

Unwrapping the Names of Jesus: Wonderful Counsellor

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, November 28th. Can you believe it's Advent? My goodness. This morning we begin the season of Advent and you see a wreath and candles up front.

And the wreath itself is shaped as a perfect circle. It symbolizes the eternity of God. Each candle has a significance as well.

And on each Sunday of the Advent season, we'll recognize one of the four virtues that Jesus brings. Hope, love, joy, and peace.

This morning I'm lighting the first candle which represents hope. At this time of year, particularly in the church, we begin to hear that word Advent.

And you've already heard me mention it this morning. It's important to recognize that Advent is not technically a when, but a what. It's a thing. It's a noun.

[1 : 04] And generally the noun Advent is used to represent the introduction of something important. The 20th century saw the advent of many important inventions, including antibiotics, airplanes, cars, personal computers, microwave dinners.

If the word is capitalized, though, it tends to have a religious meaning. And it refers to the period that is observed in certain Christian denominations.

The period that begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. And you guessed it, that's today. Not all Protestant churches, we recognize this.

Not all Protestant churches recognize Advent in a formal way. And other traditions recognize it by lighting candles, by doing other things that are Advent specific, as we've done this morning.

So as we approach Christmas this year and reflect on all this season means to us as Christians, beyond spending time with family and friends, giving and receiving gifts, the holidays, Christmas carols, delicious food.

[2 : 17] Christmas is truly a season of anticipation and waiting, isn't it? Anticipating gifts and getting special things for people in our lives.

The anticipation of giving gifts, but also receiving them as well. I love a decorated and lit Christmas tree.

It's taken Michelle a little time to get used to it, but our Christmas tree goes up shortly after Remembrance Day, but with lights only. And to me, it's a warm and inviting introduction to the season.

It gives a sense of peace and a sense of comfort in our house to sit in our living room in the dark with just the lights of the tree. It's special. So a tree with gifts under it, it's like the idea of unwrapping those gifts.

That's the most exciting, right? We look with anticipation as the gifts accumulate under the tree. And as each gift is revealed, and our anticipation and hopefully our patience is rewarded.

[3 : 31] That's what happens with that anticipation over the Christmas season. And in this season of Advent, we're anticipating Christmas and the time we recognize the birth of Jesus.

The word becoming flesh. The son of God descending to be human as part of God's plan.

So our sermon series over these next four weeks of Advent is entitled, Unwrapping the Names of Jesus. And over the course of the series, we're going to be looking at four specific names that the Old Testament prophet Isaiah uses to refer to the coming Messiah.

Refer to the son of God who was born as the man Jesus. And as we unpack, I often like to talk about unpacking an idea.

But as we unpack or unwrap each name each week, we're going to be looking at a contemporary understanding of the name. What on a surface level do we see it as meaning?

[4 : 40] What that name would have then represented when it was originally declared? And then how that name may relate to Jesus in the circumstances of our lives and in our relationship with him.

And our focus passage for this series is Isaiah chapter 9, verses 2 and 6. You can look those up. The reference will be on the screen.

There it is. So I'll read it for us and you can definitely look that up. Isaiah 9, verse 2 and then verse 6, which says, The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. For unto 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.

[5 : 47] Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. This week we're beginning by considering the name Wonderful Counselor.

So first let's begin with a contemporary understanding of that name. What do those words mean to us? Wonderful Counselor. What is the most wonderful thing you can think of right now?

And I'm not expecting anyone to say Jesus. But what's the most wonderful? Well, I'm going to start because... And for anyone who's listening, not seeing this visual, I did open a can of pop, just so we're clear.

Great pop is wonderful. I'm just going to, if you don't mind. Oh, great pop. Honestly, ever since I was little, great.

Yeah. It's the greatest thing in the world. The musical compositions of John Williams, wonderful. What other things are wonderful?

[6 : 54] Share that with me. Family. Family. Yes. Refugees coming. People coming to a safe part of the country, fleeing somewhere where they were unsafe.

What else is wonderful? Friends. That was friends. Yes. Grandchildren. Grandchildren. I know several places where grandchildren.

Yes, absolutely. Not that I would know, but one day. Not too soon. Other things that are wonderful. Well, so great pop, obviously.

Mountain air. Burns not here, but mountain air. Wonderful. Receiving an unexpected gift.

Wonderful, usually. The smell of freshly baked cookies.

Wonderful. Going to church. Wonderful. Celebrating the birth of Jesus at this time of year.

Wonderful. A baby's laugh. Wonderful.

[7 : 59] I'm going to say the smell of a puppy. Wonderful. So if we stop and think about it, I believe we can. I hope we can.

List many things that we would describe as wonderful. But we can also hopefully recognize, you probably knew, knowing me, that this was coming.

That adjective, wonderful, has also become somewhat watered down. Hasn't it? It's become overused, generally. Everything is wonderful.

But as a result of being overused, it's lost quite a bit of its original meaning and significance.

Because everything from dish soap to toilet paper, to accounting services and dental care, I'm sure they've all been referred to as wonderful.

And you've heard that before. Now, to be fair to accountants, I love many accountants that I know, many of them are wonderful. That's just fact.

[9 : 00] But do you see what I'm getting at here? That wonderful used to have a more special meaning than it has now. So what about the word counselor, when you hear that, what comes to mind?

Well, I think for many of us, a counselor is someone you may consult when, usually, you have an issue in your life that is beyond your capacity.

Beyond your capacity to deal with on your own. You don't have the knowledge, the expertise, the context. There are counselors who specialize in mental health issues.

There are counselors who work with couples to address issues in their marriages. There are counselors who help people get control over their finances. So there are compartmentalized counselors we can recognize in so many areas of our lives.

Or maybe you equate the word counselor with a legal professional. If you watch legal dramas on TV or in movies, you hear judges say things like, Counselor, you're out of order.

[10:11] Right? Sounds familiar? Counselor, approach the bench. So a counselor is someone we can recognize may have insight or expertise in one specific area of focus.

There's someone we consult when we have a specific need in a specific area. And that consultation, the counseling, is usually also for a finite period of time.

So recognizing our understanding of wonderful and counselor, what does that name mean with a more complete understanding of what it might have meant to Isaiah?

Or to folks in the first century church who equated this prophetic name and the identity of the Messiah together with the man Jesus?

Wonderful. It means, at the very best, unusually good to us. Right? It means special, unique, often even pleasurable.

[11:20] But what did this word mean to Hebrew people in the Old Testament when Isaiah used it to refer specifically to the Messiah? Well, the word's original meaning seems to be hiding in plain sight.

Maybe you noticed this. Full of wonder. Right? But it's usually very seldom used that way anymore. Today, wonderful is used to frequently mean extremely good, as we considered earlier. In Hebrew, the word *pele* is translated as wonderful.

And its original meaning would have been far closer to the English word astonishing, rather than the idea of extremely good. Astonishing.

And it's important to also recognize that wonderful is, in used in its original meaning, could be referred to, used to refer to bad things as well.

[12:26] Now, what am I talking about? Well, in the King James translation, Jeremiah 5, verse 30, talks about a wonderful and horrible thing that happened in the land.

And in Deuteronomy 28, verse 59, we read, and here's a quote, The Lord will make thy plagues wonderful. Other translations of that passage use shocking or fearful.

Do you want a fearful gift for Christmas? Probably not. Sometimes ties are like that. But we can also recognize that the Bible uses wonderful to refer to the works of God throughout Scripture. It uses the word wonderful to refer to his knowledge, his counsel, as being wonderful, fearsome, astonishing, miraculous.

As the song says, too wonderful for comprehension. Like nothing ever seen or heard. Wonderful.

As we've already considered, our general understanding of a counselor is quite limited, really, right?

[13:43] It's focused in a particular area of expertise or specialty. Human counselors can help us with insight and perspective on some things, but certainly not with all things.

In an Old Testament context, a counselor would have been an advisor to the king on matters of finance, national defense, preparing for war, critical, critical matters.

And as we see in the story of Joseph, as an advisor to the pharaoh of Egypt, he was given significant power and authority and influence.

When we read the story of Joseph, we recognize he was second in command. He was second in power and authority only to the pharaoh himself as a counselor.

The apostle John also uses the term counselor, you'll recognize this, in his writing. He uses it often. And it's a translation of the Greek word for John, *parakletos* or *paraclete*.

[14:57] And I didn't say little yellow bird, *paraclete*. So maybe you've heard that word, *paraclete*, and you think I may be talking about a songbird. No. The function of a *paraclete* would have been much more broad than our traditional understanding of a counselor.

A *paraclete* would have been to counsel, to assist, to advise, to support, functioning in all those areas.

That's a big job. That is what Isaiah would have had in mind as he declared the coming Messiah to be a counselor. And if this concept is familiar, *paraclete*, in other ways, Jesus makes it clear that when he returns to the Father, he focuses on the importance of this *paraclete* role in John chapter 14, verse 26, when he says, While Jesus is not with us in a physical and tangible presence right now, the continuity of God's wonderful counsel continues.

Because the Holy Spirit lives within each person who's declared their allegiance to God. And God's word also remains as a wonderful counsel to us.

So our third point this morning, how does the name Wonderful Counselor relate to Jesus in the circumstances, the practical things of our lives and our relationship with him?

[16:53] And he shall be called Wonderful Counselor. As the Son of God, as God himself, Jesus is wonderful.

He is fearsome. He is astonishing and miraculous. He is wonderful in the most full and rich sense of the understanding that I hope we've reclaimed to some extent this morning.

Can you also recognize what it means to have the holy and wonderful God come in the flesh of a human baby? Isn't that wonderful?

Fear some? Astonishing? Friends, God became a human being so that he could draw near to us. Not in a conceptual way, but in a very literal way.

So that he could understand and experience all that it means to be one of his created ones. And through Jesus, we have access to the full counsel of God.

[18:16] The Holy Spirit living within us. The knowledge and insight of God's counsel available, as I said before, in his word.

Friends, we have unlimited, 24-hour access to the kind of counsel that we can't get anywhere else in our lives.

So that's unlike, let's recognize this, that's unlike any human counselor that we could ever have.

And all while having detailed and intimate knowledge of each of us as individuals.

Think of that. The God who knows you better than anyone else ever can, ever will, ever would, is also available to you with insight into your life.

Through prayer, through scripture, through the support and encouragement of other believers and in Christian community. God's counsel and his guidance for us, made possible through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus are available.

[19:33] Counsel that is life-giving, life-altering, eternity-changing, and not just for us.

The same relationship that makes that counsel available to us is the good news that we are called to share with everyone we know. Not just at Christmas, but all year round.

My friends, I think this has really struck me as I've reflected on Advent and preparing for the Advent season and Advent sermons this year. I think we can so easily as Christians compartmentalize our understanding or our picture of Jesus depending on the time of year.

Can you recognize that? I was thinking about it again as I drove here this morning. At Christmas, we lock in on the baby Jesus, right? Do you recognize that?

We fiercely, firmly anchor ourselves in Mary, Joseph, Jesus, and the manger. That's it. We focus on that and that's good. But we also need to recognize that for daily encouragement, we may connect more with Jesus in his adult ministry, right?

[20:49] Gospel Jesus, perhaps, we would call it. And then close to the end of our lives, we may reflect more on the crucified and resurrected Jesus, our eternal hope, Savior Jesus.

But friends, this is all the same Jesus, right? So what I'm wanting to encourage us to do is remember that Jesus is not only locked into certain times and certain perceptions that we might have of him.

He's wonderful. Friends, that baby Jesus is the same man, the same person who washed feet and healed the sick and ate with sinners.

the same Jesus that died on the cross, who was buried and who rose again as our Savior and risen Lord, our Messiah and King.

That same Jesus is also our wonderful counselor and our eternal hope. May a deeper understanding of what it means that Jesus is your wonderful counselor.

[22:11] Be one of the amazing gifts that you wrap, unwrap this Christmas season. Amen.