

Sermon #91 — *Isaiah Series*

Title: **WONDERFUL IN COUNSEL**
EXCELLENT IN WORKING

Text: Isaiah 28:23-29

Subject: *God's Counsel and Work*

Date: Sunday Evening — June 23, 2019

Readings: *Mark Medley and Rex Bartley*

Introduction:

THE CAUSE OF WRATH

Let's go back to Isaiah 28. In the first 13 verses of this chapter God's prophet spoke of God's judgment upon Ephraim because "*they would not hear.*" — What a warning he give! — **Eternity bound sinners who will not hear God, by their willful rebellion and unbelief, heap upon themselves the everlasting wrath and judgment of God!**

(Isaiah 28:1-13) Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty *is* a fading flower, which *are* on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine!

(2) Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, *which* as a tempest of hail *and* a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing,

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shall cast down to the earth with the hand. (3) The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet: (4) And the glorious beauty, which *is* on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, *and* as the hasty fruit before the summer; which *when* he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up. (5) In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people. (6) And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate.

AN ELECT REMNANT

Oh, blessed be his name forever! In wrath he remembers mercy! There is, even in the worst of days, even among the most abased reprobates, an elect remnant to whom Christ is made “*a Crown of Glory and a Diadem of Beauty.*” — “*For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

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THE WINE OF BABYLON

(7) But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment. (8) For all tables are full of vomit *and* filthiness, *so that there is no place clean.*

GRACIOUS STILL

But God is gracious still. He promises to teach sinners made teachable by his grace, giving all who trust Christ the blessed rest of his salvation. — “*This is the refreshing!*”

(9) Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.* (10) For precept *must be* upon precept,

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precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little: (11) For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. (12) To whom he said, This *is* the rest *wherewith* ye may cause the weary to rest; and this *is* the refreshing.

What a promise! What mercy! Oh, what undeserved grace! Still, in spite of God's promised grace to chosen sinners, Isaiah says of incorrigible reprobates...

Yet they would not hear. (13) But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

REFUGES OF LIES

Stopping their ears, stiffening their necks,
hardening their hearts, “they would not hear!”

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Instead, they made lies their refuge and hid themselves under falsehood. — Their refuge of lies God exposed and swore himself to destroy!

(Isaiah 28:14) Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which *is* in Jerusalem. (15) Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: (16) Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, **Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.** (17) Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. (18) And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass

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through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. (19) From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, **by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report.** (20) **For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.** (21) For the LORD shall rise up as *in* mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as *in* the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. (22) Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.

Proposition: Now, let's read verses 23-29. — Here God's faithful prophet declares, regarding both God's judgment upon the reprobate and his matchless, free, saving grace toward chosen sinners in Christ Jesus that our all-wise, ever-gracious God is "*wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.*"

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WONDERFUL IN COUNSEL EXCELLENT IN WORKING — That's my subject. That is what God the Holy Ghost inspired Isaiah to tell us about both God's execution of justice and his exercise of grace.

(Isaiah 28:23-29) Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. (24) Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? (25) When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rie in their place? (26) For his God doth instruct him to discretion, *and* doth teach him. (27) For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. (28) Bread *corn* is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break *it with* the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it *with* his horsemen. (29) This also cometh forth

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from the LORD of hosts, *which* is wonderful in counsel, *and* excellent in working.

A FARMER’S SKILL

When Isaiah watched the farmer at work, he admired his patience, wisdom, and skill. He observed the labor, the skill with which he prepared his soil, and the discretion he used sowing the right seed in the right soil to produce the best harvest. Then he said, “This man’s wisdom is the gift of God” (v.26).

Then the prophet observed the farmer’s skill in harvesting his crops. The tender grains were beaten with a staff. That was all that was needed to separate the grain from its husk. The harder grain had to be crushed with a cart wheel or under the hooves of horses to divide the grain from its hull.

The experienced farmer, with patience and skill, used the best method possible to achieve his desired end. Isaiah seemed to admire the farmer, looking upon him as a man of great wisdom, skill, and usefulness.

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And he traced the farmer's abilities to God. He said, "*This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts.*"

Upon its surface, our text teaches us that all the arts, skills and abilities of men and women in this world are gifts of God, freely bestowed by his sovereign pleasure (*Bezaleel and Aholiab* — Exodus 31:2-6; 1 Corinthians 4:7). The philosophical mind of Newton, the inventive skills of Edison, the mathematical brain of Einstein, and the artistic hand of Michelangelo were all gifts of God.

Those men excelled in fields where other men were useless, because God gave them special abilities. Other men may have been given equal talents and abilities, but were kept from the forefront by God's providence because he had other work for them to do. But all the wisdom and skill of the wisest, most skillful, most eminently useful men in the world can be traced to only one source. — It is the gift of God.

Isaiah saw the hand of God everywhere, in everything; and we should too.

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GOD ALL-WISE

And when the prophet of God beheld the skills of the creature, he was made to see the greatest of God's wisdom. If the creature is wise, how much wiser the Creator must be! If God gives men such wisdom and skill that they astonish us, what a great God he must be! Do you see that in our text? — *“This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”*

I want to show you just one thing as I wrap this message up. — The Lord our God is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working, and then draw some lessons from this fact.

With the eye of faith, enlightened by the Word of God, I want us to look upon our great God in his counsel chamber and in his workshop. In both he is a God to be admired — “WONDERFUL IN COUNSEL AND EXCELLENT IN WORKING.”

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The more I know of God the more I admire him. The more I know him, the greater reason I have to trust him and obey him. **I want to inspire in you and in myself greater admiration for God, greater faith in him, and fuller obedience to him.** And I can think of no better way to do so than by showing you that he is “*wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.*” — That means three things...

GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE

1st — **God has a purpose, an eternal, unalterable purpose, by which he always works.** — Anyone who attempts to do anything without a plan is foolish. Haphazard work is the work of folly. We all look upon men without purpose as men unworthy of respect. Yet, when we insist that God Almighty, in all his works, is fulfilling his own great purpose, men and women get angry.

Be that as it may, let men rebel as they dare against it, the truth still stands. God always works by according to his purpose. Nothing in this world is left

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to chance. God has determined the end from the beginning. He has not left a single screw loose in the machinery of providence. Everything that is done in this world is done according to God's sovereign, eternal, unalterable purpose (Isaiah 14:24, 26, 27; 46:9-11; Romans 8:28-30; 11:36; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Ephesians 1:11).

(Isaiah 14:24-27) The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, *so* shall it stand... — (26) This *is* the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this *is* the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. (27) For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul *it*? and his hand *is* stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

(Isaiah 46:9-11) Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, (10) Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My

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counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: (11) Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it.

(Romans 8:28-30) And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (29) For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (30) Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

(Romans 11:33-36) O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (34) For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? (35) Or who hath first given to him,

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and it shall be recompensed unto him again? (36) For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

(Ephesians 1:3-12) Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: (4) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (7) In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; (8) Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; (9) Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: (10) That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one

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all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: (11) In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: (12) That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

(2 Corinthians 5:18) And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.

Illustration: The Throne, The Book, and the Lamb (Revelation 4:1-5:14).

- He who has his way in the whirlwind controls the will of man.
- He who rules the raging sea rules the hearts of men.
- He who directs the lightening bolts directs the affairs of men.

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Man is free to do whatever he wills. And in as much as he is able to do so, he always does exactly what he wants to do. And every man is responsible for whatever he does. Yet, the great, eternal God sovereignly works out his purpose and accomplishes his will as perfectly as though men were machines, programmed to carry out his designs. God is wonderful in counsel. He has a purpose by which he always works for the praise of his own glory.

EXECUTING HIS PURPOSE

2nd — **And God is excellent in his working, in the execution of his purpose.** — As his counsel is wonderful, his works, which are but the execution and fulfillment of his counsel, are excellent.

1. **His Works of Creation** (Proverbs 16:4).

(Proverbs 16:4) The LORD hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

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2. **His Works of Providence** (Romans 8:28; Psalm 107).

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

- General Providence.
- Special Providence.
- Personal Providence.

(Psalm 107:1-43) O give thanks unto the LORD, for *he is* good: for his mercy *endureth* forever. (2) Let the redeemed of the LORD say *so*, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; (3) And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.

(4) They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. (5) Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. (6) Then

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they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he delivered them out of their distresses. (7) And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. (8) Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! (9) For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

(10) Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *being* bound in affliction and iron; (11) Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: (12) Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and *there was* none to help. (13) Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saved them out of their distresses. (14) He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. (15) Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! (16) For he hath

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broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.

(17) Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. (18) Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. (19) Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saveth them out of their distresses. (20) He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions. (21) Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! (22) And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.

(23) They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; (24) These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. (25) For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. (26) They mount up to the heaven, they go down

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again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. (27) They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. (28) Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. (29) He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. (30) Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. (31) Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for* his goodness, and *for* his wonderful works to the children of men! (32) Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

(33) He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the watersprings into dry ground; (34) A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. (35) He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into watersprings. (36) And there he maketh the hungry to dwell, that they may prepare a city for habitation; (37) And sow the fields, and plant

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vineyards, which may yield fruits of increase. (38) He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease. (39) Again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. (40) He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, *where there is no way*. (41) Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh *him* families like a flock. (42) The righteous shall see *it*, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. (43) Whoso *is* wise, and will observe these *things*, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.

3. **His Works of Redemption** (Ephesians 1:3-14).

- The Everlasting Covenant
- Christ's Suretyship
- The Fall
- Christ's Obedience — Righteousness
- Christ's Death — Atonement
- The Gospel

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- The Use of Instrumentality

4. His Works of Grace (Ephesians 2:1-10).

- Preventive Grace
- Effectual Grace
- Sanctifying Grace
- Chastening Grace
- Preserving Grace

PERFECTLY ACCOMPLISHED

3rd — **All God's counsels shall be perfectly fulfilled, all his purpose shall be accomplished by the excellent works of his hands** (1 Corinthians 15:25-28).

(1 Corinthians 15:25-28) For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. (26) The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death. (27) For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under *him*, *it is* manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. (28) And when all things shall

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be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

There is a day coming when time shall be no more. And in that great day all that God purposed to do shall be done, perfectly and completely. Nothing shall have been done but what God purposed to be done. And nothing shall be undone which God purposed to do.

This is our God, “wonderful in counsel and excellent in working!” — He has done whatsoever he pleased (Psalm 135:6). — *“It pleased the LORD”*

...

- To make you his people (1 Samuel 12:22).
- To bruise his Son in the place of his people (Isaiah 53:10).
- To put all fullness in his Son (Colossians 1:19).
- To reveal his Son in me (Galatians 1:15).
- To save all who believe on his Son and to save them by the preaching of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21).

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PRACTICAL LESSONS

Now, I want to draw out some practical lessons for us from the things we have seen. If the Lord our God is “*wonderful in counsel and excellent in working,*” this fact should have a profound effect upon everyone here.

1. **The Lord our God is worthy of confident faith.**
 - To the Unbeliever
 - To the Believer
2. **There is no need for us to be in a hurry in the service of our God.**
 - Wait on the Lord.
 - Seek the will of God.
 - Do what you have the opportunity to do.
 - God will open the way before us — The Red Sea.
 - God will provide our needs — Manna — Water from the Rock — “*Lacked ye anything?*”

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- God will protect us. — The Chariots and Horsemen.
- God will give us success.

You and I need only one thing. We do not need more people, more money, or more ability. — We need to believe God. Believing him we will find him “*wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.*”

- Let us not be guided by the dogmas of prudence, but by the dictates of faith in the invincible, almighty God.
- Let us not measure our means, but trust God whose means cannot be measured.
- Let us not look to our abilities, but trust God with whom all things are possible.

(Isaiah 28:29) This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, *which* is wonderful in counsel, *and* excellent in working.

Amen.