
Jesus: Our Wonderful Counselor

SCOTT HOEZEE

In Advent, we wait expectantly for the coming of the Christ, but what specifically do we want and need in God's Son, the Messiah? We could probably generate a pretty long list if we thought about this hard enough. But in Isaiah 9, the prophet famously gives us four titles for the coming Messiah, and each one ties in with something that Israel then, and we also now, need from our great God. As we begin this Advent series, we focus on how God's coming One is a Wonderful Counselor. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this episode is the first one in a four-part Advent series. Advent covers four weeks, and so we are going to have a four-part Advent series based on Isaiah 9:6; and we will read that in just a moment. To a lot of us, these titles are pretty familiar, I think.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, they are; and we have heard them many times in our worship services and in Sunday school with the children. You know, this is the season where we are all waiting for Jesus. We are preparing our hearts, we are preparing our minds for the best gift of all, being Jesus Christ, to bring the hope and the light in the world; and Advent is that season where we walk toward the wonderful Savior's birth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what we want to do in the first part of this episode is just remind ourselves of the original historical setting in which Isaiah wrote and proclaimed this; and that will serve, really, as the background for all four of these Advent episodes. Then the second thing we want to do, just in this first segment as we get going here, is clear up what may be a common misperception about that first title that we are going to focus on in this *Groundwork* episode. But first, let's remember, Darrell, where Isaiah was in history.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if we think about how the Israelites have gotten themselves into this situation, way back in Deuteronomy they were given these stipulations: If they obey God, they will be blessed; if they disobey God, they will be cursed, in Chapter 28; and what would happen, in one of the stipulations—the fine print, if you will—it says they will be taken into foreign countries and conquered by these foreign people who worship different gods than them; and that is because they forsake the God of Israel, and they are in that situation; that fall happens around 587 BC when they are being taken out by Babylon...when they are being exiled; and that is why they are in the situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the overall book of Isaiah...it is a big one...66 chapters...it covers a lot of time. The historical setting of the book seems to be just before that 587 BC exile of the people. Isaiah is predicting that it is going to come and is pronouncing judgment; and that is the focus of Chapters 1-39: the judgment of Israel; and then, there is a second section: Chapters 40-55, and that seems to be during the exile, and yet, these words are loaded up

with hope for restoration. You know, Isaiah 40 begins famously: Comfort, comfort my people; and then that second section concludes in Isaiah 55, the words about how all the trees of the field will clap their hands in seeing God's restored people; and then, the third and final section, 56-66, are filled with words of joy and rejoicing following the end of the exile; and of course, that is the section that contains words like: Arise, shine, for your light has come; and the glory of the Lord shines upon you. So, those are the three sections of Isaiah.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, Scott, do you believe that Isaiah wrote that whole book by himself in those 66 chapters. It does cover quite a bit of ground, doesn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it covers probably well over a century of time. So, some scholars think that there were two or three people who wrote as Isaiah. They were still inspired prophets of God, no question about it, but it is possible, of course, the same Isaiah lived for just a really long time. I mean, that is not impossible. Really, whether it is a single Isaiah for the whole span of the book, or a couple or three different authors, that is not too important to settle on to get the message of the book. So again, those three sections: judgment, and then hope, and then rejoicing. Now, Isaiah 9, then, is in the judgment section, but that might be surprising, because it doesn't sound very judgmental as Chapter 9 begins.

DARRELL DELANEY

²The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁶For 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁷Of the greatness 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. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

So again, that doesn't sound very judgmental. That is a lot of hope; but actually, if we were to add one more verse, it would start a new section, which a lot of Bibles title: *God's Anger Against Israel*. So, these verses that we just read, Darrell, they are almost like a sneak preview of the joy that is going to come to fuller flower later in the book, but even in the judgment section of Isaiah, the people need something to build some hope on, and I think that is what we get here; but again, our key focus for this Advent series, verse 6: And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know what I was thinking about when you were reading that verse, Scott, is that this in the judgment section, which means that in the context of Israel being in the situation or getting ready to go into exile, they have gone so far off the rails that they are going to need divine intervention from a God who can do these things. So, you know, it is not very different from our own personal lives, that if we are left to our own devices, we are going to run off the rails; and we need God to intervene in our lives to actually change our situation; and that is what foreshadowing is happening with Isaiah here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and before we close out just this first part, and then in the next part of this program we are going to get very specific in terms of what *Wonderful Counselor* means; but we need to clear something up, because probably a lot of us listening to *Groundwork* are familiar with George Frideric Handel's oratorio, *Messiah*; and because Handel used the King James Version of the Bible, which is the best version they had in his day, he based one of his famous choruses on what is probably not a very good translation of the original Hebrew. Because Handel treats as two separate names, *Wonderful*, and then *Counselor*. You know, the chorus sings:

His name is Wonderful...stop; Counselor...Almighty God...and then it goes on. So, that makes it sound like wonderful and counselor are two separate names, but all scholars believe now that really, all four of the titles here contain two words: Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Peace Prince; and so, the first name is Wonderful Counselor. So, not two separate names, but just one name. That fits with the context here, and I think, you know, as we have found better ancient manuscripts that show what the original Hebrew was, that kind of clears that up. So, it is still great to listen to the oratorio *Messiah*, but when you get to that part, you have to kind of remind yourself: Oh, yeah; it is Wonderful Counselor, not Wonderful...one name...Counselor...second name.

DARRELL DELANEY

And we are going to talk more about that in the next episode, the names and the powerful affects of having them as a compound name; but in this segment, as we continue on, we want to talk about what it means to have Messiah come in this situation; understanding that he is the Wonderful Counselor...both compound names together; so, let's talk about that in a second. Stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and the first part of a four-part Advent series on Isaiah 9:6, where we get four amazing titles for God's coming Messiah. In this program, Darrell...this first program...we are focusing on the first one, of course: *Wonderful Counselor*; and now, we want to wonder: What does that mean?

DARRELL DELANEY

If you think about it, if you did a word study on those names, I love the fact that it is called, not just a counselor, but a wonderful counselor; a counselor that only can be God; and if you think of *wonder* and you think of *marvelous works*, you could think back of the things that might harken as a hall of fame in Israel's history of when Moses delivered them, or when the Red Sea was parted, or when Solomon got wisdom from God to rule. You would see that they have a hall of fame of things that God did to advise his people in a very divine way to help them to live, even though they had forsaken him at the time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A lot of scholars do believe...and you just mentioned the word yourself, Darrell, in connection to Solomon...this particular title ties in with one of the major literary types...one of the major literary strands...of scripture; and that is the wisdom tradition. So, we have quite a few different kinds of writings in the Bible: there is narrative, of course; there is prophecy; there is apocalyptic literature; there are letters and epistles in the New Testament; but there is also wisdom. Wisdom literature is a major tradition. You know, Darrell, I think when we think of wisdom, most of us...and we have done a series on this on *Groundwork* before...but when we think of wisdom in the Bible, we think of the book of Proverbs.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in the wisdom literature category, you've got Psalms; you've got Proverbs; you've got Ecclesiastes; and you've got the Song of Songs; and so, it is a different genre that we need to look at differently. We cannot look it the same way we look at Messianic prophecies or we look at historical narrative. There are things in there for us to actually put into practice and live by practically that will bless our lives; and so, it is great to have an example from Proverbs, and we can pick it up in Chapter 1, right here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: ²for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; ³for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; ⁴for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young— ⁵let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance— ⁶for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. ⁷The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

So, there is a lot there, what I just read, Darrell. Maybe we could start pulling it apart and say: Okay, how does the Bible define wisdom?

DARRELL DELANEY

It is very important for us to know that these are the characteristics of a person who is wise; and there are practices that they do. There are things that they do, and there are things that they do not do; and so, there is a guideline for them to live by. If they follow the things that Solomon is saying to do in the book of Proverbs, starting with the fear of the Lord, then they will actually have a better life in front of them in this world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They will be insightful, we are told. They will discern what is right and fair and just to do. And they are open to receiving guidance, and then they follow through on the guidance they are given. Darrell, I think what that all adds up to is a person who is humble before God...who has, as you just said, due fear and reverence for the Almighty God of the universe; and in that way, the wise set themselves apart from the foolish; because, you know, Darrell, one of the marks of wisdom is knowing how much you don't know. A wise person knows there is always more to learn. Fools think they know everything, and therefore, they cannot be taught, as the old saying we have used on *Groundwork* before: Fools are often in error, but they are never in doubt. The problem with a fool is, you can never teach them anything; they will not listen; but the wise are open to being instructed; and that is where our Wonderful Counselor comes in; that is what Jesus does for us, he instructs us; he guides us; he teaches us; he shows us; he makes us insightful.

DARRELL DELANEY

My grandmother used to say: You cannot tell a fool anything because he knows everything. If your cup is full, then you cannot allow it to be filled up by God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the idea is to understand that Jesus himself personifies wisdom; and he is the wisdom of God; and that is how we are called to live, because the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...showed us how we should live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is usually...what you just said there, Darrell...that is usually what we think of with God because of John 1: The Word of God...the Word made flesh; it turns out Jesus is also the Wisdom made flesh; and we can pick that up a little bit, Darrell, from something the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: ¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is; Paul names it directly. Jesus *is* the wisdom of God. He is the Word made flesh; he is also the Wisdom made flesh.

Of course, we have done a series on Corinthians, too. I think we touched on a whole lot of the Bible in *Groundwork's* history. Not much we haven't talked about, it seems like, but in the context of 1 Corinthians, Paul is making clear, Darrell, that this is a surprising wisdom. It is so surprising the world is convinced it is foolishness. I mean, how can anybody get saved by a guy who got himself crucified?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How can anybody get saved by a meek and mild-mannered person like Jesus of Nazareth? But again, this is where we need humility, to let God and let Christ, who is our Wonderful Counselor, instruct us.

DARRELL DELANEY

The world has a different way of doing things, obviously, and if you are foolish and you go along with the ways of the foolish, you would think that you need to muster up some strength or you need to build confidence in order to be wise, or you need to do this and do that...strong-arm people...but the gospel also teaches us that we are not to conform to the patterns of this world...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But be transformed by the renewing of our minds; and we let Christ teach us that by modeling how he has lived.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He shows us the way we are to go, and we as humble students receive his wisdom—we receive his instructions. It is kind of curious: Jesus, of course, as an incarnate being is a male; wisdom in the Bible is always a woman though; it is always Lady Wisdom as opposed to Lady Folly in the book of Proverbs. And even in the Greek language, the Greek word for wisdom is a feminine name even: Sophia. That means wisdom; but in the Bible, we are called to listen to Lady Wisdom...to listen to Lady Sophia and take that instruction seriously; and as you just said, Darrell, not to be seduced by the words of folly. It reminds me of Proverbs 3:5: Trust in the Lord with all you heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

That is what we are called to do, Darrell; that is supposed to be what our posture is going to be.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is very important for us to know if we submit to God, and we trust in his way of doing things, because obviously he knows more than we do, definitely it will bring clarity to our life and our understanding; and this is actually a character trait of the Wonderful Counselor. This is one of my wife's favorite verses. This is her life verse. She lives by this verse. She wants to trust God in everything she does, and therefore, get clarity on how to move forward.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The more we lean into the world's way of doing things, the more we trot down the road that leads to folly and ultimately to death and to destruction. So indeed, we lean not on our own understanding, but on what our Wonderful Counselor gives to us. But in just a moment, as we wrap up this program, we will think about a few more practical applications of all this. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we said earlier the first seven verses of Isaiah 9 are almost like an oasis of hope in what is otherwise a rather difficult section of Isaiah, about the judgment of God against Israel's sins for having not lived up to their end of the covenant bargain, as stipulated in Deuteronomy, as you mentioned earlier in the program. So, the one who we called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...he is going to provide everything we need for hope and restoration in a broken world. We need everything that this Messiah will bring, and everything that these four titles for the Christ mean, and that we are exploring in this Advent series.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important to note, Scott, too, that it is not just for the Israelites way back then that needed this situation, because they were in a position that was actually of their own doing—their own brokenness; and now they are in this exile situation. Now they needed the hope that the four titles of the Messiah could bring; but in this situation, our lives today...I mean, the world is still broken and we still have a lot of problems, whether personal or corporate, and we still today need the four titles that this Messiah brings. We need the Wonderful Counselor...we need him today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We need him in the Church today, certainly, as well. So, these words were for ancient Israel as they teetered on the brink of exile; but the Church needs them today, too, because, you know, often also in the Church, all too often today we kind of insist on our own ways; and usually when we do that in the Church, bad things happen. You know, when the Church gets seduced into thinking that the way to change the world is to use the power-hungry tactics of politics to leverage what we want; well, when we think that way, the counsel of Christ as God's wisdom as our Wonderful Counselor begins to fade away.

DARRELL DELANEY

And unfortunately, we flip what you said earlier, how the world thinks that Christ's wisdom is foolishness, but when we try to follow the world's ways, we try to make Christ's wisdom foolishness; and that is not the way we live. The other thing we don't talk about is that there are consequences that happen when you don't live according to the way God wants you to live—natural consequences of the things that make life more complicated, that make life more difficult when you try to live according to the world's ways, and that is not what we are called to, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Only in Jesus did things end up making sense; and we see this in another Pauline passage, in Colossians 1. Now, unlike 1 Corinthians 1, where Paul directly called Jesus the Wisdom of God, he doesn't mention wisdom in Colossians 1, but it is in the background. Verse 15: The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

DARRELL DELANEY

What is beautiful is that this verse echoes what Proverbs did with wisdom, because it says: By wisdom were the foundations of the world made; and this verse says that all things are held together by Christ. So, not only is Christ being connected to the wisdom personified, but we are also seeing that wisdom is how everything was created. So, we have the word *all things* that keeps coming up is quite a theme in this verse, isn't it, Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Ta panta in Greek...*ta panta...ta panta...ta panta...all things...all things...all things* must come up at least a half-dozen times. So, if you are not connected to Jesus, no things will ultimately make any sense to you; but if you know Jesus as the wisdom of God, as our Wonderful Counselor, then things sooner or later begin to make some sense after all; which is probably why some people have...in the last couple centuries, since we have known of it...Jesus has sometimes been compared to an archeological discovery made many years ago, something called the Rosetta Stone.

DARRELL DELANEY

I was thinking when you said Rosetta Stone, about how they have this company called *Rosetta Stone* now that helps you to learn different languages...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

In a very fast way, and the original meaning of the Rosetta Stone is very interesting to talk about from the archeological standpoint, and why they probably named the company that way. Maybe you could shed some light on it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, they did; well, you know, Egyptian scholars knew for centuries and centuries that on the insides of the pyramids, on walls, on parchments, on pottery, the Egyptians wrote in that picture language called *hieroglyphics*—they are all pictures. The problem was, nobody knew what hieroglyphics meant...nobody living could remember what hieroglyphics meant until around 1800. The French leader Napoleon found part of an ancient tablet on which somebody had written out a series of hieroglyphic images, but then wrote down the same message in two languages that *were* known, including ancient Greek. So, when you read the Greek, and then look at the parallel message in the hieroglyphs, *voila*, now we know what hieroglyphics means. The Greek translated hieroglyphics. The Rosetta Stone unlocked it for us, and that, we say, is what Jesus does. We face a bewildering and confusing reality. We don't always know what to make of things in this world of brokenness and sin. Sometimes we say: I cannot make heads nor tails of anything in life; you know, we say that; but then Christ comes to us and he unlocks those mysteries for us. Now, we have a shot at figuring out reality through God's very wisdom.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, I love it, because you are actually tying it to the Wonderful Counselor title, Scott; because a counselor is a guide. It is someone who helps you along; where you feel stuck, where you don't know what to do, you have a lot of questions, a counselor can help put you on the right path; and so, being Jesus, you called him basically the Rosetta Stone...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

To help us understand how we are supposed to live. If we model what he has taught us, and we allow him to counsel us in our everyday lives, then definitely we will have a better path.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Again, as we have said, you know, the Church needs this today...all of us do. We have seen so much in recent times, Darrell; so many sad, hostile divisions in churches; and sometimes we have seen, too, how partisan politics and outside viewpoints on the best way to accomplish things, that has crept, and sometimes crashed, into the Church, too. We keep trying to get stuff done on the world's terms. Jesus, as our Wonderful

Counselor, calls us back to himself and to the wisdom of God. He calls us...as we said earlier in this episode...he calls us to be humble, to lean not on our own understanding or our own understanding of the ways to get things done. Jesus unlocks the meaning of life, and he shows us again and again that even when the world thinks the gospel is foolish, we know it is wise.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is personified basically in the word from Isaiah 9: For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. This is Jesus, who is the Son of God, the light of the world, who brings us hope; and he is the one who is our Wonderful Counselor; and he alone can guide us; and he alone can instruct us; and we need to submit to his ways in order to know how to live our lives and be the blessing that he has called us to be. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney, and we hope you will join us again next time as we consider the next title Isaiah gives the coming Messiah: Mighty God; and we will see what that means for us. So, connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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