

ISAIAH 9 WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

During my second “career” in radio, the bosses at the station in Bloomington decided to treat us to a trip to “Carburetion Day” at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. At one point, a few of us wandered over to the Indy 500 Museum, and I walked through with a co-worker named Jerry.

What a trip! Jerry was an Indy car fan, and as we wandered through the museum, he gave me a great history lesson about everything we saw. I am not much of a racing fan, so without him, my trip through the museum would have been short and meaningless. But with his guidance, the time was memorable and valuable.

Have you ever had a tour with a great tour guide? Have you ever had a tour with a lousy tour guide? In a place where you are not sure where to go or what to do, a wise guide makes all the difference in the world.

In Isaiah 9, the people of Judah are living in darkness, despair and gloom. God’s people are watching their kingdom crumble. In this chapter, Isaiah offers joy as he tells of a day in the future when someone will be born who will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” We believe this person is Jesus, and today we rejoice in this One who is the “Wonderful Counselor” - a superb tour guide.

As we discover the joy of Jesus, let’s first ask, **WHO IS THIS?** To start with, this person is *A COUNSELOR*. Let’s say you are taking a tour, and somehow you get off the path. This word “counselor” describes someone who is full of wisdom for the right path.

So where do we find wisdom in the Old Testament? We usually think first of the book of Proverbs. Yet the wisdom of Proverbs is more than just a set of ideas. In Proverbs 8, wisdom is presented as a person. This person prepares us for the wisest person of all - Jesus Christ. Let’s notice just a few of the qualities of the wisdom of this person.

This wisdom is *eternal*. We read in Proverbs 8:23, “I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.” This wisdom is not driven by the trends or moods of culture. It was wise, it is wise, and it will always be wise. As the eternal Son of God, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the wisdom of this Wonderful Counselor is eternal.

This wisdom is *right*. We read in Proverbs 8:6, “Listen, I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right.” God is holy, and the wisdom of his Son is holy. It is right because it is God who decides and declares what is right, and he gives his righteous wisdom to his Son, who lives and speaks that wisdom perfectly.

This wisdom is *valuable*. We read in Proverbs 8:10, “Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold.” We think things are valuable, but in God’s economy, wisdom is most valuable, and there is nothing better for us than to know and live the wisdom of Jesus Christ.

Our culture often gives us wisdom that is about a day old, and will change tomorrow. This Counselor gives his people wisdom that is eternal. Our culture often gives us wisdom that leads to what is sinful and ugly. This Counselor gives his people wisdom that is right. Our culture often gives us wisdom that is useless for answering real questions and facing real struggles. This Counselor gives his people wisdom that is valuable.

This person is a counselor, and this person is *A WONDERFUL COUNSELOR*. What do we mean when we speak of wonder? We talk about the “Seven Wonders of the World,” and we are thinking of parts of the natural world that are especially amazing to us. The word here captures a sense of wonder, a sense of awe, even a sense of excitement.

This is the opposite of what we see and hear in our cynical culture. When you are cynical, you don’t believe anything is truly eternal, right or valuable. Everything is just a game. Everything is just a dodge. Everyone is just out for themselves. You can’t believe anyone, and you can’t trust anyone. With all the things we know and all the things we see, we easily become cynics. We fold our arms and say, “Impress me,” and we are sure we won’t be impressed.

But the wisdom of Jesus is impressive, marvelous, amazing, and wonderful. That was the testimony of

those who heard him. Do you remember the words at the end of Jesus' so-called "Sermon on the Mount"? At the end of Matthew 7 we read, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." Why were they so amazed at Jesus' wisdom?

They were amazed, because *Jesus spoke to the heart*. The teachers of the law were the Jewish religious leaders of the day, and they were all about what other people could see. But Jesus spoke to the heart. He addressed the root causes of the problems of the human condition. Do not murder with your hands - or your hearts. Adultery is wrong - but so is lust. Mere external religion is empty religion. When you speak to the heart, you are offering real answers to real questions, and Jesus did that.

They were also amazed, because *Jesus spoke from his life*. The teachers of the law said one thing and did another. Jesus called them hypocrites, because they put on a show for people to see, and they said all sorts of things for people to hear, but their lives did not match up with what people saw and with what they said.

Now - before we are too hard on the teachers of the law, let's remember that we are much like them. Ask yourself this: who is the only non-hypocrite in human history? What person had a perfect match between his words and his deeds, and complete harmony between what people could see, and what people could not see? Only Jesus Christ. Our lives and words never fully match. Jesus' did. Jesus Christ is the Wonderful Counselor because he has lived his words.

Once again, we need to know this, because once again, we are hearing much about the troubles of the great. The latest is Tiger Woods. We talk about role models, and we look to these famous people to be our role models, and they fail us time and time again. While we do have some good human role models, the ultimate role model is Jesus. He is full of wisdom in his heart-searching words, and he is perfect in wisdom in his utterly consistent life.

Who is this? He is the Counselor - the Son of God who brings eternal, right and valuable wisdom. He is the Wonderful Counselor - who amazingly speaks to the heart and consistently teaches with his life. If we are in union with him by faith in his perfect life, atoning death, and resurrection power, we will seek and follow his wonderful counsel.

This leads us to a second question: **WHERE IS THIS?** If Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor promised by Isaiah, where must we see and follow his wisdom?

First, *IN THIS WORLD*. This title speaks of his sovereign wisdom in this world and for this world. As we think about this title, we have to ask, "Do I trust this One who rules over this world, to rule wisely?"

This is a hard question, because this world is a mess. We are blessed to have worldwide media and the World Wide Web. But this means we are painfully aware of the details of this mess. If something awful happens in Honduras or Russia or Indonesia, we know about it almost immediately. It is overwhelming. It is discouraging. It is frustrating. Why that horrible crime? Why that devastating war? Why that unbelievable disaster? We do not know why God would ordain or allow this or that event. We see what seems to be senseless, and we may question the wisdom of this One we call Wonderful Counselor. Where is this tour guide taking us?

This is why we call this journey a walk of faith. We trust that he is a good tour guide, and that while his ways are mysterious to us, he is working toward his ultimate purposes - the glory of Jesus Christ through the building of his kingdom, until the day when he returns, wrong is made right, and his people live with him forever in the new heavens and new earth.

Can you see this today? Can you believe this today? How is your world challenging your faith in the wisdom of the Wonderful Counselor? Maybe you are frustrated by politicians. Maybe you are troubled by statistics. Maybe you are sickened by the details of the cruelty of people and nations. Maybe you are fearful about weapons of mass destruction or biological warfare. Maybe it is just the weight of everything in this messy and messed-up world.

His name shall be called, "Wonderful Counselor." Fix your eyes on him in faith, and when your faith is

weak, cry to him for strength to trust him in this world.

Where is this? Where must we see and follow the wisdom of the Wonderful Counselor? In this world, and *IN OUR LIVES*. This title also proclaims Jesus' sovereign wisdom in your life. He is great to reign over the nations, and he is good to rule over you. So now the question is, "Do I trust this One who rules over my life, to rule wisely?"

Now it is even more difficult, because while we know we cannot rule the world, we want to rule our lives. We think we are wonderful counselors. We want control over our families, our jobs, our finances, our health, our relationships, and all the people and events that shape and fill this short time on earth. We want to be God.

But only Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor. Only he has the right to sovereignly, wisely rule over our lives. So this title calls us to some rarely seen heart attitudes.

The first rare heart attitude is *a heart of humility*. I must accept that I am only wise, if I live to follow the wisdom of the Wonderful Counselor.

I tend to be proud. I may sit in church and affirm that Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor. I may admit that the Bible is the wisdom of God. But I still live as if I am on my own. I think I can navigate through life. I trust in my wisdom, my experience, and my ability to survive and thrive in the different places of my tour of this world.

I do this as I enter and engage the day, without prayer. I do this as I read the Bible without a thought for how God may be speaking to me about my life. I do this as I think little about what God gave me this week in the preaching and teaching of the church. I do this as I consult the wisdom of my culture, instead of seeking the wisdom of God. I do this as I live and act as if it all depends on me - whatever I am doing.

A heart of humility says, "Left to myself, I will follow a path that is no good for me, and no glory to God. I desperately need God's Spirit to quietly and loudly direct me in all that I do. I need God's Spirit to give me wisdom as a friend. I need God's Spirit to give me wisdom as a husband. I need God's Spirit to give me wisdom as a student. I need to listen to him in his Word and speak to him in prayer, so that he may fill me with the wisdom of the One I call Wonderful Counselor. Am I proud? Or am I humble?"

The second rare heart attitude is *a heart of openness*. I must accept that I may have ways of thinking and living which this Wonderful Counselor may intend to invade and overturn.

I tend to be stubborn. I have my plans. I will do this, and I will do that, and no one will stop me. I will do it my way. If I am challenged, I will say, "That's just the way I am, and that's just the way it is." Don't go there, God.

I may do this in my marriage, as I keep doing what I have long been doing, even though it is draining the life from my marriage. I may do this in my finances, as I stubbornly hold on to the fantasy that somehow I can play with fire and not get burned. I may do this with my studies or work, as I continue with lazy and foolish habits. I may do this with my lips, as I continue to gossip, slander and abuse.

A heart of openness says, "Wonderful Counselor, I want you to take hold of me and make me into what you want me to be. As painful as it may be, I long for you to show me how I am living for my glory and not yours, and how I am living in ways that hurt and harm me and others. Invade my life and overturn those deeply held habits." Am I stubborn? Or am I open to correction by the Wonderful Counselor?

The third rare heart attitude is *a heart of submission*. I must accept that if Jesus is my Savior, then Jesus is my Lord, and I will submit to his claims upon my life.

I tend to be evasive. I may never say, "Jesus, I defy you!" But I may avoid what I know he wants for me. He wants me to cut off that affection that will soon be an addiction. He wants me to stop living for my lifestyle, and to begin living with generosity. He wants me to take advantage of that opportunity to tell my neighbor about him. He wants me to change the way I run my business, so that people can trust my integrity.

A heart of submission says, "Lord Jesus, you are Lord. I will follow your words about lust, and separate myself from whatever tempts me in that direction. I will follow your words about anger, and replace a

spirit of bitterness with a spirit of forgiveness. I will follow your words about service, and change my habits in my home. I will follow your words about the kingdom, and seek to be a faithful servant there.” Do I evade Jesus? Or do I submit to him?

Yet there is this, too:

* As we come to Jesus with hearts of humility, openness, and submission, he will help and bless. In our own strength, we will become lost on this tour. But the One who commands us with his wisdom, equips us with his grace. The Christian does not say, “I cannot.” The Christian says, “I cannot on my own, but I can, in the grace of Jesus.”

* As we come to Jesus with hearts of humility, openness, and submission, he will give us joy. The writer of Psalm 97 proclaims, “Light is shed upon the righteous, and joy upon the upright in heart.” In the path of the Wonderful Counselor, we have joy. He leads us in upright paths, and he fills us with his joy, as he enables us to follow him.

As I think I have mentioned, Taylor and I took a couple of college tours this fall - at Grove City College and Geneva College. We were blessed in both places to have smart, likable tour guides. But the Grove City tour was a bit better for me. Why? Because I graduated from Geneva, and while much has changed, much is the same. I knew my way around, I knew the history, and our guide wasn’t telling me much I didn’t already know. But I had never been to Grove City, so it was all new to me. I listened and learned so much.

If Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor, we must come to him with the fascination that I could not bring to the Geneva tour, but I could bring to the Grove City tour. Jesus, you are amazingly eternal, right and valuable. I humble myself before you. I am open to you. I submit to you. Great guide for this world and my life - I trust you to take me where you want me to go. You will help me get there. And if you are by my side, it will be a joyful journey.