

Unwrapping the Names of Jesus: Mighty God

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome here for this Sunday, December 5th. And on each Sunday of the Advent season, we're going to recognize one of the four virtues that Jesus brings us.

Hope, love, joy, and peace. This morning, as we continue in the season of Advent, we're lighting our first candle again, which represents hope.

So Vern missed this one. So now, now we're caught up to where Vern is. We're also lighting our second candle this morning, which symbolizes love.

Why is the third candle pink? Tune in next week to find out. Today, like shepherds, we watch for signs of the Messiah's birth.

We celebrate the good news that was proclaimed for all people, saying, glory to God in highest heaven. And on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests.

[1 : 09] We reflect on the wonder of the manger, which represents God's rescue mission, to come and save us, his beloved children. We recognize again this morning that we are in the season of Advent, as Vern mentioned.

It's the season in the church calendar that leads towards Christmas. It's the four Sundays before Christmas. And not all Protestant churches recognize it in a formal way, but some recognize it by doing things like lighting candles, which we do here, as we've done this morning.

And as we approach Christmas this year and reflect on all the season means to us as Christians, beyond spending time with family and friends, hopefully we're going to be able to do a bit more of that this season.

Giving and receiving gifts, having holidays, a bit of a break from your regular routine perhaps, carols, delicious food. We recognize that Christmas is a season of waiting and anticipation as well. Getting special things or doing special things for people in our lives. The anticipation of giving gifts and receiving them perhaps as well.

[2 : 30] And in this season of Advent, we recognize that we are anticipating Christmas. We're anticipating the time when we recognize the birth of Jesus. The Word made flesh.

Our Advent sermon series this year is entitled Unwrapping the Names of Jesus. And as one of the songs, one of the songs was a big spoiler because it was all four of Isaiah's names for the Messiah. We should sing that every Sunday during this season, I think. But over the course of the series, we're going to look at those specific names. And we started last week. These are the names that the Old Testament prophet Isaiah used and uses, as we read the book, to refer to the coming Messiah, to refer to the Son of God, who is born as the man Jesus.

And as we unpack or unwrap a different name each week, we're going to be looking at three kind of perspectives. A contemporary understanding of the name, or what the words in the name might mean to us.

What that name might have meant when it was originally declared. And then how that name relates to Jesus, perhaps in the circumstances of our lives and our relationship with him.

[3 : 52] And our focus passage for this series is Isaiah chapter 9. And Carol caught this last week. I had Isaiah 2 on the screen, which was very confusing.

And thank you to everyone for extending me grace and not saying, Pastor, you had the verse wrong. But it's Isaiah 9, chapter 9, verses 2 and 6, which say, The people walking in the darkness have seen a great light.

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

We're continuing in our series this week by considering the name Mighty God. So first let's begin with a contemporary understanding of that name.

[4 : 58] Mighty God. What comes to mind when you hear the word mighty? Audience participation time. Mighty. Mighty. Powerful.

Superhero. Kathy, very nice. Strong. Almighty. Very nice.

So I believe, and we got a bit of a sense of it there, the general word we might associate with mighty, we associate that with a sense of physical power or strength.

Don't we? That makes sense. That's how we anchor it. So I have to confess something to you this morning. You recognize over my time being at Braemart, I confess a lot from up here.

It's good therapy. I am a fan of Arnold Schwarzenegger. I know you're shocked. So certainly in the 80s, I would have defined Arnold as mighty, right?

[6 : 00] He was obviously a world-renowned bodybuilder for many years. He turned action movie star and was a box office giant in that regard. He turned successful business mogul.

He married into the Kennedy family and became the governor of California, or the governor of California, if you prefer. And his name is still recognized by people around the world.

You say Schwarzenegger, first of all, people say, what did you say? But you say that name. There are other people in the world named Schwarzenegger, but when you think of that name, you get a picture in your mind.

But like me, Arnold is aging. His physical might and even his recognition in popular culture, the might of his public persona, is gradually waning.

So certainly by human standards, being physically mighty, or mighty in reputation alone, can be something that really at the end of the day has no lasting purpose or direction, right?

[7 : 07] Those things are fading. They are temporary. And yet physical strength is still the thing we most commonly associate with the word mighty. So our perspective and understanding of the word, the name, we would say, God, should be clear, I hope.

And if you're like me, maybe the frequency with which you hear that word, that name, used as a casual throwaway in daily conversation, bothers you.

I'll be honest with you, there are lots of words that might be more offensive to you that frankly I would rather hear than the three-word phrase, oh my God.

People throw it away all the time. I challenge you to listen for it. Oh my God, I can't believe that happened. Oh my God. And Christians do it too. And I don't know why we do it.

I think it's just force of habit. But for me, oh my God, used not in a literal way, if you ever hear me say it, I usually say beforehand, I mean this literally because I'm saying, how horrifying for the person, God, you know, I'm asking God to intercede, to step in.

[8 : 23] Or I'm using it as a way of declaring, oh my God, step into this situation. But we hear that, the name God used in relation to so many different things, which doesn't mean God.

You might think, oh, that person is very prayerful. Well, not really. It's just being cast aside as a phrase. So, even if we recognize that, can you wrap your head around the name God being used in relation to Jesus?

Well, if that's the case for you, if you think, well, Jesus is here and God is here, they're not, eh, Jesus is robe, beard, taught, you know, children on the knee in the pictures, down by the water, talking to the disciples, and God is God on the throne in heaven, I can't really, so let's explore that a bit.

Let's park there for a second. So, in making the connection between the Messiah being called God, which is what Isaiah does, and the Messiah then making the next move is Jesus, then I believe this reminds us of the importance of something core, something central to our belief as Christians, something that we declare, and that is the Trinity.

Because in making that connection, Messiah equals God equals Jesus, we're recognizing that God and Jesus are the same.

[9 : 58] So, yes, Jesus is the Son of God, the baby born in Bethlehem, but the Son is also one with the Father and with the Spirit.

So, individually, they are God, but together, they are also God. And as I was thinking of this sermon, I thought, well, I'm not going to share some of the, in our theological studies in seminary, we often talked about broken metaphors, that people try to use to represent the Trinity or to explain the Trinity.

So, here's one. Okay, well, to describe the Trinity, I'm going to say that a candle represents the Trinity. So, what I'm saying here is that the flame is one, the wick is another, the candle in itself is another piece.

So, all those three things together are the Trinity. Okay, okay, but a flame is not a candle. The wick is not a candle.

The wax part of the body of a candle, not a candle. So, that's a broken metaphor. Then, an egg is another one that's often used because it's three things that are one.

[11:17] So, the shell, the yolk, the white. So, together, those are egg. White is not egg. Yolk is not egg. Shell is not egg.

So, do you see those kind of, we try to use human terms and human analogies to connect that, but it's not quite that easy. So, maybe that's a bit too much theology for Sunday morning, and so we'll move on.

But it's important to remember and affirm this. Affirm the Trinity because it's a core belief of our faith. So, second, what does the name Mighty God mean with a more complete understanding of what it might have meant to Isaiah or what it might have meant to folks in the first century church who equated this prophetic name from the Old Testament with the identity of the Messiah with the man, Jesus, connected all those dots.

What does it mean to say that the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah in our central verses for this series is Mighty God? Well, let's recognize that progression of thought.

Isaiah declared the Messiah to be Mighty God. We recognize Jesus as the Messiah, right?

Everyone can nod.

[12:43] and that makes Jesus himself Mighty God. Do you see that progression of thought and how it connects back? When we refer to the might of God, God's power, we often use another word, Almighty.

Mighty. And that's another way we may describe that characteristic of God is to say that God is Omnipotent, All-Powerful, All-Mighty, All-Powerful.

God is not simply Mighty, although Mighty is a big deal to us. God is not simply Mighty as though he were Mighty among others who have significant power.

Do you recognize that? So I got thinking about I studied mythology in university. So Greek and Roman mythology, they had a pantheon of gods who were essentially the same degree of power, except for maybe Zeus if you're Greek, in the Greek culture, or Jupiter who is the equivalent in the Roman culture.

So essentially all this pantheon of gods, all these other gods were equally powerful pretty much. So we're not saying that our God is a God who has power among other gods who are of equal power.

[14:11] We're saying that God is Almighty. God is Omnipotent. He is All-Powerful. And as an equal member of the Trinity then, Jesus himself as God is also powerful.

He is also Almighty. And in Jesus, we see that great power revealed through his miracles.

Right? As he healed people, as he cast out demons, he did so many things that declared and demonstrated not his own personal power, but the power of God, Almighty God.

And as we consider the power of God in the context of this season, in the context of the birth of the Son of God, Jesus, as a human baby, we can recognize something else.

Our God sure loves to mess with our conceptions or misconceptions of conception, doesn't he? when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her she was to give birth to a baby boy whose name was to be Jesus, Mary's a smart girl.

[15:39] She thinks, no, no, no, nope, pretty sure she's positive. That's not possible. simple. Right?

Simple biology. She's pretty sure it's not possible. And Gabriel responds to Mary in Luke 1 verse 37 reminding her, for nothing is impossible with God.

As the disciples wrestle with the idea that a rich man can't buy his way into heaven, and then they begin to start to think, well, it must be impossible for anyone to be saved then.

We read in the Bible, in Matthew 19 verse 26, Jesus looked at them and said, with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

My friends, think of the greatest challenge in your life. The obstacles that seem to you to be impossible to overcome.

[16 : 52] The relationships that seem beyond repair. The hurt that you aren't able to forgive when you reflect on it. Can you look at them from the perspective that God is in your corner?

That God is with you. Can you reflect on the fact that you have his power at your disposal to make it through?

And can that perspective remind you to ask God for his power in your life to help you? Mighty God. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 3 verse 20, and this is one of my favorite benedictions. Vern teases me because he says, well, you often say this is my favorite passage.

This is my favorite. I just love the Bible, which is probably a good thing for a pastor. This is one of my favorite benedictions, but I want to share it here. It's in fact one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture.

[18 : 01] Ephesians 3 verse 20. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. According to his power, hear this, that is at work within us.

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Mighty God. Friends, what may seem impossible to you is not impossible to God.

Lean on him. Ask for his help in whatever circumstances you're facing because I guarantee you that your mighty God will come through.

As I've said previously in this series, I think we can so easily compartmentalize our understanding of our picture of Jesus depending on the time of year.

[19 : 11] At Christmas we lock in on the baby Jesus. For daily encouragement we may connect more with Jesus in his adult ministry as it's told in the gospels the things that Jesus said and did.

And as we get close to the end of our lives we may reflect more on the crucified and risen Jesus as our personal eternal hope.

Friends, the baby Jesus that we're talking about at this time of year is the same Jesus who washed feet, who healed the sick, who ate with sinners.

That same Jesus died on a cross, was buried and rose again as our Savior and risen Lord, our Messiah and our King.

That same Jesus is our mighty God and our eternal hope. May a deeper understanding of what it means to say that Jesus is your mighty God be one of the amazing gifts that you unwrap this season.

[20 : 25] Amen.