

Mighty God

DAVE BAST

If you are a Bible reader, you probably turn to the first two chapters of Luke and Matthew each December. There we find the familiar Christmas stories: the angel Gabriel appearing to the virgin Mary; the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem; the shepherds abiding in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night; the wise men journeying from the East led by a shining star; but the message of Christmas is not limited to the Gospels, or even just these couple of chapters. In fact, the Old Testament is full of predictions about the promised Messiah; prophecies that point in the most striking way to Jesus' life. In a famous verse from Isaiah 9, the child born to be king is given four great names or titles. We will look at the second of those today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. So during Advent this year, Scott, we are in a series from Isaiah 9:6, looking at the four great names of the Messiah as Isaiah prophesies this child who will be born so that light will shine on people in darkness; and we just considered in the first program the first of those names: Wonderful Counselor...not wonderful, counselor as Handel's Messiah puts it, but one name with a noun and an adjective. He is a wonder of a counselor and he gives us wisdom for life and guidance and advice and direction; and he does that in an ongoing way through the Holy Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; who is the counselor—the advocate that Jesus has sent to us after he ascended into heaven. He promised the disciples: I am not going to leave you as orphans; I will send another; and the Spirit does that. There is a sense in which all of the titles of Jesus' here in their ongoing capacity will be animated by the Spirit, but we saw that very clearly in terms of how we get counsel from Jesus now. We get it through the Person of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Today we are going to consider the second title: Mighty God; and let's just review this verse from Isaiah 9:6 and a couple of other verses, which is the core of this series. Isaiah writes:

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. 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 it and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is such a great passage, and for those of us familiar with the Bible, or again, with Handel's Messiah, when you are really familiar with a verse or a passage of scripture, it can kind of fly right past you. It rolls over you. So, just to step back, it is just a little hard for us, I think, also in our cultural moment to grasp what this promise would have meant for the people of Judah, to whom it was originally delivered during a very dark time in their history, when the land had been overrun by the Assyrians. The city looked like it was about to fall. The northern kingdom of Israel had just been wiped out. Now, as it turns out, Judah

would have another hundred years before the end finally came, but these were dark times and they were losers. They looked like they had been swallowed up completely and all hope was gone; and into that darkness comes this promise that once again a king would be given to them; a descendent of David, and he would occupy the throne, and what a king he was going to be.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and I think if you have been blessed to live in a country like the United States or like Canada or many nations in the world where you have never been really horribly defeated in war or oppressed or lived under the...

DAVE BAST

Right; or occupied by an enemy army, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then you do not really know how delicious the promise of a mighty God would be; and one thing we sometimes forget, what we now call the Old Testament or the Hebrews scriptures, almost all of it was never written down in written form until the period of the Babylonian exile or after the exile. Most of the Bible was oral tradition passed down generation to generation, and that became the lens or the prism through which they viewed everything, really. The way they told the stories of Genesis even, and Exodus, were told for a people who were looking for good news because they had been conquered and carried off to a foreign land.

DAVE BAST

Try to imagine yourself back into this situation, where it was basically hopeless as far as Judah's future was concerned as the people of God, the Jewish people. They were conquered. They had lost their land; they had lost their city; and Isaiah comes up with this prophecy in glowing terms of another child of David. The David line had been snuffed out as far as they knew; there were no more kings of David reigning on the throne; and people must have said: You are crazy, Isaiah. This is a pipe dream. This is ridiculous. This is fantasy. What are you trying to tell us about this beautiful child who is coming? And yet, it was the powerful Word of God that would ultimately come true in a way none of them could imagine. I think for starters it is interesting just to note that the child of David—the son of David that Isaiah prophesies and promises—is called God here in this second name.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the Mighty God; and he... If you roll back a couple of chapters in Isaiah to the seventh chapter, we get that famous title which comes up again in Matthew's Gospel in particular, that he is going to be Immanuel—God with us—the with us God. God is going to be present here with us. We do not always know for sure what all the expectations the Israelites had for their ultimate deliverer, the Messiah. It is possible, though, they thought it was just going to be another human being *like* David. They maybe did not connect all the dots that it was actually going to be God in flesh, as turned out to be the case; but that he would have the *power* of the Mighty God at least. This prophecy certainly seems to say a child is going to be born. He is going to be a wonderful counselor, but also a mighty God; and they needed that strength. That would be a tremendously comforting message if you could buy it, right? If you believed it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; well, they were looking for the Messiah, and that becomes clear even when we get to the New Testament and the time of Christ, or even in the intertestamental period—books that we do not usually read, especially as Protestants—but the story of the Maccabees, which came in the second century BC. These were sort of Jewish freedom fighters. There was a widespread hope...a widespread expectation...that when the Messiah came he would be sort of the ultimate freedom fighter, who would gather the people together and raise up against their oppressors, whether they were Babylonians or Assyrians or later Romans or Greeks, whoever they were, and overthrow the yoke of the oppressor and bring freedom and liberty to the people again, and everything would be peachy keen and hunky-dory...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And what Isaiah I think is trying to say here in this prophecy is: You know, it is going to take more than a freedom fighter. It is going to take more than a human figure or leader to bring ultimate peace; and as we move through these names, we will see that is where we are headed in the end, to the Prince of Peace. It is going to take God himself coming with the power of God—the mighty power of God—in order to deliver us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is all true, and you can more than understand why a people who had been in exile, and even after they went back to Israel after the exile, things never were the same. Jerusalem and the Temple were in ruins. It would take a long time to rebuild. Alexander the Great would come, and then the Romans. They kept being occupied.

DAVE BAST

You just made me think of that scene...is it Ezra or one of the later prophets, when the Temple is rebuilt. The old folks who remembered the first one just sat there and cried when they saw how pathetic it was.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It did not look the same... So you can understand why they would want a strong political leader; and by the time Jesus was born, that was the common expectation; that they needed somebody to get rid of the Romans, to defeat Caesar and Pontius Pilate and King Herod. So, it had become very politicized, but when the child is actually born of Mary, the one we know as Jesus, who is the true Messiah, he is the Mighty God, but it took a rather surprising form, and we will want to think about that in just a moment. How do we reconcile the power of God with the carpenter's son from Nazareth? We will think about that next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are talking about the second of the four names and titles of the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah in Isaiah 9:6. He is going to be Mighty God when he comes; and just a little bit more about that phrase together: The Mighty God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It brings to mind the idea of the Lord of Hosts or the God of armies, which is a very common designation, especially in the Old Testament, for God. It is the idea that God not only is powerful in himself...all powerful...but he commands these legions of angels, you know. So, you have a verse like Isaiah 6:3, the great vision of Isaiah when he sees the seraphim calling out: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. Or from Psalm 46: The Lord of Hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and sometimes that gets...from the Hebrew it gets transliterated into certain hymns. Sometimes you will hear: Lord *Tzevaot*, which is the Lord of Hosts, and hosts, as you just said, Dave...hosts there is like armies or legions of angels; and it reminds you of that story involving Elisha, and he and his servant. The people are under siege; there is this big army that is coming and marching on their position, and the servant of Elisha says: We are doomed; and Elisha says: Nah. Greater is he that is within us...Lord, open his eyes; and God opens his eyes to see these legions of angels and chariots of fire and all this stuff, that they are surrounded by a far greater host than the attacking army. So Elisha says: Don't worry, God's got this. He is the Lord of Hosts. That is the idea here; and we were saying in the previous segment, that would have sounded awfully good to Israel after they had been defeated in battle, carted off to seventy years of exile.

Even once they returned to Israel they were never really free. The Persians occupied them, then Alexander the Great, and then by Jesus' day the Romans. In fact, after the Israelites were carted off to captivity in the sixth century BC, they never had their own country again, unless you count modern-day Israel, which was formed in 1948 in the 20th Century. That is how long they were...

DAVE BAST

Twenty-five hundred years, yes, of no longer ruling the land. So, yes, the idea that God would show up with all of the army of his angels and just utterly throw everyone else out and put them in; that was a familiar and much longed for result for the people of Israel. You see it in the psalms, too: God, why don't you do something? God, you used to do...show up! Or Isaiah...later in the book of Isaiah: Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down...like, open up the heavens and let us see the hosts again; but when God actually *did* come...when the Mighty God was born in the world, now the paradox that he came as a helpless baby...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right...

DAVE BAST

Wow...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And not only came as a helpless baby, whom only the Magi or the Wise Men recognized as a king; everybody else just saw a baby. It took a special revelation like the angels' message to the shepherds in Luke 2, or the star that led the Wise Men or the Magi there...you needed a little extra help to see that this little kid is something special; but even once he grew up, he was not a political figure, and whenever anybody tried to make Jesus a political figure, he said: No, no, no, no. That is not the way. I am going to be a mighty God in a spiritual sense over a different kind of kingdom...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, there is that paradox, which is why, by the way, a lot of the Pharisees and others...and even the disciples struggled with this through to Pentecost almost, expecting that the Messiah ought to look kind of like a general on a white stallion to chase out the Romans.

DAVE BAST

Well, you think of Acts Chapter 1, very early on just before Jesus ascended into heaven his disciples say to him: Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Okay, you were obscured during your lifetime, you came as a little baby, you were weak...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you died...

DAVE BAST

Yes, you died on the cross, but now you have been raised from the dead, you are alive again. Surely now you will unleash the hosts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Forty days they were waiting for him to make a move, and...

DAVE BAST

Yes...I read once something N. T. Wright said about that question of the disciples, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel, and Wright said: As usual, the answer was: Yes, but not the way you think...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, right.

DAVE BAST

So, he was Mighty God, yes, but not the way most people thought. He started out life as a little baby and he died in seeming defeat on the cross, but only in this way was the power of God against the forces of evil and darkness actually realized.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When we think about that Lord of Hosts image, Dave, we can maybe remember the end of Matthew's Gospel, where in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus is being betrayed and the soldiers come out against him, and Peter produces a sword—obviously he was armed—cuts off somebody's ear, and Jesus says: No; put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? (There is that Lord of Hosts.) But how then could scripture be fulfilled since it must happen in this way. In other words, the way of sacrifice and suffering and meeting death by enduring death. That was Jesus' ultimate mission, to establish his kingdom; but as you just said, right up to the day of the ascension, there was still that political and military hope.

DAVE BAST

So, we mentioned the word *paradox*. A paradox is a seeming contradiction. God promises that he will come; he will send his Messiah into the world, and when the Messiah comes, he will be the Mighty God. The paradox is, he is born as a little baby, and then as he comes to the climax of his life and faces the cross, instead of calling down the hosts of heaven and just routing the power of the devil and of evil, he submits to death; and Paul says in Colossians 2:15:

Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. One of the beautiful and powerful ideas of the New Testament is that at the cross where Jesus apparently was defeated and his whole life was ended in a failure, that was actually the very thing that destroyed the power of darkness and of evil—did away with evil in the world—ultimately broke its back, although it still exists.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And very few writers in the New Testament reveled in that paradox of power coming through weakness, wisdom coming through folly than Paul did, partly because Paul, when he was known as Saul of Tarsus, was one of the people who could not believe that anybody could think that carpenter from Nazareth who got crossed out by the Romans was the Messiah. Of course not! And so, he persecuted the Church on account of his obviously not being the mighty God Paul (Saul) had been looking for, but when he met Jesus on the Damascus Road, it just reversed everything for him, and he realized: Oh my, that cross that I used to think was just the end of this imposter, was the beginning of the whole new kingdom; and so Paul saw through to that paradox, that reversal of everything you expected, and he reveled in it and celebrated it.

DAVE BAST

And you know, there is one more paradox that Paul can lead us toward, and that is the way that we experience Jesus' power as Mighty God in our own lives. Think of the verse where Paul says God told him: My strength is made perfect in weakness, from one of his letters to the Corinthians. So, there it is in our lives. We want to explore what that means, how we experience the power of Christ even in our own weakness, and we will do that next.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. So, we have been talking about Jesus the Mighty God. He is the child, the prince, who was promised; the Messiah who was prophesied by Isaiah to come into the world, and he has these four names—four titles—the second of which is Mighty God. He will be God in person, and he will be God in power—with all the power of God—the Lord of Hosts; but when he comes, he will exercise that power and might in a very strange and unexpected way. He will come in weakness, he will die in seeming disgrace and defeat; and yet, in that very death, he will overthrow Satan and all his hosts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus came recognizing that there are lots of ways we suffer in this world, lots of ways his people, the Jews, were suffering under Roman oppression and Roman occupation; of course, those things are bad, but Jesus as the Son of God could see deeper to say that the *real* struggle, the real threat, are not these puny, tin-plated dictators on earth but the demonic and spiritual powers of evil *behind* all of that, as is behind all of our suffering on this earth; all of the diseases, all of the ways by which we mess up our own lives. There are spiritual forces at work against God and that do not want to see God establish a kingdom and reestablish a new creation. That is what had to be defeated, and Jesus knew something that C. S. Lewis once called the deep magic of the universe, which is that the only way you are going to undo death is from the inside out.

DAVE BAST

Right; the problem with a merely political leader, like any government solution of any kind... You know, we kind of do our best. We try to make things better, and ultimately when situations are horrible there will be a revolution and one set will be thrown out and a new set will be brought in; but the problem is, it always ultimately leads to another dictator, you know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Or the solutions peter out or only favor the wealthy and the powerful. So you can throw one set of wealthy and powerful people out and pretty soon you will have another. It goes deeper than that—the problem goes deeper than that. We need help. We need a divine deliverer, and the triumph of the cross reveals the truth as God said to the apostle that my power, my strength is made perfect in your weakness. It is when we are weak that we are strong; it is when we experience Jesus' life through the power of the Spirit that we find the power ourselves to overcome the enemies that confront us, personal and otherwise.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the cross that defines that whole new way of looking at life. It is the cross that defines the full inbreaking of the kingdom of God; and I think for us today, Dave, as we think about Jesus as the Mighty God...and yes, we want our God to be mighty for the same reason the Jews in his day did and the disciples did, but like the disciples of old, we are tempted today to forget that the power of Jesus was on the cross, and the Church is forever in danger of being seduced by political power, military power, legislating our way to make people behave; whereas, Jesus always as Mighty God points us in a different way than strong-arm politics and military solutions. The Church is called to go another way.

DAVE BAST

So, Jesus has defeated evil. He has defeated sin. He has done in the devil, although the devil still exists—evil still exists...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

We still fall into sin. So, the question is: Does this really matter to me? Does this make a difference in my life from day to day? How can I experience more victory if Jesus has won the victory? It does make a difference because, once again, listen to Paul from Colossians 2:

¹⁰You have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority...¹²having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God...¹³when you were dead in your sins, God made you alive with Christ. That is a powerful truth. If you have been baptized, you died with Christ; you have been made alive again to God; and that means you can have power in your life over the things that confront you...over the problems that plague you...over the sins that beset you. I am not going to try to pretend that everything will go away automatically...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right...

DAVE BAST

That it is nothing but victory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But, the victory is real and we can live into it now and here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And precisely because we know that Christ's power was made perfect in weakness, that the apparent folly of the cross is actually the wisdom of God, as Paul says in I Corinthians 1. Because of that, we know that when we do go through hard times, that does not mean we have fallen out of Jesus' hands. It means he is with us; he has been there; he went to hell for us, so we are never alone. The mighty power of God is going to sustain us somehow, and that does not make the bad times wonderful or enjoyable...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They're not, but it does mean we are not alone, and that there is a mighty God who holds us in his mighty hands, and he will have the last word.

DAVE BAST

One practical example maybe before we close: The power of forgiveness. It seems like weakness. Someone has hurt you; you want vengeance; you want to hit back; and that just leads to more violence and an unending cycle...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

But by the seeming weakness of forgiving in the name of Jesus, as we have been forgiven, that cycle can be broken and the power of God can bring peace and reconciliation. So, it really does work. It is real. And as we live it, we can rejoice in our Mighty God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope that you will join us again next time as we will study the eternal benevolence of the Messiah as our Everlasting Father. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com and let us know scripture passages and topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

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