

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Wonderful Counselor*  
**SERIES:** *And His Name Shall be Called*  
**SCRIPTURES:** *Isaiah 9:2,6*  
**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*  
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*\*Credit to John Oswalt (commentary); Michael Coogan (Annotated NRSV); John Ortberg (sermon on PreachingToday.com - Guide) for ideas & illustrations in this sermon.*

Well good morning it is so great to worship with you.

This morning and for the next several weeks, in anticipation of Christmas and in celebration of God born as a baby we are kicking off our Christmas series.

This year, our Christmas series is titled: **“And His Name Shall be Called” (Series Title Slide)**

Perhaps you remember from your High school choir days...a popular Christmas song...

Handel’s “Messiah”...I can hear the words of that song reverberating through my ears.

And it comes from a passage in the Old Testament...the book of **Isaiah 9**. If you have a Bible you can go ahead and turn there. It may seem strange to turn to an Old Testament passage around Christmas, but this is one of the passages from the Old Testament, traditionally understood as a reference to the coming of the Messiah.

**Isaiah 9:2,6 - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned...<sup>6</sup> For to 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.**

And so over the next four weeks, we want to look at the four names or Title's that Isaiah uses to describe the coming Messiah. Each week will talk about the significance of one of these names.

So this morning we want to talk a little bit about Jesus described as...

## **I. Wonderful Counselor**

Why did the prophet Isaiah call the future Messiah, wonderful counselor? And more importantly how does Jesus function as our counselor today, 2019...in Franklin County, PA? What kind of counsel does Jesus give to you and me?

### **A. Background is important.**

Isaiah was a prophet in Israel about 700-800 years before Jesus. Around the time of what is commonly known as the **Assyrian conquest**. (**MAP of ANCIENT ISRAEL**)

Remember Moses & Joshua, led the Nation of Israel out of Egypt (Plagues, Red Sea), across the desert and into the Promised Land. For many years, during the time that Israel was ruled by the judges and Kings, Israel was an independent nation.

Now at one point, in Israel's history, the nation started fighting amongst itself. I know it's hard to imagine...a nation, divided and fighting amongst itself. Brothers, family members and neighbors not getting along with each other. But this actually happened. And the fighting became so strong, the nation actually split into two distinct Kingdoms (**MAP OF DIVIDED MONARCHY**). The Northern Kingdom is often

referred to as **Israel** with it's own Kings and the Southern Kingdom is often referred to as **Judah** with it's own Kings. Israel – North, Judah – South...but all the nation of Israel.

And so when your reading your Bible and you come to books like 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles...you are reading mostly about the history of the two Kingdoms Israel & Judah, their relationship and their various kings.

But in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE (before Jesus), the Assyrian Empire rose to power. And began conquering all of the Middle East. In 722 BCE the Assyrians conquered/destroyed the northern Kingdom, "Israel" (**PUT AN X OVER ISRAEL**) and made the Southern Kingdom, Judah, slaves.

Isaiah most likely lives around this time. This is why when Isaiah is writing, in Isaiah 9, he writes things like...

**Isaiah 9:2 - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned...**

Here is the nation of Israel, God's people, living in the Promised Land...supposed to be experiencing God's blessings and favor. And instead they find themselves walking in darkness. They are divided, fighting with each other...worse yet destroyed, beaten up, enslaved by the invading, pagan Assyrians.

And they don't know why? They are looking for answers, guidance, counsel? Has God left and abandoned them? Did God get fed up with their disobedience, He just walked away. Are the god's of Assyria, stronger than their God? Maybe all of this talk about their one, true God, Supreme Creator, is nonsense. They are lost, walking in darkness, confused, hopeless, helpless.

Have you ever looked around our world, kind of thought that maybe we too are a people, a world, walking in darkness, looking for some answers about life? Have you ever looked around our world and thought to yourself perhaps God has abandoned us or you? Have you ever wondered if the god's and powers in this world are just too much for our God? Cause this life isn't going the way you expected.

That's the world Isaiah is writing to. But notice what he says...

**Isaiah 9:2,6 - The people walking in darkness** (are lost forever, hopeless, you may as well give up) **have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned...**

There is hope, there is light approaching...what is that hope...

**6 For to 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.**

God's answer to the oppression and hostility of the invading Assyrians is not a conquering warrior to smash the opposition. God's answer to his confused, lost, broken people is to take on flesh, enter the chaos and confusion of this world as a baby.

God will rescue his people through a child.

People walking in darkness... that's us, our world...often confused, blinded, overwhelmed by our world. We need a guide...wisdom, knowledge. Amidst the confusion and questions of life...we need a...

## **B. Counselor.**

Have you thought about this before, your life, my life, is made up of a series choices, decisions. That's what life is. Each moment of each day we are faced with challenging decisions and hard choices about life. And our life, in many ways, becomes the result of our choices.

From the moment you hear your alarm ringing in your ears...Are you gonna wake up when your alarm goes off or are you going to back to bed? That choice can have significant consequences on the person you are becoming.

When you get into an argument with your spouse...wouldn't it be great to have a counselor by your side? Just when you're about to tell them how much they're like their mother...someone to whisper in your ear, "Probably best not to say that."

When you are trying to determine whether to go to college or trade school? What to study? Where to go to college? Wouldn't it be nice if someone were there to point you in the right direction, give you some counsel?

When you're trying to decide whether you will exercise today or not?

Where should you settle your family down and live?

How much money should you put into a home or car, entertainment, retirement, savings?

Marriage or singleness?

Do you consider putting loved ones in nursing home care or have them move in with you?

***Columbia researcher Sheena Iyengar has found that the average person makes about seventy conscious decisions every day. That's 25,550 decisions a year. Over seventy years, that's 1,788,500 decisions.***

***Albert Camus said, "Life is a sum of all your choices." You put all those 1,788,500 choices together, and that's who you are.***

(John Ortberg book - What is God's Will for my Life?)

And that's why, when Isaiah identifies Jesus as our counselor it's just so important for our lives.

Jesus does not simply enter our world to offer us sympathy, to tell us he is sorry for the broken and lost condition we are in.

Rather he comes to bring counsel, to bring wisdom, to providing instructions about how to act and behave. To give us guidance in decision making. So that our lives reflect his wisdom.

Bible talks a lot about making wise choices and where wisdom comes from.

**Proverbs 1:7 – The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...**

**Proverbs 9:10 - <sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.**

**John 1 – In the beginning was the WORD (LOGOS...meaning, knowledge or wisdom!), and the WORD was with God and the WORD was God and the WORD became flesh and dwelt among us.**

**1 Corinthians 1:30 - <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—**

Jesus is the wisdom from God. Jesus is the guidance from God. Which is why Jesus is given the name Wonderful Counselor!

And I know that 70 decisions a day and 2,000,000 decisions in a life times, seems like a big, an overwhelming place to start.

I was reading an interesting article recently about Jeff Bezos (**PIC OF BEZOS**). You may or may not be familiar with the name, the founder of Amazon. I was reading about an interview that was done with him about leading such a complex, multibillion dollar mega-company. And he said one of his rules of thumb is to make 3 good decisions every day.

He says, **“If I make, like, three good decisions a day, that’s enough. And they should be as high quality as I can make them.”**

I thought that just seems like a great rule of thumb, a good place to begin. Today, tomorrow...make three good decisions. In this instance I’m gonna make a good decision. Not gonna talk back, gonna hold my tongue. Etc.

Second, kind of neat...notice Isaiah says...

### **C. Wonderful**

Counselor. The Hebrew word that Isaiah is using here for **wonderful** in this passage is a pretty important word.

In our world we have identified **Wonders of the World**. I grew up in Zambia, Africa, happens to be home to one of the 7 wonders of the natural world...Victoria Falls. And just to give you some perspective on this.

Maybe around here you’ve been to Cunningham Falls (**PIC**). Which is about 75 feet tall. And it’s a remarkable sight. Or perhaps your familiar with Niagara Falls (**PIC**). I’ve been to Niagara Falls as well, and Niagara falls dwarfs Cunningham falls. Niagara falls is more than double the height of Cunningham. About 180 feet. And is about 2500 ft. wide. And it’s a remarkable sight. Now just think about this, Victoria Falls (**PIC**) on the other hand, dwarfs Niagara Falls. Victoria is more than double the

height of Niagara 360 feet and 5,604 feet wide...it is the world's largest sheet of falling water.

They say that the spray from Victoria falls, can be seen as far as 30 miles away and that rush (roar) of the falls (the sound) can be heard up to 24 miles away, which is about the distance from here to Cunningham Falls! Hence the local people...have named Victoria "The Smoke that Thunders."

It's one thing to stand beside a waterfall and admire it's beauty. It's quite another to stand beside one of the 7 wonders of the world...maybe you've been to Grand Canyon or Mt. Everest...our world sees these wonders and their presence is astonishing, it is incomprehensible.

This is kind like the idea behind Isaiah description of the wonderful counsel of Jesus.

Not just really good advice, it is according to Isaiah, astonishing, incomprehensible, the absolute best there is.

There is much wisdom about life. And how to live life. There are many good and wise and helpful counselors...like youtube, google, pinterest and Judge Judy. And you'll find there a lot of people who will want to tell you how to live your life like your family and co-workers and our culture just loves telling us how to live our lives. And whose wisdom and counsel you choose to listen to as you make decisions, will have a major impact on the person you become.

And you see there is one whose wisdom and counsel about life, surpasses all others. His counsel is a wonder to our lives. Jesus is the most wonderful counselor.

In fact, it's kind of fascinating to me. Turn with me if you would to a familiar Christmas passage...there was a group in the Christmas story that really understood this.

**Matthew 2:1-2 - After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi<sup>[a]</sup> from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”**

There is much debate and much unknown about these Magi from the East. They are often called **wise men**. And by the way, just a note of clarity. You’ll notice in the Scripture text it doesn’t actually say how many there were. That’s because the Bible never actually tells us, how many wise men there were. The traditional view that there were three simply comes from the fact that there are three gifts mentioned. Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. They brought baby Jesus Gold, Frankincense and myrrh.

And you also often find these wisemen pictured at the manger. But in the story the wisemen come looking for likely, a toddler. Herod has all children 2 and under killed...not just babies. These wisemen did not arrive at the birth of the baby.

Most scholars do agree on though, is that these Magi would have been gentiles coming from a long distance off. Perhaps Arabia (Bailey). They would have likely been from the wealthy class of society and the fact that they studied stars and planetary movements, puts them in the educated category. Wealthy, educated, gentiles.

Isn’t it fascinating that even the most learned and intelligent, self-sufficient, the rich and wealthy find true wisdom at the cradle of Jesus.

Because this child, is a wonder of a counselor. He has the best answers about how to live. He teaches things about life, that you won’t often find in the world around us...things like:

Do unto others as you would have them do to you.

It is better to give than to receive...

He who is without sin, may throw stones sinners...

Forgive seventy times seven...

You cannot serve both God and money...

Probably not the kind of advice you'll hear from your co-workers or family. Probably not what you'll find in TV commercials this Holiday season.

But it's real life counsel from the creator himself.

Finally, let's just want to close by clarifying a little bit about...

## **II. The Counsel Jesus Offers**

### **A. Jesus doesn't tell you what to think, he teaches how to think.**

I remember when I was at Messiah College and they used this phrase over and over again... *"Here at Messiah we don't want to teach you what to think, we want to teach you how to think."*

Sometimes when we think about receiving counsel or wisdom, we kind of picture somebody giving us all of the answers or making decisions for us. Telling us the right or best thing to do in every situation.

*Think about it as a parent. If you're a parent wouldn't it be great to just make every decision for your kids life. "Wear these clothes. Eat this food. Date this person. Choose this major. Buy this house. Marry this person."*

In your head you're thinking "Wow, that would be great!" But do you know what the problem is? Do you know the best way to become a wise person? Do you know the best way to become a good decision maker? Is to practice making decisions...

*As a parent, your goal should never be one particular result or outcome of a decision. Your main goal is that your child becomes a person of wisdom, character, courage and integrity.*

(Illustration adapted from PreachingToday - Ortberg sermon – Guide)

You don't want your child to become dependent on you making decisions for them, you need to teach your child how to make good decisions. And so they have to practice.

They have to learn how to think things out and evaluate information. They have to learn how face uncertainty or adversity in the decisions they make and then take accountability for decisions made and learn from them.

*I was reading about a young CEO who took a new job and had a conversation with the retiring CEO. And the retiring CEO tells him, "You have to make choices. But sometimes you'll make wrong choices. You'll make mistakes. It's just part of the job. When that happens I have prepared three envelopes for you as guidance, they'll give you all of the answers you need. I left them in the top drawer of the desk. The first time you make a mistake, open envelope #1 and so on."*

*For a while everything goes fine and then the young CEO makes his first mistake, goes to the drawer, opens up envelope #1, and the message reads, "**Blame me.**" So he does: "This is the old CEO's fault. He made these mistakes. I inherited these problems." Everybody says, "Okay." It works out pretty well.*

*Things go fine for awhile, and then he makes his second mistake, so he opens up envelope #2. This time he reads, "**Blame the board of directors.**" And so he does:*

*"It's the board of director's fault. They made a mess. I inherited them. They're the problem." Everybody says, "Okay, that makes sense."*

*Things go fine for awhile, and then the young CEO makes his third mistake, so he opens up envelope #3, and the message he reads is, "**Prepare three envelopes.**"*  
(PreachingToday Ortberg Sermon – Guide/ Kevin Kruse – New York Times article.)

The moral of the story is, the only way to learn how to make good decisions is to practice making decisions, and allowing yourself to get some of them wrong.

That's why the best counselors or teachers, rarely tell you specifically what to do in given situation.

Instead they help you to think through all of the possible solutions and the positives and negatives of each. Instead of "giving you the answer," the best counselors train you or teach you to become wise decision makers.

And so what you find when you come to Jesus for counsel is that rarely does He, just give you the answer key to life. He doesn't make our decisions for us. He doesn't tell you where you should go to college. He doesn't tell you if you should get married or who you should marry. He doesn't tell you where to settle your family down and live or what career path you should choose. Because your not a robot. He's trying to teach you to become a thoughtful and wise decision maker.

Dallas Willard says it like this...

**"Jesus aim in teaching is not to win arguments, but to achieve understanding or insight in his hearers...he presents matters in such a way that those who wish to know can find their way to...the appropriate conclusion as something they have discovered..."** (Willard, Great Omission pg. 183)

And this brings up a second important aspect of how Jesus counsels us.

## **B. Scripture**

It's your Bible. The wisdom Jesus offers us is always consistent with what Scripture teaches.

For example if someone is tailgating you, and you think to yourself, "I am getting the sense God is telling me to slow down. In fact I should slow way down. This person is in such a big hurry and that's not safe. They're gonna end up in an accident, hurting themselves or someone else and so God is telling me I should just slow way down."

We know that is probably not from God. Though Jesus never says anything in Scripture about tailgating, he does say things like, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." So you take that golden rule, learn it, memorize it and then you apply it to life, situations, like being tailgated or frustrating co-workers.

So as cliché as it sounds, it might be time for you to open up your Bible as we head into the New Year. This is a great time of year to begin. Start with the New Testament...book of Matthew, Christmas story. Read about how Jesus lived, what he said and taught. You begin taking those concepts and applying them to your decisions about life, because Jesus' counsel will be consistent with Scripture.

Perhaps this past year 2019, you have found yourself, perplexed, confused by life. You have faced challenging decisions and you have kind of been looking for wisdom. You need a wonderful counselor. Isaiah, might say to you...

**"People walking in darkness have seen a great light...for to us a child is born and he will be called...Wonderful Counselor."**