

Advent 2018

His Name Shall Be...

Mighty God

Isaiah 9:6

1. Divine power: *his conception*
2. Disbursed power: *his life*
3. Disarmed powers: *defeated death*
4. Declared power: *Son of God*

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Our Sunday series for this month is called, "His Name Shall Be ..." We are looking at one of the biblical birth announcements for Jesus. Most birth announcements are sent in the mail *after* the baby is born, but in Jesus' case, one of his birth announcements was given about 750 years *before* he was born, by the prophet Isaiah:

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.

Of 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. (Isaiah 9:6-7, niv)

During this Advent month we will be digging a little deeper into what those names meant about Jesus, what he came to do, and what that means for us. Advent means "arrival," and these names told people what to expect when Jesus arrived. Now that he's arrived the first time, they tell us who he is.

Last week, we looked at the name, "Wonderful Counselor," and we learned that it means that Christ is supernaturally and in miraculous ways, a counselor for us emotionally, he's also an advisor, and then he is an advocate or an attorney. We need him to be all three of these types of counselors for us.

Today we are looking at the name "Mighty God." If you will allow me a little time, I want to give you the context for when Isaiah made this prophetic statement about

this coming child-king, the Mighty God,¹ because I think it will help you see that he is Mighty God.

There were four kings who reigned during Isaiah's forty year prophetic ministry in the land. In Isaiah 1:1 we read that the names of these kings were Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Now, in Isaiah 6 we read about the vision that Isaiah received in the "year that King Uzziah died." Then in Isaiah 7, Isaiah skips right over Jotham's sixteen year administration and he turns his attention to King Ahaz. Ahaz was a bad king, and a terrible darkness fell on the nation of Judah because of him. Ahaz is described as "not doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord." When you study his life you can see that there were many reasons why this epitaph was inscribed on his tombstone. In 2 Chronicles 28:1-4 we can get a snapshot of Ahaz's ungodly practices. There's too much to print on the screens, so listen as I read it:

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. He did not do what was pleasing in the sight of the Lord, as his ancestor David had done. Instead, he followed the example of the kings of Israel. He cast metal images for the worship of Baal. He offered sacrifices in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, even sacrificing his own sons in the fire. In this way, he followed the detestable practices of the pagan nations the Lord had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the pagan shrines and on the hills and under every green tree. (2 Chronicles 28:1-4 nlt)

You have to ask the question, "What was going on in Ahaz's mind, or life, to bring him to make such foolish, ungodly decisions?" What led to him turning away from the Lord? Did he just one day decide that he would turn away from God because he didn't believe any longer? Ahaz wasn't an atheist – an atheist doesn't believe in *any* god at all. Ahaz worshipped at the shrines of *many* gods. He believed passionately in those gods – so passionately that he made a human sacrifice of his own sons to the idol-god Molech. What happened to Ahaz that led to him releasing his faith in God and clinging to something that was empty of power? I am so glad you asked.

Let's go back and take a minute to see what was happening in Judah in Isaiah 7-8. In Isaiah chapter six, Isaiah has this incredible vision of God and heaven, and God gives him the calling to be a prophet to speak for God. Immediately after Isaiah has this glorious vision of the holiness and majesty of the Lord, in Isaiah 7 we see what's going on in and around Judah.

When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. (Isaiah 7:1-2 niv)

So here's the deal: King Rezin of Aram, also known as Syria, and King Pekah of Israel, just to the north of Judah, decided that they wanted King Ahaz to become

¹ Much of the contextual material is from "Mighty God," by Rev. Mike Hayes

their ally against the Assyrians. When King Ahaz refused to join them, the two of them attacked Ahaz, and he and all of the people of Judah are struck with fear. These were dreadful times for King Ahaz. He was filled with anxiety and he beefed up security around his palace.

God, the Mighty One of Judah, had delivered His people out of the hands of their enemies over and over again. Yet even so, Ahaz was forgetting about that. But God had not forgotten Ahaz. So God told Isaiah to go and talk to Ahaz. This is what God said (again, listen as I read it to you):

Then the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman’s Field. Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah’s son have plotted your ruin, saying, “Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.” Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “It will not take place, it will not happen, for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah’s son. *(God is trying to reassure Ahaz that these enemies’ aren’t so tough – he’ll defeat them. But here’s the key statement:)* If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”’” (Isaiah 7:3-9 niv)

God says, “I know what they have planned, but it isn’t going to happen.” You can’t get much clearer than that! I love the last line that Isaiah delivers to the king who is trembling with fear—“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” Another translation of the Bible says God’s message to Ahaz this way:

Israel is no stronger than its capital, Samaria. And Samaria is no stronger than its king, Pekah son of Remaliah. You do not believe me? If you want me to protect you, learn to believe what I say.” (Isaiah 7:9 nlt)

“If you want me to protect you, learn to believe what I say.” What an incredible word for you and me today as we face our own enemies! Your enemies, the things that cause you fear and anxiety, may not be kings, but they have names like cancer, or conflict, or debt, or unemployment, or divorce, or grief. But listen: believe what God says! Not just when the seas are smooth and the sun is shining, but when the dark clouds gather and it seems that the light will never shine again—believe what God says!

Ahaz heard the message, but he did *not* believe. He was frantic. His nerves were frazzled. Ahaz decided that it would be more expedient, more practical, to trust in Assyria since they were the power that his enemies feared. Instead of trusting God, he tried to buy Assyria’s protection. Ahaz emptied out the temple of God and sent all of the gold and silver to king Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, with this note, “I am your servant.” Do you remember what I said last week? The name for Jesus,

“Wonderful Counselor” is made of two Hebrew words: *pele* and *sar*. This name for Jesus was God’s way of telling Ahaz he should not have put his trust in the Assyrian king, but in God himself.

Well, the people of Judah turned away from trusting in God as well. They began to consult spiritualist and mediums. They went to palm readers and horoscopes and those who supposedly had powers to know the future – instead of going to God. A nation turned away from trusting God because their situation was difficult, they couldn’t see any light at the end of the tunnel, and in their fear they frantically sought a solution—any solution, except God.

The very power that Ahaz sought to protect him, is the very one that eventually did him in. There is a powerful lesson in this my friend. We are not to trust in people for our deliverance. We are not to form alliances outside of Christ when we are afraid. Those alliances will not calm your fears. Our hope is in the Mighty God and in Him alone!

So by the time we get to Isaiah 9, the prophet speaks about what God is going to do in the future. He speaks to those who see only distress, darkness, and fearful gloom and gives them these comforting words. Look at what Isaiah 9:2-3 says:

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 niv)

But then comes the promise: to us a child has been born, a Son has been given, and His name is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace! He is the Mighty God. He alone was able to deliver Ahaz and the people of Judah from the hands of their enemies, if they would have only trusted in Him. He alone is able to deliver you and me from the fear and pain that grips us like a vice, if we will only trust in His power and might. And that all makes sense, but imagine yourself in their shoes: imagine, in all your fear, that you are told to trust in a baby who is called “Mighty God.”

This is a bold name for a baby, isn't it? Imagine opening a birth announcement from friends. There's a charming picture of their precious little boy, with the details of his birth. You read, "Born December 9, 2018, 8 lbs. 3 ounces, 23 inches." And his name? Not Jeff or Liam or Kevin, but ... "Mighty God"! It's a bold name for a baby.²

As we see the mighty power of God at work in Jesus, we realize that Jesus himself *is* the Mighty God—come in the flesh, even as a baby, as a child.

Let’s see how the mighty power of God is at work in this Mighty God we know by the name "Jesus." My goal with the message is simple: I want to encourage each of us to

² Much of this research is from Dr. Todd Wilson (PhD, Cambridge University), cofounder of the Center for Pastor Theologians, and author most recently of *The Pastor Theologian* and *Real Christian*.

look to and rely on Jesus as the Mighty God, instead of anything else. Let's not be like Ahaz; let's trust the Mighty God, Jesus. Let's start by seeing...

1. Divine Power: *His conception*

Jesus' conception was a virginal conception, which is—on the surface, at least—a contradiction. You don't need to be a physician who specializes in human reproduction to know virgins don't conceive children. That's a biological impossibility. But those things that are impossible with man are possible with God. So it was in the case of Jesus' conception. He came into existence through supernatural means, the power of God, and yet he did so in the Virgin Mary's womb. Luke refers to this stunning miracle when he records the words of the angel:

"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35)

You see, in the conception of Christ in Mary's womb, God did something he'd never done before—and will never do again. By the power of the Spirit, God brought together two radically different realities in a single unity: He wedded humanity and divinity in the womb of Mary and in the person of Jesus. God traversed an infinite gap to bring together his own divine nature with our human nature in one person. It's an amazing display of mighty power, right there in the womb of the Virgin!

But then we see...

2. Demonstrated Power: *His life*

The display of God's mighty power doesn't end with Jesus' birth. It continues, as you might have guessed, throughout the whole of his life.

In fact, from the very start of his public ministry, Luke tells us that "the power of the Spirit" was upon him (Luke 4:14). And when he began to proclaim the gospel, this is what Jesus said about himself:

In the synagogue on a Sabbath day, he took the Isaiah scroll, opened it, and read. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21, niv)

And so it was. His life and ministry were unlike anything anyone had ever seen. He came with such clear demonstrations of power. Again, Luke tells us that everyone who saw Jesus cast out a man's demon was...

"amazed and said to each other, 'What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!'" (Luke 4:36, niv)

Because Jesus was teaching with such clear demonstrations of power, everyone was flocking to him. On one occasion, a woman "who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years" (Mark 5:25) found a way to get right up next to Jesus and touch his garment.

"At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?'" (Mark 5:30, niv)

That's how mighty his power was!

Wherever Jesus went in this fallen world, he constantly met opposition: whether in the form of sickness, spiritual ignorance, demonic possession, or even death itself. Yet, as the Gospels reveal, we see the power of the Mighty God constantly at work in and through him, pushing back on the forces at work in this fallen world. God, by his Spirit, working in and through Jesus – the Mighty God at work. We also see it in...

3. Disarmed Powers: defeated death

Of course, you might say it's easy to see the power of God at work in the life of Jesus when you simply look at his miracles and healings. But what about his death? What about his execution at the hands of the Romans? If you think about it, wasn't it Pontius Pilate who showed *real* power, because he sentenced Jesus to death. That seems more powerful than Jesus, who was led like a lamb to the slaughter, with his hands and feet nailed to an executioner's stake. Isn't it a sign of weakness to be captured and killed? After all, when talking about John McCain, didn't our president say, "I like people who aren't captured"?

Well, consider what Scripture says about what the Mighty God *did* through the capture and cross of Christ:

When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15, niv)

For starters, through Christ's death, God forgave us all our sins—an infinite weight of sin he bore on the cross, a weight none of us could begin to bear even if it were only our own sins. Indeed, there is no creature in all creation with power to bear that weight or burden. Only an infinite being—that is, God himself—could take on and atone for an infinite weight of sin.

So, too, forgiving our sins, he made us alive. He took those who were dead in their sins and made them alive together with Christ: an amazing display of resurrection power in our own souls! If you are a Christian, you are a walking miracle of the Mighty God! But, more than that, he disarmed all the spiritual forces that are

arrayed against us, so that while they may still aim and shoot their guns at us, they fire only blanks. They've been totally stripped of power through the power of the cross of Christ, so there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)! That's...

4. Declared Power: *Son of God*

No wonder Paul describes the cross of Christ as "the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Admittedly, it is foolishness to those who do not believe. But to those who do—"Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). Yet if we stopped here, at the crucifixion, we'd be left with a lopsided view of things.

We need to press on in the life of Jesus, to his resurrection. There, on the third day—when God raised Jesus from the dead—we see the power of the Mighty God on display supremely.

Consider what Paul says at the beginning of his magnificent letter to the Romans. He begins by rehearsing who Jesus is: first, his Messianic pedigree, his genealogical link to the line of David, Israel's great king" (Romans 1:3). But he moves from there, seamlessly, to Jesus' enthronement as the Messiah through his resurrection from the dead...

"appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead."
(Romans 1:4)

There's never been a greater demonstration of power than when God raised Jesus from the dead and declared him to be the Son of God in power.

Yet here's the amazing truth: This same power is now at work in those of us who believe—resurrection power—at work in you. If you are a believer, the same power that raised Jesus is now at work in you to do immeasurably more than all you could ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

If you are a believer this morning, you don't have some little boost of energy here or there in your life. No, you have an immeasurably great power at work in your life—whether you're fully aware of it or not. Indeed, the same power that gave life to Jesus' lifeless corpse is at work in your life. He is the Mighty God.

Some of you, especially, need to be reminded of this because you face the most unlikely of human odds; you're up against some forces far greater than you. But what's impossible with man is possible with Mighty God.

Some of you may need some specific provision, even material provision: money to pay the rent or the mortgage or to meet other obligations. Mighty God hasn't given you or any one of us a specific promise that he will provide so much money at certain times, but we can hang on to the belief that he is certainly able to do so and will provide what we need. He has the power. He loves to surprise his children with grace and blessing, as we look to him in faith and hope.

Some of you need the Mighty God to work reconciliation in your life. You live with a broken relationship, perhaps multiple broken relationships, and despite your best efforts, you've not been able to put them back together again. You realize it's simply not within your power to do so. The issues are too longstanding, the pain too deep, the damage too great, for you to mend—or for anyone, humanly speaking, to fix. Believe, though, that Mighty God, who reconciled the world to himself through his Son, is more than able to bring about a reconciliation in your life. Don't give up just yet on the person, or on the relationship, but trust Jesus with it and move forward in faith and hope.

Some of you need the Mighty God we call Jesus to deliver you from some power at work in your life: one that is exercising a controlling influence over your life. You've been dealing with something for years and can't seem to make any headway. At times, you're tempted to call it a bad habit—at other times, an addiction. You can recall how you've made resolutions to do things differently, do it better, be more faithful, but you know that not much came of those resolutions. You've become skeptical about the possibility of change.

If that describes you, then don't forget the Mighty God, whose name is Jesus: who heals the broken, gives sight to the blind, even calls out of the grave those who have died with the simple word of his power. Trust that he is able to not only heal you, but liberate you from whatever holds you back or down, whatever sin it is that so easily entangles. Jesus, the Mighty God, is powerful enough to liberate you and to sustain you as you trust in him.

And, finally, some of you are acutely aware of the power that unbelief has in your life. Perhaps you want to believe, but you find you're like the man whom Jesus met on his way to Jerusalem, who had a hard time believing. He cried out to Jesus, "I believe, but help my unbelief!" For some of you, in fact, belief—real faith—has never really been a part of your life. You've never had that "aha" moment of coming to faith in Christ. You'd like to, but you know that at least up to this point, that kind of thing has eluded you for some reason. If this describes you, may I invite you to look away from yourself and to the Mighty God, who is able, Scripture says, to cause his light to shine in your heart to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Turn to Jesus, and trust that he is able and willing to do it. Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate this Advent: He is the Mighty God.

Don't trust something or someone else when you can trust the Mighty God!

Pray