

Wonderful Counselor

December 10, 2023

Advent - 2

Good morning church!

Thank you for joining us this morning!

As you may know we have been anticipating a time such as this. In fact, each year, this season of advent is one of excitement, expectancy, hopefulness and even suspense.

If you have ever read a poorly written book or watched a movie with a bad storyline one of the things it typically lacks is either a plot or suspense.

Just by reading the book of Hosea that we have been going through over the past few months has caused a great deal of suspense in its reader.

The advent season leaves us in suspense.

Advent which means “the arrival of a notable person or thing” leaves us all in suspense.

Many of you may know that the notable person in the advent season is one of the greatest arrivals ever in the history of mankind.

On December 25th we celebrate the arrival of the birth of Jesus Christ!

To the mortal man, this birth is insignificant and has no value to him.

But to the one who recognizes that there is no true hope in this life or beyond, outside of a savior, this birth is EVERYTHING!

Last week Pastor Steve preached on Christ as the Prince of Peace. I pray that you have received and experienced the peace that comes from Christ that nothing else can replicate. I also pray that you have allowed this peace to permeate from you within your home, your workplace and in your community to those who don't know a peace like the one that comes from life in Christ Jesus.

Pastor Steve read from Isaiah 9:6. We are going continue the deep dive today in this verse to explore more of who Christ is.

Last week was Christ as the Prince of Peace. This week we are looking at Christ as the Wonderful Counselor.

Let me begin by re reading Isaiah 9:6 to you again.

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Isaiah 9:6

⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

For those of you who have kids or grandkids know that one of the most exciting things about Christmas is watching them anticipate, hope for, talk about and enjoy Christmas morning.

As young kids, the Christmas season invigorates.
As we get older, our focus becomes the Christmas bills that proliferate.

The things that we once hoped for when Christmas was new to us we have allowed the distractions of this world to mar the simplicity that came on that first Christmas morning.

We used to joke around that often when we watch kids receive an expensive gift from a family member hours later the kids are playing hide and go seek for hours in the box that gift came in and have given the gift no attention at all.

Many of us, if we think back to our last few Christmas' most likely you can't even remember what you asked for or hoped for. If you do remember what that was, most likely you don't have the same interest level for that thing that raised your adrenaline levels when you first thought of it.

When we make Christmas about the things, about the stuff, about the people, about the décor and the food and the music...I could go on and on. Eventually, Christmas will lack for luster.

When Christmas however, is rooted in the truth of what the season is all about, the distractions don't seem to matter, the problems seem to be insignificant and we begin to understand that the gift of Christ is all that matters.

Often we judge a book by its cover when it comes to selecting which gifts we are eyeing under the Christmas tree that we want to open first.

I enjoy running this experiment with my kids. I'll wrap one of the "best" presents with ugly wrapping paper, make it look less appealing or I will put the smallest present in a huge box and wrap it. This definitely ups the suspense for Christmas morning!

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Often the kids want to open the biggest, best looking present first thinking that what is on the outside will reflect what is on the inside.

This is exactly how the world was expecting the Messiah to come. They expected a political ruler to come in and restore power, a conquering Son of David.

Even up to the last moments with the apostles, even they were trying to figure out Christ.

Peter said in Acts 1:6, "Are you going to restore the kingdom?"

Christ's birth was lowly and simple, born in a barn in the animal feeding trough because there was no room at the local hotel.

This was not the grandiose entrance that they expected.

At the very birth of Christ, He, was demonstrating to the world, his Wonderful Counsel of humility and lowly servant leadership.

To better understand Isaiah 9:6 we need to look at the word "child" because it is in a place of emphasis.

Also, the word "us" used in the first-person plural which suggests a link with:

Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you (the link to 'us') a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son (the link to the word 'Child'), and shall call his name Immanuel.

We have talked a lot about the bigger themes that take place in scripture. When we understand the bigger themes and lessons that the scriptures paint it helps us to understand the details that we read within the verse and chapters of the Bible.

There is a theme used throughout Isaiah here that is germinating, literally, when it comes to the birth of Christ.

If we back up in Isaiah even further and look at

Isaiah 4:2

² In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.

I am again referencing Hosea because it has been on the forefront of our recent messages, but we see the patterns between God and the Israelites in Hosea.

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1. Man sins
2. God is patient but warns
3. God judges and disciplines
4. God offers a redeeming and forgiving love

This redeeming and forgiving love is the “Branch of the Lord” that Isaiah is referring to.

The concept of the “branch” begins in Isaiah at the botanical level, which is in view here in Isaiah. The famine and devastation wreaked on the land by their enemies showed the Israelites their dire need of literal fruitfulness. The God of new life therefore promised that the future would be marked by such God-given fruitfulness.

The people’s need of life, however, was far greater, embracing the nation’s very existence—which was being threatened by its foes.

There was need of reassurance that the God of new life would make the remnant of God his people fruitful, too. But their deepest need was for the Messiah; thus, he appears as the ultimate “Branch of the Lord”

We saw these references used in the book of John about Christ being referred to as a vine stock or branch.

John 15:1

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

The Israelites were hoping for the land to start producing fruit bringing life so that they could eat. What they didn’t realize was that God would provide a greater source of life started as a seed planted in the virgin Mary.

Isaiah uses four names to describe the Messiah. These names have special meaning to us.

Wonderful Counselor is the first in the list of names Isaiah uses for Christ. This name signifies that Christ is:

1. Exceptional
2. Distinguished
3. Without peer
4. The one who gives the right advice

The words of Isaiah 9:6 were written 700 years prior to the birth of Christ but yet were written in the past tense. This was a prophesy that Isaiah was so sure would be fulfilled that it was as good as done in his literature.

When you think of the word ‘distinguished’, you don’t typically think of someone new, young or a rookie. A distinguished person has years of experience and expertise in a subject matter.

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So when a 12 year old boy is in the local synagogue blowing the minds of who you think would be the most distinguished, the suspense of the storyline is riveting.

The religious leaders on the other hand don't think it is so cute however.

Matthew 13:53-58

⁵³ And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there,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? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" ⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." ⁵⁸ And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

The reason Jesus was distinguished had nothing to do with his manmade abilities but had everything to do with the fact that He is God. Even though he was a baby born in manger, a 12-year-old spiritual prodigy in the synagogue, a Wonderful Counselor, is because He always has been. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end. He has always been in existence. He is fully God and fully baby Jesus. Fully God and fully a 12 year old boy.

I can't even imagine Mary and Joseph trying to parent their 12-year-old son, who is...umm...their savior. Again, talk about suspense in a storyline.

The Hebrew word for wonderful here is 'Pala' (paw-law) which indicates a phenomenon or something that lies outside the realm of human explanation. It's the same word used in Psalm 139:6 when David, in awe of the Lord's personal knowledge of man said, "such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."

The Lord makes this clear in:

Isaiah 55:8-9

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God makes it clear that he is in control.

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In this advent season this should bring you comfort. It is a peace that surpasses all understanding. We don't always have to have the answers but we know the Wonderful Counselor who does have them.

Yesterday afternoon when I was doing some final touches on the message and I felt the Lord laying on my heart some of the scripture to use in today's message I was typing away and all of the sudden my nose started bleeding. I was right in the middle of my thought and didn't want to lose it so I kept typing away but I was bleeding all over the place. I was determined to get my thought down so I didn't lose it before getting to the tissue box. So, if it looks like a crime scene upstairs...don't worry I was just writing the sermon.

We see God's Wonderful Counsel expressed by Job in Chapter 42 verses 1-6 as he confesses and repents to the Lord after questioning God.

¹"Then Job answered the Lord and said:

²"I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

³'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

⁴'Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.'

⁵I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;

⁶therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."

As humans, when we come to the full understanding that God. Is. In. Control. Of. Everything. We begin to minimize ourselves. I don't say this from a value standpoint but I say this from a position of humility.

When we finally conclude in our own hearts and minds because the Spirit of God has renewed us, our own world no longer becomes important. The foolishness we once thought of the Gospel, becomes the daily substance of our nurture.

I used to do a decent amount of backpacking. When I was first getting into it there was a friend of mine and I who decided to do an overnight backpacking trip. You learn a lot about yourself and about backpacking when you first get into it. Especially when no one in your group are experience backpackers.

The ingredients of our trip are why search and rescue were formed many years ago. I think the only thing I owned as far as gear goes, was a backpacking backpack that I purchased from REI the year before. It was the cheapest one they had at the time. I borrowed hiking boots, put on

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some cotton shorts, a cotton T-shirt (which if you are experienced with hiking in the outdoors you know cotton is not the thing to wear).

I stuffed my 40-degree Fred Meyer sleeping bag in my backpack, a light pair of pants, extra socks, 3 cliff bars (one for the way up, one for lunch time and one for the way down) and a can of Denty Moore beef stew for dinner that my friend and I would share. We didn't have a map, we didn't understand our elevation gains and we didn't know that the temperatures in the mountains at night in September were much colder than down in the valley.

The trip length wasn't that long but the terrain was treacherous! It was super steep. This caused us to burn a lot of calories and form a lot of blisters. We ate 2 of the three of our cliff bars on the way up. We arrived at our destination by lunch and ate our final cliff bar.

We planned to eat dinner by 6 pm. By 2 pm we started salivating as we stared down our Denty Moore beef stew. By 3 pm our stomachs were in knots. By 3:30 pm we agreed that it was time for dinner. If only we had remembered a can opener. Fortunately, we had a swiss army knife that allowed us to get it open.

Our stomachs were finally satisfied but our blisters on the heels of our feet were so sore that we decided to hang out in camp. Time moves the slowest in the mountains when there is nothing to do.

By the time 7 pm rolled around it was getting dusk and we were so bored we decided to go to bed. We noticed the dew settling on our tent and recognized it was getting cold. By midnight my 40-degree bag wasn't cutting it. As I looked over at my friend snuggled in his down feather, -40 degree sleeping bag as beads of sweat formed on his brow, I debated between, snuggling with him or punching him...both had negative repercussions so I shivered myself into the worst sleep I can ever remember.

I learned a couple of things from this trip:

1. I need to have good counsel before backpacking by those who have gone before me and understand what they are doing rather than relying on my own foolish ways.
2. When I sat there with my friend Josh, staring at the single can of Denty Moore beef stew, with hunger pangs in my abdomen, the only thing I could think of was food. Nothing else really mattered. I longed for the satisfaction that came from eating that cruddy can of stew. Even the cliff bars could have been T-bone steaks. I longed for the nourishment that came from that food.

I didn't know this then, but now I have a better understanding of how much my soul longs for the word of God. Without it, my soul is not satisfied, it is all my soul thinks about and longs for.

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When the journey in life is difficult and the terrain is rough and you don't have a can opener, the wise and Wonderful Counsel of God is what will satisfy.

The best counselors are full of wisdom and offer insight into our lives and problems. So, who better to counsel us than the one who knows all things?

At 12 years old, Jesus astounded the Jewish rabbis with his wisdom. Many years later, when teaching in his hometown synagogue, the religious leaders were amazed and took offense at his wisdom and mighty works. Paul said in Colossians 2:3 that in Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

If you recall back in Hosea 4 we did a word study on the 'Knowledge of God'. We saw the impacts and consequences of what happens when people don't adhere to the wise counsel of God. I want to read this to you as reminder of what happened to the Israelites when they strayed from God's Wonderful Counsel.

Hosea 4

Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel,
For the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land,
Because there is no faithfulness or kindness
Or knowledge of God in the land.
2 There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery.
They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.
3 Therefore the land mourns,
And everyone who lives in it languishes
Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky,
And also the fish of the sea disappear.
4 Yet let no one find fault, and let none offer reproof;
For your people are like those who contend with the priest.
5 So you will stumble by day,
And the prophet also will stumble with you by night;
And I will destroy your mother.
6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being My priest.
Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.
7 The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me;
I will change their glory into shame.
8 They feed on the sin of My people
And direct their desire toward their iniquity.
9 And it will be, like people, like priest;
So I will punish them for their ways

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And repay them for their deeds.

10 They will eat, but not have enough;

They will play the harlot, but not increase,

Because they have stopped giving heed to the Lord.

11 Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the understanding.

12 My people consult their wooden idol, and their diviner's wand informs them;

For a spirit of harlotry has led them astray,

And they have played the harlot, departing from their God.

13 They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains

And burn incense on the hills,

Under oak, poplar and terebinth,

Because their shade is pleasant.

Therefore your daughters play the harlot

And your brides commit adultery.

14 I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot

Or your brides when they commit adultery,

For the men themselves go apart with harlots

And offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes;

So the people without understanding are ruined.

15 Though you, Israel, play the harlot,

Do not let Judah become guilty;

Also do not go to Gilgal,

Or go up to Beth-aven

And take the oath:

"As the Lord lives!"

16 Since Israel is stubborn

Like a stubborn heifer,

Can the Lord now pasture them

Like a lamb in a large field?

17 Ephraim is joined to idols;

Let him alone.

18 Their liquor gone,

They play the harlot continually;

Their rulers dearly love shame.

19 The wind wraps them in its wings,

And they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

There are natural and spiritual consequences that take place as a result of following or disobeying God's Wonderful Counsel. In general, when you listen to and adhere to the wonderful counsel of God, good things happen in your life and family. In general, when you don't listen and don't adhere to the wonderful counsel of God, bad things happen.

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As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, when we gain the wisdom of the Father we become more like Him. Our character changes and becomes more like His.

Our world today would look very different if we had Fathers who become more like our heavenly Father.

Now, do bad things happen to Christians who adhere to the wise counsel of the Wonderful Counselor? Well, in the big scheme of things the answer is no. Eternally the rewards are far greater than any bad thing that could take place on this earth. There is an eternal protection that we have in Christ that we can take hope in.

We have all probably had a friend or person in your life who comes to you on a regular basis asking for wisdom and advice, yet they always seem to not take the advice and it always ends poorly. It is hard to watch and eventually you don't see the value in giving out the advice anymore.

A patient of a good counselor will pay money to receive good wisdom and advice for the problems that they wrestle with and many don't take the good wisdom that comes from their counselor.

The Bible talks a lot about rejecting wisdom and calls it foolishness.

WORSHIP TEAM BACK UP

James 1:22-25

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

The fact that James calls professing believers to be "doers," rather than simply to do, emphasizes that their entire personality should be characterized in that way.

The word 'deceiving' was used in mathematics to refer to a miscalculation. Professing Christians who are content with only hearing the word have made a serious spiritual calculation.

Matthew 7:21-28

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name,

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and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

²⁸ And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, Church, this morning I ask you, where is it that you are getting your counsel from?

When you take inventory of your time that you are taking in counsel for your life, your profession, your personal well-being, you name it...Is the time you are spending in the very word of God at the top of the list of sources where you receive your counsel?

If not, I challenge you to consider today, for you and for your family, to begin a pattern of daily devotion to the word. The more time you spend in it the less you will regret it.

The Wonderful Counsel of God is the greatest wisdom that you can obtain. There is nothing that even compares. The proverbs remind us that it is more precious than silver or gold.

If you are wondering where it is that you can begin, I encourage you to grab one of the advent reading guides in the back to get you started. If you are new to reading the Bible there will be words and concepts that you may not understand. That is totally fine. Keep a notepad alongside your bible and jot down words and concepts that you don't understand. Find someone who is seasoned in their Christian faith and have those discussions.

We want to help give you the tools you need to study and learn the greatest wisdom that you could ever receive.

I also want to encourage you to place your life in the hands of this Wonderful Counselor that I spoke of today. If you have sensed the Lord urging your heart to surrender to Him I ask that today you cling to the power of salvation that can only be found in a Savior named Jesus Christ.

Pray

Home Group Questions:

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1. When was a time when you got good advice or wisdom and you didn't take it? Or maybe you gave good advice and wisdom and someone else chose not to take it. How did that impact you when the results were undesirable?
2. What is it that you fill your life with to bring satisfaction that is temporary?
3. Talk about a specific time in your life when the Wonderful Counsel of God was 'life saving' aside from salvation.

*Read James 1:22-25

4. Why is it important to act upon the counsel of God right away based on what James says? What are some principles (biblical or familial) that you have practiced when you were young that you still do today?
5. How have you developed a regular hunger for the word of God? What advice would you give to someone who hasn't sensed that hunger for the word to obtain it?