

3. What Child is this? He'll be a Powerful Liberator - The Mighty God

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much indeed, Ross. Do keep your Bibles open there. What child is this who laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping, whom angels greet with anthems sweet while angels watch are keeping?

That's the question that we're asking this Christmas together. And the answer is to be found in the Christmas that all these people in the Christmas story in the first century AD, in the Christmas that they were waiting for.

What were they expecting? Who were they expecting? Well, the answer is they were expecting Christmas according to the prophet Isaiah. Because 700 years earlier, as we've read, he had promised that one day a child would be born, a son would be given, and that child would be the answer of God to all the hopes of his people, right from the very start of human history.

And so we've been looking at one of the places where Isaiah tells us about this child to come to see just what it was that the people were to watch out for and were to wait for.

And that verse, Isaiah 9-6, is so well known to us, isn't it? From that chorus in Handel's Messiah. By the way, it is a chorus, not an aria. I was put right on that by Joel the other week.

[1 : 24] I mentioned it and said it was an aria. You can't get away with anything in this place with all these musicians around. But it was a chorus. We just had a chorale, by the way. That was what the choir was singing, in case you were wondering. So if you don't know your chorales and your arias and your choruses and your recitatives, speak to Joel afterwards.

But we've been looking at this verse now for a few weeks and we've seen that first of all and above all, this child would be the promised Lord. He would be the ultimate King of Glory.

The government of all kinds and of all time would be on his shoulder and his reign would be forever and ever. And then last Sunday evening we saw that this child would be a present leader for his people, a wonderful counselor, or the counselor, the purposer of wonders for his people, to lead them into the wonders of his great salvation.

And his counsel, his purpose for all of us is that we should bow the knee to him as our leader and as our Lord. But this morning I want to look at this next name, which perhaps is even more explicit. His name, that human child who is to be born, his name shall be called, says Isaiah, mighty God. And that means, as we'll see, that he would be the one who would be a powerful liberator for his people.

[2 : 53] I want us to focus on three things that this name implies and things that we must get clear. Here's the first. This child himself is almighty God. He is the Lord.

That seems obvious. Indeed it is obvious. But I make that point just because there are so many who simply won't accept this. You'll find, of course, many groups that would want to describe themselves as Christian and yet who wouldn't have anything to do with the idea that a human being could possibly be one with God.

So as to be, as the Nicene Creed says of Jesus Christ, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not created, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate, enfleshed by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man.

Now that statement is the mark of Orthodox Christian belief. But no Mormon or Jehovah's Witness or Christian scientist or Christadelphian would ever say something like that.

God can be man. Of course, no Muslim could ever say something like that either. That would be blasphemy. But the Bible, that in fact many of these cults say that they adhere to, the Bible clearly

says that this child will be a mighty God.

[4 : 33] Now you'll find attempts, of course, to explain that away even among scholars who do call themselves Christian. They'll say things like, well, that phrase in Isaiah just means something like mighty and God-like.

That kind of thing. But, you know, in all honesty, if you could actually read these verses that we've read in Isaiah 9, and if you can't see that whatever Isaiah is talking about, he's talking about something absolutely of staggering proportions.

Something absolutely supernatural. If you can't see that, I'm not sure that there's anything other I can say, really, other than that you must be blind. Even if you think such a thing is impossible, at least it's clear, surely, that Isaiah thinks it's possible.

And Isaiah is talking in those terms. His name will be called Mighty God. Now, we don't need to waste time, I think, making the case for that because it's so obvious.

But just let me say that that word there, God, L, used in Isaiah there is only ever used by Isaiah for one person. That's God, the Lord, the God of Israel.

[5 : 44] He never uses it for anything else. Actually, if you'd like to turn over the page to Isaiah 10 and verse 21, I think you'll see that the only other place in his prophecy where he uses exactly this phrase and it's absolutely unequivocal, isn't it?

It refers to God. Look at 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, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. God. So this child will himself be Almighty God.

He's the Lord. He's the Holy One of Israel. And so an angel tells Mary that she'll give birth in an utterly miraculous way as a virgin to one who will be great, who will be called Son of the Most High, who will rule on David's throne forever, whose kingdom will never, ever end.

And there can be no doubt at all, can there, who this child, Jesus, that she was going to bear, must be. He's the Christ. He's the Lord.

[6 : 55] He's God Almighty. Now, if you read the Gospels, you can't miss, can you, the absolute clarity that Jesus himself has about his own identity.

Extraordinary, isn't it? Well, I find it extraordinary when people say things like this. Well, Jesus, of course, never claimed anything like divinity for himself. Have you heard people say that sort of thing? I've seen it by biblical scholars and people like that being interviewed on the television. Jesus never claimed divinity for himself. I just wonder what Bible these people are reading. He constantly acted as one who had authority, the authority of mighty God.

He spoke of his own oneness with the Father. He definitively himself interpreted the law of God and said, this is the way you're to understand it.

Something only God could do. He even forgave sins. Something, nobody was in any doubt that it was only God who could do that. And of course, that's precisely why the religious authorities hated him.

[8 : 03] We're going to stone you for blasphemy, they said, because you, being a mere man, claim to be God. John chapter 10, verse 33. He ought to die, they said to Pilate in John 19, verse 7.

Why? Because he claimed to be the Son of God. So the answer is unequivocal, isn't it? In this child, God became man.

And that's the heart of the Christian faith. Great, indeed, we confess, says Paul, is the mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh.

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

And that's why our Christmas carols speak of this so magnificently, don't they? veil in flesh, the Godhead see. Hail, the incarnate deity.

[9 : 11] Behold, the great creator makes himself a house of clay, a robe of human form he takes forever from this day. hear this, the wise, eternal word, as Mary's infant cries, a servant is our mighty Lord, a God in cradle lies.

What child is this? He's the mighty God. He is the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, God become man. We're going to pause again for a minute and sing one of the great Christmas hymns that help us to ponder this wonder of God manifest in the flesh below.

Let earth and heaven combine, angels and men agree to praise in songs divine the incarnate deity, our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.

Yes, it is incomprehensible, but it is true. Let earth and heaven combine. So, this child is himself God.

He's the Lord. But here specifically we're told he is called Mighty God. He's the one who counsels wonders, who purposes wonders, but as the Mighty God he is mighty to accomplish all that he purposes.

[10:42] And what he purposes for his people is their redemption. So, secondly, this child will be the Lord mighty to save.

He is the liberator of his people. He's the God whose very name speaks of mighty redemption, of liberation.

Listen to another prophet, Jeremiah, and what he says of him. O great, O mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed.

See the same terms? 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 as to this day.

You see how God gets his name, his renown, from the wonders he did, above all, in Egypt, in the Exodus, in the great liberation of God's people, out of the bondage of slavery and into the land of God's promise.

[11:47] Where God redeemed his people, where he liberated them by the power of a mighty hand, the mighty hand of the mighty God. And the language of the mighty God always surrounds that great liberation.

In Exodus 3 at the burning bush, God speaks to Moses and says this, the king of Egypt, he says, will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. And so I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders I will do and after that he will let you go.

Liberated by the mighty hand of God. God And that's why forever after the Israelites were to tell their children of the mighty God of liberation.

Listen to Deuteronomy 6 verse 21, You shall say to your son, We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Or Deuteronomy 7, Because the Lord loves you, says Moses, the Lord has brought you up with a mighty hand and redeemed you, liberated you from out of the house of slavery. You see, God is a mighty liberator.

[13:13] And so he will be in the future, says Moses. You shall not be afraid of your enemies, but you shall remember that the Lord your God did that to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. The signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, the outstretched arm by which the Lord brought you out.

And you shall not be afraid for the Lord your God is in your midst a great and awesome God, a mighty God, a liberator. And that's what this child will be for you, says Isaiah.

He will be as Emmanuel, as God with you, with a mighty hand. He will be God, the mighty liberator in the midst to redeem you, to set you free and to liberate you forever.

And that will be something far, far greater than just the liberation from Egypt. That was just temporary. But Isaiah is telling us this will be forever. And this liberation will be something that brings a great redemption not just to God's people Israel, but to all people.

In fact, Isaiah says to the whole creation. In chapter 60 of his prophecy, Isaiah tells us that it will be a liberation from the darkness that covers the whole earth.

[14:32] The thick darkness that shrouds all peoples. But a day is coming, he says, the day of this child, when the glory of the Lord himself will arise and all nations will come to that light.

the day when kings will come, he says, to the brightness of your dawn, bearing, what do you think, golden frankincense, he says, and bringing good news not only for Israel but for all peoples.

And 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.

In its time, I will hasten it. Read Isaiah 60 when you get home later on and see what he says. What child is this? He's the Lord but he's the liberator.

He comes mighty to save and to liberate forever all of those who are bound in the shadows and in the darkness because he comes to save men and women and boys and girls from the tyranny of sin, from the tyranny of Satan himself.

[15 : 38] And he does it by the hand of the mighty God, the one who liberates out of bondage and into freedom. And that's what this child, the shoot of Jesse, was going to do.

That's why we sing in the carol, O come, thy branch of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny, from depths of hell thy people save and give them victory o'er the grave.

That's why you see Christmas is good news, not just a good story. Because it's the coming of this child. And with his coming, earth's dark shadows flee away.

In Christ has dawned the endless day, the day of liberation. So we're going to pause again and sing about the good news that has opened wide heaven's door.

Good news, good news to you we bring. Hallelujah. What child is this? Well, he is himself almighty God.

[16 : 47] He's the Lord. He's the mighty God. He's the Lord mighty to save. He's the liberator. But what is this bondage that Isaiah is talking about?

And what really is this liberation all about? And what's it got to do with us? Twenty-seven centuries after Isaiah spoke these words.

Two thousand years after the birth of Jesus Christ. Well, that's the third thing that we must get clear this morning. This child is the liberator from death itself.

He's the true life giver. See, you might be saying to yourself, well look, that's all very well but this doesn't really have anything to do with me.

I don't need to be liberated. I don't need a redeemer. I'm free. I live in a free country. I'm in control of my life. I'm in control of my body.

[17 : 48] I'm in control of my future. I make my own choices in life. I'm perfectly happy. I don't need any of that redemption stuff. That's, well, that's just for feeble people. You might feel quite indignant at some of the things I've said.

How dare you say that I am in bondage? How dare you say that I'm in darkness? I find that very offensive. And perhaps you're saying that to yourself but at the risk of me being offensive to you a little bit longer, would you just hear me out for a few minutes?

I'm just going to put my cards on the table here. I'm going to be blunt. I'm not trying to hide anything. Here's the reality. The Bible says that if you don't know Jesus Christ personally as your liberator, as your redeemer, then yes, you are in darkness.

You're in bondage. You're a slave. You're a slave, according to the Bible, to the power of sin. And in fact, you're a slave to the author of sin, to the devil himself.

I know that's very offensive. But look, it's just a language that Jesus Christ himself used all the time. All the time. So try not to get angry but just think for a moment.

[19 : 07] Who is right? Not who's offensive and who's polite, but who's right? Jesus or those who claim to be free and autonomous and in control and masters of their own destiny and not in any need of liberation?

That's the question. Who's right? Jesus or you, if you think that? Now, you know, I think, you might disagree with me, but I think that it's possible to be enslaved and to be needing liberation even if you don't know it.

Maybe because you've never known anything else. Could that be true? Could that be possible? I think it could be. I mean, take, for example, people growing up, being born and growing up in somewhere like North Korea today.

A country shut off almost completely to the outside world. People never having known liberty in generations, in political terms, in social terms, and so on.

Do you think those people realise the extent of their bondage? I very much doubt whether they do. You see, there are equally many people in our own culture today who think that they're free.

[20 : 24] They can do as they please, they've got money, you've got freedom of speech, at least we still have, mostly in this country, although it seems to be disappearing. We've got freedom to travel, we can more or less do as we want, we're pretty free.

But are we really as free as we think we are? Are we really as liberated in our society today as some of us like to think? I'm not sure.

I mean, if we were, why, for example, is there so much dissatisfaction in our society about what we have, about what we think we need? Why, in our society, there are such high rates of unhappiness and depression, of marriage breakup, family disharmony.

Why is there so much psychological ill health if we're so free and liberated, so much relationship breakdown? Why are our artists still seeking to try and break free from conventions, from a sense of being stifled?

Why are musicians, artists, people in the artistic and aesthetic world, always searching for more, rebelling against what they know and currently experience?

[21 : 40] Why all of that if we are so free, if we're so autonomous, if we're so in control of everything as we sometimes think we are? I wonder if we are so free of masters and rulers as we think we are.

I think, actually, a lot of us are very willing slaves all of the time. Don't you think so? Slaves to the harsh powers and taskmasters that we bow down to and serve in our society today, striving to please what the world around us demands in so many different ways, of our minds, of our bodies, of our possessions and so on.

The wealth that gives you kudos in the world today. I was reading this week that a million is not enough. Actually, you need five to be considered rich today. Or maybe the career or the education or the future that gets you admiration in the world that you're striving for.

Or the relationship that you need to give you identity. Or the achievements, maybe. Maybe for younger folk, it's the achievements that will gain you the approval of your parents that you're striving for.

Maybe it's the body image that you're striving for that the world will recognize. There's so many things, aren't there, that we today in our society that's so free, so liberated, are actually living for.

[23 : 08] So somehow, at last, these things will actually give us the true satisfaction that we desire and we crave. That's why Buchanan Street today will be full of grumpy, miserable-faced shoppers, isn't it?

Looking for the things that will bring satisfaction at Christmas. But you see, if we're living like that, whatever it's for, it means that these things have a control over us.

And the tragedy is, friends, that these powers do not have the power to liberate us in our lives. Much as they might promise that.

What they do have, alas, is the power to condemn us as failures. Isn't that right? When we don't achieve everything that we hope to achieve, so I'm not sure that this modern claim of our world to have such real liberty really stands up to the test of scrutiny.

But listen, there is one indisputable fact that I think you'll have to concede, even if you feel affronted by the very thought that you are in bondage to something, to darkness, according to the Bible, but to whatever it is in your understanding.

[24 : 17] And that indisputable fact is this, it's the fact of death. See, writing to the Christian church at Rome, Paul likens the bondage of humanity to the power of sin, to being under the overlordship of a brutal employer, an employer that abuses his workers all the way through, and in the end pays a final wage that just adds insult to injury.

He pays out the wage of death. The wages of sin is death, says Paul. That's what that master pays to you in the end. I don't think we can deny that fact, can we?

Anybody here believe that they can really dodge death? Well, the cosmetic industry and the medical profession help us to try and avoid it for a while, or to hide it from ourselves for a little while, but not forever.

And however free we might think we are, we will all receive that final payment, won't we? That bitter wage. And that's a wage, isn't it, that spoils even our joyful times.

Times like Christmas. It does tend to cast a dark shadow, doesn't it? We've used the Bible's language, don't we? We say, well, Christmas will be under a bit of a shadow this year for us, if there's been a bereavement in the year.

[25 : 44] And that's true, isn't it? It's the fact of death means that all of us are people who are walking in darkness. People walking all the days of our life in this world in the shadow of death.

As Isaiah says. But you see, the message of Christmas is that this child who is Lord, who is the mighty God, who is the liberator, is the liberator from death itself.

He's the life giver. And with His coming, says Isaiah, the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. The light of life that conquers death, that destroys death forever, and therefore liberates people from the shadow of death, both now and forever.

Hebrews 2 says, in Jesus Christ, God Himself took flesh and blood, that through death, He says, He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver, liberate, all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

And that's right at the heart of Isaiah's promise for this child. He would be the Lord, the liberator, the life giver, mighty, to deliver from the tyrant of death and to do it forever.

[27 : 09] Listen to what He says in chapter 25 of His prophecy, when this plan comes to fruition, His wonders cancelled of old. He says, You have done wonders, plans from of old, faithful and sure.

And on this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food, full of marrow, of aged wine, well refined.

He will swallow up, listen, He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over the nations. He will swallow up death forever.

And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. And in the next chapter He says, Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise.

You who dwell in the dust, awake, and sing for joy, for your dew is a dew of light and the earth will give birth to the dead. You see, that's what this child will do.

[28 : 16] Liberate, rescue forever and ever those trapped in the powerlessness of their own mortality and helpless and under the curse of sin.

Something that we could never do, but something that God can do because He is mighty God, the one whose arm is mighty to work salvation for His people.

And all because as a humble human servant, this child would be the one, says Isaiah, to bear the curse for His people, bearing their sins away and receiving the wage of death for their sin.

and so loose sinners from the claims of hell, as the carol says, and liberate them from the gates of heaven. Paul puts it this way in Colossians chapter 1, He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, liberation, the forgiveness of sins.

And so we're liberated. No guilt in life and no fear in death. Only life, life eternal as God created it to be, in the place where He will swallow up death forever and where He will wipe away every tear from every eye.

[29 : 45] You know, there are some people here with us this morning who in all probability know very well that they won't see next Christmas here on earth.

But they are liberated from the fear of death because in Jesus Christ they have found the light of life. What child is this?

He's the mighty God. He's Emmanuel. He's God with us to redeem, to liberate, to free His people. He's the Lord.

He's the liberator. He's the life giver. He was born to die that we might be born again never to die but to live in the liberty of the sons of God.

And that's what Christmas is all about. And that's why we're here this morning well we're going to sing of that liberation now in our last carol of the child born to die that we might live.

[30 : 54] Listen to this verse. Through the kisses of a friend's betrayal he was lifted on a cruel cross. He was punished for a world's transgressions. He was suffering to save the lost.

He fights for breath. He fights for me. Loosing sinners from the claims of hell. And with a shout our souls are free liberated death defeated by Emmanuel.

and will in the flood