

A Perfect Reign

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Date: 10 December 2023

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- [0 : 0 0] There should be an outline as well in your newsletters if you want to follow along.
- Well, as King Lee was saying, we have started Advent, and so we're going to spend a few weeks just focusing on this passage in Isaiah 9, verse 67, and seeing how it finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus.
- But I want to begin by just getting you to reflect and to look around, because it's not hard, well, actually, it is hard to find good government around, isn't it?
- It's not hard to find example after example of bad government. Now, perhaps the reason why is because the media has no interest in pointing out good government, whereas bad government, well, they sell papers, don't they?
- And pretty good for clickbaiting. But I don't think that's just the only reason, because good government is hard to achieve and attain, isn't it?
- [1 : 1 0] And why is that? Well, perhaps we may blame it on the form of government. Dictatorships, for example, is bad, by definition.
- We know that. But even democracies don't guarantee good government either, do they? Winston Churchill once said on the next slide, democracy is the worst form of government, except for the others.
- What he's saying is that it's the best of a bad bunch, isn't it? And I think that's because no matter how perfect a system of government appear on paper, the people that end up running it and ruling are flawed.
- Power corrupts, they say, and corrupts absolutely. Well, today, as part of our season of Advent, we dive into this key Old Testament passage that foreshadowed the coming of Christmas.
- The Isaiah prophet writes at a time when Israel is in turmoil. The glory days of King David and Solomon are over. Israel is no longer the powerhouse like they were at the time.
- [2 : 2 0] The 12 tribes that made up the nations of Israel are divided. Ten in the north, two in the south. Successive kings had come and they were, you know, tended to be lousy.
- Faith, unfaithful and disobedient to God. And increasingly, they were vulnerable to the nations around them. Superpowers like Egypt in the south and Assyria in the north and then the Babylonians from the far east.
- It's into such a fraught time that the prophet Isaiah speaks. And in our reading today, he brings a message of hope. It's not a glimmer. It's not a glimmer. But it's something for the people to hold on to.
- Now, in the verses before our reading, Israel, Isaiah had already foreshadowed for Israel that a time will come when wars would cease. But now, in verses 6 and 9, he also speaks of a time when peace will take hold.
- And so he says in verse 6, For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[3 : 38] Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. Now, these are only two verses, but there's lots to unpack, some of which I will actually save for next week when we get to our annual Doncaster carols.

But for today, I'd like to focus firstly on the qualities of this ruler. Now, it's clear from the words that what's promised is a ruler. The government will be on his shoulders.

Of the greatness of his government, there will be no end. He'll reign on David's throne, upholding justice and righteousness. All of which are aspects of a ruler's reign, isn't it?

But there in verse 6, if you can see on the slide, we have a list of names for his rule. Four qualities, if you like, of the kind of ruler that he will be. First, wonderful counselor.

[4 : 42] Or more literally, the words are wonder of his counsel. That is, when one hears his words, the wisdom of his counsel, it would elicit wonder. People will say, wow, what a wise ruler.

He's able to understand the complexity of a situation, have incredible insight into the motivations and actions of people, and then give just the right counsel for the right situation.

And that's almost an impossible human task, if you ask me. Because it requires you to be a mind reader, to see into people's hearts. Some years ago, in a movie, *What Women Want*, on the next slide, Mel Gilson plays a marketing executive who had the ability to hear the thoughts of women, which ought to have given him an advantage, because he was trying to sell products to women.

But in the case of this ruler, he doesn't use his power like Mel does, does he, to his own advantage. But instead, he uses it to uphold justice and righteousness.

Now, of course, this movie is fiction. I haven't known anyone to be able to read minds. Because such an ability is only possible, isn't it?

[6 : 04] If you are God. Which is why we have the second quality, Mighty God. To name a human ruler as Mighty God is actually quite preposterous, isn't it?

Especially in the Bible, where all the writers are so careful to only worship God. And yet, this ruler is clearly human, isn't it? Because he will be born as a child.

But by combining both these names, what we have is a ruler that's not only wise, but also mighty, because he's able to put into effect his wisdom.

And if you ask me, that's often my problem, isn't it? Not to say that I'm such a wonderful counselor, but even if I do work out what the wise thing ought to be, I often find myself powerless to make it happen.

I could persuade others, but often I can't bring it to pass. But unlike me, this ruler has the power to establish and uphold justice, which he will do because the third quality is that of an everlasting father.

[7 : 16] Now sadly, not all of us are good fathers. And even if we are, we're not perfect. But we all know what to look for in an ideal father, don't we?

Not only are they a source of wise counsel, but they're also protectors and providers. They use their power and authority to ensure that we have what we need, that we are kept safe from harm.

Thus, a ruler who is described as an everlasting father is one who uses his power, not against us, but for us.

Yes, when we misbehave, there will be discipline. But even such discipline is ultimately for our good, not our harm. And so this ruler does what's best for Israel.

And ultimately, what he presides over is a reign of peace, which is the fourth name we have of him, Prince of Peace. This peace is achieved in his realm, not just by fending of external enemies, like the ones I've talked about, Egypt, the Syria, and things like that, but also to establish peace within his realm.

[8 : 31] You see, those of us who are parents with more than one child, know that keeping the peace in the house is often trying to sort out the squabbles of our children. You know, arbitrating between who's right, who's wrong, separating the siblings when they're fighting with each other.

You're looking at me like it doesn't happen, or it's not true. Now, the people in Isaiah's day may have thought that the peace they needed was from their enemies outside.

But they may not realize that what they also needed was rescue from their internal strife. Because don't forget, ever since the time of Solomon, those 12 tribes were divided, weren't they, north and south.

But I think even within these two kingdoms, there would have been rivalries between and within clans and families. But Israel's promise is that this ruler will bring them all together.

He will inaugurate a perfect reign as their perfect ruler. And so, to the second point, alongside those four names, I also list three characteristics of his rule, some of which I've already mentioned in passing.

[9 : 45] First, his rule will never end, verse 7. This we've already seen in the name Everlasting Father. But what we get here is that this peace is not just fleeting, isn't it?

There, one moment, and then gone another. Rather, strife and conflict will be banished for good. His reign will go on forever. Second, he will rule on David's throne.

Now, why is it so important, this idea of David's throne? Well, first, I think it signifies that God was fulfilling his promise to David. That promise was to raise up a son who will establish David's house and kingdom forever.

Standing behind this ruler, then, is God himself, because God is standing behind his promises. And it's God's character of faithfulness that will ensure that this reign will continue.

But secondly, in reestablishing David's throne, I think what's implied is that Israel, again, will be reunited. It's like the Japanese art of kintsugi, which you've seen.

[10 : 53] Many of you have just come back from Japan. You may have bought a souvenir, something like this. But kintsugi is the art of using, you know, taking cracked and broken pottery and repairing it with golden seams and then making it look beautiful in the repair because the gold is the thing that mends the cracks.

Well, Israel, under God's promise, this divided kingdom will be kintsugid together. And what ensures this reunited kingdom is a reign characterized by justice and righteousness.

Now, again, we all like governments to be just and righteous, don't we? I talked about it right at the start. But if you think about it, it is actually harder to achieve than you think. And that's why there's no perfect government in the world.

Not just because the people ruling are not perfect, but also the very fact of justice, if you think about it. Because on the one hand, justice requires wrong to be punished.

It needs to do the right thing by the victims of wrongdoing, isn't it? But if every wrongdoing was punished, then there's really no room for mercy or compassion, isn't there?

[12 : 13] All we have is harsh and punitive government. It may be fair, but I don't know. It's not the kind of government that I want to live under because I will be so fearful all the time of doing the wrong thing.

You know, sometimes families that we see live like that as well, isn't it? That the parents are fair and harsh, but then there's no compassion. Members of that family often say they don't experience any love.

And yet on the flip side, we don't want a society in which the government just overlooks all wrongdoing, is it? It just turns a blind eye? Because what happens then is that it leads to lawlessness. And so it's really hard, isn't it, to have both of those things.

And yet here in Isaiah, he's saying that the child and the son who is born will achieve all this. I don't know about you, but that's a lot of pressure on a young person, isn't it?

Just think about Abigail here, youngest member here today. That kind of pressure on her. You know, I'm sure Victor and Helen have lots of expectations for her. Who knows?

[13 : 26] Victor may already have dreams of her becoming a famous person. Maybe in music, a world-renowned pianist, concert pianist. No? No. Maybe a sports person, winner of the Tour de Femme fan.

No? Okay. You have to tell me what it is then later on. Helen may be a bit more realistic. Her expectations... Her expectations of...

I'm not saying Abby's not up to great hearts, but her expectation of Abby right now might just be that she sleeps through the night. Fair enough? Yes. But you know, much as we dream for our children, there's no guarantee how they'll blossom, is there?

And actually, it's not fair to put such weight on their shoulders. And yet here we have this child, before he's even born, having the weight of the world on his shoulders. Now, of course, given this is Advent, we all know who this child is.

It's Jesus. And as we read in Luke, even before he was born, great things are foretold of him. Thus, in Luke, the angel appears to his mother, Mary, and in the announcement to her, uses very similar words that Isaiah uses as an echo.

[14 : 40] So, Luke, chapter 1, verse 30 on the slide. Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great.

He will be called the son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David. He will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end.

Now, incidentally, it's interesting, isn't it, that it talks about Jacob's descendants, because that shows, isn't it, that it's a united Israel, all the twelve tribes, not just the tribe of Judah. And as the son of the Most High God, he is also divine, and so worthy to be called Mighty God.

But, as I said already, he is also human, because he is a son born to Mary. And, of course, we see there that the kingdom will never end. So, all the characteristics that I've talked of that comes from Isaiah 9 are all right here, isn't it?

It tallies up really nicely, except for one detail. And that is, how will he uphold justice and righteousness? There's no mention of it here, is there, by the angel.

[15 : 50] Rather, you have to look a bit further, because it comes from the mouth of Zechariah instead. So, that's John the Baptist's father, and a few verses later, in verses 68 to 75, in Luke chapter 1, he prophesies, or he says this, Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he said through his holy prophets of long ago. And we know one of those prophets being Isaiah.

Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to show mercy to our ancestors, to remember his holy covenant, the oath he saw to our father Abraham, to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before him all our days.

So, yes, Jesus will save them from their enemies, so that they might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness. That's that word there. But then we ask, who are these enemies, and how will this come about?

Well, let's read on, because on the next slide, you, my child, that is John the Baptist, you will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go on before the Lord, that is the Lord Jesus, to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

[17 : 19] So, how will his people know salvation? Not through military conquests of physical enemies. Can you see that? But through the forgiveness of their sins.

Which means that the enemy is death and sin, the punishment for doing wrong and turning their backs on God. And if you read through the whole Gospel of Luke, you will see that the enemy of death is finally conquered by Jesus himself facing death on the cross, and then defeating it by rising from the dead.

So, friends, this perfect reign that Jesus is offering for Israel, but also for all of us, which we all can enjoy, is not found by escaping corrupt and bad governments in this world.

That may be what we long for, but what Jesus has given us, has come to give us, is to find that coming under his rule, we will be forgiven for our sins through faith in his death.

This is the great gift of the child that is born to us at Christmas. And so, if you're not yet a follower of Jesus today, let me share with you why I love belonging to this kingdom, why I love coming under his rule.

[18 : 42] As I said already, good governments are hard to find and this world isn't. Actually, in Australia, we're actually pretty fortunate to have relatively good government.

We have peace, don't we? That's because our governments are constrained by laws which everyone has to abide by, even the rulers. But, you know, if you live under a bad government, you can do the right thing and still be punished, isn't it?

And then you see bad people go free. There's no fairness, isn't it, with bad governments. But even if you do live under good governments, like we do here in Australia, things can be fair, but there are many times when we don't really experience any mercy, do we?

Just take something as simple as a parking fine. If you've parked where you shouldn't for too long, okay, maybe you deserve to pay the fine, but sometimes, you know, maybe it's just me, but there are valid reasons, aren't there?

Just late, because you were held up waiting in the queue to buy that loaf of bread and, you know, people take their time to order stuff and it's not your fault, is it?

[19 : 59] Otherwise, you're just rushing to help someone else and, you know, you need to get them to the doctors and so you just park the car there wanting to get them in. You're doing a good thing, isn't it? And yet, I don't know about you, but I've never been shown any grace with my parking fines.

So the laws of good government may be fair, but still pretty harsh at times, isn't it? But when you come under the rule of Jesus, we're not only forgiven for the wrong we've done, we continue to receive grace from our Master.

Yes, Jesus desires that we do right, but He's not sort of looking over our shoulders waiting to pounce every moment that we've done something wrong. Instead, we have a ruler that laid down His own life for us.

You know, He's better than the father who lets his daughters have his favorite chocolate ice cream, or the mother who forgoes her precious sleep so that her child can be fed.

This everlasting father keeps showing grace even when we falter in our attempts to obey Him. He forgives each time we come back to Him, having failed again to show the love that we ought to.

[21 : 18] That is the kind of reign that we come under when we put our trust in Jesus, when we call Him our King. And you know what? The moment we do something right, it immediately puts a smile on His face.

When we trust Him and obey Him, even when it's hard, it's met with His pleasure and affirmation. That's the kind of King that we serve.

And so I know that as a Christian, even if the rulers of this world can be unfair in treating us, they can be harsh in enforcing the law, I know that ultimately I have a ruler in heaven, Jesus, who sees and understands and is not only fair, but gracious and abounding in mercy.

And He will one day reward me for my faithfulness to Him. And so it's in that knowledge that I live secure knowing that one day as I keep serving Him, I will meet Him face to face.

and I will finally see Him and be able to call Him Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[22 : 35] Now, would you like to do the same? Well, all you need to do is come to Jesus and make Him the ruler of your life. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your Son who sits on the throne of David, who upholds justice and righteousness forever and ever.

Thank you for the wonderful and mighty ruler that He is, that through Him we have salvation through the forgiveness of sins. Help us to live under His perfect rule so that we can serve and please Him.

In His mighty name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.