

An Authority That Frees

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[0 : 00] Father, we give you thanks and praise that you know us perfectly, and knowing us perfectly, still you sent Jesus to die upon the cross.

We give you thanks and praise that Jesus knows us perfectly. In fact, he knows us better than ourselves, since he bore every one of our sins in his person when he died upon the cross. So we thank you, Father, that knowing us so perfectly, still you loved us. That we are your precious possession. And Father, you know how often we struggle with things without even realizing what we're really struggling about.

But you know, you know, and you desire, Father, to have us be so gripped by the gospel, have the Holy Spirit so powerful in our lives, and have your word so real to us, and know Jesus so closely, that you would help us in the midst of our various troubles and stresses and anxieties, our delights and our tasks.

So we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would do a quiet but wonderful work in our midst this morning, as we think upon your word, that we might be disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, learning to live day by day for your glory.

[1 : 21] And this we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. So my wife would tell you, she's a good wife, she doesn't normally go around saying things like this, but she would tell you that it continues to surprise her how clueless I can be.

Even after many years of marriage, there are times she just goes, like, what were you thinking? Like, how could you do that? And there's still times like that.

When I was in my mid-30s, I was having some real problems in my life, and some things in my life were sort of breaking down. And so at the age of 36, I think I was, maybe I was 37, I went into some counseling for the first time in my life.

And after I'd been in counseling for a bit of a while, one day the counselor said to me, George, has it ever struck you that you're a very anxious person? And I was gobsmacked.

That's an old Irish expression for just being completely and utterly like this, the deer in the headlights. It had never dawned on me that I struggled with anxiety.

[2 : 40] 36, it never sort of struck me that I had lots of stress in my life and I struggled with anxiety. At 36, I've talked to lots of people who don't recognize stress in their lives and don't recognize their anxiety, so I understand now that it's not exactly just a George cluelessness that, in fact, many of us don't recognize when we're actually feeling a great deal of anxiety.

The text that we're going to look at today actually has a profound comfort for those of us who knowingly or unknowingly are living with stress and anxiety.

So we're going to look at it. It's from Isaiah chapter 9, verses 1 to 7. Really, we're going to look primarily at verse 6, but it's worth it to look through all of the text to try to get just a bit of a sense about how this text is this profound comfort for those of us who struggle with anxiety.

So here's where it is. Actually, just before we look at the text, there's this wonderful thing. Many of you know that I love this phrase from Winston Churchill. Winston Churchill was using it about Russia.

I think he said it in 1939, just after the Second World War had begun, and he referred to Russia in this term. And I don't know how true it is of Russia, but I know that there's lots of things in life that this is a very, very helpful expression.

[4 : 03] And Christmas is the beginning of the answer to a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. And we're going to see that as we start to look at the text, that there's, you know, just like in our own lives, a lot of times in our own lives, to ourselves we're often a riddle.

How did I put it? How did he put it? A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. And the text has a riddle wrapped in a, how do I put it, wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

And it's part of the thing which makes the text so interesting once you start to look at it. And here's how the text, but now just in terms of the literary flow of the text, right? Because Isaiah is a book.

And so in the book, it's all part of, this text is all part of the same literary unit as the part we looked at last week in Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14.

And then in that text, some of you might remember, it's the great text where there's this prophecy that a virgin shall give birth to a child and they'll name this child Emmanuel, God with us.

And I didn't mention this last week, but it literally means God with us. If you look at the Hebrew, the word Emmanuel, the last little bit, El, is the word that only refers to God.

[5 : 16] It's not the generic word for God. It's one of the two Old Testament words, especially in Isaiah, that refers to the God of Israel. And it's so literally, it's saying that this, a virgin will give birth to a child and this child is actually God with us.

And so this text that we're looking at today is part of the same literary unit. It does all sorts of things in this whole literary unit. But the part just before this is God talking to Israel or the prophet talking to Israel about how, it's talking about Israel going through a very, very, very dark time.

A very, very heavy and dark time. And, you know, sometimes we don't like the image of dark, but it's a good image.

Last night, my wife had gone to bed just a few minutes before me and she very appropriately turned the lights out. So I come into the room and I'm turning the lights off as I go and I come into the room and it's dark and it's Christmas on Wednesday in case you didn't know.

And so we have a whole pile of Christmas presents in our bedroom unwrapped yet, but still piles of Christmas presents. So I come in from the bright light into the darkness and I go to go to the bathroom and of course I trip over a pile of Christmas presents that aren't usually there but have been placed there and I can't see them.

[6 : 39] And that's a very powerful image, isn't it? That when we're very, very confused about things and we can't understand things that it's a good word to understand that we're in a time of darkness. And so just before this they're describing a time of darkness in the life of Israel and now the prophet begins to this final sort of bit for the literary unit in the book of Isaiah and here's how it goes.

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he, that's referring to God, brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.

But in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them has light shone. Now just sort of pause about here. Remember I said that there's a whole range like the people, the Jewish people who are reading this at the time, they wouldn't have understood a lot of what was going on.

One of the reasons probably that Isaiah was recognized as a prophet by the ancient Jews is that so many of his more immediate prophecies actually came to pass. But for those who are reading this a little bit later and then maybe for those of us, those Jewish people who are reading this in the, in the, in the about 50 years, 30 or 40 years after he died, this would have been a very, very puzzling part of the text.

[8 : 09] Because as we talked about a little bit last week, one of Isaiah's astonishing prophecies in the year 735 or 734 BC was that the Assyrian nation was going to invade and destroy Syria and, and the Assyrian nation was going to invade the northern part of the Jewish kingdom because the, there were two Jewish kingdoms, Israel and Judah.

And the, the Assyrians were going to come in and they were going to completely and utterly annihilate the nation. And that prophecy came true. In fact, by the year 670, 670 BC, there had been, because Assyria was a very, very, very cruel empire.

And part of its cruelty was that they would take large parts of the population and they would have them go on forced marches great distances and relocate them very, very far away from their homeland.

And they would take another part of their conquered people and put them on a forced march into where, like it was a bit of a, you know, they'd take some from here to go there and they'd take some from here to go there and they'd move them all around.

It was a way to break up people's ancient connections with tribes and kings and with the land to create a type of a, of a disconnected humanity that was very easy for them to oppress.

[9 : 28] And so, what happened is that by the year 670 BC, Isaiah's prophecy came to fulfillment that the ten and a half tribes that made up the northern kingdom of Israel, they've been completely and utterly lost from history.

Every single, as I shared last week, every single Jewish person you know is descended from one of the two and a half tribes that were in the south in Judah because the northern Jewish people completely and utterly disappear from history.

And so, Isaiah in chapter 7 makes this prophecy that the northern kingdom is going to be completely and utterly destroyed. And in fact, what happens is when Assyria comes, as often happens, I mean, generally speaking, Israel's enemies have either come from the south, usually Egypt, or they've come from the north.

And today, it would be Lebanon and Syria or Jordan. But Israel's enemies came in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali first. So, it's a bit of a puzzle because on one hand, the people reading this, especially after 670, would say, that's so odd.

Isaiah's talking as if, and here's another thing about it. One of the things, if you look at the verb tenses all the way through this part that we're going to read, it's very, very interesting, but often it's in the past tense.

[10 : 48] And it's a very particular literary device used by, in Jewish prophetic literature, that the future is so certain, we're going to talk about it as if it's in the past tense.

That's how certain the future is. It's so future, so guaranteed by God, I'm going to talk about it as if it's already happened. And so, for Jewish people, they would have looked at it and say, a moment, like those before 670 would have just thought, wouldn't have known, they would have had one meaning, but after 670, they would have said, there's no Jewish people left there.

Like, how is, like there's a riddle here. By the way, just as an aside, I don't talk about it very much, but God isn't finished with the Jewish people.

A Jewish person doesn't become, doesn't go to heaven, isn't made right with God by being Jewish. They have to know the Messiah. But God isn't finished with the Jewish people.

That's what, that's what the New Testament fundamentally teaches. And this is part of it here, this little bit of a mystery here that Jewish people, by the time of the, by the time of Jesus, Jewish people had started to move back in.

[12 : 04] And part of the reason that Galilee was viewed as a little bit suspect was that they, they often were very close to pagan villages. But the Jewish people had moved in by the time of Jesus.

And it's why, amongst other things, is that if you look at Matthew chapter 4, Matthew says, when he describes Jesus beginning his preaching ministry after his baptism by John the Baptist, that Matthew 4, Matthew says that this is a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 9 being fulfilled. It's the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy because Jesus begins his preaching in the areas that were depopulated, where Assyria had first come in. And that's where he begins his preaching ministry.

And so there's a bit of a, you know, a bit of a riddle here. In 650 BC, they wouldn't have, it would have been beyond their wildest dreams that there would be Jewish people living there.

They would have not known entirely what this meant because there's so many riddles within the text. But Jesus begins his ministry in an area amongst Jewish people in an area that earlier on Isaiah said they are wiped out.

[13 : 17] And we can now see that both of those prophecies came true, actually, can't we? Then he moves to these very, very, very powerful images about what God is going to do in their midst.

And it's seen in verses 3 to 5. If you want to follow along with me. You have multiplied the nation, verse 3, you have increased its joy, they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

For the yoke of his burden and the staffer is a shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in the battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

Now, the heart of these two images is this. There's a harvest image and there's a battle image. And at the heart of both of these images is this fundamental idea that, like in the harvest image, the image is that God is like a farmer but God has tilled the land, God has watered the land, God has

planted the seed, God has plucked out the weeds, the harvest has come, it's God's harvest, and then God actually brings in the harvest and then after all the work is done, he invites people to come and enjoy the harvest.

But it's all done by him. And in the battle image, and it's emphasized by this image of Midian, in the battle image, the image is that there's a great battle against Israel's enemies, against the people of God's enemies.

[14:53] And God defeats, does everything. He takes on the enemies, he defeats the enemies, they're completely and utterly defeated, and then people get to come in and enjoy the victory that he has accomplished.

Those are the two images which are going on here. And if you're wondering a little bit about the weapons and the bloody boots and all of that type and the bloody clothes. Some of you know I was in Israel in the last little bit of October.

And we began, I was part of the tour, and we spent the first couple of days around the Sea of Galilee. And one day we were driving from our hotel in Tiberias up to the Golan Heights. It was really interesting. I really, it was really sort of neat. We got to actually go within 500 yards of the Syrian border. And we also, and we were two kilometers away from the Lebanese border. We were able to see in the distance two villages, one controlled by, I think it was Al-Qaeda, one controlled by Hezbollah. And our guide who was a just retired major, we had two guides at that point in time.

[16:05] We had a military, a former military major of the Northern Israeli Command. And he talked about how sometimes you can come up there and you can see the two villages fighting at each other.

And he confessed that as an Israeli on one hand, of course, he hates to see any bloodshot. On the other hand, he's glad that they're fighting each other because it means they're not attacking us. But we're right up there at the border.

But before we got there, he's talking about different things and our tour guide is talking about different things. And all of a sudden, the tour guide interrupts them and says, oh, oh, oh, we have to make sure they understand what's happening.

And he smiles a big smile and he said, okay, just in a few seconds, we're going to go over the mighty Jordan River. And, of course, it's really funny because the Jordan River is about the distance from the end of that chair to the door.

Like, the Jordan River, it's not very, the Jordan's not very wide. Like, it's tiny. So, some people say, well, what's the big deal about all the things in the Bible about the Jordan River and crossing it?

[17:07] And the guy said, well, amongst other things, he said, it's deep. I mean, people back then, a tall person was five foot tall. I mean, obviously, there were people higher than tall, but most people were five foot tall.

In the time of the Roman Empire, most of the soldiers that were doing the fighting were five foot tall. And so, when they had a shield that was four foot tall, it doesn't take much to get underneath to be protected by a shield that's four foot tall when you're only five foot tall.

And he said, so the water's deep and so it's hard to cross. They couldn't swim. So, somebody said to him, well, why didn't they just build a bridge? It's not a very big river. And he said, look around. If you're there, look around.

There's no trees. Like, there's no trees. There aren't. No trees. So, how would they build a bridge? It's a big deal. It's a big accomplishment.

Even today, if you couldn't swim to get across a river that's higher than you and to bring all your family and your goods and everything like that and there's no trees. So, this part of the text here about the burning of the clothes and the weapons, it's something that, especially Jewish people, they would have instantly understood.

[18:15] They're practical people. And here, God has won a wonderful victory. All the enemies destroyed and God is God. And so, you know what?

All these weapons of war, you don't need them anymore because God's won the battle. But you know what? They're really, really handy to heat the house. And they're really handy to cook on. Like, why waste it?

You're not going to wear the clothes. It's all filled with blood and yuck. But it dries and you burn it and you use it. It's a very, very, it's part of the spoils of the battle which is being described here.

And it's a very, very powerful image. Now, I have to confess that, so, so, some of you, if, some of you have been to our Christmas Eve seven o'clock service or a Christmas morning service and one of the things I do at those services is, you know, even though I had all these kids, God, I didn't get that thing about being able to do good kids stories.

Like, that's somehow missing in me. So, a few years ago it was always a struggle. I have to do something at Christmas for the kids, you know. Just like, it's like nothing, right?

[19 : 25] So, a few years I discovered that there's many movies that you can get for either free or very little price. So, my Christmas Eve sermon and Christmas morning sermon, I interspersed, I talked for like four minutes, people were starting to go, kids are getting restless.

I put on a movie. They all perk up and they go back to speaking for four minutes or five minutes. They all start to get restless or fall asleep. I put on a movie.

So, here's the thing. For those of you who are parents, I came across this spectacular Christmas mini movie called There's a Dragon at My Nativity.

And it shows a dragon swallowing things and there's the stable but beside the stable there's this huge dragon sort of drooling because it wants to eat the baby.

And I'm trying to decide if I should show it. So, I think I should. I think I'll just warn the parents that if you have kids it's going to be too scary. Cover their eyes for this next three minute video because it's really cool.

[20 : 24] I think it's really cool and if you come on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning you'll get to see it. But here's the thing. Here's the riddle. So, you hear about there's this going to be this like the main images are all around this image of battle that all of you who are oppressed and under the yoke of slavery under the yoke of an oppressor that yoke will be broken.

All the people who have staves and rods that beat you on the shoulder and beat you on the back this mighty warrior is going to come and he's going to take them all out of people's hands he's going to break them and all of the enemies are all going to be defeated.

So, what is the image? What's this all leading us to? Is it going to be something like Godzilla? Is it going to be something like a mighty giant way, way, way taller with unbelievably big muscles? Is it going to be something like a superhero who can fire things with his hands?

Is it going to be something like a volcano? They would have seen massive storms. Is it going to be like a lightning storm that somehow is like a person but can do things?

Like, what's it going to be? And so, it comes to the whole climax and it's a baby. That's the whole thing about the dragon in my nativity thing.

[21 : 41] That's why I think it could be a really cool thing. It's a baby. Like, it's a baby? Like, it's a baby. All the enemies defeated, it's a baby.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

Remember, this future is so certain they use the past. For the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. That's the part that I missed earlier about the Midian image. We're going to be doing a series of, we're going to go through all the book of Judges in the new year and the Midian reference, some of you will remember the story once I start to tell it to you in the previous text because the emphasis on the text is that God's going to do all of this.

It's not going to be any way that any human being can think that they were responsible. And one of the wonderful stories in the book of Judges is the story of Gideon, right? So God raises up Gideon to deliver the people of Israel from this terrible oppressor.

[22 : 59] So Gideon gathers a huge army, thousands, tens of thousands of people and God says to Gideon, the army's too big. You can just imagine, I don't know if there's any military people here but generally, the army's too big is not normally what a general wants to hear.

Normally they say, give me a bigger army. Send me 30,000 extra troops. But God says to Gideon, the army's too big. And so he tells Gideon what to say, almost everybody leaves.

And then God looks at the army and he says to Gideon, the army's still too big. And he gives them some other tests so that more people will leave. And when it's all over, he's left with 300 people against tens and tens and tens of thousands of Midianites.

And what's the point of the story is that God wants to show Gideon that he won the battle. There's no way that Gideon can say it's because of my cleverness, because I'm such a good general, because we fought so hard, because our muscles are big or anything like that.

It's one of these powerful lessons that God wins the battle. And yet when it comes down to the culmination of it all, it's this very, very simple mystery that it's all about a baby being born.

[24 : 14] Actually, why don't you just all read this text with me? Some of you have to fight yourself from bursting into song, I know. But let's just read it. For to us, a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Remember, at the beginning of the sermon, I said that one of the things that was a shock to me at 36 was to discover that I was actually an anxious person without realizing it, that I didn't experience my anxiety directly, but because I found anxiety so unpleasant, and I found the stress so unpleasant, I either didn't recognize it or I did other types of things to mask my anxiety, to dull my anxiety, to dull my stress, and it ends up leading to me acting out in ways that were further unhealthy, which of course create more anxiety, which create more covering it up and masking it and not experience it directly, which means more acting up, which makes you feel more, you know, it's a very, very terrible way to live.

It's a very, very, very, very terrible way to live. And it's even harder if you watch somebody else struggling with that and you realize that they're caught in this cycle of not really dealing with the stress and anxiety in their lives.

And so, I mean, I still have times when I struggle with anxiety. And, you know, one of the things I'm just so thankful for, and I think in heaven I'll discover that it's not because of anything to me.

I'll probably discover in heaven that somebody was praying for me at that instant. And it's as if God will speak to me and say, because I'll be really worried about something going on in the church.

[25 : 58] I'll be worried about the money or I'll be worried about some type of decision or I'll be worried about something in my family or I'll just be worried about something in my marriage. Not that I have stuff to worry about all the time in my marriage, but, you know, you've married for a while, there's things that are worrisome in marriages.

If I didn't say that, I'd be lying to you. People who've been married for very long who say that they've never had anything worrisome in their marriage is probably not telling you the truth. Sorry.

That's life. And it can be really, really, you can get, you know, weighed down by things and I can be really get down on myself and just feel a type of darkness and coming on me.

And it's as if many, many, many, many times a phrase from this and other similar passages will just really be brought home to me by the Holy Spirit. Look at it again.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And I have this, it's as if God reminds me, George, if you try to carry Church of the Messiah, it will crush you.

[27 : 04] George, if you try to carry your life and your health and your finances, it will crush you. If you try to carry your marriage, it will crush you.

If you try to carry this problem, it will crush you. You see, the wonderful truth is that Jesus carries me and he carries the church.

And he carries my marriage. He carries those problems and anxieties that I have in my life. He carries them. Just as he carries me.

And, you know, here's the wonderful thing. I've only had a couple of times I've tried to describe this to non-Christians. You can pray that I have more time to try to explain this to a non-Christian because, you know, for many people, you'd think that if you have this image that Jesus is carrying you and he's carrying the problem, you'd think that this means you can go, whoa, okay, if that's the case, I'm going to go home.

On the way home, I'm going to get a big bag of chips. I'm going to get a six-pack of beer. I'm going to binge watch Netflix and just drink the beer and eat the potato chips because God's going to handle the whole thing.

[28 : 31] But here's the amazing thing about the gospel. You see, amongst other, remember I said that this text is that there's all these mysteries and riddles and enigmas in the text.

Like, how is it that a baby is going to do this? How is it that a baby is God? Because that's what mighty God means. Mighty God means God. How is it that God is going to take on flesh and

actually be born as a baby?

How is it that this is going to be somehow a descendant of David, his son, yet it's also going to be God? Because that's what the text is saying. Many Jewish people try to evade this text, but it's a fundamental mystery of the text.

The Hebrew, all of it, it points to this fundamental mystery and riddle. And the fact of the matter is, is that the wonder of the gospel is that God himself takes on human flesh.

And he is God with us, as Isaiah prophesied just a few verses earlier. And he really was with us.

And he's with me even to the point of my future death upon the cross.

[29 : 49] And on the cross, he is so deeply with me. And he is so deeply concerned that his order of shalom would be what characterizes the fundamental eternal order of my life.

That he himself takes upon himself all my disorder, all my sickness, all my wounds, all my shame, all my sin.

And on the cross, he bears it all. He bears it all.

And when that gospel truth, I mean, part of the growth in a Christian life is receiving that for the first time. But the other part of the Christian faith is that that truth becomes more and more and more real and precious to us at a very, very deep level of who we are, at the level of our identity, at the level of our emotions, at the level of our basic thinking and worldview, that that truth grips us more and more and more and more.

And the funny thing about it is that because it's so freely given, all in grace, that God, in his zeal for me and for you, does all of this, when that truth grips us, the result is never laziness and fate, but a freedom to act.

[31 : 29] And so it is that when I have these times in my life where I'm weighed down by thinking about these decisions I have to make or different times in the church's history or my other churches that I've served in where there's been, you know, a financial issue or some other type of strategic issue or conflict in the church or conflict amongst staff or conflict amongst leaders or anything like that that's going on or problems in my family or in my personal life or whatever it is and I start to get weighed down on it.

And I just, this text comes to me again where a similar text for to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon the authority, the rule is upon his shoulder.

His shoulder. I'm on his shoulders. That's partially what it means to be a Christian, that Jesus has redeemed me and I am now carried by him and he carries this other problem.

And every time, as that truth grips me, the result isn't that I want to go home, pick up the six pack and buy a bag of chips and just binge on Netflix. The result is a lightning of the load and you look around and say, okay, what steps can I take?

Like, that's how it actually works. What steps can I take? Like, what can I do? You know, Lord, guide me. You know what? And then, you know, maybe a phone call or whatever.

[32 : 49] It doesn't mean that there's still not a series where it's still difficult. I'm not saying it's just, it's not magic. But the reminder of the truth that I am on his shoulders and he is shouldering this burden brings light and brings freedom to try to deal with it.

That's how it works. See, and that's what's so wonderful about these other phrases as well that we can just pray and I'm just going to sort of close with these.

Look at these phrases. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Wonderful Counselor means, in a sense, not just a counselor, basically it's an idea of supernatural counsel. Many of us, I mean, every single one of us needs counsel.

We need advice. And it means that of the very, very nature of Jesus is that he is wise. And he is both from outside of this world, he's eternal, he's transcendent, he's omnipotent.

[34 : 11] But at the same time, he was one who came and dwelt among us, who there is no trial or temptation that we have undergone that he has not undergone as well. And he knows the problems in our life far better than we know the problems of our life because he died for things that we're not even aware of that we were sinning when we did them.

I mean, you know, for those of us who get a little bit older, I've shared with it before, you don't maybe realize some of the ways you've sinned with your kids until they call you later on and say, you know what, you did that was wrong.

Or maybe a co-worker or maybe one of your employees or something like that and they tell you later on and you didn't at the time think it was wrong and you realize it was wrong. Even the things that we don't know of, Jesus knows those things about us and so we can call out to him for counsel. I mean, I actually don't really always know how it is that a person who doesn't, can't call out on Jesus for prayer and wisdom and advice, like, how hard it must be to live without knowing that you can call on God, on Jesus who died for you and ask for his wisdom.

I know in heaven there'll be many, many, God will show me all the times I didn't listen to his advice. You know, pray for me. But he is wonderful counselor and he's mighty God.

[35 : 45] and this is something which has become an important part of my prayer life over the last 10 years in particular because one of the things that would cause me anxiety is I would think that these problems are really big, like bigger than this building, like bigger than the Rockies and how on earth could I ever deal with them and it was really hard for me to get my mind around.

It was one of those until the scriptures started to come really home to me that however big my problem is, God is bigger than my problem. I mean, one of the things that's so easy for us to get despairing about our country, it's very easy to get despairing about the world, I just want to remind you no matter how big Trudeau is or the government is or the opposition is, Jesus is bigger.

No matter how big Brexit seems to be, no matter how big Trump or Pelosi seem to be, Jesus is bigger. He is bigger. He is bigger than every problem I face and he is the mighty God.

It's a warrior image. It portrays Jesus as the ruler who is both supernaturally and eternally transcendently yet imminently wise and he is the one who is bigger than any obstacle.

He is bigger than Satan. He is bigger than anything that we will face and he is bigger and he is able and present and powerful and active and able to deal with it. And he is also the everlasting father, the prince of peace.

[37 : 25] Everlasting father here, it's not confusing the Trinity, it's an Old Testament word to describe the king, the perfect king, the father that we wish we had. Maybe some of us have had such a perfect father, but the father that we wish that we had who sees that it is his obligation to care and protect for his family.

And God has described that the perfect king is one who described that he sees his people as his children and that he will do what he should do not for his own glory, not for the furtherance of his empire, but to protect and care and nurture, provide for his people.

And then this final thing which I'll end on, that he is the prince of peace. This is a very, very, very, very important analogy in my life and hopefully after I share with it with you as well.

You know, almost every single time in the Old Testament and the New Testament when the Bible talks about the word peace, it doesn't mean an emotion. It means a type of order. See, what we need to pray about isn't that God would give me peace, but that God's peaceful order would order me.

See, the word is shalom and the basic idea of shalom, some of you have heard me share this before, is it used to be, I don't know if they still do it anymore, they probably don't, but it used to be that you'd see mobiles, right, and a mobile is something with little sticks and pieces of string or, you know, fishing, you know, whatever that, fishing line and at the end of the fish, the sticks, at the end of the fishing line there would be some little object, a plane or an animal or something and you could occasionally back in the day see these very, very elaborate mobiles which had lots of different sticks all going out in different directions and the sticks and all the whole mobile if it's done really well it can have different heavy things and small things and if you have a small thing and a heavy thing then the stick has to be balanced in a particular way and then this balance has to be balanced with this which has to be balanced with this and if it's very, very well done you can have a very, very complicated mobile so that the least little bit of breathe and it just moves very, very, it just moves a tiny bit from the tiny breezes in the house and if you just think of that type of mobile with some sticks this long and some sticks that long and some sticks with the cord right in the middle and some words right here at the end because you have a tiny, a big heavy thing and a tiny thing and if you see that, you think that type of order that's what shalom is.

[40 : 06] That's what shalom is. Shalom is when God has ordered things so that there's a proper order of me towards creation. There is a proper order towards me, towards the plants in my house, towards the animals in my house, a proper order towards me and the children, a proper order towards me and my neighbor, a proper order towards me and my brothers and sisters, a proper order towards me and the government, a proper order towards me and my God, a proper order, an

order of peace, of balance, of harmony, of beauty.

That's what shalom is. And so Jesus is the prince of this order. So what I need in my life isn't the feeling of peace.

I mean, for those of us who struggle with addictions, you use the Jack Daniels to give you peace and your life is in chaos. Use the drug to give you peace but your life is in chaos.

You use shopping and debt to give you a sense of peace but your life is in chaos. We don't need a feeling of peace while our life is in chaos.

us, we need shalom. We need the prince of shalom to bring his shalom to order our lives.

[41 : 28] And that's what this text is inviting us to pray into. Jesus, you carry me and you carry my problems. You are bigger than my problems. You are the mighty God.

You are the wonderful counselor. I need your counsel. You are the one who cares for me and will protect me. I need you to be my fortress. And most of all, I need your order in my life.

I need your peaceful order in my life. I need your peaceful order in my church. I need your peaceful order in my family. Lord Jesus, come. Babe of Bethlehem, come. Crucified Jesus, come.

Risen Jesus, come. Returning Jesus, come. And bring your peaceful order into my life. I invite you to stand. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Father, you know those amongst us who struggle with addiction issues. You know those of us who struggle with them. And we ask, Father, that for each person here who struggles with that, that you would grip them with the gospel.

[42 : 39] and we ask, Father, that you would grip them with the truth of this text. That they would not turn to that which addicts them to give them peace.

But they would turn to you and know that you carry them and carry that problem. That you would help them, Father, to experience their anxieties and their stress knowing that it will not unmake them because you have made them new in Jesus.

And, Father, you know those of us who are carrying big loads of stress right now. It's Christmas. Many of us have spent more than we can afford on gifts. And many of us have stressful times with families and travel and just life.

And, Father, you know those of us who struggle with anxiety. And we ask, Father, that you would turn our hearts to Jesus at this time. That you would turn our hearts to be gripped by the gospel and know that Jesus carries each one here who carries these problems.

And, Father, so bring this truth, hope, deep to them that they might walk towards their problems seeking your counsel and wisdom to deal with them in a wise way.

[44 : 00] Good for them and good for others. That you might bring their shalom order, your shalom order, into their lives. And, Father, there are some of us here who aren't struggling with anxiety or with addictions.

And we ask, Father, that you would help us to be people of prayer, that you would help us to be men and women of prayer, that we might pray, Lord, for those who are burdened with stress and anxiety, burdened with cares of life, burdened with problems of addiction or alcoholism.

Father, that if you have put us in a season where that is not what is going on in us, that you might grant us the great gift of prayer for our brothers and sisters, for our neighbors, for our loved ones, that we might be a people of prayer.

And in all things, Father, we ask that you would grip us with the truth of the gospel, that you would grip us with the truth that you came humbly as a baby and died humbly on the cross, that we might be your children by adoption and grace, that we might give ourselves to you, knowing you do not turn us away, and that you will save us.

And all God's people said, Amen.