

Wonderful Counselor

SCOTT HOEZEE

In Advent and at Christmas, Christians have the chance to answer the question: Exactly what all did the world receive when the Son of God was born as the baby Jesus? It goes without saying that the advent of God's Son in human form is the most remarkable thing that anyone could have ever imagined. The birth of Christ split history clean in two, to the point that to this day all of human history is defined as happening either before Christ's birth or after. So what did that birth mean? Well, there are myriad answers, but a lyric and classic answer emerges from well-known words in the 9th chapter of the prophet Isaiah. There, the prophet predicts four different names or titles that God's Messiah would have. Today on *Groundwork*, we begin a series on those names, and we start with Wonderful Counselor. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee. Welcome folks, to this series that, as we just said, is going to look at those four titles that come from a very, very well-known passage in Isaiah 9. They are: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. So, those will be the first four programs in this five-part series...

DAVE BAST

Right, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the fifth one will look at the overall message of Isaiah 9, that all of this brings light to people who had been walking in darkness.

DAVE BAST

Right, exactly; and it is a wonderful text and passage to be inhabiting. We are going to live into it over these next few weeks during the season of Advent, as Christians around the world think once again of the great miracle of the incarnation, God actually coming among us, but in the person of the baby Jesus...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Coming as an infant into the world. It is kind of a mind-blowing idea. Of course, there is so much music that has been written about it and so many passages in scripture that point to it, but this is, as you said, Scott, one of the loveliest, and it is from the book of Isaiah Chapter 9. Let's just listen to it first:

²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them the light has shined. ³You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exalt when dividing plunder. ⁴For the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor you have broken, as in the day of Midian. ⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁶For a child has been born for us, a Son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

DAVE BAST

So there it is, this wonderful buildup, which we are going to kind of hold for the last program, and then comes verse 6 and the four names, but are there four or are there five? That is kind of a question, isn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is probably the first thing we need to talk about because many of our listeners are familiar with the well-known oratorio by George Frideric Handel, the *Messiah*. What we need to remember is that Handel lived quite a long time ago, and back in his day the best Bible translation available was the original King James Version, which was based on the best manuscripts, the ancient Hebrew texts that they had; they separated it; and you know, you can hear it in your head: His name shall be called Wonderful...Counselor, and then it goes on with the other ones...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So it makes it sound like it is two, but our new translations now know, based on better access to even older Hebrew manuscripts that it is not two titles, it is one.

DAVE BAST

Speaking of the *Messiah*, Scott, one remarkable thing about that amazing piece of music—one of the world's great masterpieces and something that many of us will hear, or at least parts of it, during the Advent season—is that it tells the story of Christ, the meaning of his life. It talks about his birth, it builds up to the cross, it then moves on to the resurrection; but it does so almost entirely using Old Testament texts.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

That is really quite an astonishing thing when you think about it. So, the Christmas portion includes this verse, Isaiah 9:6, and several others: Isaiah 7:14: Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son and his name will be called Immanuel. So, it is a wonderful instance of the way scripture points forward in amazing detail to the coming of Christ into the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is very accurate in what it portrays and as it comes through in the oratorio. The one part, again, that we can get messed up on in terms of this series is thinking that wonderful and counselor are two different names and they are just one; in fact, all four titles have two words. So, here is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, then really Peace Prince—Prince of Peace...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So they are all two words.

DAVE BAST

And if you think about it, one is a noun and the other is an adjective.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is right.

DAVE BAST

So, there is a descriptive for each of the fundamental terms, but then each one of those is modified; and so, in this case, in our first word, Wonderful Counselor, literally it could be translated: He is a wonder of a counselor...he is an amazing counselor...he is a marvelous counselor...he is the counselor of all counselors.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and what an important title this is, because I think all of us realize that we need somebody to guide us in life. It is a confusing, perplexing world; it is a fallen, broken world; and so this title really points to the idea that Jesus as the Messiah is going to be the one who will provide the guidance for us; and really, if you think of where else in life do you run across the word counselor, there are a lot of different places where we run across it, and it has always got to do with steering our feet unto the correct paths.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, just for example, lawyers are sometimes called counselors. I just remember back as a kid watching *Perry Mason*, and the judge would always say, "Counselor," in court. There are therapists, marriage counselors, financial advisors in a sense sometimes are called wealth counselors. So yes, it all has to do with somebody giving the kind of advice or helpful corrective, perhaps, that can put people straight.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; this is from the dark underside of life, but even in mafia crime families, one of the most revered offices is *consigliere*; he is the counselor who helps them lead their nefarious enterprise, but right, in most other settings it is in a more positive way, like a guidance counselor at school or a career counselor in college...

DAVE BAST

Or an advice column writer, you know; that is a kind of counselor: *Ask Amy*; people don't where to turn with these thorny questions or problems so they will write the newspaper or somebody online. So, we get the idea of counselors in human life, but the Messiah, the one that is promised and coming into the world, he is a wonderful counselor. He takes it to another level, doesn't he?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and as we are going to see coming up in just a moment, the idea of Messiah as a wonderful counselor, as the ultimate guide that ties in with a very important Bible-wide theme, and we are going to tap into that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are in Isaiah Chapter 9, at the beginning of a five-part Advent and Christmas series here on *Groundwork*, where we are looking at, first of all, the four titles—the holy titles—or names that Isaiah predicts will apply to the Messiah when the Messiah comes, and the first one is Wonderful Counselor; and as we said, that refers to somebody to guide us, to steer us, to advise us on the most fruitful ways to live; but, we mentioned just a moment ago, it also ties in with a pretty big and important biblical

theme.

DAVE BAST

The theme actually was the subject of a brief series...I think it was just a two-parter that we did on *Groundwork* previously on folly and wisdom—the foolish way to live, the way of the fool, and the way of the wise, the wisdom that comes from God. So there is a direct linkage between the title of the Messiah as the Wonderful Counselor and the idea of wisdom really as the right way to live, the best way to relate to reality as we attempt to negotiate life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, and we think biblically we go straight to the book of Proverbs, and when we did that little series on folly and wisdom we spent time in Proverbs, but it really weaves through the whole Bible; and in the New Testament, Paul says that...you know, we often think of Jesus as the Word of God—the Word made flesh from the opening of John's Gospel—but Paul says that he is not only the Word of God, he is the wisdom of God incarnate...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so that is who Jesus is. Jesus embodied all the wisdom there is from God.

DAVE BAST

We think of his teaching ministry in that regard. Think of a passage like the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus begins with the Beatitudes: Blessed are those... It is really the way to happiness; it is really the way to fulfillment; and it is counterintuitive to the world's way of wisdom because Jesus says it is the meek who will inherit the earth; he says it is those who hunger and thirst for righteousness who will be satisfied, not those who pursue money or sex or pleasure or all that. So again, we have this contrast between the foolish way and the wise way; and interestingly, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus closes with the familiar parable of the house built on the sand and the house built on the rock, and then he says, you know: Do what I say and you will be building on the rock. That is the wise way. Do my words, don't just listen to them; and Matthew adds the comment: The people were astonished at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority. That is the wisdom of Jesus personified right there. It is astonishing to people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and wisdom is astonishing, because we have said before that there is a distinction in the Bible between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is book learning; it is the periodic table of elements, it is the multiplication tables, it is the best way to cook a chicken. You can learn knowledge in school and from books, and most people do not find knowledge terribly startling. I mean, 2+2 is 4 and you know, it is dates from history and so forth. What the people found startling about Jesus was that it was wisdom, not knowledge; and wisdom...to figure out how to live the best, to see the world the way God sees it, where the meek are more important than the powerful and so forth, that is what Jesus ties into; and his role again, as Wonderful Counselor points us right at that tradition in scripture, where Jesus wants us to live in such a way that it will lead to delight and flourishing instead of misery and pain.

DAVE BAST

Right; so now...just about now maybe you are thinking: Well yes, that would really be nice if I could only live back then and listen to Jesus and hear his wonderful words as counselor, or maybe gone to him with a question that I had about my life; but the wonderful news...the further wonderful news that the Bible proclaims about Jesus the Counselor is that, as he promised, he has not left us without a counselor. Even though he no longer is on earth, he is no longer directly teaching, he promised his disciples in a very significant passage that he would leave someone else with them to give them guidance.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So this is from John's Gospel, John 14 then 16*; we are in the upper room on Jesus' last night before his crucifixion. He is going to be betrayed by Judas just in a little while; but as he is there and preparing to leave the disciples, he says, [John 14:15] ¹⁵“If you love me, keep my commands, ¹⁶and I will ask the Father and he will give you another counselor to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him, but you know him, for he lives in you and will be in you.”

DAVE BAST

John 16:12 “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear,” (Jesus goes on) ¹³“but when he, the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own, he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here...

DAVE BAST

That is a really neat passage, isn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is, and it connects the ancient words of Isaiah, from Isaiah 9, of the Wonderful Counselor, to an ongoing work that is going to happen now through Jesus as the Christ of God, who is going to make sure that this keeps happening through the Holy Spirit; and you know, in a confusing world, Dave, where... I mean, advice is cheap. We get people giving us advice on Facebook and Twitter and on cable TV. So, how do we know?

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How can we sort the good from the bad? Well, Jesus says, I am going to give you a little help. The Holy Spirit is going to live right in you as sort of like your internal GPS. It will be the guide to lead you, he says; to lead you continually. The verb in the Greek is he will *continually* lead you into all truth.

DAVE BAST

A couple of other verbal points here in this passage from John. We read one brief verse, or a couple of verses from John 14 and then a couple more from John 16; but there is a word in John 14:16 translated in the version we read, *counselor*. That is a great translation because it directly connects with the theme of this program. He is the counselor; but originally it is *paraclete*, and that is a little difficult to translate. So in the old translation he is called the *comforter*—I will send you another comforter. Sometimes it is translated *advocate*, which sounds more like a lawyer, but a *paracletus* literally was one called alongside to help, and especially to help with advice with wisdom; and so, it is a beautiful idea that the Spirit is the ongoing counselor left by the original Wonderful Counselor to give us guidance and advice through life; and in fact, Jesus says in the verses we read from John 16: It is going to be me talking to you through him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He will take what I give and he will pass it on to you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that image of the *paraclete*...sometimes we hear para-church organizations; that means organizations alongside the church. So, a paraclete is the called one alongside you. It is a lovely image. Most of us have probably seen enough courtroom dramas on TV that we know that when the judge says: Will the defendant please rise? The defendant does, and so does the attorney—so does the lawyer—the counselor, who stands next to you and identifies with you as your counselor in court, so you both stand together; and that is the image that you are never alone. Whatever you face when you have decisions, the Holy Spirit will be right next to you and he will help.

DAVE BAST

So, if you are at all familiar with the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit, you have probably heard different things about the important work that he does in our lives, but maybe you haven't thought about this one, that he is now the Wonderful Counselor who advises, guides, and directs us into the path of wisdom. The thing, though, is, how does that happen?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

What does it mean practically for me in my life in decisions that I am facing? And we want to talk a little bit about that, too, before we close out this program.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and the first program of a five-part Advent and Christmas series looking at the titles for the Messiah that come in Isaiah 9; and ultimately in this series we will also ponder that idea of people walking in darkness seeing a great light, which is what this all adds up to, so that is how we will close out this series; but we are on the first title in this program: Wonderful Counselor; and we just were saying, Dave, this ties in with the wisdom tradition of the Bible...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which helps us steer a fruitful, delightful path of flourishing through life; and then we ask the question: Okay, Jesus was a wonderful counselor and he is at the right hand of God now; what good does that do us? We said: No, he is still with us; the Holy Spirit is in us as the paraclete—the one called alongside to be our counselor.

DAVE BAST

But the question is, where does this show up in our lives? So, in one sense, it is theoretical: Jesus is the wisdom of God. You alluded to that, Scott. It is a phrase that Paul uses in I Corinthians Chapter 1. He embodies the revelation of who God is and what our lives should be—where they should lead—in himself. In the Old Testament, Israel had the Law—the Ten Commandments. We have Jesus, and we want to live into his likeness. We want to become like him. That is our goal. That is what it means, really, to keep the Law, to become like Jesus; but we face decisions every day. We face specific questions of what to do, where to go, how to choose the right path.

There is another great passage in Isaiah Chapter 30 that says: You will hear a voice behind you saying this is the way, walk in it; and we believe now that that the voice is the Holy Spirit speaking to us on behalf of Jesus, giving that counsel and guidance and that wisdom. So, the real question is, how do we hear it; how do we focus on it in order to follow it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are going to have four ideas...we are going to have four suggestions for when and how and where the Holy Spirit exercises that role as our counselor—as our advocate—our guide and our comforter; and the first one we will point to is... And of course, two preachers on this program, nobody will fall off their chair to here us say sermons. One of the places where God speaks to us and counsels us are through the sermons we hear in church as we try to apply God's Word to our lives; and hopefully, if a sermon describes real life accurately enough, it will make people hungry for ideas for how the Spirit might guide us through the perplexing paths our lives sometimes take.

DAVE BAST

I think there is a little bit of a caution here, too, though. One of the problems preachers often face...one of the pitfalls that preachers can fall into is turning sort of moralistic...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And making a sermon a list of do's and don'ts: and here are ten steps you should take. They seem very practical, but really, the role of the preacher ought to be to proclaim the Gospel...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Again and again; and so, what we want to do is uncover basic principles that people can accept and believe and find guidance that way, rather than lists of rules...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because that makes it sound like salvation is up to us...

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When it is already perfectly accomplished. What we want to do is describe the beauty of grace and of living the Beatitudes in such a gorgeous way that people say: Hey, I want part of that in my life.

DAVE BAST

Right; I am thinking about the fruit of the Spirit right now because I have to preach on that soon. Talk about the Spirit giving us guidance, and in a sermon...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control; what does that look like? What does it really look like if it were in my life? So, that is a role that preaching can play; and as you say, I love that idea, Scott. It can make us hungry to want to follow that path. That is real wisdom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so that is one place, in church, through the formal preaching; and I suppose the teaching and adult education and Sunday school classes too, certainly.

A second idea...this just is very, very common and everyday, and maybe we don't always imbue this with the work of the Holy Spirit the way we should, but very simply, the advice we get from close friends...from our sisters and brothers in Christ in church. Just when we describe a situation, they think about it with us and maybe they come up with an idea. That can be the voice of God in our lives.

DAVE BAST

I was talking to a friend recently who is involved in the medical field, and he said: You know, one of the things that we do with a patient is, we make a collective diagnosis. We don't allow the patient to come and say: Well, this is what is wrong with me. I think I have this disease. It is a whole team of people who come together and listen, and then collectively try to determine what the problem is and what the course of treatment ought to be; and spiritually speaking, I think that same thing is a beautiful and wise way that the Spirit speaks to us when we don't just try to decide on our own, sit around and think: Well, what is God telling me now? But we bounce it off several friends and trusted advisers...other human counselors who can help us to discern.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A third idea: Our own devotional reading of scripture. We believe God speaks to us. We say it is the living Word. So, when we read and study scripture, we listen for the voice of God and how God is speaking into our lives. I suppose then the question is, do we do that?

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I recently heard some surveys that were rather upsetting that, you know, something like only forty percent of regular church attendees read the Bible at least once a week; and another forty percent who go to church pretty regularly read it maybe once a month; and so, if we are not reading scripture, we are not opening ourselves up to that living voice of God that can counsel us.

DAVE BAST

And not just racing through it, but reading, reflecting, meditating, slowing down, listening. To read and listen... I think it was Martin Luther who said: I read the Bible as if it was a letter from God addressed to me...as if it had my name on it; and God will speak, I believe, and I know you do, too, Scott; God will speak in that way through his Word to us as we read meditatively and reflectively; and constantly saying what Peter once said to Jesus when Jesus had just given them a proverb: Lord, are you speaking to us? Are you talking to me, God? And the answer very often is: Yes, I am speaking to you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we said we have four ideas; so very briefly, when we run into fellow Christians who actually are lawyers and therapists and guidance counselors, obviously...

DAVE BAST

Or pastors.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or pastors, this too, through that human voice, the Holy Spirit speaks, and through all of these avenues, many of them everyday realities, Jesus as the Messiah, as the Wonderful Counselor, breaks into our lives and shows us the right way to go.

DAVE BAST

He is still speaking today, and the question is, are we willing and ready and able to listen? Well, let's do it, and wisdom will be the result. Thanks be to God. And thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we discuss our Mighty God, the second of the names of the Messiah. So connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know what scripture passages or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

***Correction:** The audio of this program only references John 16, the source of the second biblical quotation read by Dave Bast. The first biblical quotation read by Scott Hoezee is found in John 14:15-17.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/wonderful-counselor>

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