

Jesus, Name Above All Names: The Fourfold Name   
By Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson

**Bible Text:** Isaiah 9:2-7  
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Now in our Advent Sunday morning series, "Jesus, Name Above All Names," we were thinking the first Sunday of Advent about Philippians 2 from which these words are taken, and then last Lord's day from the promise that Immanuel would come, and this morning we turn in our Bibles to the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2-7 and you'll find this passage in your pew Bible on page 573, and for children who have their own children's Bible with them, the passage is on page 837. This is God's word and we give attention to it.

2 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. 3 You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. 4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. 5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. 6 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. 7 Of the increase of his government and of 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. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

If you belong to roughly my generation, you must have lived a very sheltered life if your life, your thinking, was not both influenced by and expressed through the popular music of the late 1960's and the early 1970's, the great vintage of popular music, if I, an expert in these things, may dare to say. And you will remember, I am quite sure, many of those great LPs which Simon and Garfunkel produced. They call that vinyl these days and I think you can still buy them as CDs. I particularly remember the first time I heard "Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme," drawn from the first track, "Are You Going to Scarborough Fair?" But the track on that LP, vinyl, CD, that left of the longest impression on me was the final track, Simon and Garfunkel singing "Silent Night," and those of you who are familiar with it will remember that as the strains of "Silent Night" are being sung, a voice gradually appears in the background and then takes its place in the foreground and it's a newscaster and he is reading the news, the evening news of a

particular day. He records the death of the comedian Lenny Bruce from an overdose. He speaks about the arraignment of Richard Speck who had murdered nine nurses in Chicago. Some of you will still remember of disruption through the civil rights movement, of anti-Vietnam protests, and then the whole thing ends with the words, "And that's the 7 o'clock news tonight." Then "Silent night, holy night." And the impression whether intended or not, neither Simon nor Garfunkel as far as I know were or are professing Christian believers, part of the intention was to make the listener feel the tension between these two things: the Christmas singing and the reality of the world; the Silent Night and the sound of guns and war and protest and anger and disappointment and fear. I don't know whether the whole point of that was to destroy the illusion of the Christmas message, and there is no doubt whatsoever that the illusion of Christmas does need to be destroyed in many people's minds, but there is also a sense in which that strange juxtaposition of alienation and hatred and disappointment, political unrest and war on the one hand, is of course the very atmosphere, the very world into which the Christmas Gospel first came and always needs to be proclaimed.

The greatest folly, of course, at this Christmas would be to make the naïve assumption that somehow or another that there will be this kind of international peace in our world. The war to end all wars almost 100 years ago simply spawned more. The second world war, the present conflicts, oh, if only they were ended the world would be exactly the same place it was when those conflicts began and other conflicts will go on until the end of the age, which is why this message of that silent night is so utterly vital for our world because we delude ourselves if we think that our lives will be more stable, our hearts more peaceful, our families more joyful, if only wars out there will come to an end. And this of course, is the reason why the prophet Isaiah, having already announced that Immanuel will come, God with us, now here in this chapter re-pronounces Immanuel's name, spells it out not with one or two or even as we would do, with three names, but with four great names, and sets him in his mind's eye in the context of deep darkness and conflict which, of course, throughout the whole book of Isaiah is actually, as it were, a physical picture for the deeper darkness of the human heart and the Deliverer who will come is a picture of a greater Deliverer than any human deliverer or ruler or peacemaker could possibly be.

So here he announces in the midst of this gloom and darkness and we know he is speaking about the Lord Jesus because these words in Isaiah 9:2 are quoted in the context of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel according to Matthew, as Jesus, the light of the world, penetrates the darkness and brings to us everything that we could possibly need for our salvation because he is first Wonderful Counselor; second, Mighty God; third, Everlasting Father; and fourth, Prince of Peace. He is a great Savior and he is all of these things all of the time to all of his people. This is the vision that Isaiah sees although he knows less about its fulfillment, obviously, then we now by God's grace do. Is Jesus this to me?

He is, says Isaiah, the Counselor who has exactly the wisdom we need and he portrays the human condition under this great picture of people walking in darkness, having no light, stumbling around, feeling their way, as it were, to something that will anchor the

whole of their lives and yet having no guidance. In a sense, what he pitches here is a world, a heart, a life, in which the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm does not work, "The Lord is my shepherd. Even though I walk through the valley of deep darkness, I will fear no evil because you are with me." That isn't true for everybody. You just need to go to funeral services to understand this is not true for everyone. And Isaiah sees that the Lord Jesus is a Wonderful Counselor, a Wonderful Guide for those who are in darkness if they will only come to him. But instead what do we do in our moral and spiritual darkness? We create our coping mechanisms. We are lonely but we pretend that all is well. We find ourselves disturbed in conscience but we smile. We have no real relationships in which others encourage us and guide us, but we keep others at arm's length and instead of, as it were, doing the simplest thing of all, coming to trust in Jesus Christ, we produce all of our coping mechanisms so that we continue to pretend that we don't really need this Savior.

That's the world in which we live. I have never forgotten many years ago sitting on a panel of theologians to assess the comprehensive exam of a doctoral student. It was by no means granted an easy exam, two days of written papers, morning, noon and night, and then brought in before these theologians to ask any question about anything they wanted to. And this particular student had done rather well in his written papers, but when he came to the oral exam he was all at sea. Theologian after theologian asked him questions and getting no answers. He was dismissed and brought back another day, dismissed and brought back another day, until with exasperation one faculty member said to him, "How is it that you have done so well in your written exam?" They were beginning to think that he had used a dodgy computer to write it. "How can you have done so well on your written exam and you can hardly answer any of our questions when we ask you?" And the student owned up, he said, "Well, in preparation for the exam, I memorized 93 articles from theological dictionaries," and they weren't short articles. And we are all sitting there thinking, "Don't you think it would have been easier just to learn and understand the material?" Silly man, we think, except we do it, don't we? We've all these coping mechanisms and sometimes they are coping mechanisms against the basic work of God in our lives that he wants to be in Jesus Christ, the Guide and Counselor that we need through life.

We pretend that we've got it all worked out but it's just a coping mechanism. String of degrees behind my name but they are just coping mechanisms. And Isaiah is saying to us, praying that the word will break into, break through all these coping mechanisms, he is pointing us to the one whom Paul eventually describes as the one in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found. It's not coping mechanisms I need, it's Christ I need and he is a Wonderful Counselor.

But second, says Isaiah, he is the God who possesses the power that I need, the wisdom that I lack but also the power that I need. He is the Mighty God. Well, we could say, "Of course he's the Mighty God. God is mighty by definition." But actually the word that Isaiah uses here as an undertone and maybe even an overtone of the heroic, the God who does things in an heroic fashion. And actually he's given us a rather startling illustration of that in verse 4 when he speaks about the way in which the Savior saves his people: the yoke of the burden, the staff on the shoulder, the rod of the oppressor, the Savior breaks,

now notice the phrase "as on the day of Midian." Now, most of us in this room know exactly what he's speaking about here. We might not think so if I pointed to you, as I'm not going to do, and said, "Mr. So-and-so, would you just stand up and tell us what the day of Midian is?" I'm sure many of us would say, "Well, I knew what it was before you asked me the question but just in the moment, it's gone out of my mind." But we all know what the day of Midian was, it was the day of Gideon. You remember when these 20,000 soldiers and God is saying, "That's far too many. Send the ones who are frightened home." And then 10,000 are far too many. Then eventually Gideon ends up with 300 men at God's bidding in order to take on the mighty Midian Army and no Kalashnikovs to do so, but the weapons are clay pots and lights inside, broken pots and shouts, a sword for the Lord and for Gideon and the Midian army is put to flight. What's the point? The point is that Mighty God demonstrates his power to save his people by weakness and frailty.

"To us a child is born, to us a son is given." This was one of the reasons why the Apostle Paul rejoiced in the Gospel. He said, "You know, the Greeks, they are always looking for wisdom and intellectual understanding. Explain it to me and then I'll believe when I am able to understand." What folly? Do we think we are God that we can understand what God does? "But the Jews seek signs and works of power," and so he says they are liable to miss the fact that God's great work of saving power is done through the weakness and frailty of the Savior as he dies on the cross.

"The government," isn't this interesting, "The government shall be upon his shoulder." You know in the whole of the Gospel story, I think it's right to say there was only one thing ever said to be on the Savior's shoulders as he carried his cross outside of Jerusalem to reign from the tree. That's where power is to be found, power to set me free from my deepest bondage. Oh, if we could have men and women from many countries in the world, especially in the East and in the South, they could speak to us about the political bondage in which they have lived as Christ's free men and women. And you see, you can live in political freedom and be the greatest prisoner in all the world, imprisoned to your sin and to yourself, and Isaiah is looking forward to this day when a Savior will come will have power through his weakness to set us free from both the guilt and the power of sin.

But thirdly says, Isaiah, not only the Counselor whose wisdom we need, and the God whose power we need, but the Father whose love we need. Isn't this an astonishing way to describe our Lord Jesus Christ, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father." What is it saying? It's saying that your need and my need is to be adopted, isn't it? We announced an adoption this morning, a long and difficult adoption, requiring great patience and much intricacy, and a marvelous picture of the fathering grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as we are brought into the family of God through him. And brought further away than from Russia, brought further away than from the ends of the earth, brought from a great distance from God. And he comes to us as the Everlasting Father so that we know that we are brothered by Jesus Christ and that we are adopted into the family of God and we are bold to call him our Father. Oh, magic word. Of course, people say to us as Christians in these days so often, "Well, of course, you poor Christians, you need a father figure and that's where all this comes from." Not a bit of it. It comes from the very

beginning of the Bible, doesn't it? The basic picture in the Bible is that fathers have sons in their image. I often find at the church door that someone will introduce a family member who has come as a visitor and say, "This is my sister," and I bite my tongue, I want to say, "You didn't need to tell me that. It's as plain as your faces." This is my son. This family likeness.

That's why the Bible begins by telling us we are made as the image of God. We are made to know him as our Father but we don't know him as our Father. Indeed, by nature we are prodigals in the far country trying to forget our Father. And alas, so often this is where a little religion can be such a dangerous thing. What we are actually trying to do is to, as it were, squeeze the last memory of God's fatherly pursuit of us out of our minds because we think so ill of him by nature. Don't you find that? Don't you find that even people who will speak about God's goodness and love, that their lives show they think ill of him? Have you ever seen one of those situations in a family, perhaps in the mall or somewhere, and there is father walking along and the 14-year-old son is as distanced as he can possibly be. He doesn't want to be with his father. My dear friends, we are all those teenagers by nature otherwise we would delight in him, rejoice in him, be proud of our Father. But we are teenagers. We are ashamed of our Father. We don't know who we are. The alienation that is in our hearts towards him, we just daren't look there. We don't really love him and we don't really feel loved by him. Yes, we say he is a loving heavenly Father, as far as our hearts are concerned, it's total nonsense.

We've actually never really felt loved by the Lord. Have you? You know, when people tell you how they first felt the grace of God breaking in on their lives, the grace of God is stored up for us only in Jesus Christ but Jesus Christ brings people to himself in as many different ways as there are people, really. There are no two people in this room whose spiritual pilgrimage is identical in every respect to one another or to anybody else's. I remember being with another minister on an occasion when we fell into conversation with a woman in her late 30's or early 40's who was in a conference both of us were speaking at, and the way she described her coming to faith in Jesus Christ was this, she said, "I felt loved for the first time in my life everlastingly." Isn't that something? That we can be adopted into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ, come home

The Welsh, you know, have a special word for being far away from home and what it feels like. I'm not Welsh but I know the meaning of that word, to feel far away from home, hiraeth. They sing about it sometimes. They have songs about it but they are always melancholy songs and they always make you feel even more hiraeth than you did when the song began. And there is a hiraeth in the human soul, in your soul, the longing for home, and the Gospel tells us how it is that we can come home because if I can put it this way, our Lord Jesus Christ tasted the depths of hiraeth. The Gospels even use language about the Lord Jesus, especially in the last days of his life when he speaks about the soul distress, the loneliness, the disturbance of his whole being, the homesickness he experienced in order that we might through his homesickness, come from our homesickness in the far country to the heavenly Father.

So he is, indeed, a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. The greatest wish, you know. If you are famous this year and somebody sticks a microphone in your face and says, "What is your greatest wish this Christmas?" You know you're going to lose fans if you don't say, "World peace. Oh, if there could just be peace in Afghanistan and peace in Pakistan, peace in the Middle East between the Jews and the Arabs." And we don't hear much about Africa. We need to hear more about Africa. "If only peace in Africa and in Latin America." What would be the result? Well, the result would be there would just be dispeace and war somewhere else, isn't it? It's a figment of the imagination that there will ever be world peace in this world. How can there be world peace when our world leaders divorce their wives, are unfaithful to them? Or seek power and stand in the faces of little men? A figment of the human imagination and, therefore, while we pray that there may be cessation of hostilities, we don't place our hope in this world nor in our leaders because the real dispeace is not out there, the real dispeace that causes the dispeace out there is in here, and if only we would admit it.

Why do we do the hard thing? Why do we pretend that there is peace when there is no peace? Why don't we just do the simple thing. It's amazing, isn't it? How can we be so foolish when there is the promise of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and a quietening of the accusation of our consciences and the knowledge that the judgment of God against our sin has all been dealt with and that the overflow of that is our desire to live in shalom with others, to count them as more important than ourselves, to use our power for service rather than for self-aggrandizement.

And Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace who brings lasting peace to the human heart. It would take Isaiah many more chapters from chapter 9 to the beginning of chapter 53 before he would begin to explain how it is that such peace can be mine. As you remember, that servant figure comes onto the scene in the latter sections of Isaiah's prophecy in 42 and 49 and 50, and then most movingly at the end of 52, beginning of 53, and those great words that point to Jesus Christ, "He was wounded for our transgressions; bruised for our iniquities; and the chastisement to bring us peace was upon him; and with his stripes we can be healed." There is only one who can raise his hands and say, "Peace be to your soul," and we will believe him because we see those hands are nail pierced. And Isaiah is looking forward obviously with deep longings to that day when our Lord Jesus Christ will go to that place where he discovered the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm ceased to function, and instead of being able to say, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me," to bring us to have that kind of peace, he went into the dark valley of Calvary to cry, "My God, why is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm not working for me here? Why have you forsaken me?"

And all of this still to unfold because Jesus Christ is wisdom for us in a world of darkness; power to deliver us from our bondage; love to bring us into God's family; peace to remove all of our guilt. "I am the light of the world," he said, "He who follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life." He is a Wonderful Counselor. If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. He has power to deliver me. "I will not leave you orphans," he says, "I will come to you." He is able to take me home into the family of the Father. "My peace I give to you, not as the world gives, give I to you. Do not let your

heart be troubled. My peace I give." The great thing about Jesus is not just that he is the Savior but that he is a complete Savior. Everything I lack and need is found in his fullness and given to me in his grace, and I spend my life trying to rid myself of the divinely given hiraeth of my soul with baubles and like a child on its first Christmas, I play with the wrappings and avoid the gift.

That's why it's so interesting that Isaiah says, doesn't he, "To us a child is born, to us a son is given." I don't suggest you deface your Bible but it might not be a bad idea to underline that word "us," and then write in your margin "me." "To me a child is born. To me a son is given. The government of my life will be on his shoulders because he is my Mighty God, my Wonderful Counselor, my Prince of Peace, my Father Everlasting." That would be the best Christmas present anyone could ever have. Oh, open it that he may be yours.

*Heavenly Father, how marvelous our Lord Jesus Christ appears in our eyes as you point us to his grace in his own word in the Scriptures. We pray that as we come to you this Christmas, as we rejoice in all this season means for us as individuals and families and as a church family, we pray that something of the sheer grandeur and completeness of our Savior will break in upon our souls and thrill us, and that this Advent may be a time not only when we remember Christ's Advent to us but when we enjoy our Advent to him in faith and love. Hear us, bless us, we pray, in Jesus our Savior's name. Amen.*