

**Wonderful Counselor
Prince of Peace, pt. 1
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Scripture:

Turn to Isaiah 9, p. 683.

In my humble opinion, one of the greatest pieces of music ever written was Handel's Messiah. It has become so famous and well-loved as a work on its own that many people don't even realize that almost its entire text is taken right from the words of Scripture.

In every performance, the pinnacle of the oratorio comes towards the end as the choir sings the Hallelujah chorus. It's such a compelling piece that from its very first performance, the audience feels compelled to stand as the basses sing, "And He shall reign for ever and ever."

This morning, we're starting a brand new series based on this very famous text. A series that I'm hoping will be a landmark series for our church. During these next four weekends, we are going to look at four descriptions of the babe born in Bethlehem that may be the most-needed elements in our society at this time.

So as an introduction to this series I want to read you the full text from which Handel wrote his hallelujah chorus. And to just sort of solidify this moment together, I want to invite you to stand while we read it.

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan – Isaiah 9:1

***The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
On those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.***

***You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;
They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. – Isaiah 9:2-3***

For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them,

***The bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.
Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. – Isaiah 9:4-5***

In other words, all the garments used for war can be thrown away because there will be no more war.

***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
And the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace. – Isaiah 9:6***

***Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
Establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
From that time on and forever. – Isaiah 9:7***

Let's pray.

Father, during this series, and during this Christmas season, we need these words. And we need this hope. That one day, the work begun in Bethlehem will take root all over the world, and there will be no more need for warrior's boots or sailor's uniforms because there will be no more war. And not just an absence of war, but the presence of peace inside all people.

O God, make this so.

And in the meantime, as we wait and as we work towards it, fill us with this hope. And fill us with the reality of your son's wonderful counsel, and His might, and His fatherliness, ministering to our souls, and His peace that surpasses all comprehension.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Welcome to the 2001 Christmas season, friends. You may be seated.

Message begins:

Well, I don't really understand it friends. But every year about this time, I start getting the urge to experience certain things again.

- I want to change the pace and pattern of my life.
- I want to be with family and friends.
- I want to watch the flames of a fire crackling in the fireplace, and smell the fragrance of a pine or fir tree in the living room.
- I want to drink hot chocolate or hot apple cider and eat good food and think about good memories and dream about happy times to come.
- And I want to feel close to God.

And I don't think it's just me who feels these things this time of year. I think we all do, don't we?

I think that somewhere just inside our skin is this thing that wants hope and warmth and security. I think it's part of the human condition and triggered by the changing of the seasons.

And more than anything during this series, I want to help us all get a little closer to that hope and warmth and security.

I don't know any better way for that to happen than for us to look, piece by piece, at the gift God brought to earth when He delivered His Son from the womb of a woman in a stable of Bethlehem. Because imagine friends: Imagine if you would really understand who God wants to be in your life. Imagine how that would change you: give you clarity, and courage, and understanding, and hope.

On a side note, I think those are things people everywhere have always wanted.

I think that's why God couldn't *wait* to write down the text of Isaiah 9:6 so many years ago. I think He couldn't wait to tell folks about how wonderful His Son would be to them when He finally came to earth.

So instead of just announcing it a day or two before his coming-out party, 700 years before Jesus was born, God chose a prophet, a man very near and dear to him, and He said to him, "Isaiah, write this down and tell people about it. Here's what My Son is going to be like: he's going to be a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an everlasting Father, and a prince of peace to you all."

Because so many people needed the clarity and courage and understanding and hope, God began announcing the news about His Son 700 years before He ever arrived.

How's that for excitement?

When I was a little guy, my parents decided that it would be good for us to visit the east coast to tour all the historic sites there. So we started planning that trip about six months in advance and a few months ahead of time, I started telling my friends about it.

"I'm going to get to miss two weeks of school to go to the east coast," I would say. I think I was actually more excited about missing the school than seeing the east coast.

As early as 700 years ahead of time, God was getting so excited about the difference His Son was going to make on planet Earth, that He started telling His friends about it.

The book of Isaiah was written around 700 BC.

We know from historical records that ***Isaiah lived from about 760 BC to 680 BC.***

As I was thinking about that, it occurred to me that during these 4 weeks, we are going to be looking at some words that tie us into a historic flow with spiritually-sensitive people over the last 27 centuries.

Long before Handel ever wrote the Messiah, people who felt like they were in darkness were looking at this description of God's Son and saying, "Woe! This helps me."

So let me read the central part of it to you again:

***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
And the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace. – Isaiah 9:6***

Some people who wonder how the Bible can be true, read this passage, and when they learn that it was written 700 years before Jesus was born, and that the Israeli government has a copy of it on display in Tel Aviv from 100 years before Jesus was born and they say, "You mean the Bible spelled out 700 years ahead of time that a child would be born who would be called the God's Son and bear the responsibility of governing mankind?" And then they find out that ***The O.T. contains more than 300 other prophecies about Christ that are fulfilled in the N.T.***, and most of them are far more explicit than this one, often they switch their reasoning from, "How could the Bible be true?" to, "How could the Bible *not* be true? Only God could be this accurate so far in advance."

"And he will be called 'Wonderful Counselor.'"

I want to talk you through just that phrase for the next fifteen minute in the hopes that you will never again look at a manager scene without appreciating the *wonder* of the person who was in it.

Just to give you your full money's worth, Isaiah didn't write his book in English, he wrote it in Hebrew. And in Hebrew, "Wonderful Counselor" is...

Pele' yo'hetz = Wonderful Counselor

"Pele" means wonderful, but it goes beyond that. It's used dozens of times throughout the O.T. and it tends mean "wonderful" in the sense of ,

Pele' = "a cut above." Or, "better than anyone else could expect to do"

Because it usually describes something so great only God can do it, almost all the Bible's references to pele are referring to God.

Job uses the word when he says that God, **...performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. – Job 9:10**

David says about God, **...you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God. – Psalm 86:10** And that word "marvelous" is pele.

See the sense of it?

"Yo'hetz" means counselor, but in our day and age, when we think of a counselor, we usually picture someone sitting across the room asking us things like, "So, how did you feel about that?" and "Tell me more about your family growing up," and then taking notes on us.

Up until about 100 years ago, when the modern science of psychology was develop and Sigmund Freud went out and got his patients a couch, counseling was a far different trade than it is today.

Counselors weren't therapists, they were strategists. They gave people they were counseling advice how who to run a war, or win a political campaign, or organize a new business venture. Counselors didn't listen to your inner child, they gave advised a king or other person of importance about the best course to take given whatever circumstances they were facing.

So **"Yo'hetz" = to give advice, to guide.**

And whenever you see Jesus meeting with people, that's the kind of counselor he was. He wasn't pulling people aside and saying, "So let's talk about your past." He said to the woman caught in the act of adultery, "don't do it anymore." It was good counsel.

In Luke 19, Jesus set up a lunch appointment with a crusty, financially-driven businessman named Zacchaeus. During the lunch He helped Zacchaeus see what that type of drivenness was doing to the people around him. His counsel changed the course of Zacchaeus' whole life. It was a cut above. It was better than Zacchaeus could have expected from anyone else.

In my early years, when I was far from God, I wasn't experiencing God's input or guidance in my life. But since the day that I invited Christ to play a leadership role in my life, He has been a wonderful counselor to me.

- In my teenage years, He steered me away from destructive dating patterns.
- When I was trying to figure out a career, He made it very clear to me that I ought to prepare myself for doing church work.

- As I was trying to figure out what college to attend, one day I had a very clear leading from Him that I should apply to a school I had previously never heard of. The experience and learning I gleaned from that school continues to reap dividends in my life.
- During my college years, I dated several eligible young women, and each time, after a time, He made it clear to me that they weren't to be my life partner.
- After Lori and I married, we had plans to move to the Midwest so I could attend a reputable seminary back there. But over a few-week period of time, Jesus made it clear that I should attend a seminary in Denver. From there, I ended up serving a church in Colorado. The church I met Scott and Susan Evans in. Scott and Susan introduced us to Free and Soni Grafton, and our three families moved here to start New Song shortly thereafter. If Jesus hadn't steered me to Denver, this church probably wouldn't be here today.

He has been a wonderful counselor to me. His guidance in my life has been a cut above. It's been better than I could have expected from anyone else.

- He's counseled me about my marriage and how I treat my wife.
- He's counseled me about my mouth and the words I let come out of it.
- He's counseled me about my mind and the things I let play in it.
- He counsels me daily about the handling of my personal life, how I spend my money, the way I'm raising my children, how I'm leading the church.

A few years into Jesus' itinerant ministry, the writer Luke describes a run of wonderful counsel that Jesus dispensed to people one circumstance after another.

In Luke 8, he says that Jesus restored a man's life who had been tormented by demons for a long period of time. Afterwards, as the man's mind is clearing and he's realizing what has happened to him, the Bible says, ***The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him... - Luke 8:38***

Now, that's understandable, isn't it?

Here's a guy whose whole life has just turned around. He's grateful, and he wants to soak up all he can from Jesus. So he begs Jesus, "Please let me go with you. I'll carry your bags, I'll shine your shoes. I just want to be near you so I can testify to that you've changed my life."

What would a normal teacher do in a situation like that?

I think a normal teacher would immediately start thinking of all the additional things he could teach the student, and how helpful he could be to him. And conversely, how helpful it would be to have another bag-toter along to help do set-up and tear-down.

So most teachers would say, “Of course you can stay with me. In fact, that would probably be the best place for you to be right now.”

But Jesus doesn't say that. Instead, the text says ***...but Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” – Luke 8:39***

Translated, “While I applaud your desire to learn more, and appreciate your desire to help me, friend, you have been away from your family a long, long time, and they need you, and you need them. So go home. Instead of lightening my load, lighten theirs. And instead of telling people you don't know about me, tell people you do know.”

And the text completes the story by saying, ***So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.*** – Luke 8:39

Other people might have given him different counsel. And it might have been good counsel. But Jesus' counsel was a cut above. Better than could be expected from others.

Immediately following that, the text says, ***Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him.*** – Luke 8:40

Apparently he had gone out of his way to help this demonically-tormented guy.

But now he's back on track.

The next verse says, ***Then a man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve was dying.*** – Luke 8:41

Push pause on that for a minute and try to imagine how this second guy, Jairus, must have been feeling. The text says he's a leader in his religious setting. So he's probably a fairly mature guy, probably wields some power and authority in the circles he travels in. But he's helpless to help his daughter.

What does he do? He calls on the counselor. Jesus.

And Jesus says he'll come.

So now, you're Jairus, and you've got this counselor's full attention, and he's coming with you. And you're hoping he's going to fix things. But you know there's not much time.

Here's the next verse.

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. – Luke 8:42 So now, you're slowed down, and you know time is running out.

Next verse: ***And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. – Luke 8:43***

Why do you suppose she's in the crowd?

Because, like everyone else, she's discovered that Jesus' abilities are a cut above. She's hoping he can help her.

Next verse: ***She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. – Luke 8:44***

See what just happened? She is hoping against hope that Jesus is going to be able to fix her. So she works her way up through the crowd, and reaches past a whole bunch of other people and just gives a tug on Jesus' robe. She's hoping that will get his attention and maybe he'll turn around and see her and say, "Yes, what can I do for you?"

But before he can even turn around, she realizes that she's been healed. Now that's a touch above. Wouldn't you agree? It's all that she could have hoped for.

But it doesn't stop there.

Next verse: Jesus wheels around and says, "***Who touched me?***" ***Jesus asked. – Luke 8:45***

Now, what are you thinking if you're the synagogue leader right about now?

Come on Jesus! No time to chat! We're going to fix my dying daughter, remember, and time is running out.

But Jesus, not to be hurried, apparently stops right there in the middle of the road. Because the next sentence says, ***When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." – Luke 8:45*** In other words, "Who can tell who touched you. Probably the person who touched you doesn't even know it themselves."

So Jairus is thinking, "Come on! Come on!"

But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.” – Luke 8:46

At this point, if I'm Jairus, I'm thinking, "Alright, okay, so what? What's done is done. Let's keep moving."

But the text says, ***Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.*** – Luke 8:47

Now, why would Jesus make her do something like this?

Well, the text doesn't say. But it does say, ***Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”*** – Luke 8:48

Which I think is a hint as to why Jesus stopped in the first place. See, he wasn't content with just healing the woman's body. He was interested in her heart. He wanted to counsel her. He wanted to have some words with her so that she wouldn't wonder if her touching him had just been a coincidence. And he wanted to begin rebuilding her confidence after all these years of invalidhood. So he says, "You did good! You expressed faith in me, and that expression healed you! Now, as you go, don't just go with a healed body, go with a healed heart too, go in peace."

See what Jesus is up to here? He's not just helping people. He's helping them at the "cut above" level, beyond what's expected.

Meanwhile, Jairus is almost crushed with worry that they're not going to make it to his little girl in time. And in the next verse, his worst nightmare is realized.

While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” he said, “Don't bother the teacher any more.” – Luke 8:49

Anybody want to call that guy a wonderful counselor? "Your daughter's dead, don't bother the teacher any more."

So the little girl died.

What would you expect a normal counselor to do at this point?

I'd expect him to say, "I am so sorry. I wish I could have done something to help you."

That would be counsel at the normal level.

But what kind of counsel does Jesus give? – *A cut above!*

Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.” – Luke 8:49

Is that good counsel, or not?

V. 50. When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child’s father and mother. Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. “Stop wailing,” Jesus said. “She is not dead but asleep.” – Luke 8:51-52

How would you respond to counsel like that?

They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. – Luke 8:53

But what kind of counselor is Jesus? – *A cut above.*

But he took her by the hand and said, “My child, get up!” Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. – Luke 8:54

If you’re Jairus, at this moment, what are you thinking? “This man is a wonderful counselor! He does more than I could have ever hoped or imagined that someone could do for me!”

At this point, you’d think Jesus would take a deep bow and excuse himself, wouldn’t you?

One last act: ***Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. – Luke 8:55***

Why? Probably she had been too weak to eat for several days. But her parents are just crying and hugging her. They aren’t thinking about food at this moment.

So Jesus, the well-above-average counselor says, “One more thing! Feed her.”

It was cut-above counseling, wouldn’t you agree?

700 years before this ever happened, God peered forward in history and said, “My Son is going to be a counselor like no one has ever seen before. He is going to do things so well and so unexpectedly. I’ve gotta tell people about this so they can anticipate, and watch when it happens, and celebrate it after the fact.”

And friends, that brings us to what we’re doing. We’re getting ready to celebrate.

My hope is that two things will happen for you as a result of coming this morning. One is that, for the next 24 days, you won't look at a manger the way you did before.

I hope that every time you see a manger you'll think not just about a little baby, but a God, growing up to be a wonderful counselor. Maybe while you're thinking about it, you can just pause and say, "Jesus, thank you for being a wonderful counselor."

The second thing I'm hoping will happen for you is that, every day from now until Christmas, you will seek out the counsel of Jesus. If you've never read his life story, you'll start today with the Christmas story, and you'll find out what he has to say to people.

Or, if you already have a relationship with Him, you'll seek His counsel every day. – Every morning when you get up, every time you face a decision or a challenge. Throughout your day you'll say, "Jesus, counsel me on this." "Jesus, give me your perspective, give me your advice. Direct me. Give me counsel on this."

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