

Wonderful Counselor

Isaiah 9:3-6

By Pastor Jason Van Bommel

*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.*

³ *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.*

⁴ *For the yoke of his burden,
 and the staff for his shoulder,
 the rod of his oppressor,
 you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

⁵ *For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
 and every garment rolled in blood
 will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

⁶ *For 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.*

⁷ *Of the increase of his government and of peace
 there will be no end,
 on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 to establish it and to uphold it
 with justice and with righteousness
 from this time forth and forevermore.
 The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

– Isaiah 9:2-7, ESV

I'm not very good at waiting. When Beth is cooking and it smells delicious, I sometimes wander into the kitchen to sample what she's working on. Once or twice, as I've been making my way through a book or a show, I've looked up what's going to happen next because I can't stand the suspense of waiting for the plot to develop and unfold. When I was a kid, I used to try to figure out what my parents had bought me before Christmas Day.

The Advent season is all about waiting. Some of us are waiting for the new COVID vaccine to be released and distributed so we can get everything back to normal. If you're concerned about the safety of the vaccine, just

keep an eye on Shawn Trautman or on Doctors Jonathan and Erin Hansen. They'll probably get the vaccine within the next few weeks. So, if they don't turn green, sprout gills, or grow a second head, you can sign me up as soon as it's available!

Of course, Advent is about waiting for something so much more important than Christmas presents or the COVID vaccine. It's about waiting for Jesus. God's people waited for Him to come for centuries, and we're waiting for Him to come again.

Ever since high school, I've been waiting for the Lord Jesus to return. I remember a couple of times when I was a teenager looking at the sky and just desperately wanting to see it roll back like a scroll and see the Lord Jesus appear in all His glory. Singing "I'll Fly Away" in my Baptist church and listening to Andrae Crouch's "Soon and Very Soon" both made my heart long for the coming of Christ.

What is it that the human heart deeply longs for and is waiting for? What is it that we want to see come into our lives and into the world more and more?

A. The Good News We've Been Waiting For, vv. 3-5

If you were to make a list of the most-desired things people most want to see come, certainly high on the list would be joy, freedom, and peace. And Isaiah 9:3-5 tell us that this is exactly what will come with the coming of the Light of the World.

I. Joy, v. 3

*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.*

The coming of the Promised Light into the world brings a joy that is compared to the three most joyful events ancient Israelites would experience: a great increase in population ("multiplied the nation"), the joy of harvest and the dividing of the spoils of war after a great victory.

Jesus' coming into the world brings the joy of seeing His kingdom grow throughout the earth, the joy of seeing many souls come into this kingdom- as a great harvest of eternal life – and great victory over the forces of darkness that oppose the kingdom of God. The Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is a brilliant picture of this kind of joy, as people from many nations speaking many languages all heard the Gospel of the Kingdom and over 3,000 were added to the church, released from darkness to light, transferred from Satan's dominion to Christ's saving rule. And Christ has been repeating this triumph of joyful harvest and victory all over the world ever since.

2. Freedom, v. 4

*For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

My favorite word from one of my favorite movies, “**Freedom!**” “They can take our lives, but they will never take our freedom!” Freedom was the final, dying word of Mel Gibson’s William Wallace in *Braveheart*. To be free is to be released from the oppression of bondage. For the Scots in *Braveheart*, they wanted release from the oppression of the English. For the Jewish people of Jesus’ day, they wanted release from the oppression of the Romans. But the greatest oppression we face comes from the universal enemies that defeat and oppress every human being in the world- sin and death.

Jesus came into the world to defeat sin and death and give us true freedom from the oppression of these enemies:

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” – Hebrews 2:14-15, ESV

While we have been delivered now from the lifelong slavery of the fear of death – death is no longer a terrorizing end to life – we must wait until Jesus comes again, for His second Advent, for the full and glorious freedom He has purchased for us to be ours forever.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

*“Death is swallowed up in victory.”
⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”*

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. – I Cor. 15:54-57, ESV

3. Peace, v. 5

*For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

One constant feature of life in the ancient world, both in Isaiah’s day and in Jesus’ day, was warfare. Nations fighting against nations, neighboring tribes and peoples invading each other, was almost an annual event. The

opening of 2 Samuel 11, the chapter that tells of King David's great sin with Bathsheba, carries the sense of this reality as it sets the scene:

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. – 2 Samuel 11:1, ESV

But when Jesus comes, He brings peace. We'll explore this more on Christmas Eve together when we consider Jesus as the Prince of Peace, but in His first Advent, Jesus made peace between God and His people by His blood shed on the cross ("*making peace by the blood of his cross*" – Col. 1:20). He also made peace between the people of God, as Ephesians 2:14 tells us, "*For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility*" And when He comes again, He will end all warfare and conflict forever and reign over the New Heavens and Earth as the victorious and eternal Prince of Peace.

B. The One Who Comes to Bring the Good News

The announcement of the coming of the One who will make these things a reality is the birth announcement of a special, royal child, a child who will be born, who will also be a Son given by the Lord, and who will rule over God's people –

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,*

I. The Child Born

Isaiah had spoken earlier of a child who was to be born, in 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.*" This child would be born to the Royal Line of David, born of a Virgin and would be the definitive sign that God was indeed with His people, as He would be called Immanuel, "God with us."

This is what we read in Matthew 1 about the birth of this child given:

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).

– Matthew 1:18-23, ESV

2. The Son Given

The child who was born is also the Son who was given. But what kind of Son? Given by whom? How could the royal son of the line of David be Mighty God and Everlasting Father? How could any human king bring the kind of joy, freedom and peace promised here in Isaiah? It is only because the Son who is given is the Son of God:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. – John 3:16-18, ESV

C. Wonderful Counselor

Isaiah 9:6 gives us four throne names for Jesus, the Promised Child, the Son who was given: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The first throne name of Jesus has sometimes been interpreted as two names. The King James places a comma between wonderful and counselor, making it two names, Wonderful and Counselor. The original Hebrew has no commas, so it's a judgment call for the translators, but the pattern seems to be four two-word titles, a kingly role and an adjective that describes it:

1. He is a counselor. What kind of counselor? A Wonderful Counselor.
2. He is a Father. What kind of Father? Everlasting.
3. He is a God. What kind of God – Mighty God (which actually makes it clearer that He is God and not just “a god.”), and
4. He is a Prince. What kind of Prince? The Prince of Peace.

I. His Name is Wonderful

However, just because Wonderful isn't likely a separate name doesn't mean He is not wonderful. For Him to be the Wonderful Counselor, He has to be wonderful. His name is Wonderful.

In Judges 13, Samson's parents are promised their son, who is promised to be greatly used by God. Samson's father, Manoah, wants to honor the One who has made this promise and find out more about Him, so we read in verses 17-19:

Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, “What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?” ¹⁸ And the angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?” ¹⁹ So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. – ESV

The Lord's name is wonderful, and He is the one who works wonders. But, even more specifically, “the angel of the LORD” when He appears in the Old Testament is a pre-incarnation appearance of the Lord Jesus. So, this One who says His name is wonderful is the promised child-son-King of Isaiah 9, the Lord Jesus. His name is

wonderful for He is the One who works wonders. It doesn't mean that he's just terrific and super-fantastic, although He is, of course. It means He works wonders, does miracles, on behalf of His people.

2. The Counselor of Counselors

So, when Isaiah says that He name will be called “wonderful counselor,” we need to make sure we don't hear, “He's a really terrific therapist.” It's not telling is that Jesus is the best therapist there is and we can tell Him all of our problems and He will give us a seven-point plan for a happy and fulfilled life. Of course, we can go to the Lord with everything. We can indeed cast all our cares on Him, knowing that He cares for us, as 1 Peter 5:7 says. But even then, we need to understand that what we're really doing is humbling ourselves and putting ourselves under His mighty hand of rule as a way to have victory over our enemy:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. – 1 Peter 5:6-11, ESV

The purpose of counsel in the Bible is to give plans for victory. Jesus is the very best of kings and the very best of counselors for He gives counsel for victory over the enemy of our souls, and He is able to work wonders to bring about the deliverance we need. We not only cast our cares on God because He cares for us, but He also will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us.

One of the frustrations I sometimes face when giving others counsel is that I am so often powerless to really help. I don't have the ability to save or deliver anyone. I can give sound Biblical advice. I can explain the Bible's teachings on God's plans and purposes for us, but I can't change someone's heart or their circumstances. I am not a redeemer.

Jesus is the Wonder-working Counselor. By His Holy Spirit, He changed us from the inside out. And by the power of His resurrection victory over Satan, sin, death, and hell, He leads us in victory, as we humble ourselves, learn from His counsel, and trust His wonderful strength.

This Advent season, do you find your heart longing for more peace, more joy, more freedom? The only one who can deliver and redeem and lead you into true victory is the promised child, the given Son, the Wonderful Counselor who is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So, we must go to Him, worship Him, learn from Him, and follow Him.