

Our Trustworthy King: Mighty God

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[0:00] Well, when our country was in its infancy, the most powerful man in the land had an extremely important decision to make.

General George Washington had been given almost the powers of a dictator while he was the commander of the Continental Army. He could do basically anything he wanted with his power in order to defeat the British and win the war.

But now that the war was over, the question before him was whether he would stay in power or lay down his sword. He had the hearts of his countrymen, of his soldiers, and of the Congress.

He could have easily marched into Philadelphia, tell the Continental Congress that he desired to remain in power as a conquering king at the head of a victorious army.

And he would have been warmly received, because that's all that our country knew. Ruled by a king, by one man. He would have been crowned king of a new monarchy, the American kingdom.

[1:10] But surprisingly, he marched into Philadelphia, all right, but he declared his mission accomplished, unbuckled his belt, and set his sword on the table, and walked back to civilian life.

George Washington exercised his might in a very surprising way, because he knew it was in the best interest of his people.

They didn't need another dictator. They needed a stable form of democratic government for the American people at the time. He exercised his might in a very surprising way.

And this morning, it's our privilege to explore how the mightiest person, in the mightiest position of all, exercised his might in a very surprising way for the good of his people.

Throughout the whole testimony of this book, scripture, and particularly in our passage today, we cannot help but see that God exercises his might in surprising ways to deliver his people.

[2:19] God exercises his power in surprising ways to deliver his people. So we're going to start in Isaiah 9 to see this. And there we're going to see the first of four Ps that will guide us through our time together today.

We're going to first see God's surprising promise in our passage for today. We'll proceed there to see how that promise is based on a surprising pattern.

We'll see how that all points to a very surprising person and a very surprising plan. So four Ps. Let's start with a surprising promise.

In our passage for today, Isaiah the prophet foretells that God is going to deliver his people yet again. Last week, Pastor Mike introduced us to what was going on in Isaiah's day.

Several generations after Israel's great King David died, who was the first monarch that God put over his people, God's people were consistently choosing to trust other nations and their own wisdom instead of depending upon God and his word.

[3:35] They were choosing darkness over light. They were becoming blind and stubborn, insisting on delivering themselves through their own strength or wisdom.

And judgment was on its way in the form of foreign armies to come and conquer them. This is the note that chapter 8 ends on in verse 22.

They will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. They will be thrust into thick darkness. And yet, chapter 9, we see, unlooked for, surprisingly, on the other side of the gloom of judgment, God is promising light.

In verse 1 of chapter 9, the very epicenter of the gloom and the darkness, which was the northern region of Galilee, where the Assyrian hordes were going to first invade, God is saying that light is

going to dawn there.

In verses 3 through 5, Isaiah tells us that the dawning light would produce an expansive joy for God's people, and that light would mean deliverance from bondage, victory over enemies, and an end to the warfare and the conflict that was coming because of their sin against God.

[5:01] And we see that this light that produces joy because of this deliverance and this great victory is all centered on one person.

Let's look at verse 6. This whole work of gracious rescue and light would center upon this one ruler. Last week, Pastor Mike unpacked the beauty of that first phrase, wonderful counselor, one who has supernatural insight, miraculous wisdom that is going to deliver God's people.

And today, I have the opportunity to unpack that word, that term, mighty God. We're going to focus in on that particularly this morning. So, what is so surprising about this promise of a ruler who is to be called mighty God?

Well, that word mighty shows up all through your Bible in different ways. It's the Hebrew word gabor. Everybody say it with me. Gabor. Nice.

Turn to your neighbor. Tell them they're looking mighty gabor this morning. Looking mighty, mighty. Gabor is a synonym for other words in the Bible like strength, power, greatness.

[6:41] But interestingly enough, the majority of the times gabor is used in the Bible, it's referring to warriors. Mighty men of battle. David, the great warrior king, the anointed ruler of God's people, was called a gabor in 1 Samuel 16 when God tells Samuel to anoint David as king over God's people even though he was basically the runt of his family.

And the very next chapter, 1 Samuel 17, this little runt gabor defeats the giant gabor, Goliath, the gabor of God's enemies.

But God himself is also called a gabor. Great, mighty warrior, awesome God. Later on in Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 49, God is described as rising up like a mighty warrior to bring his people back from captivity in Babylon, laying waste to mountains, drawing up rivers in order to lead his people home. God has the might of a great warrior to deliver his people. And here we see, in verse 6, this future ruler of God's people, who's going to bring light and joy and deliverance to God's people, we see is called a gabor.

A mighty warrior who will bring joyful, triumphant deliverance to God's people walking in darkness. But not just a gabor.

[8:11] He is mighty. He is a warrior. But he's not merely a warrior. His name is to be called Mighty God. I just can't help but wonder about what was going on in Isaiah the prophet's mind when he took his quill or whatever he was using, and he wrote that phrase.

Mighty God. Isaiah was a faithful worshiper of the one true God, Yahweh. And Isaiah knew there was no God but Yahweh.

He was passionately monotheistic. He only worshipped one God. And he knew that this one God does not share his glory with another. And yet, carried along by the Spirit of God, Isaiah is unmistakably calling this future ruler of Israel the mighty God.

There's just no other way to interpret that phrase. This coming king will share God's very name, his very character, and his very nature as God.

But here's where we come to the jaw-dropping surprise of this promise. This future ruler who is to be called Mighty God, through whom God would accomplish such a mighty deliverance of his people, is also human.

[9:36] He has to be. Look at the beginning of verse 6. To us, a child is born. To us, a son is given.

In God's passionate and zealous love for this people in darkness, God is going to accomplish this great work of deliverance by being birthed.

God is going to be birthed and not cease being God. The surprising wonder of it is twofold.

First, this human ruler is unashamedly and directly referred to as God himself. But secondly, this mighty warrior, who will single-handedly bring light to those in darkness, and joy to the despairing, and lift the burdens of slavery off the shoulders, is coming, not as a conquering soldier, but as a child, an infant.

This is the plain and simple reading of this God-breathed text. We just can't get beyond the fact that he is called Mighty Warrior God, and he is yet a human child. What a surprising promise.

[10:56] But if we're reading our Old Testaments well, it shouldn't be too surprising. Here's where we get to our second P. This promise is surprising, yes, but it's also based on a surprising pattern.

A surprising pattern. I always enjoy stories that have flashbacks. Right now I'm reading Prince Caspian from the Chronicles of Narnia to my older kids, and we just finished reading Trumpkin the Dwarf, giving a long flashback explanation to the Pevensy kids about what had happened in the several hundred years since they had last visited Narnia.

So let's take a moment, and let's do a little flashback. Let's do a flashback on the summary of the Old Testament story so far, up to Isaiah's day.

God has often exercised his might in surprising ways. He has consistently showed his might through human weakness and through hopeless situations, so that it was extremely clear who exactly was responsible for delivering his people.

Remember Abraham. Old dude with an old wife, 100 years old and 90 years old respectively, and God's entire plan to redeem humanity was totally dependent on this 90-year-old woman conceiving a child in a 90-year-old body when she couldn't even conceive when she was 20 because she was barren.

[12:34] Just to make sure that it was crystal clear that God would bring about life out of death in a hopeless situation and through human weakness.

Jump ahead to the Red Sea Rescue, Exodus 14. God gets his people out of slavery in Egypt, and he leads them straight into what seems like a trap. There's water in front of them, enemies behind them, and they have nowhere to go.

And they start freaking out. They start blaming God, saying, why did you get us out of Egypt when we're going to die here on the shores of the Red Sea? And Moses tells his people, just stop and stand back and watch God fight for you.

And then what seems like a major blunder on God's part by leading his people into this weak and vulnerable position turns out to be God the cunning warrior leading his arrogant adversary into a trap without Israel having to lift a finger.

God got the glory. Through human weakness and hopeless situations. Or think about the Battle of Jericho. Joshua chapter 6, which wasn't much of a battle, right?

[13:41] There was some marching in circles by some circumcision sore warriors, some shouting, some horn blowing, and God the warrior gets the glory, and his people didn't have to do really anything except just trust him.

Last week, Pastor Mike mentioned Gideon's defeat of the Midianites in Judges chapter 7. God whittles Gideon's army down to less than 1% of its original size, 300 out of an original 32,000. And they defeat an innumerable horde of enemies just by blowing trumpets and smashing pottery. God gets the glory. God gets the glory when human weakness is on display and his mighty strength is on display.

We could mention David's defeat of Goliath, Elijah's soaking wet altar on Mount Carmel, or what's coming up in Isaiah chapter 37 through 38, sorry, 36 to 37.

The Assyrian army, 200,000 strong nearly, is camped on Jerusalem's doorstep, and a single angel warrior slays them all on a night. God uses human weakness and hopeless situations to demonstrate that he and he alone is responsible for rescuing his people and getting glory over his enemies.

[15:01] So the surprising promise of a mighty God ruler who is a human child is really not that surprising.

It's based on a surprising pattern that God has shown ever since the beginning. Now, let's return to Isaiah. Let's look at our third P, and let's turn our attention to the surprising person who was promised in Isaiah chapter nine and see how Isaiah continues to speak about him and who he turns out to be.

So third P, a surprising person. Have you ever been at the grocery store and you saw someone that immediately you recognize, like, I know them, but you had to think pretty hard to remember how you

knew them and where you knew them from because you just weren't used to seeing them in that context?

I was at the store with my son the other day and I ran into a former co-worker of mine and my brain had to work really hard for a few seconds to, like, oh yeah, that's who she is. So I wasn't used to seeing her there. That same phenomenon happens as we keep reading Isaiah.

If we keep reading Isaiah with our eyes kind of peeled for, okay, so who's this person going to be? This child, this mighty God, this wonderful counselor, this Emmanuel.

[16:22] How else is Isaiah going to talk about this person? If we keep reading, what we keep, we see in chapter nine and chapter 11, this child is described with royal imagery, mighty imagery over and over again.

He's the one who's going to sit on David's throne forever. He's the prince of peace. The increase of his government will never end. Flip to chapter 11 for just a second. There shall come forth, chapter 11, verse one, a shoot from the stump of Jesse, a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

The spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might. The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity the meek of the earth.

And listen to this, authority. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, with the breath of his lips. He shall kill the wicked. This child has authority. He has power given to him from on high.

But once we hit chapter 40 in Isaiah, the language shifts. Flip with me to Isaiah chapter 42. Isaiah 42.

[17:45] All this royal, kingly, mighty imagery that we see describing this future ruler then shifts from royal imagery into servant talk.

Look at chapter 42 in Isaiah. Isaiah 42. Isaiah 42. Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.

I have put my spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street. A bruised reed, he will not break.

A faintly burning wick, he will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for his law.

So there's, kind of like the person in the grocery store, there's a lot here that's familiar that we recognize. God approves of him. He delights in him. The Holy Spirit is on him. He will bring justice and righteousness in the earth.

[18:46] So we recognize him, but the setting, the language is different. The emphasis is different. There's not a lot of royal might. Instead, there's a lot of servant-like gentleness and humility.

So is this the same person? Is Isaiah talking about somebody else? I thought we were looking for a mighty warrior, a conquering king to deliver his people. Why do we now hear about a servant?

Well, that's the beautiful surprise about this person. As one author put it, the king will be the servant and the servant will be the king.

So once we get to the Gospels and we hear a birth announcement on an angel's lips in Luke chapter 2, turn there with me, Luke chapter 2, we shouldn't be too surprised to hear this mingling of royal might and servant-like humility in the same person.

Luke 2. Let's read verses 10 through 12 of Luke chapter 2, this announcement to the shepherds. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

[20:05] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

Good news, great joy, a Savior in David's city, the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed ruler that was foretold, the Lord.

Did you catch that? Christ the Lord. The Lord. But also a baby born, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a feed trough.

Do you hear the tension? Do you sense the paradox? Mighty God of boundless power and authority bundled up and weak, exposed to the elements in a stable born to poor peasants who are under the thumb of Roman rule.

Don't let this sight pass you by without adoration bubbling up in your heart. Don't let this Christmas pass by without you being utterly astounded that the mighty God of endless days and limitless wisdom and authority gladly and willingly and humbly gave up his throne for a feed trough.

[21:49] If we cease to be amazed by the incarnation of the Son of God, then something is not right within us. Lesser things have claimed our devotion if we are not in awe at the sight of God incarnate humbling himself to the lowest state of vulnerability.

All of history was building up to this point and all of history looks back to this point when the mighty God became a weak and helpless infant.

Divinity and humanity forever fused in a baby. one very surprising person. What is keeping you from beholding this surprising person with wonder and awe?

there is nothing else that God desires for you this Christmas season than to freshly behold the mighty God lying in an animal's feed trough.

you have the ability and you have the responsibility to set everything else in its proper place in order that he might take the rightful place in your affections and your devotion.

[23:16] Oh come let us adore him. How can we not? What a surprising person. Lastly let's look at God's surprising plan.

Let's go back to George Washington for a minute. Old George after his victory over the British he had some options. He had some options.

How was he going to exercise his mighty authority? I like having options. I like driving up to McDonald's and I know I have thousands of combinations of possibilities of options.

It's rather empowering. God had options. He had a rebellious people on his hand in the garden. He had options of how to exercise his might and deal with them. He could have rightfully and justly and gloriously for the sake of his own name been done with the human race.

[24:24] He could have destroyed Adam and Eve in their rebellion then and there. It was his divine right. He had told them on the day you eat of this tree you shall surely die but they did not.

Instead he elected to delay judgment. He exercised his divine might surprisingly to show mercy. That was his plan. Judgment was delayed and he put into effect a very surprising plan to redeem his rebellious image bearers. Time and again throughout the Old Testament as we saw earlier the pattern was to graciously rescue an undeserving people by exercising his power through human weakness and hopeless situations to redeem his people.

Turn with me back to Isaiah. This time we're going to chapter 53. Getting your exercise in the Bible today. Sword drills.

Isaiah chapter 53. As I read parts of this very familiar prophecy I want you to listen for the surprising mingling of mighty deliverance and utter human weakness in God's plan.

[25:48] This is the pinnacle, the climax of God's surprising plan to redeem his people. We'll start in chapter 52 verse 13.

Behold my servant shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up and he shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you, his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.

So he shall sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him. For that which has not been told them they see and that which they have not heard they understand.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? To whom has the arm, the strength, the might of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground.

He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

[26:54] And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

Go over with me to verse 10. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days.

The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors.

[28:01] Do you hear the upside-down surprise that's summarized in verse 12? The servant king will divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death.

Dividing the spoil was what victors of the battles do. They conquer the enemy, they acquire the spoil of war. But this king's mighty conquering was not by pouring out his enemy's blood, but through pouring out his soul to death like a humble servant.

This was God's choice. He had options, and this is what he chose to do. He would demonstrate his might toward rebellious sinners not by crushing them, but by being crushed for them.

So when we behold the stricken servant nailed to a Roman execution stake in Luke 23, and he's gasping for breath and groaning under the crushing weight of our rebellion against God, we hear three groups of people taunt him, and they tell him to save himself.

In Luke 23, verse 35, the Jewish leaders mock Jesus, and they say, he saved others. Let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one.

[29:17] In the very next verse, the Roman soldiers mock him. If you're the king of the Jews, save yourself. The thief on the cross next to him rails at Jesus in verse 39. Are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us. Christ. But the might of this anointed ruler, whose name is Mighty God, was surprisingly not being exercised on his own behalf to save himself, but to obey the will of his father and to remain on the cross for the sake of people condemned to eternal judgment for me and for you.

Jesus could have stopped that whole ordeal even before it started. And at any point during it, he could have said enough. But he exercised his might in a surprising way according to God's surprising plan to take each step toward the cross and endure the terrifying wrath of God on our behalf.

It was God's surprising plan for Jesus, the Messiah, the ruler, the mighty God to use his power to pour himself out to death for an undeserving people so we could have life.

And three days later, God mightily raised him from death. And he is the risen Lord Jesus, our mighty God forever. This is God's surprising plan.

[30:48] But God's surprising plan is not yet finished. Our servant King Jesus is right now enthroned in glory. Because he conquered his enemies and delivered his people through the humility and weakness of the cross, God highly exalted him and gave him the name above every name so that the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the mighty Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And one day this mighty God will return in full splendor and strength to establish his kingdom forever. He will indeed judge in righteousness and everything for you and me will hinge on whether we have bowed the knee to this mighty God on this side of eternity or not.

So how are we to respond to this surprising news of great joy of this mighty servant King who conquers by laying down his rights?

There are two things I'd like for us to consider how to respond to this good news in faith and obedience. First, it's helpful to identify where you're at. If you have bowed the knee and trusted in this trustworthy King, this mighty God, then Paul's words from Colossians 1 are true of you.

God has delivered you from the domain of darkness and transferred you into the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. God has delivered you from God.

[32:19] So because of the might and power of God exercised through death and resurrection of Jesus, he has undone the power of darkness over us.

He has brought us into the kingdom of his light by being under his gracious and loving rule. So give thanks. Give thanks to this mighty God if you are under his mighty and loving rule.

On the other hand, if you're aware that you have not bowed the knee to this mighty God who poured himself out for you, if you're aware that you have a need to be rescued by him, call out to him.

Confess your offense to God. Turn from it and turn to him. He will transfer you from Satan's dark dominion into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

Secondly, if you belong to this servant king, then you have the privilege to join him in his kingdom work now.

[33:23] It's not flashy. It's not might makes right. It's not worldly wisdom kind of work. Rather, it's the joyful and daily labor of taking up your cross as he took up his.

It's denouncing our right to rule our own lives. Giving ourselves over to death to self for Jesus' sake. And there, and only there, can we find the true joy that he brings and lasting kingdom fruit.

So servant-like humility and sacrificial obedience and self-giving love are not just the Lord Jesus' marching orders. They are ours as well. Exercising our right to lay down our rights, our time, our comfort, our resources for the good of others.

That is the normal pattern of the Christian life. Listen to Jesus' words from John 13. He just finished washing his disciples' feet. Listen to these words as if he's speaking right to you.

You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash another's feet. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent them.

[34:42] If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. So if mighty God incarnate has so powerfully given himself for you so that you could be rescued from the wrath of God on your sin, then surely we cannot be greater than our master.

We serve others because he served us. We love because he first loved us. It is right for us to imitate the mighty God who used his might to serve us.

So, in what area of your life are you needing to become more like the mighty God who is the servant king? How is the risen Lord Jesus calling you to follow him into a joyful laying down of your rights and comforts for the earthly and eternal good of those around you?

Is it in your marriage? Humbly caring for your spouse and putting their interests ahead of your own? Is it with your children?

Giving yourself over to prayer for them and patiently disciplining them and discipling them in the Lord? Are there opportunities for you to humble yourself on behalf of extended family members this Christmas season or coworkers and serve them as the hands and feet of Jesus even though it may cost you in some way?

[36:14] Is it perhaps in the way that you spend your free time and energy and finances? Are you hoarding time and energy and money that God has given you to build your own kingdom of self-security or are you seeking to trust the mighty God to provide for you as you give yourself for the good of others?

So, whatever it is, go to God in prayer and ponder how to respond rightly to him in faith and obedience.

Let's respond to his mighty love by trusting him, adoring him, and giving of ourselves in the same way for the good of those around us and for his great glory.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, thank you that it was your plan all along to demonstrate your great mighty strength to deliver your people through the cross and through the humble obedience and love of our Savior Jesus.

Help us to trust you. Help us to lay down our lives to you as living sacrifices to adore this child who is God in the manger and to live for the risen servant king and all that you would have us do, Lord Jesus.

[37:50] Give us the faith and obedience we need now and the power of your spirit to respond to your word. In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you. Amen.

Amen.