

Jesus, Our Wonderful Counselor!

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Our Scripture reading this evening is from Isaiah 9 and we'll again verses 2 through 7, 2 through 7 and I want to read four verses from James 1. Isaiah 9:2,

2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. 3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. 5 For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. 6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Dear church family, a friend, every real friend is a gift of God. My first theological instructor in Canada used to say to me, "If you can count real friends on one hand, you can fill up a hand, you're a rich man." Now, of course, we all have many many friends at various levels, but he meant, of course, a real friend to whom you could share your innermost being, your weaknesses, your struggles, your fears, but within that handful of friends, if you have one or two who are really wise, really wise and can give you wise counsel about all kinds of subjects, you are really blessed. You are really blessed. It's huge if we have someone, a brother born for adversity, in our lives who can give us great spiritual, biblical wisdom and loves us, loves us dearly like our own soul. What a friend David and Jonathan had in each other, for example.

But you see, the friend I want to talk to you about tonight, the wise friend, is one who never makes a single mistake and his counsel is always right and good and he's a friend that sticks closer than a brother in adversity. His name is Jesus and he can take you out of every pit into which you fall, out of every mess into which you come. He is the answer.

His name is Wonderful, Counselor. He's not only our advocate in heaven if we're believers, but he also gives us wise counsel from heaven by his Spirit, by his power, by his grace. Someone illustrated it this way. He said a man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out. A Pharisee came along and said, "You know, only bad people fall into a pit." A fundamentalist came along and said, "Well, you deserve the pit." A charismatic said, "Just confess you're not in the pit." A social gospel pastor came by and said, "Here's some food and clothing we're bringing you while you're in the pit." A hyper-Calvinist said, "You're not there by accident, you know." An optimist walked by and said, "Well, things will get better." A pessimist walked by and said, "Things will get even worse." But Jesus came along and reached down and took the man's hand and pulled him out of the pit with almighty power. That's the kind of wise counsel we have in Jesus.

So my text is again Isaiah 9:6,

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Last week, we looked at the word "wonderful," the name Wonderful. Tonight, we want to look at the name Counselor or if we bring it together into one name, we saw both interpretations are possible, Wonderful Counselor. So our title tonight is "Jesus Our Wonderful Counselor," and we're actually going to look at eight qualities of this counselor but I'm grouping them in groups of two because they're related to each other, I believe. So four thoughts: a given and a word-based counselor, a listening and an all-knowing counselor, a teaching and exemplary counselor, and a sympathetic and successful counselor. Given and word-based, listening and all-knowing, teaching and exemplary, sympathetic and successful counselor.

Someone has once said life is rather like a scrambled egg, you can't unscramble a scrambled egg. You know, all of us have had times in our lives, many times, where we've said if only we could undo it, if only we could take back the words we said, if only someone had told me, if only I had asked for advice, if only I could do a rerun of that situation, if only I'd been aware of the consequences of my thoughts, my words, my actions. An English poet, John Clare, once wrote these words, "If life had a second edition, how I would correct the proofs of the first edition." But the point is there is no second edition in life. There's only one pass-through. You've only got one life. You've only got one soul. It is appointed unto men once to die, how we've seen that four times in the last three weeks in this dear congregation, and after that the judgment. So what that means, boys and girls, teenagers, parents, seniors, is we've only got one chance to get it right in this life and when this life is over, we don't get another chance. We must appear before God. We're accountable for what we've done with the life he has given us. It is absolutely critical that we are born again and that we are prepared to meet God because we don't get a rerun.

"What shall it profit a man," Jesus said, "if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" Now we lose our own soul, of course, in terms of its state. From the moment we're

conceived, we're lost. But losing one's own soul in terms of our sanctification, in terms of our condition, is a process, isn't it? It's a way of lifestyle. As you live for this world and you listen to the voices of this world and you breathe in the propaganda of this world, and you live for what the world has to offer you, so you lose, lose, lose, and ultimately lose your own soul, and unless that process is reversed, you see, and by the grace of God you learn to say farewell to the world, and you learn to take up your cross and deny yourself, and come to repentance and faith, genuine repentance and faith in Christ alone, you will be lost forever. That is incredibly incredibly serious.

So the question is, the real question is: who can we turn to for counsel? Where do we go for help? Where do we turn for decisions and demands of life in this world? To whom shall we go with our never-dying soul when we're in the pit? Critical questions, I say, because if you don't get it right on your first pass-through through life, there won't be another chance. Now the good news is that Isaiah gives us the answer. He says there is someone, "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor." And you can go to him, you see, at any time and he invites you to come, he invites you to come just as you are.

So my first point is that he's a given and a word-based counselor. A given and a word-based counselor. "Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given." When you first read that it looks like needless repetition but it's not. You see, a child who is born is also the son who is given. That's the word-based message of Jesus, the message of Christmas, that "God so loved the world that he gave," given son, "his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." God gave his Son. The child who was born in the manger is the Son of God, the Almighty, the Mighty God, as the next name says, the Mighty God who was given.

You see, there's nothing like this in all the world. When a child is born into your home, that child just doesn't come from anywhere, that child had no existence before the moment of his or her conception, that child was brought into being. That's true of all of us, isn't it, whether you're five years old or you're 95 years old. But that's not what Isaiah says here. He says a miracle happened, unto us a child is born, a child born to the virgin Mary but that child was also a son who is given. God's Son. The one in whom is hid all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. The one whose name is Wonderful Counselor, whose nature is unfathomable and incomprehensible. Two natures in one divine person.

Now you've got to understand that. This is important. You see, when you come into a great problem in life, into a pit, and you can't find your way out, it helps when someone who is not involved in your problem, someone who can come from outside the pit comes along to offer you wise counsel. Have you ever had problems that you don't know where to begin or where to end? You can't find a loose end to start to untangle the web of your problem? And then someone comes along from outside of you and you pour out your heart and the person helps you. Well, that's a great thing, but the beauty of Jesus, you see, is that he doesn't just come from outside of us, he comes from above us, he comes from heaven, he comes from glory. He's the Son of God. He's the Almighty whose name is Wonderful, Wonderful Counselor. He comes from above and he comes from above and

from above he comes below us and he's born in a manger, he's born in the poorest of poor circumstances to declare to us that no one must think he's too high for them to reach. He comes for the lowest of the low, for the chief of sinners. He's a Wonderful Counselor who has a listening ear for every single soul that cries out to him, and because he comes from above, because he's the Mighty God, he is able to get you out of any mess that you've gotten your life into. That's who he is.

So he's a given, a given counselor who can save you from all your lostness, also spiritually. Like Nicodemus when he came to Jesus by night, you know the interview in John 3, don't you? It says that Jesus says, "If you only knew, Nicodemus, who it was that is standing in front of you and speaking to you, you would understand that I'm the one that comes down from heaven. I'm the Son who is being given. You can't save yourself from your lostness, Nicodemus. You can't unscramble the egg that you've scrambled with all your outward religiosity, but I'm the only one who can do it, Nicodemus. I can do the impossible." That's true in our lives, that's true in our nation even right now in all the mess that this nation is in. It's true in the world. Of all the sociologists, the educationalists, the environmentalists, the psychologists, the politicians, none of them have the answers to our human predicament as fallen sons and daughters of Adam nor to all the pits in which we dig and fall into. None of them can undo the effects of the fall or the damage of the fall.

And isn't that what God is saying to us right now in our 21st century in the United States of America? We can do so many things as a nation, we can split the atom, we can fly to the moon, but we can scarcely live together in America. And all the enmity, all the division, all the fake news, all the anger that abounds in our country with all the science and all the technology, we have to understand that the only answer for us, for our nation, has to come from above, has to come from this Wonderful Counselor.

We can't even get it from education, as important as education is. Earl of Shaffesbury in the 19th century said this, "Education without instruction in religious and moral principles will merely result in a race of clever devils." How right he was. Education in itself is not the answer. Education without religion, true religion, as is so evident in many of America's colleges and universities today will only result in glorifying sin, it will result in unbiblical forms of isms in which everyone does that which is right in his own eyes as in the time of Judges. It will only result in a race of clever people that do the work of devils.

You see, man in himself does not have the answers we need. Salvation from a higher source, from wisdom with a capital "W," from wise counsel from the one who is wisdom must flow to the human race if we're ever going to be saved and be delivered from the pit which we've dug for ourselves. This is the gospel. But the good news is Isaiah says we have him, "Unto us, unto us a child is born, unto us this son is given," the Son who comes from heaven. We commemorate his birth as a child in time on December 25, 2020. His name is Wonderful, Counselor.

He's given for the salvation of sinners and he comes with his own word. He's a living Word but he also comes with his written word. He's a word-based counselor given to us.

And he exemplifies that word-baseness in his own life. When he's taken into the wilderness, three great series of temptations are recorded. Now there are probably many more in those 40 days but three great ones are recorded in Matthew 4 that Jesus faced. He answered them all with these words, "It is written. It is written. It is written." And all three times, by the way, from the wise counseling book of Deuteronomy that teaches us how to walk in God's ways.

But Jesus not only exemplified this word-baseness for himself, he also guided others in the path of Scripture. You remember the story of the two travelers to Emmaus in Luke 24. Verse 27 says, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures," the scriptures, "the things concerning himself." And then 18 verses later, "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead."

Now today we desperately need wise counselors in every church as well. Jesus is the wise counselor par excellence, but there are so many needs today with so many people, we need wise counsel and that's not just a task for elders and ministers, it's also a task for people to give counsel to each other. But we must remember that our priority, our top priority in biblical counseling must always be to glorify and please God, and the best way to please him is to be word-based, always speak according to his word. The Bible is the best counseling book ever written and so to be effective counselors, we must counsel like Jesus. We must know the Bible and we must meditate on the Bible, we must memorize the Bible, and as we counsel others, we should refer often to the doctrines, the principles, the examples in the Scriptures. The Scriptures must be our foundation, our framework in our guide in all counseling just like Jesus says in his counsel. Actually in our seminary, God willing, the Synod has approved that we unfurl a counseling degree in 2022, the Lord willing, and plans are being made even now as we speak to do that, and the goal is not just to train ministers but also laypeople who have a heart for other people, to train them in biblical counseling, counseling like Jesus through his written word, looking to the living Word. And that's so sorely needed today. Nearly all changes that are implemented in counseling today on non-scriptural principles will be superficial and temporary at best, or harmful, sinful at worst.

So we must admonish each other against a pragmatic approach in counseling where ends justify means, which is precisely the problem with so much counseling today, unfortunately not just secular counseling but also much so-called Christian counseling which is no longer really tethered to the word of God, and that's why so many counselors today do far more damage than good because they're not tethered to the Scriptures. The best counselors, you see, are like Jesus. They're word-based, they rely on the given Jesus, the word-based Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor. They rely on his precious life-saving, life-correcting, life-changing, life-guiding word.

But Jesus is not only a given and a word-based counselor, he's also, that's my second thought, a listening and all-knowing counselor. A listening, all-knowing counselor. You can't be a good counselor without learning the art of listening and there's no listener quite

like Jesus. I point you again to Luke 24 because it's just such a beautiful example. In verse 17, Jesus comes alongside Cleopas and his friend and says, "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?" This is such an intriguing question because Jesus is all-knowing and the Bible says he can see into the heart of people, he even knew their thoughts, John 2:24-25 says he knows all men and he knows what is in man, and yet he says to them, "Why are you sad? What are you talking about as you walk along?" You see, a good counselor knows how to draw people out like that and can read body language as well. It may be in a person's eyes or in their facial appearance or their demeanor, their whole pathos. Jesus is a counselor who sees not only the external appearance but he can read the internal heart. He can do more than any earthly counselor can do.

But a good earthly counselor will also seek to be a good listener, opening up the counselee. And so Jesus opens them up. First they're a little astonished at him, at his question. They say, "Are you a stranger," verse 18, "in Jerusalem, and you haven't known the things which are come to pass there in these days?" They can't believe the ignorance of the all-knowing Jesus. They're shocked at this stranger's ignorance but Jesus didn't defend himself, he didn't interrupt them, he kept listening. He obviously was someone who cared and it got their attention.

So he says to them in verse 19, "Tell me, What things? What things are going on in Jerusalem? Tell me everything." And they began to pour out their hearts. Verse 19, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. We trusted him and he which should have redeemed Israel." And then they go on to say, you see, by redeeming Israel, they were looking for a Redeemer not only for their souls but also for one that could deliver them from the political yoke of the Romans and they confess that they had been sure Jesus was the one to do that. But they still didn't understand the gospel, you see. Calvary and their expectations didn't really mesh very well. They didn't grasp the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom. Their hearts were set on a throne and a crown, not on a cross, not on Christ's cross nor on their own crosses of suffering persecution for his sake.

So more confusion tumbles out of them as Jesus continues to open them up and they said, "Beside this on the third day certain women saw that the sepulchre was empty and they said he was risen from the dead, but him they saw not," verses 21 through 24. You see, Jesus gets them to open up absolutely everything, to tell him their whole heart. That's a good counselor. He's given them no advice yet. He listens, listens, listens. And maybe maybe you know something about that, maybe you know what it is to tell God everything as if he knew nothing about you, yet knowing he knows everything about you. Or maybe you say, "I don't know if I feel free to do that." Well, do, please do feel free to do that. He's got a listening ear. He listens better than anyone on earth listens and he knows you completely, so he knows exactly what you need.

So keep no secrets from Jesus. There are no secrets from him anyway. But you notice even now Jesus doesn't say, "I am he," after they open up everything. No, he works deep down. He sends the roots down deeply into the soul before he builds up the tree. He

works internally before he manifests that work externally and powerfully. And you see, these are all marks of a good counselor. A good counselor is someone who, first of all, is thorough in listening, doesn't jump to early conclusions. Listening takes time, you see, patience, perceptiveness.

Second, a good counselor doesn't minimize the counselee's problem. The problem is very real to the counselee. This problem was very real to the two travelers. Jesus doesn't minimize it. A good counselor takes problems seriously.

And third, a good counselor watches for attitudes or a mindset. You see, Jesus is opening up their whole approach, their whole attitude, their whole mindset to all the impossibilities of the situation. If a person is saying to you constantly in counseling, "Well, can't. Impossible. Hopeless." That's often the language of despair. Maybe there's deeper problems that are not yet revealed and you've got to go deeper. The tone of voice, the body language can convey anger, worry, guilt, humiliation, a host of emotions. Jesus, you see, is opening up all of this. He's a wise, all-knowing, listening counselor.

But then thirdly, he's also a teaching and exemplary counselor. You see, there comes a time for a counselor to actually teach. There are certain psychologist ideas today, for example, Carl Rogers has this idea that you listen and you reflect what the person is saying and, young people, you probably studied him in psychology classes in college. A lot of what he says there is good, you know, you get the person to open up, but you see, the problem is then you don't have an absolute set of authoritative values, you don't have a word-based counseling system so that you don't have any advice to really give, you don't have anything to teach, you don't have anything to say, "Thus saith the Lord" in your counseling. So what happens is you go back and back and back and back and back years on end to the counselor and there's no solution and you have to really come up with your own solutions and do what you think is right in your own eyes because there's no authoritative right and wrong.

Well, Jesus isn't that kind of counselor. He listens. He draws out, but then he teaches and he speaks with authority, he speaks with conviction, not as the scribes and Pharisees. He tells you the answer, but along the way, you see, he deals with each soul very differently. Have you ever noticed that about Jesus, how differently he dealt, say, with the rich young ruler and the travelers to Emmaus? A totally different approach. And so in counseling, you need wisdom to approach people in different ways according to the personality and the circumstances and the mindset of the individual.

Now today you might say this a broad generalization, there are three basic approaches that you could use biblically to counsel people. In a way, Jesus uses all three of them although he didn't use this language. You have, first of all, what's called behavioral counseling, right? You know what that is, I think. Behavior counseling emphasizes that you change a person's behavior on a regular basis, you can gradually change his thinking as his behavior becomes habitual, and good behavior sometimes will promote right thinking. Now people can reject that. The rich young ruler, for example, he even rejected Jesus. He came to Jesus and he said, "Oh, I've done all these things for all my life up.

What should I do to have eternal life?" And Jesus says, "One thing you lack." Then he gives him an imperative, this is a behavior he had to do, "Go thy way, sell whatsoever you have and give to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven, and come and take up the cross and follow me." And he rejected it. He went away grieving because he had great possessions. Lots of good counseling gets rejected even by good counselors today. Sometimes you counsel somebody and you really know in certain situations you've given them good biblical advice. But what you don't know is as soon as they walk out the door, are they going to follow it?

The second kind of counseling is called cognitive counseling. The word cognitive means the way you think. You see, this form of counseling is the opposite approach, it derives from your thinking. So if you change a person's thinking, cognitive counseling says, you've won the major battle because if they think rightly, then they'll go out and they'll live rightly, they'll behave rightly. Now Jesus used this approach as well. He was always teaching people how to think rightly, taught his enemies how to think rightly, the Pharisees. He also taught his own disciples. In fact, they were enrolled in what we would call today a three year seminary course with him. He was always teaching them, wasn't he? Every day teaching teaching teaching how to think, how to think, knowing that that would impact their lives on how to act.

Then the third approach is what's called, for lack of a better word, eclectic counseling, that is, you merge different kinds of counseling and it usually uses a combination of behavioral and cognitive counseling. You tailor counseling to the individual personality and the need of the counselee. And Jesus often did this, didn't he? Very often actually. For example, going to the Mount of Olives, he's teaching all the way while he's talking to his disciples. And then one of them asks a very foolish question after three years in the seminary, they flunked this question. They asked Jesus, "Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?" They meant, "Are you going to free us from the Roman yoke and set up an earthly kingdom?" And Jesus said, "No. No, I'm not. This is a spiritual kingdom." And he counsels them to go out and to be witnesses and martyrs for him both in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the outermost parts of the earth.

So he first tells them, "I'm teaching you it's a spiritual kingdom, because it's a spiritual kingdom, you," that's cognitive thinking, "you must now go out," here's behavioral counseling, "and you're going to be martyrs for me. You're going to give your life for me." Thus combining, you see, cognitive and behavioral. And Jesus' teaching was combined with his own example. He was also an exemplary counselor. This is very important. He was not like the Pharisees, you see, who told their followers what to do but didn't walk that way themselves. But Jesus mixes these kinds of counseling together according to the individual and then he himself exemplifies all of them and lives them out.

Think about John 13, the foot washing. What a beautiful example this is. He's showing them what to do behaviorally by his own example, "As I wash your feet, so you must wash each other's feet." But he's also teaching them what to think about cognitively. He's saying, "I've given you an example that you may do as I have done to you, but now get

this deep in your mind, this principle of humility, this principle of self-denial. As I, your Lord, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet." That's teaching. So he's combining, you see, teaching and example himself and he takes the towel and he models it for them in their presence. He's a wise wonderful counselor.

You know, my own experience, I believe this example of Jesus is very powerful. One of the things I try to establish in my own mind when I counsel someone is does this person operate primarily by behavior or does this person really, is this person more of a thinker? If the person is more of a thinker, I always use cognitive, mostly cognitive counseling. If I can get them to think rightly, you see, then they will act rightly. If they're more behaviorally oriented, I give them more homework assignments and try to get them in a pattern where they're behaving rightly and then try to mix that with teaching so they think rightly and they work together. And sometimes it's hard to decide in a certain individual and you use both, but you see, Jesus, we as counselors, we take stabs at it, we think we're doing what's right, but Jesus does something much more because he knows you completely inside, he knows exactly how to handle you. You can't hide anything from him and he will counsel you exactly behaviorally, cognitively, eclectically he'll counsel you exactly according with his sovereign will and what is really best for you if you're his child.

He's an amazing, amazing counselor and he'll exemplify it himself. That's why reading the gospels is so fascinating for a believer. You get to see how Jesus acted, how Jesus counseled, how Jesus taught, and we are to think like him, we're to think his thoughts after him. We're to do his actions after him, we're to be Christ-like. And so we need to sit at the feet of our wise counselor and say, "Counsel me, Lord, that I may counsel others as thou hast counseled me."

Finally and very importantly, Jesus is a sympathetic and successful counselor. He's sympathetic for two reasons. First of all, he's a son who is given, he's the Son of God who made you, who knows your frame, as the Psalmist puts it. He knows what makes you tick. He understands you because he made you, and he made you differently than he made anyone else. You are unique in his creation. He knows your personal psychology. He knows everything about your personality. You need to understand this, that God made you like he made no one else. We are all different, we're not clones, we're not robots, we don't come off an assembly line.

To us a son is given. The Son of God formed you in your mother's womb. Psalm 139, he brought all your members together when as yet, as it were, there was none of them. He knows you as no one else does. He implanted a soul within you from the moment of conception. He knows your frame, but he also knows your frame because unto us a child is born, because he became bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. You can never say to Jesus, this wonderful counselor when you get into some huge problem, some problem that you think no one else has ever faced on the globe, have you ever been there? I've been there and you complain to the Lord partly out of real concern, partly maybe a little bit out of self-pity, and you say, "Lord, no one has ever been here before." But you're

wrong. Jesus has been there. The author to the Hebrews puts it this way, "He was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin."

Now it doesn't mean the exact physical circumstances he was in every detail what you're going through, but it does mean the essence of what you're going through, the temptation you're going through, the problem you're going through, the essence of it. He's been there. He's faced it. He's gone through it sinlessly. He's been emotionally involved and so he can be touched not just by but touched with, enter into as a sympathetic high priest what you're going through.

He's a sympathetic counselor. You know, in counseling today you often read these books that say, well, the counselor really should not get beyond empathy when counseling the counselee because you can't take all the, if you felt everyone's burdens it would be too much for you. But you see, the beauty of Jesus is he says of his people in all their affliction he was afflicted. He's not just touched by and then he goes home and leaves it alone like an earthly counselor can meet with someone and act like he really cares and maybe does really care, but doesn't personalize it. He goes home and dismisses it. No, Jesus feels deeply his people's needs. He gets emotionally involved with his patient. He doesn't see that's a bad thing. He's a sympathetic high priest. He understands your downittings and your uprisings, and he knows your thoughts afar off. Isn't it beautiful you can go to a counselor, you don't have to have any secrets because there are no secrets, and you don't ever have to say to him, "But Lord, you don't understand." He does understand. He understands every sigh, every cry, every mystery, every riddle. He understands what you don't understand and what you can't understand because he's God.

He's sympathetic. He's sympathetic even when you don't feel his sympathy. He's sympathetic when you say, "I can't go one more day, Lord. I can't carry this burden one more day." He says, "There's no temptation that has taken hold of you but such as is common to man and I will with the temptation also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it." He comes with the authority of his word and he comforts you and you take it up one more day, don't you? Or he comes in Proverbs 23, that beautiful verse, verse 18, "There shall surely come an end and thy expectations shall not be cut off," and you go forward again. He comes with his word, he comes with his promises, he comes with his comfort, he comes with his understanding, he comes with his sympathy.

He's the Wonderful Counselor, and this is the crowning element, he's always successful. He's always successful not just in understanding you, but because he's able and powerful and successful and Almighty God, and because all things are under his control he has no failures.

I still remember as a teenager when I felt called to the ministry, my dad would talk to me often and one thing he said to me, he said remember, remember as difficult as it will be to preach, sometimes it is more difficult to give one individual soul counsel than to preach to a thousand because you can't see the heart and that's challenging to know exactly what to say. Sometimes you're not sure am I giving exactly the right advice?

And also it can be very disappointing when you do know you give the right advice and it's not followed. Every minister knows lots of failures in counseling but not Jesus. Why? Well, the text tells you because the government, the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Counselor. The Counselor, this Wonderful Counselor has the government of the entire world, the government of your heart, the control of every situation in his hands. The whole world is in his hands, and so are you.

So he's a great counselor, a great counselor. He's the one who rules and reigns in the affairs of men. He holds the universe together physically, emotionally, spiritually in his hands and he does so, Paul says, for the sake of his church, his bride. The government is upon his shoulder. Also today in the midst of all the confusion and problems in your own life, in society, in the United States, in the church, in the world, he's in charge. He's the King Counselor who sits on his holy hill in Zion, and the policy of the government that's on his shoulder is that he gives eternal life to as many as the Father has given him to save, and all the resources of that government are committed to that end, that he will present every one of us who are saved by faith alone, in Christ alone, perfect and faultless before his Father's throne on the great day. There won't be one empty chair in heaven because this counselor will never fail. There's no possibility of him failing because he's the Almighty God. He's the Wonderful Counselor, the powerful, successful counselor who conquers his clients by his amazing sovereign grace. We use those words a lot, don't we, sovereign grace? Sovereign grace simply means this: the government of the Triune God committed to the salvation of his people and it rests on the shoulders of Jesus. The policy of that government, dear believer, is your salvation and mine.

And this is all summed up so beautifully in Psalm 89:19 where God says, "I have laid help upon one who is mighty." And that's Jesus, of course. Remember, boys and girls, when Christian fell into the Slough of Despond, all the mud and he cleaned it out of the pit. No one could bring him out of the pit until a man came by, a man whose name was Help, right, and Help reached down into the pit and pulled Christian out, and Bunyan puts in the margins so beautifully, "Help is Jesus." He can help you. He can help you get out of any pit. He's the mighty counselor. He can solve every tangled mess you've gotten yourself into. He can untangle every confused life. That's the message of Christmas, that's the message of the gospel, "Unto us a child is born and a son is given, and the government is upon his shoulder and his name is Wonderful, Counsellor."

Someone has translated this text, I've laid help upon one that is mighty this way. God has treasured up help in one who is equal to the task. Oh, as earthly counselors, I'll tell you, there's been many times in my life where I said, "I'm not equal to the task. I don't know how to solve this problem. Lord, help. Lord, give me wisdom." But Jesus never has to say that. He's always equal to the task. He never fails. He's a given and a word-based counselor. He's a listening and all-knowing counselor. He's a teaching and exemplary counselor. He's a sympathetic and successful counselor.

So where does that leave you? Well, as I close tonight, let me say this to you. I urge you, I urge you to seek the saving power and a Wonderful Counselor, Jesus Christ, in your life. And there are so many encouragements in the Bible to do this, so many invitations.

Someone counted more than a thousand invitations in the Bible to come to the Savior. I want to just give you one. I want to close with one and talk a little bit about it. It's the one I read, James 1:5-8. Let me read it again, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."

Notice how this begins, "If any of you lack wisdom." So if you really want to get out of your pits, you really want to get out of the mess you're in with God and with man, the first thing is you have to be humble enough to admit you don't have all the answers, you have to be humble enough to admit you need a better counselor, that you're not wise enough to control your own life. And you know what? That's almost half the battle. In counseling we often say to really admit, "I need counsel," is half the battle. You see, what we want to do by nature is, well, we think we know God's mind, we're religious people and we think we can tell God, I mean, we don't do it directly but indirectly, how God ought to handle things for us, what he ought to do. Some people, of course, dare to say it outright. They start out their sentences sometimes even with these bold words, "Well, if I were God, I would..." That's blasphemy. If you were God? Puny little you were God? God doesn't need your counsel. Paul says, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord or who hath been his counselor?" Your solution is not to give God your advice, your solution is to bow under his advice and know it. Humble yourself. Humble yourself, realize your lack of wisdom.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God," James says, "and he gives, he gives to all men liberally, generously, who ask him." Isn't that amazing? The Psalmist says he will open your hands and satisfy the desire of every living thing. You see, God has opened-handed, not tight-fisted. He's gracious. If you see God as a clenched-fisted God, you don't see the God of the Bible. You're wrong. God is a giving God, James says, a God who gives liberally. That's who he is.

So what you need to do just like you in a classroom, boys and girls, if you don't understand something what are you supposed to do? You're supposed to raise your hand and ask the teacher for help. You know, when I was your age, I have to tell you, I was so shy I didn't raise my hand at all ever to ask for help. And that's the way we are by nature, we don't want to raise our hand and say, "Lord, help me." Maybe some of you are like that. But how do you learn if you don't raise your hand and ask for help? That's what we need to do with God, we raise our hand and say, "Lord, help me. Lord, I can't do this. I can't answer my problems. I can't answer the problem of sin in me. I can't answer the problems, the pits I've fallen into. Lord, I've made a mess of my life."

You don't have to be afraid to tell God that. He doesn't respond in mean ways. He doesn't say, "Well, that's rather obvious." No, when you admit to your lack of wisdom and you say, "Lord, I've received counsel from thy word before and I've heard preaching but I haven't put it into practice in my life. Help me to do so." He doesn't say, "Well, it serves

you right." No, James says come to him if you lack wisdom, ask of God, he'll give it to you.

You see, really this is the gospel in a nutshell. This is the gospel. When we, by the Spirit's grace, sincerely repent of our sins before God and truly believe in his Son alone for salvation and raise our hand and say, "Lord, help me," God will not hold our sins against us. He will wash them away and he will come and give us wise counsel. But you see, this is our problem, we want to live independently of God, we want to keep our hands down, we want to do it our own way. The Lord says, "Thou shalt not covet," but we can't live like that, we say, in the 21st century. Our neighbors have this and we must have it as well. We know better than God. You see, that's what sin is, knowing better than God, knowing better than God's law, keeping our hands down. James says don't do that. Don't be a fool. Come to the Lord. Com and tell him you're a sinner. Trust in his Son alone for salvation. And you can't just fool God when you say that, you have to mean it. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways, James says.

So come, ask for faith if you can't get faith. Say, "Lord, help me to come by faith. Help me not to hesitate, not to waver. Help me to come to the Wonderful Counselor just as I am, the Counselor who has the government also of my life upon his shoulders, the Counselor who's always available, never distant from me. Who not only knows me perfectly but knows the precise way that I should go. Who knows everything I ever need to know and who's able to give it all to me and to solve my every problem, especially my sin problem, every problem I will ever face. Lord, help me to come and give to me liberally and upbraid not, just as you've said in your word you will do." Come to the Wonderful Counselor. Amen.

Gracious God, what a Wonderful Counselor thou art, and when we look back in our lives, Lord, we've made so many mistakes, committed so many sins, they're numberless, but thou has so many times, numberless times, come as counselor and extracted us from our sins, from our difficulties, and made no mistakes, sent us trials along the way to take us out of our pits, to set our feet upon a rock. Oh, we thank thee, Lord, you have taken us out of the horrible pit and the miry clay and setting our feet upon the Rock Christ Jesus and establishing our goings in thyself. Please come now in work savingly and practically as Wonderful Counselor in the life of those who do not know thee in this audience or listening online tonight. Please, please, Lord, don't let them pull away again. Don't let them quickly bring their hand down again but help them to keep their hand up high, keep their hand up high until the Teacher Counselor calls on them and then help them to pour out their heart to tell thee everything like Cleopas and his friend, and come and give them counsel and draw them to thyself, save their souls, could it be even tonight? And be the Wonderful Counselor for thy people who've learned to love thee as a counselor, who've learned to depend upon thee, who love thy wisdom and thy word, who want to live according to thy word. Help us so to do and to grow in wisdom through thy counsel. O God, we thank thee for the living Word Jesus and for the written word the Bible, and for the counsel that both give to us to lead us in the way everlasting. Go before us every step of the way to the Celestial City, to that place where we will learn forever and grow

exponentially forever at the right hand of our Wonderful Counselor. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.