. Judah had expanded under his reign and in many ways Uzziah had honored the Lord and had lots of success. But things in Judah aren't great and Ahaz makes it worse. You see Judah falls under threat of a bad deal struck between Israel or Ephraim (remember the Northern Kingdom) and Aram or Syrian who was a neighboring country. You see King Peka who was king of Israel at the time Ahaz was king of Judah was tired of sending Israel's wealth to Assyria (the regional super power). So King Peka and King Rezin who was King of Aram or Syria decide to form an alliance against Assyria and when Judah refuses to join that alliance they decide to gang up on King Ahaz to replace him with someone who would honor the Israel/Aram alliance. So, what do you do if you are King

Ahaz and Judah in that moment. Well, you have a couple options. Option 1 “obey and trust the Lord through the Lord’s prophet Isaiah.” The Lord tells Isaiah in chapter 7 of the book to go tell Ahaz not to be afraid, not to let his heart grow faint but rather to be careful, quiet, and to trust in the Lord and that he would deliver Judah from the hands of Israel and Syria. He even invites Ahaz to ask for a sign as a way to assure him in his uncertainty. But instead, Ahaz chooses Option 2 and basically says, “thanks but no thanks, I’m going to take matters into my own hands and strike up my own deal with Assyria to have an alliance of protection with them.

- And it all goes downhill from there! And how true is this of our own lives today. God says to us often, DON’T TRUST IN YOUR OWN WISDOM, YOUR OWN COUNSEL, YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING! Wait for me and I will act on your behalf, I’ve always acted on behalf of my people. But we just like King Ahaz say, “No thanks God I got this, my wisdom is higher than yours and therefore I’ll call on you only when I truly can’t figure it out on my own. Church this never works out well for us and it certainly didn’t for King Ahaz or the kingdom of Judah.
- So, what happens? Ahaz entered into an arrangement with Assyria similar to the one Israel had made earlier with Assyria (we see that in verse 12 of Isaiah 7 or in 2 Kings 16:7–9). Isaiah foresaw that this would be devastating arrangement for Judah and indeed it was. This foreign entanglement meant that Assyria would eventually invade Judah and cause great destruction and that’s exactly what happened. In addition to this, Ahaz basically remodels Solomon’s temple, opens wide the doors for foreign gods to be worshiped, and even engages in corrupt worship by burning his own son as an offering.
- What’s God’s response? Praise God for His INFINITE Wonderful Counsel and wisdom. God says back to Ahaz, “Ok Ahaz I offered you a sign to reassure you of my protection, you said ‘no, you’re going to take matters into your own hands and team up with Assyria for your protection,’ but I’m going to give you a sign anyway and here it is, in Isaiah 7:14, the famous Advent promise, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” You see our beloved Christmas promise that we often quote during advent was originally a word of judgment on Ahaz’s lack of trust in Yahweh. Christopher Ash in his commentary on this familiar Christmas passage put’s it brilliantly when he says:
 - *“Ahaz is a descendant of King David, and God had promised David that his line would always rule over God’s people. So, it looks like God needs Ahaz so God can keep his promise to David. But here God is saying, I can bring the reign of David’s godless sons to an end and then start again with a virgin. King Ahaz thinks he can do without God, but it’s God who can do without Ahaz. God can judge the house of David and still fulfill his promise to David by raising up a king from a virgin. Yes, God will defeat Israel and Aram (7:16). But God will also judge Judah (7:17).”*
- And so Assyria will indeed defeat Israel and Aram as King Ahaz had hoped but then they’ll turn their attention to Judah, leaving them in utter defeat. And how do the people respond? Chapter 8 of Isaiah says in primarily two ways:
 - 1. the people consult mediums and spiritists and absolute darkness for reassurance which is no surprise given the example of their king
 - 2. They curse God and they curse the king

- It is utter chaos in the kingdom. And you see, that's what happens when you take God out of the picture. You're left without any objective moral standard. If you take God away, you take justice away with him, and any sense of right and wrong. And what's the result? Distress and gloom as Isaiah 8:22 tells us. There's no light of revelation and no hope of redemption. Humanity is left to itself in God's judgment and that is a dark dark prospect.
- Does this sound familiar? Wars, lawlessness, darkness, cursing God? You see I think it's so helpful for us to look backwards and see that the world has always had wickedness and evil in it. I think we can grow so weary of the darkness and the sin that is so pervasive in our culture right now and think to ourselves, "Man, this is worse than it's ever been how am I going to live past this or move through this particular time in our culture or history." But I would encourage us this morning, church, don't lose heart. The people of God have always been under the intense pressure of darkness and sin because sin broke everything when it entered the world at the fall in the garden.
- BUT... Isaiah 8:22 isn't the last word for the line of David, for God's people, and therefore for us this morning! The word BUT, or NEVERTHELESS, is the first word of our text in Isaiah 9:1 and it's as glorious for the people of God as the BUT or the NEVERTHELESS we see in Ephesians 2:4 when Paul says you were dead, and hopeless in your trespasses and sins, in other words in total darkness... BUT God being rich in mercy saved us!
- You see, into this distress, into this darkness, and into this gloom, through God's infinite wisdom, Counsel, and providence comes an **UNEXPECTED LIGHT** when Isaiah says in verses 2 and 3, "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. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy." You see, the very land of Zebulun and Naphtali that Isaiah references in verse 1 were the two most northern tribes in the kingdom and therefore the first to feel Assyria's wrath and be thrown into darkness. But in God's gracious planning, they would also be the first to experience the true relief and joy of unexpected light. For in the land beyond the sea, a land that God had truly humbled, whose nickname we know from 1 Kings was "land of Kabul" which literally means "good for nothing" right here in Zebulun and Naphtali is a place called Galilee (and Nazareth), where the unexpected Nazarene light of the world would shine from!

So, darkness and gloom are turning to light as Isaiah 9:1-2 says, and distress is giving way to joy, as verse 3 mentions 4 times. And why was this unexpected light such good news for God's people? Because it is going to bring:

- **The Unexpected Rescue** – look at verses 4-5. There are two promises being made here in these verses:
 - 1. God would rescue his people from oppression – "He will shatter the yoke that burdens them (vs 4)
 - 2. God would rescue his people by finally bring an end to war and violence – "Every warrior's boot will be burned." (vs 5)

- God is going to rescue His people. There is a rescue plan in place and it's going to come in a way and by means that man could never accomplish and Isaiah uses the battle of Midian and Gideon to highlight this.
 - Do you remember what happened in Judges 7 with the armies of Gideon and the Midianites? Just a quick recap: The Midianites, Amalekites, and all those of the east cross over the Jordan and camp down in the valley of Jezreel. And Judges says there were a ton of them, they were like locust in abundance, their camels were without number, somewhere over 120,000 men. And Gideon gathers a whole bunch of people to come against them, but the Lord says, Gideon you have too many men for this battle (which is ironic because he didn't even have a fraction of what the Midianites and Amalekites had to begin with). Nonetheless the Lord has Gideon send home 22,000 people leaving only 10,000 to fight this horde coming their way. And then God says, Gideon that's still too many and has him send home another 9,700 people leaving only 300 which is Ludacris in our own wisdom and estimation. And then Gideon overhears one guy telling another guy about a dream and its interpretation and is so reassured that the Lord is going to deliver them from this impending doom that it says he returns to his men worshipping saying, "arise, for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand." And they hadn't even fought yet? If I'm one of those guys, I'm thinking WHAT!? And we know the rest of the story, those 300 men don't even have to lift a sword only some trumpets and the Lord confuses the minds of the masses and over 120,000 people end up fighting themselves in mass confusion and God delivers on His promise!
 - And WHY is this important and why does Isaiah reference it here in Isaiah 9:4!? I think the key to this is in verse 2 of Judges 7 where this story comes from when the Lord says to Gideon in Judges 7:2, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, my own hand has saved me." You see when God saves and rescues and delivers, He does so in the most unexpected and incomprehensible ways.
 - *"God is Yahweh, Jehovah Jira, our provider, our rescue, and he shares his glory with NO ONE; NOT ARMIES, NOT PROPHETS, NOT KINGS, NOT STRATEGIES, NOT MAN'S WISDOM OR COUNSEL, AND NOT YOU OR I."*
 - And this is the best things for us because our hearts our idol factories and we are prone to lean on our own achievements, our own strength and wisdom, and therefore trust in our own rescue, but GOD SAYS NO! He says, I WONT LET ISRAEL, I WON'T LET MY PEOPLE, I WANT LET FCBC BOAST OVER ME SAYING 'MY OWN HAND HAS SAVED ME.'

God's rescue of Gideon and His people was unexpected and according to His own counsel and in the very same way Isaiah is saying God is going to bring an unexpected rescue, and dispel the darkness and gloom the people thought they were doomed to live in through an unexpected burst of light, and what is this unexpected light and rescue from oppression and ultimate defeat? It's the:

- **Unexpected gift** – The gift of himself, in the form of a baby born in Bethlehem, raised in the land of Galilee, where surely nothing good could come from Nazareth, an unexpected gift was given to unexpecting parents. And this is the wonderful counsel and wisdom of God! **Read verses 6-7 with me.** This is the son promised in Isaiah 7:14 and the son promised to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-14. A king has come, a new King David (Israel’s greatest king), and He will reign over God’s people with perfect justice and perfect peace. His name is Jesus. He is the unexpected gift in Isaiah’s day and the unexpected gift we celebrate and look to for our hope at Advent and every other time of year.
- I love how one commentator put it, just listen and track with me for a moment:
 - *“The reason why we so often read this passage at Christmas is that its fingerprints are all over the Gospel narratives. In Luke’s Gospel we read, “God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26-27). Just so we don’t miss the geographical allusion, Luke tells us that Nazareth is a town in Galilee—the place where Isaiah 9:1-2 said light would dawn. Then Luke tells us the angel came to a virgin—just as Isaiah 7:14 had promised. He tells us too that she is a married to a descendant of David—just as Isaiah 9:7 had promised. And the angel hasn’t even spoken yet! When he does speak, this is what he says: “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:31-33)”*
 - Did you catch it!? Isaiah 7:14 says, “The virgin will conceive’; the angel says, “You will conceive.” Isaiah 9:6 says, “A child is born ... a son is given”; the angel says, “You will give birth to a son”. Isaiah 9:7 says, “He will reign on David’s throne”; the angel says, “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.” Isaiah 9:7 says, “He will reign ... over his kingdom ... forever”; the angel says, “He will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”
- Church this is incomprehensible wisdom! Only the wise counsel of God could have come up with such a rescue plan and it’s called the plan of redemption and it’s been the plan since the garden! The creator saving his own creation for his glory and by his love! Can you see it?
 - Unexpected light, bringing an ultimate and unexpected rescue, through the unexpected gift of Himself in the person of His own Son Jesus Christ, for undeserving darkness dwellers like me and you!
- Ray Ortland said it like this:
 - Our Liberator will not only defeat all the forces of evil, he will put a final end to conflict itself. Every mechanism for tyranny will go into the bonfire of God’s grace. This victory is not our accomplishment. We step onto the battlefield after the victory is won, and all we do is celebrate. God’s answer to everything that has ever terrorized us in this life is a child. The power of God is so far superior to the Assyrias of this world, all the big shots of this world, and even our own sin and death problem that he can defeat them by coming as a mere child. So look

at Jesus. As the Wonderful Counselor, he has the best ideas and strategies. Let's follow him. As the Mighty God, he defeats his enemies easily. Let's hide behind him. As the Everlasting Father, he loves us endlessly. Let's enjoy him. As the Prince of Peace, he reconciles us while we are still his enemies. Let's fall down and worship him. This child is the King to end all kings, saving us from our failure, lifting us into his own justice and righteousness. He is Jesus Christ the Lord, our crucified, risen, reigning, and coming Savior. He will not come back to simply tweak this problem and that problem. He will return with a massive correction to reverse all evil, sin, and death forever. That is the best part. "Of the *increase* of his government and of peace *there will be no end.*"

- How can we be sure of this? Well Isaiah tells us, "the Zeal of the Lord of Host's WILL DO THIS." He will not fail. God and his wisdom is inevitable!

So what can we do today and this week? What do our hearts need more than anything this Advent?

1. Look to the unexpected light of Christ and see and know His love for you, let it expose your sin, melt your idols, and lead you into loving repentance and grace.
2. Rejoice in the unexpected rescue of God that came to deliver you not just from the armies of the Midianites but from the armies of darkness and the tyranny of sin and death.
3. Receive the unexpected gift of grace that came in the form of a baby, in an unexpecting land, to unexpecting parents, for undeserving sinners, whose name is Immanuel "God with us" because God will live with His people again!

Let's Pray