

**Mighty God  
Prince of Peace, pt. 2  
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(Joseph's monologue's last words = "God's son born into a humble family to save the world... It is so illogical, so imperfect, so imprecise, so odd... so completely unexpected; so unlike the work of a carpenter... so much like the work of God.")

...And that's what we celebrate at Christmas, friends. Something completely unexpected: God's son born into a humble family to save the world.

If you've just joined us this morning, last week we began a series covering one of the most famous descriptions of Christmas in all of history as we began a look at the famous words from Handel's Messiah taken from Isaiah 9. – Would you turn there, please? **[Turn to Isaiah 9, p. 683]** And just to build community and make sure everyone has a Bible, if you're sitting in front of a rack with Bibles in it, would you pass those out and make sure everyone in your row has one?

Last week we discovered that God was so excited about the gift He was going to send on Christmas that he started telling people about it *700 years* before it happened. That's when Isaiah was written, 700 BC.

Last week we also started a tradition, which is that, since everyone always stands while these words are sung in Handel's Messiah, that we would all stand while they're read. So let's all rise as I read Isaiah 9:1-7.

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

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

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

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

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

***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,***

***And the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace. – Isaiah 9:6***

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

Let's pray.

Have a seat. And keep this passage open on your laps for a minute.

In 700 BC, the people of Israel were facing hostile enemies to their east. The nation of Assyria, or modern day Iraq, was raiding and conquering and causing all sorts of terror, particularly on Israel's north and eastern borders. That's how the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were "humbled." They were the northeastern states of the union of Israel, and they were being terrorized by their enemies.

God knew how they were feeling, so he issued them a promise through one of His most respected spokesmen: the prophet Isaiah.

God says, "Don't be afraid. Have courage, have joy. One of these days you are going to feel as happy as you do on pay day (that's what the day of harvest was for them. Pay day.) You're going to feel as relieved and joyful as you did on the day World War II ended. (That's what "The day of Midian's Defeat" was like for them. The outcome of their war against Midian was uncertain until God brought about a huge victory."

And then God says, "And the way you're going to get that relief and joy is from an action you would never have anticipated: I'm going to send a *child* to deliver you. A child who will lead you – the government will be on his shoulders. And if you want to know what this child will be like, I'll tell you. He is going to be a *wonderful counselor*. (We talked about that last week. If you missed it, get the tape.) He is going to be a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, and a Prince of Peace."

This morning, as the second installment of this series, all I want to cover with you is the second two-word phrase in v. 6, "Mighty God." I think if you'll stay with me for the next 25 minutes or so, you will see the Babe Born in Bethlehem in a whole new light. And that could change your Christmas season. And it could even change your life."

***And he will be called... Mighty God.***

There is a paradox in this friends. In this passage, God is telling people that one day a child will come, a baby, the most vulnerable of human beings. One who can't feed himself, clothe himself, communicate, defend himself, a *completely dependent one*, and that this child will be almighty God.

That's the exciting part about Christmas. There's a baby being born who will change the world. There's a small one coming, with limitless power.

One time, years before this prophecy, the nation of Israel was facing an unconquerable enemy. A nearby nation by the name of Midian was attacking them and repeatedly stealing their food, their animals, and their tools and their jewels.

The Israelites tried year after year to stop these Midianites, but they couldn't. It was humanly impossible, given their limited size, numbers, and resources. The Midianites were just a superior power to them.

So, they did exactly what many of us do: they tried anything and everything they could under their own power, and then, when all else had failed, they cried out to God, saying, "Send us a deliverer."

And God did.

*But* in a typically unusual way.

Turn your Bibles leftward to the book of Judges, because I want you to see what happens in this story. (**Judges 6, p. 238**)

Here's how the story goes:

***Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, (in other words, they blew it morally and spiritually and ethically), and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because of the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds. – Judges 6:1-2*** (So the Taliban weren't the first to think of this kind of defensive strategy.)

***Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. . – Judges 6:3-4***

***They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.***

– **Judges 6:5-6**

For purposes of time, I'll tell you the rest of the story, because it actually spans 2 chapters.

In response to Israel's cries for help, God appoints a deliverer. A very unlikely deliverer. His name was Gideon.

Gideon was about as unlikely a hero as any nation could have. When God comes to him, God says, ***The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.*** – **Judges 6:12**

You know what Gideon's response is? "Mighty warrior? Mighty warrior?" ***"How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest..., and I am the least in my family."*** – **Judges 6:15**

Not exactly a Norman Schwarzkopf type, wouldn't you agree?

God says to him, "Here's the deal Gideon, I want to prove to my people, and to the world, that I can do something great with something small. So Gideon, the Midianites are about to attack your country with 120,000 soldiers. I'm going to use you to defeat them with an army of 300." – And just to make it a fair fight, God didn't allow the 300 to receive training at Camp Pendleton.

And the 300 under Gideon win. They're never again troubled by Midianites.

Moral of the story: *It is just like God to do something great through something small. [ He does something great through something small. ]* Which is exactly what Isaiah is saying when he says, "The child will be called, 'Mighty God.'"

Last week we learned the original Hebrew language words for Wonderful Counselor.

Anybody want to know the Hebrew words for "Mighty God"?

They're ***El Gibbor***

"El" is the noun in the phrase. "Gibbor" is the adjective that modifies the noun.

"El" is the shortened form of "Elohim," (***El is short for "Elohim"***) which is the most common name used for God in the Old Testament. When the Bible says in its very first verse in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," the word for God there is "Elohim."

Whenever the shortened form "el" is used, instead of "elohim," in the Bible, "el" always describes "The Mighty One." ***"El" = "The Mighty One"***

Which is very interesting, because “Gibbor” the second word in the phrase, is an adjective that modifies mighty one. And gibbor itself means, “mighty.”

So literally, what Isaiah 9:6 is saying is, “***And he will be called... The Mighty, Mighty One.***”

Friends, this is a paradox. A paradox typical of the way God works. - He puts something great in something small.

But it’s a little hard for rational people to swallow. After all, how can a baby be a Mighty mighty God?

Well, let’s have some fun for a minute. Consider this.

From ancient times, prophecies about the coming Messiah are strewn all throughout the O.T., starting with the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Genesis where God says, the One to save the world will be born ***The offspring of a woman. – Genesis 3:15***

There are actually 12 such ancient prophecies that Jesus fulfilled before he could walk, 10 of them before he even got out of the womb.

The Bible says he will be born:

- 1. The offspring of a woman. – Genesis 3:15***
- 2. From a virgin. – Isaiah 7:14***
- 3. The Son of God – Psalm 2:7***
- 4. A descendant of Abraham – Genesis 22:18***
- 5. From the line of Isaac – Genesis 21:12***
- 6. From the nation of Israel – Numbers 24:17***
- 7. From the tribe of Judah – Genesis 49:10***
- 8. From the family of Jesse – Isaiah 11:1***
- 9. From the house of David – Jeremiah 23:5***
- 10. In Bethlehem – Micah 5:2***
- 11. Presented with gifts – Psalm 72:10***
- 12. Children will be killed – Jeremiah 31:15***

Do you know how hard it is to fulfill *any* prophecy of antiquity, much less 12 of them?

Several years back, Professor Peter W. Stoner wrote in a book titled, Science Speaks that using the mathematical science of probability that there was a  $1 \times 10^{17}$  possibility of any person fulfilling even 8 such prophecies.

***Possibility of fulfilling 8 prophecies of Scripture =  $1 \times 10^{17}$***

***$1 \times 10^{17} = 100,000,000,000,000,000$***

That's a number that's hard to get our minds around, so Stoner describes it this way. He says:

***We take 10<sup>17</sup> silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one.***

- ***Science Speaks, Peter W. Stoner***

With that in mind, how many of you think you could fulfill 8 prophecies of Scripture if you really really tried? Jesus pulled off 10 of them while he was still in the womb.

That's mighty, mighty impressive to me! Approaching God-like stature, in my humble opinion.

And, He got better! Throughout his adult life he fulfilled over 300 more prophecies!

And when He grew up, people marveled at what He could do.

Skeptics often scoff at Jesus' ability to perform miracles. But miracles are only miracles because they're outside the bounds of the normal laws of nature. Breaking such laws ought to be no problem for the God who invented them.

So everywhere He went, people watched Jesus heal people. Sometimes their bodies, sometimes their minds, sometimes their souls. Often, all three.

One time, Jesus gets word that his closest cousin, John the Baptist, had been killed. The wife of the wicked king who ruled over Israel at the time had apparently gotten tired of John, so she had her husband chop off his head.

Imagine how you'd feel if you just received such news?

Obviously, it hurt Jesus deeply. So he's not at his best when the next day he's out teaching all day on an open hillside to an unexpected crowd of probably about 15,000 people. Matthew 14 says that there were 5,000 adult men in the audience. So figure one child and one woman per adult male, and there were probably roughly 15,000 folks. A huge number, at any rate.

Well Jesus teachings these people late into the afternoon, and there are no convenience stores around, so towards the close of His talk He starts getting concerned that some of these folks might not make it back into town without having something to eat.

His solution? He finds a little guy who was smart enough to tote along a lunch for the afternoon. The little guy has 5 barley loaves, each about the size of your fist, and 2 fish, cleaned and pre-cooked little lake fish, so they weren't very big. Just enough for his early-evening dinner.

Jesus asks the little guy if he might be willing to share his dinner with some of the rest of the folks on the hill. "Okay!" says the young guy. So here's what the Bible says that Jesus did:

***He directed the people to sit down in groups on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were leftover. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children. – Matthew 14:19-21***

Personally, I don't know anyone who could pull off something like that, except a mighty, mighty God.

The text says that immediately after that, Jesus packed his weary disciples into a boat and sent them off across the lake, telling them he'd catch up with them the next day, on the other side of the lake.

Meanwhile, Jesus went up on top of the mountain to pray, probably about the death of His cousin John.

The Lake Jesus set the disciples on was called the Sea of Galilee. It's a unique lake because it sits inland from the Mediterranean Sea about 30 miles, and it's 1200 feet below sea level. Which means that when the weather turns, it turns violently in this little rift valley.

The Bible says that 3 a.m., after Jesus finished his almost-all-night prayer session, he set out to catch up with the disciples. – Only he had no boat, so instead of sailing, he decided to walk. – Straight across the lake. And it wasn't winter, and that lake has never frozen over.

In fact, while Jesus is out walking, the weather decides to take a turn, and all of a sudden, huge waves are breaking everywhere. (Which I would think would be a little hairy, even if you could walk on water. But Jesus isn't thinking about Himself once the wind picks up, He's thinking about His disciples in the boat up ahead.)

Here's how the Bible describes it:

***When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear." – Matthew 14:26***

***But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” – Matthew 14:27***

And then a kind of a fun sidenote here,  
***“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” – Matthew 14:28***

***“Come,” he said.”  
 Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. but when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” – Matthew 14:29-30***

***Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. – Matthew 14:31***

***And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. – Matthew 14:32***

Pretty powerful stuff, wouldn’t you agree? I’d be tempted to call it “mighty powerful stuff.”

***He fed 15,000.  
Walked on water.  
Empower a friend to walk on water.  
Calmed a storm.***

Big work from a small package. That’s how God works.

2000 years ago, He sent a little package to earth with a message to Mary:  
 “Handle with care, because you’re handling almighty God.”

The little babe was mighty in his birth, and grew up to be even mightier, conquering great forces effortlessly.

Here’s a question I’ve wanted to ask you all since the minute I got up here today:  
 what are the great forces coming after you these days?

What are the great forces coming after you?

Might it be unemployment? That’s can be a huge force blowing against your life, can’t it?

Might it be fear? That can be crippling, if we give in to it.

Is some type of temptation a force in your life right now? Is there something you’re doing, or tempted to do, that eats away at your right now? Maybe alcohol or a substance? Maybe it’s a relationship that you know you’ve crossed a line in?

Maybe your great force is self-doubt.  
Or discouragement. Or depression.

One reason I think God was so eager to tell people the news about the coming of His son at Christmas, you know, doing it 700 years before the actual event, was because he was eager for us to do something that Jesus' closest friend discovered he could do with Jesus some years after Jesus' birth.

Peter, Jesus' closest friend and companion found the technique he had discovered was so helpful, he wrote a letter to friends to encourage them to practice it to.

In his letter, Peter writes, ***Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. – 1 Peter 5:6-7***

***How do you get Him to be mighty mighty in your life?***

- 1. Humble yourself.*** Admit you're not as mighty as you pretend to be.
- 2. Cast your anxiety on him.*** Tell him about the storms in your life.

Friends, for years I didn't talk about a piece of my interior life much. But recently I felt like God was asking me to be more open with you all about my own interior life. So a couple of months ago I mentioned at a breakfast for men, and then later at a breakfast for women, that I wrestle with a great force coming against me almost all the time.

Fortunately, my great force is not a substance, or a temptation. It's the burden I carry for this church and this community. It never leaves me, and sometimes, it gets almost overwhelming. I had one of those "almost-overwhelmed" feelings just this Friday.

The news of families that need help and ministries that need attention piled up to what felt just a little too high to handle this week, to where I was having trouble staying on task, my mind was wondering so and my heart felt so burdened.

And then, with a little help from the Holy Spirit, I was reminded that Jesus is a mighty, mighty God and that he can not only handle my burdens, he wants to handle my burdens. He wants, as it says in Isaiah 9:5, to have the government be on his shoulders.

So in my office I just paused for a minute and I put my hands on my lap and I talked through all the things that felt like great forces blowing on me. I said something like, "Lord, here's this and this and this and this, please take the burden of them. I promise to participate in them, but I don't think you want me to bear the weight of them." And I put what was troubling me on his shoulders.

And then I wandered if an exercise like that might be helpful to some of you as well.

So here's how I want to end this portion of the service. I'd like to give you all a chance to do a little pondering before a mighty, mighty God. Because He is in the world and He listens. He came to earth to be for you mighty in your weakness, strong in your infirmity, God of your creation.

So do this for a minute (sit on stool) put your hands on your knees, palms up.

Now, think of the things that are troubling you. The wind and waves and storms that are blowing against your life.

Place those in your hands, and now tell God about them, and ask him to take them and carry them for you. Cast all your anxiety upon him, for he cares for you.

(give time)

Lord Jesus, there are some things in some of our lives that we'd rather not handle alone. Thanks for listening to them. Thanks for handling them with us, in some cases even, for handling them *for* us.

Personally, I know some in this room, for whom their health is a force that is blowing against them. I ask you to be mighty mighty for them in this Jesus.

I know some who have gale force winds blowing against their marriage. By mighty mighty in healing those, Lord.

And then there are temptations and old habit patterns and financial worries and fears about our children and concerns for loved ones. Surely, if you can walk on water or five thousand or make Peter walk on water, you can right these boats and carry this burdens, and I ask you to Lord. In Jesus name.

Friends, before I say "Amen," I want to talk to you again for about 30 seconds. So look up here for another 1/2 minute, and then I'll be done.

Because it occurs to me that in that boat that Jesus saved from the storm were 12 men. But only one of them walked on water. Why? Because you can't walk on water unless you get out of the boat. You can't experience the power of a mighty, mighty God, unless you get out of the boat.

Some of you have problems you haven't solved because you're not trying. It's like you're sitting on the bench, waiting for something to happen.

Others of you have never felt God's power in your life because you've never invited God *to bring* His power into your life.

So I want to conclude this prayer time by giving you a chance to mentally get out of the boat.

Bow your heads. God, for all of those who want to get out of their boats today, I pray for courage, as well as your power to stand up and walk.

With your heads bowed, how many of you know you've got an issue you need to give to God, but you've been holding back on it. Raise your hand, so I can pray for you.

(pray)

And how many of you have never invited Jesus to be your savior before, to be in your life and forgive your past and be a mighty mighty God in your life?

(prayer)

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