

A Christmas message

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[0:00] We've got one more song which we're going to sing in a moment, but first I thought we would stop for a few minutes and think about what we've been hearing.

We've got one more song which we've been hearing about 700 years before Christ, so 2,700 odd years ago. For to us a child is born, for 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 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.

However, the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. I'd like us to think about that prophecy for a few minutes.

At the time of writing, it was the prophecy of a child yet to be born. I know it says, to us a child is born, to us a son is given, but it's looking forward. And it's particularly a prophecy about his government and his rule.

[1:49] And right at the end is a sentence which talks about the motivation behind it, and I'd like us to think about those three things. So, first of all, the child yet to be born.

He's described. He's described in four ways. He will be called Wonderful Counselor. So, the word wonder in Hebrew is something that you say, wow, that's wonderful.

A wonder. A counselor who can form plans. And the plans, you would say, wow, that's amazing. A wonderful counselor. He's also referred to as Mighty God.

So, it's the standard word for God, and then in front of it is the word which says, mighty, strong, powerful, mighty God. And then he's referred to as Prince of Peace, and there's a little pun that goes on in the original because both those words begin with an S.

He's the Sar Shalom. He's the Prince of Peace. The Prince of Peace. And I missed out. He's the everlasting father.

[2:59] And there's a little pun in the original that goes on there as well because the words sound the same or sound similar. And the everlasting father. And those four descriptions of this baby.

Rather amazing descriptions. Something about his duration. Something about his power. The increase in his government.

There will be no end. He will reign forever and ever. That's his duration. His power. Mighty. His intellect. He's a wonderful counselor.

And his program. A program of peace. So, something about his mode of relating to people. He's called a father.

And it also says something about his being. That he is mighty God. He's God. Quite a list of things, isn't it? And I'm going to ask whether you think that's a good thing or a bad thing.

[4:04] Do you think it's a good thing or a bad thing? Do you think it's a good thing or a bad thing that such a ruler should be prophesied? And I think we would say it's a good thing, isn't it?

Are the leaders that we have? There are many admirable politicians. And there are some awful politicians. But they're all limited in their wisdom.

So, as we see at the present time, they've put all the heads of state together to solve the war in Syria. And they can't do it. We hope that they'll be helped to do so.

But there's no instant solution. And to solve the refugee crisis. But this person here is said to be a wonderful counselor. He can come up with solutions that would take your breath away. Wow. That's a wonderful idea. Why didn't anybody else think of it? Our human leaders are limited in their resources.

[5:08] So, we face cutbacks because there isn't enough money. Not enough people. Et cetera, et cetera. But this leader is said to be mighty.

There's no sense of his being limited in his resources. He is the mighty God. And you could also, with some justification, I think, say that our politicians don't always understand people. Don't always understand what it's like to be on the receiving end of whatever it is. But this leader is said to be a father.

In the nature of a father. A good father. A father doing his job properly to understand his children. So, if I were to say, is this leader that's portrayed here a good thing or a bad thing?

I think we ought to say. I think we would say it's a good thing, isn't it? This is what ought to be. An excellent person. But then I'd ask the question, is it possible to have such a ruler?

[6:16] Is it a good thing or a bad thing? I think it's a good thing. Is it possible, though? Because that list of descriptions just seems like a conundrum, doesn't it?

But how can somebody be like that? How can they be mighty God? Well, actually, the rulers of the Roman Empire regularly thought that they were God.

And wanted themselves to be worshipped. And set themselves up in that sort of way. But they weren't really God. They were just pretending. They believed their own PR.

Which is always a mistake. But if we were to say, does Jesus fit this? The answer would have to be yes. Because all the conundrums about being compassionate and almighty.

And being human. A child is born. And being mighty God. They all amazingly fit together in Jesus. Jesus is an amazing person. If you read the story of Jesus.

[7:24] And I do recommend that you do so. You'll find that often people heard him say something. Saw him do something. And went, wow. Often says people were amazed.

So is it possible to have somebody who fits this bill? Well, I think it is. If it's Jesus. You just have to look at his character. And his words.

And his deeds. And people did worship him. They also crucified him. But they did worship him. Let's move on to think about his government.

It says of his government. Of the increase of his government and of 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. So again, I ask. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Is this something?

[8:24] You think, well, I don't want any of that. Or do you think that's an admirable thing? Well, I don't see how we could object. It says that it's a kingdom of justice and righteousness.

Of his government and peace. There will be no end. Peace seems like a good thing. It seems what we were. What human beings always aspire to, isn't it? We don't want division.

We don't want conflict. We want there to be peace. It just seems so elusive. But of this person, it says. Of his government and peace. There will be no end. And the quality of his kingdom.

Is justice and righteousness. It uses two classic Hebrew words. which are full of resonance. Justice. Righteousness.

Goodness. Fairness. A good thing or a bad thing? I think that's a great thing. Great, isn't it? And then I ask the question. Is this possible?

[9:26] Well, for human rulers, it isn't possible. Because none of them have a government of which there is no end. It's just not possible.

And it cannot be said of our political rulers that they establish justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. It's just not possible.

Well, it's not possible except if you put Jesus into the equation. Because Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead and never dies again.

And he fits this exactly. The Bible has a dream of the forever king. And nobody fits it except Jesus.

So, let's come to the third thing, which is the bit at the end. Because as I've described this Bible text so far, it seems so good.

[10:34] Why isn't everybody talking about it? Why isn't it on the text of every Christmas card? Why isn't every song about the king who will reign in this way forever and ever?

Establishing and upholding a kingdom of justice and righteousness. And when I was preparing this, I'd got quite a long way. I thought, this is all, it seems to make sense to me at any rate.

And I got to this bit and I got stuck. Why isn't, if the text is so good, if this person is so good, why isn't everyone talking about him?

Why isn't everybody saying, yeah, he's the great one? Why not? And I got stuck. I couldn't think of a good reason. I mean, there are a couple of reasons that come to mind.

One is a timing thing, because the way Jesus operated, he said, I don't do everything at once.

[11:37] Some of the things that he promises that he will do, he does by way of delay. So, as you will know, when he died on the cross, he rose again from the dead and he went into heaven.

He says, I will return in due course. Well, that hasn't happened yet. There's a delay before he finally comes and does everything that he said he will do. So, that's one of the reasons.

There's a delay factor. And some of these things haven't, don't seem to have happened yet. He doesn't bring perfect peace. So, there's a delay. That's certainly one of the reasons.

But, is that the whole reason? I think there's another reason. How shall I describe it? I think human nature.

Because, well, let me just say what happened when Jesus was born. Do you remember there was no room for him at the inn?

[12:46] He was an outsider. And do you remember what happened to him at his death? That people said, crucify him, crucify him.

We don't want this man to rule over us. And if we go back to that story in the garden where human beings said, we don't want God to do his thing his way.

We want, you know, they snatched at the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and said, we want it our way. And I have to say, and it's an embarrassing thing to have to say, and indeed it's a sort of offensive thing really to say, we as our human race say to God, no matter how wonderful the offer you make to us, we don't want you telling us that stuff.

We don't want you telling us what to do, how to live, what to believe. We don't want anybody telling us that. And certainly not God. It's a terrible thing to say. But I think that's what the Bible says is what's happening.

It's a sad thing. It's a sad thing. But I don't want to leave us on a sad note because the text ends up saying, the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

[14:14] The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. And God says, I feel passionately about this. I will have Jesus reigning.

I will have him on the throne. I will have his kingdom achieved. I will have men and women and boys and girls from all nations believing in him, worshipping him, serving him.

And although he hasn't finished that process, he has certainly started it. Of all the religions in the world, you might think, well, Christianity is sort of way down and is of the past.

But actually the statistics are not saying that at all. Christianity is a fast-growing religion. Christianity is a fast-growing religion. Perhaps not in the UK, but if you look at it globally. The zeal of the Lord Almighty is accomplishing what he said.

I'm so pleased that God is not thwarted by the poor choices that we sometimes make.

[15:28] Jesus will rule forever. He's just beginning that process. He's beginning it a life at a time, a heart at a time, a soul at a time.

And maybe he's even doing that with his eyes on you this evening, at this very moment. For to us a child is born.

To us a son is given. And the government will be on his shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. It's good news.

Let's sing together the last song.