

The True Liberator of All the Oppressed-Mighty God

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] I do have a seat and Aidan Chin is going to read for us our first reading this morning. If you'd like to turn up and follow, you'll find it in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 1. That's page 807, I think, in the Church Bibles.

And Aidan's going to read to us from Matthew, Chapter 1, verse 18 to 25. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

When his mother, Mary, had been betrothed to Joseph before they came together, she was found to be with a child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband, Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

[1 : 11] Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took his wife, but knew her not, until she had given birth to his son, and he called his name Jesus. Thank you, Aidan, for reading so lovely and clearly.

Well, perhaps you'd pick up your Bibles again, and this time turn to Isaiah chapter 9. Prophets foretold this infant of wonder.

And Ellie McClure is now going to read to us from Isaiah chapter 9, which you'll find on page 573. They will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish.

But the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.

[2 : 21] 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 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 is this. Again, thank you, Ellie, for reading so well. Well, perhaps you'd like to take up your Bibles again to that passage that we read from Isaiah chapter 9.

You'll find it on page 573 if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles. And in our Christmas services this year, we've been looking at this passage from Isaiah the prophet, and asking the question that one of the carols asks, Who is he in yonder stall, at whose feet the shepherds fall?

That's the question that we're asking. And the answer is found in the Christmas that all those people of faith were waiting for some 2,000 years ago.

[3 : 45] You might remember in Luke's gospel at the beginning that he tells us about people like Simeon and Anna and so on, Zechariah, who were waiting for the consolation of Israel.

But what were they expecting? What were they waiting for? The answer is, of course, they were waiting for the Christmas that was promised way back 700 years and more, before the birth of Jesus.

As spoken of by Isaiah and many of the other prophets. Isaiah, as we've read, promised from God that one day a child would be born, a son would be given to his people, and he would be the true answer, the ultimate answer from God.

Not only for all the hopes of his people Israel, but for all the hopes and fears of all the peoples of this world. Now, Isaiah's prophecy is very long.

It's 66 chapters long. But we've been focusing down mainly on this one place in Isaiah chapter 9, where he speaks of this coming birth. And it helps us to see what people were waiting for, what they were watching for.

[4 : 58] Look at verse 6 in front of us here. It's such a well-known verse, isn't it? Especially if you're familiar with Handel's Messiah that we hear so much at Christmas time. We've been looking at him. We've already seen that Isaiah says that this child will be the true Lord of all the world.

He'll be the ultimate King of glory. On his shoulder, he says, will be the government of all things. And of his government and of his peace, there will be no end.

And to that end, his name, verse 6, will be called the Wonderful Counselor, the Wonder Counselor, the one who counsels, who purposes wonders for his people. Wonders of salvation.

And so he will be the true leader of all mankind. He's the one who will lead all those people who bow the knee to him into the wonders of his everlasting peace and rule.

But this morning, I want us to focus on this next name. After that one, in verse 6. And it's perhaps the most explicit of them all, I think, isn't it?

[6 : 06] His name, this human child, will be the answer to all his people's longings. His name shall be called the Mighty God. And that means, you see, that he will have power at last to be the true liberator of all the oppressed the whole world over.

This child, long promised, will himself be, says the Prophet, God Almighty. He's come to bring promised liberation forever into this world.

True redemption to those who the Prophet says are walking in darkness. Walking in the gloom of anguish all the days of their lives. And he comes instead to bring the everlasting light of God.

True liberation from the darkness of death into the light of life everlasting. So I want us to focus this morning just on three things that this name implies.

Things that we really need to get clear if we're to understand what Christmas is all about. And the first is the obvious one. That this child is himself Almighty God.

[7 : 17] He is the Lord. That seems obvious, doesn't it? But I make the point of it because there are many people who won't accept this. You'll find, in fact, lots of groups of people who would call themselves Christian, but who won't have anything to do, actually, with the fact that the human being named Jesus of Nazareth really could possibly be one with God.

But that is the Christian faith. The Nicene Creed says this. Jesus Christ was God of God. Light of light. Very God of very God.

Begotten, not created. Being of one substance with the Father. And by whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate.

Made flesh. By the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary. And was made man. And that is a statement that marks true and orthodox Christian faith and belief.

But no Mormon could repeat those words. No Jehovah's Witness could repeat those words. No Christian scientist. No Christadelphian. All these groups that call themselves Christian don't believe that.

[8 : 38] Nor, of course, could any Muslim or any Jew contemplate the idea that God himself becomes human flesh. But the Bible, that many of those cults say they adhere to, clearly says that this child, look, will be called Mighty God.

Now, you'll find attempts to explain that away, of course, even among those who do call themselves Christian. Sometimes they say, well, but that phrase you see in the Hebrew just means mighty and God-like.

Just means he'll be a mighty one. God-like. That sort of thing. But look, in all honesty, if you can't look at Isaiah chapter 9, verses 1 to 7, and read that and see that whatever Isaiah is talking about here, it is something surely of staggering proportions.

Something that is clearly supernatural. If you can't see that reading these words, then all I can say is I think you have to be blind. Because even if you think that's impossible, surely it is clear that is what Isaiah thinks is possible.

That is what he is saying. That's what he's talking in those terms. I don't think we need to take time to make that case, because that's very obvious.

[9 : 55] But by the way, just for the record, and in case anybody tries to say to you, it can be explained away that way. The word God here that Isaiah uses for Mighty God, the word El, it's only ever used in the whole of the book of Isaiah, it is only ever used to refer to God, the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

Only ever. All throughout 66 chapters. In fact, turn over just a page to chapter 10, just so I can show you. Chapter 10, verse 20 and 21.

This is the only other place in the whole of Isaiah's book where the same exact phrase is used. I think you can see it refers unequivocally to God himself. Verse 20.

In that day, the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel in truth.

A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob too, the Mighty God. The Lord, the Holy One of Israel, the Mighty God.

[11 : 03] Look at chapter 9, verse 6. What does Isaiah say? This child's name will be called the Mighty God. He is the Lord. He will be the Holy One of Israel.

And so, of course, when the angel comes to speak to Mary and to say that she will be giving birth in a totally miraculous way, giving birth as a virgin to one who will be great, who will be called the Son of the Most High God, who will rule on David's throne forever, whose kingdom will never end.

There is surely absolutely no doubt, is there, what this child Jesus is going to be. And that's why the angel adds in, for nothing is impossible with God, even though such a thing seems utterly impossible to you.

It is not impossible with God. So, he is the Christ. He is the Lord. He is God Almighty.

It's extraordinary, you know, because sometimes people say, well, of course, Jesus Christ never claimed divinity for himself. Friends, that is an extraordinary thing to say if you have ever read even one of the Gospels, let alone if you've read all four of them.

[12 : 20] Jesus constantly acted as one who had all the authority of mighty God. He spoke constantly, didn't he, about his oneness with the Father.

He definitively interpreted God's holy law with an authority that only God himself could possibly hold. He even forgave sins, which is something that only God could do.

And that's precisely why the religious leaders, the Pharisees and those people hated him. We're going to stone you for blasphemy, they said to Jesus, because you, being a man, claim to be God.

John chapter 10, verse 33. That's pretty clear. He ought to die, is what they said to Pilate. Why? Because he claimed to be the Son of God.

John 19, verse 17. Many, many more, just like that. So the answer of the Bible is absolutely unequivocal. This child is the one in whom God became man.

[13 : 28] That's the heart of the Christian faith. Paul says, Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness, that God was manifest in the flesh.

He, this child, says Paul to the Colossians, is the image of the invisible God. In him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

I don't think you can really get any clearer than that, can you? And that's why the carols that we sing at Christmas time are full of words that speak of God so magnificently as having become human flesh in the person of Jesus.

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see. Hail, the incarnate deity. Behold, the great creator makes himself a house of clay, a robe of human form, he takes forever from this day.

Hear then, the wise, eternal word, as Mary's infant cries. A servant is our mighty Lord, our God, in the cradle lies.

[14 : 45] He is the mighty God. He is the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. Well, the carols are clear. Charles Wesley is very clear.

Isaiah is extremely clear. This child to come will be himself God, the Lord. But specifically here, notice he is the mighty God.

So he's the one who cancels wonders, who purposes wonders. But as the mighty God, he is the one who is mighty to accomplish all that he purposes. And what he purposes is redemption.

And so the second thing we need to be clear about is that this child will be the Lord mighty to save. He is the liberator of all mankind. He's the God whose very name speaks of being a mighty redeemer, a liberator.

Listen to what the prophet Jeremiah, another of the prophets said of him. Listen to the similar language. Oh, great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty indeed.

[15 : 57] You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among mankind, and have made a name for yourself. You see how God gets his name, his renown from the wonders that he did.

And of course, above all the wonders that he did in bringing his people out of the land of Egypt. In the Exodus, that was the great liberation of God's people out of bondage and slavery and into the land of God's promise, his kingdom.

Where God redeemed his people, he liberated them with his mighty hand. It was the mighty hand of the mighty God that brought his people out of Egypt. The language of the mighty God surrounds the whole story of the Exodus.

And God met Moses at the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3. He says to him, the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. And so I will stretch out my hand to strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do.

And after that, he will let you go. Liberated, you see, by the mighty hand of the mighty God. That's why ever after, Israelites are told to tell their children about God, the mighty liberator.

[17 : 14] Remember when we studied in Deuteronomy chapter 6, you're to tell your children, say to your son, we were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Because he loves you, says Moses to the people. The Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand. He has redeemed you. He's liberated you from the house of slavery.

God is the mighty liberator of his people. And so he will be in the future. That's what Moses also said to the people. You shall not be afraid of your enemies, he said, but you shall remember that the Lord your God did all those things to Pharaoh and to all Egypt.

The signs, the wonders, the mighty hand outstretched by which the Lord brought you out. And you shall not be afraid. For the Lord your God is in your midst, the great and awesome God.

A mighty God, a liberating God, is your God. And that is what this child will be for you and for all God's people is what Isaiah is saying.

[18 : 27] He will be Emmanuel. He will be God with you. A mighty God in the midst to save you, to redeem you, to liberate you. And this is a promise to liberate you at last forever.

This will be something far, far greater. than just a liberation out of Egypt. This will not be just temporary. This will stretch out and last forever and ever.

And notice that the liberation that this will bring will be for all peoples and indeed for the whole creation itself. In chapter 60 of Isaiah's prophecy, those are the words I read at the very beginning of the story.

Isaiah says, it will be a liberation from the darkness that shrouds and covers the whole earth. The thick darkness, he says, that shrouds all human peoples.

But a day is coming, he says. And it's the day of this child that he's speaking about. A day is coming when the glory of the Lord will arise upon Israel and all nations, he says, will come to your light.

[19 : 36] It will be a day when kings come to the brightness of that rising, bearing gold and frankincense, is what Isaiah says, 700 years before Jesus was born. Isn't that extraordinary? And bringing good news, not just for Israel, but for all the nations and all the peoples.

In that day, says the Lord, you shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. I am the Lord and in its time I will hasten to do it.

Read those chapters later. See for yourself. He's the Lord. He is the liberator. He comes mighty to save. He comes to redeem, to liberate forever and ever all of those who are bound in the shadows and in darkness.

He comes to save, to redeem men and women and boys and girls from the tyranny of sin, from the bondage to Satan himself, the author of the sin, by the hand of the mighty God, powerful to save.

And that's what this child who was going to be born as a shoot and branch of Jesse would do. That's what the carols tell us too. O come, thou branch of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny, from depths of hell thy people save and give them victory over the grave.

[21 : 02] That's why Christmas is such good news. That's why the Christmas story is not just a story, it's news, it's gospel. Because in the coming of this child, earth's dark shadows will all be forced to flee away.

And in Christ will dawn upon us the endless day of life everlasting. That's true liberation. Who is he in yonder store?

Well, he is himself the mighty God, he's the Lord. And he is the mighty God who is mighty to save. He is the liberator.

But what is this bondage that he's talking about? What is this liberation from? What is the great thing that makes this such good news?

And what's it got to do with us? 27 centuries after all, after Isaiah spoke these words. 20 centuries after Jesus Christ was born. Well, friends, that is the third thing that we really need to get clear about what the Christmas message is all about.

[22 : 13] And it's this, that this child is the liberator from death itself. Forever. He will be the life giver. The giver of life everlasting in the place of death everlasting.

Now, you might be saying to yourself, look, what has this got to do with me? Perhaps you've been dragged out this morning by members of your family who you're with for Christmas and you're just being polite and coming to church with them and good for you.

That's a good thing to do. But you might be here thinking, well, look, this is nonsense to me. I don't need liberated. I don't need a redeemer. I'm free. I live in a free country after all.

We've got free speech. I've got money. I can make my choices. I'm quite happy. I don't need this redemption that you're talking about. In fact, you maybe feel quite indignant just to hear me to speak in those terms.

It might feel quite offensive to you to be, to have somebody saying, well, you're in bondage. You're in darkness. You don't feel like that at all. And I understand that because in many ways it is offensive, isn't it, to every one of us, to our human spirit to be told that.

[23 : 22] None of us likes to think in those terms. But if you just listen for a few more minutes and just try and hold your sense of offense at bay, and let me just try and put this to you.

I'll put my cards on the table. I'll be absolutely blunt. I'm not going to hide anything. Here is the reality that according to the Bible, according to the Christian gospel, according to Jesus Christ himself, if you don't know Jesus Christ personally as your liberator, as your redeemer, then the message of the Christian gospel is that, yes, you are indeed in darkness.

You are in bondage. You are a slave. The language Jesus uses in his apostles is that you are a slave to the power of sin.

You're ultimately a slave to the author of sin, to the devil himself. And I know that's very offensive, but that is the language that Jesus Christ constantly used.

So try not to get angry about it, but just try and think for a moment. Just try and think about those propositions and think about what is really true and who's right. Not who's being offensive and who's being polite, but who's actually right about the human condition and who's wrong.

[24 : 45] Jesus, or those of us who claim to be free, who claim to be autonomous, who claim to be in control, who claim to be in control of our own destiny and in no need of anybody to liberate us or redeem us or anything else.

Now, I think, you might disagree with me, but I think that it is actually possible to be enslaved, to be in need of liberation and not even to know that, not even to realize that.

Maybe because you've never really known anything different, never known anything else. I wonder when you hear news reports about countries like North Korea, for example, I wonder if the people living in that country really have any idea of what real liberty is.

They've never known it, have they, most of them? Do you think they realize the extent of the bondage, of the slavery, of the oppression that they live under? They may have some idea, but I wonder if they really do in the same way as we do, so easily looking on.

And actually, you see, many people today in our own culture, in our own nation, in our own city, they think that they are free. Perhaps that's you. People think they can do what they please, they've got money, they can travel, they can we're in control of our lives, I can do what I please.

[26 : 10] But if we are really so free, if we really are as liberated as people like to think they are, why is there so much dissatisfaction in our society?

About what we have, about what we need, about what we think we need? Why is there so much unhappiness all around us? Why are there soaring rates of depression?

Why is there so much marriage breakup? Why is there so much family unhappiness? Why is there so much psychological ill health, so much relationship breakdown?

Why is it that work related stress is overwhelmingly the greatest reason for people being signed off ill from work today? Why are artists, people who work in the creative arts, why are they constantly in their work expressing a desire to break free, to break free of conventions, to get away from being stifled?

Why are they always searching for something more, searching for something better? Why are they rebelling against everything they know and everything they experience? Why is there all that around us all the time in our own free, liberal, Western society, if we really are, as individual human beings, so autonomous, so in control, so free, and not needing any kind of liberation?

[27 : 38] See, I wonder if we are really anything like as free of masters and rulers and oppressors as we like to think we are. I think actually many of us live as quite willing slaves a very great deal of the time to the powers, to the taskmasters, that actually we're buying down to and serving so often in our lives.

Striving to please what the world demands of us. Seeking the wealth or the prosperity that will give us kudos in the eyes of others. Or seeking the career or the education or whatever it is that will give you admiration as you want to have from other people.

Or seeking the relationship that will give you that sense of identity and meaning and belonging. Or nowadays there's a great pressure, isn't there, being put out all over our earwaves to try and seek the perceived gender that will give you that identity and that life.

For some people it's being driven, isn't it, to make those achievements that will give you the approval of your parents that you so desperately long for or a host of other things that are what drive you and what make you live for.

there's so many things, aren't there, that we find ourselves living for. So somehow at last these things will actually give us that satisfaction, that freedom that we crave.

[29 : 14] If that was really true, friends, why? Go around to Buchanan Street or Socky Hall Street after the service and you will see a sea of grim-faced choppers trudging up and down full of the misery of Christmas.

Are we really as free as we want to be? Because you see, living like that, as so many of us do in our society, is living under powers that are controlling our lives.

And the tragedy is, friends, those powers do not have the might and the power to liberate us as we would like to imagine. They may promise that, but they don't do it.

What they do have power to do, of course, is to condemn us as failures. When we don't achieve what we hope to achieve, when we don't get what we long for.

So I'm not sure myself that our modern claims to liberty and to freedom really actually stand up to the test of scrutiny, of real life. It's one thing to think these things in your head. It's quite another thing, actually, to see that that is true in the real world.

[30 : 25] But even if you do still think that, you disagree with me, well, I think there is one indisputable fact that I think you will have to concede. And that is that according to the Bible, we are all in the bondage to the darkness of death itself.

The fact of death itself. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome, sin. And he likened this bondage that all human beings are in to the power of sin.

He likened it to being under the overlordship of a truly brutal employer. Some of you may be able to identify with that. But this employer abuses his workers and in the end pays out a final wage, which just adds insult to ultimate injury.

He pays out their death. the wages of sin is death, says Paul. Now, I don't think we can deny that fact, can we?

Okay, the cosmetic industry does its best to help us. The NHS does a sterling job, helping us to try and avoid it or hide from it for a little while, but never forever. Never forever.

[31 : 39] And however free we might think we are, we all will receive that final paycheck. And friends, a very bitter wage that is, is it not? That is a wage that spoils even our joyful times, even times like Christmas.

It casts a dark shadow, doesn't it? A loud, a long shadow. In fact, we even use the very language that the Bible uses about this. We'll say, don't we? We'll say, well, Christmas is under a shadow for us this year.

Because there's been a recent bereavement in the family. And the fact of death, friends, makes all of us, all of us, people who are walking in darkness.

People walking all the days of our lives in this world, as Isaiah says, walking in the land of the shadow of death. But his message of Christmas is that this child who is the Lord, who is the mighty God, who is the true liberator, is the liberator from death itself.

He is the life giver. And with his coming, that's why the people in darkness have seen a great light. Because they've seen the light of a life that conquers death, that liberates people from the shadow of death.

[33 : 04] And that brings us into the light of life forever. In Jesus Christ, God himself took flesh and blood, says the apostle, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and liberate, deliver all those who through fear of death had been subject to lifelong slavery.

And that is what is right at the heart of Isaiah's promise all those years ago for this coming child. He would be the Lord, the liberator, the life giver, mighty to deliver from the tyrant, the greatest tyrant of all, death itself.

Listen to what Isaiah says a little later on in his prophecy about when this plan comes to fruition, the great things that God has counseled and purposed. He says you have done wonderful things, plans counseled from over old, faithful and sure.

Listen. And on that day he says on this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of rich food, a feast of well aged wine, of rich food full of marrow and aged wine well refined and he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples.

He will swallow up death forever and the Lord will wipe away all tears from all faces.

[34 : 30] Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise, you who dwell in the dust arise and sing for joy for your due is a due of light and the earth will give birth to the dead.

You see that is what this child was coming to do. To liberate, to rescue forever those who are trapped powerless in their own mortality because they're under the curse that is upon the human race because of the guilt of sin, of rebellion against God.

something we, no human being could ever do. Jesus Christ, this promised child who came, he can do because he himself is the mighty God.

He is the one whose arm is mighty to work salvation, even life from the dead for sinful people because he came down to earth from heaven.

And as a humble human servant, this child came to bear the curse himself away from all his people. To receive in his own body on that mountain of Calvary the curse of sin himself.

[35 : 50] So as to loose sinners from the claims of hell, to liberate them into the gate of heaven. the apostle Paul put it this way, he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the son of his love in whom we have redemption, liberation, the forgiveness of our sins.

And so we are truly liberated people who believe and trust in Jesus Christ. No guilt in life, no fear in death, only life, life eternal.

Life as God himself created it to be. In the place where he will swallow up death forever, in the place where he himself will wipe away every tear from our faces.

You know, friends, there are people here this morning who no doubt will wonder, will this be the last Christmas for me? Will I still be alive here next Christmas?

But they are liberated from fear of death because they find Jesus Christ and know him as the light of life. Who is he in yonder stall?

[37 : 11] He is the mighty God. He is Emmanuel. He is God with us to redeem. He is the Lord. He is the liberator. He is the life giver. who is he that from the grave comes to heal and help and save.

It's the Lord. A wondrous story. It's the Lord, the King of glory. He himself who was born to die that we might be born again never to die but to know life and liberty forever as sons of God.

That's what Christmas is all about. That's why it's good news and not just a great story. At his feet we humbly fall and we crown him as Lord of all.

Amen.