

Here I Come to Save the Day
Delivered at Washington Community Fellowship
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Isaiah 9:6

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.

[Recorded Mighty Mouse Theme <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsPa8QgGGkc>]
“Mister Trouble never hangs around
When he hears this mighty sound:
"Here I come to save the day!"
That means that Mighty Mouse is on the way!

Yes sir, when there is a wrong to right
Mighty Mouse will join the fight
On the sea or on the land
He gets the situation well in hand

So though we are in danger
We never despair
'Cause we know that where there's danger
He is there!
He is there! On the land! On the sea! In the air!

We're not worryin' at all
We're just listenin' for his call:
"Here I come to save the day!"
That means that Mighty Mouse is on the way!"

It's true. When I was a small child my hero was a rodent. Between Mighty Mouse and Mickey Mouse, my world was as mouse-driven as my computer cursor is today. Over the years, however, I've discovered that mice are not as noble as I once imagined. And I've experienced a rather striking transformation from mouse admirer to mouse exterminator.

But I still have kind of a soft spot for Mighty Mouse, because he wasn't just mighty; he was heroic, saving the innocent from the likes of Oil Can Harry and other assorted villains. Which, of course, segues quite naturally into our focus for this second week of Advent 2006. Okay, it may require a little imagination, but hang with me.

Isaiah 9:6 says, “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.” Last week we considered the first of these names, Wonderful Counselor. This week’s focus is the promised Messiah as Mighty God.

Of course, it would be both ludicrous and blasphemous to place the Mighty God on a par with Mighty Mouse. But, like all great art, Mighty Mouse points the way to a greater and more transcendent reality. He is not only mighty but heroic. He delivers the oppressed. He inspires hope in those he protects. And we’re about to see that this is exactly what happens when the Mighty God says, “Here I come to save the day.”

What is Isaiah trying to tell us by saying that this child who will be born, this son who will be given, will be called *Mighty God*? Let’s think first about the startling fact that the Messiah is called *God*.

Old Testament Jews had no concept of the Trinity. There are prophecies that, in retrospect, seem to indicate that Messiah would be divine, but no other passage in the Old Testament states the connection in such bold terms. In Isaiah’s time, before the exile, people simply expected that the Messiah would be a great ruler. It wasn’t until a much later period that they began to expect a superhuman deliverer sent from heaven. But even so, they didn’t equate the Messiah with God, as Jesus’ own experience clearly shows.

The stunning theology of this statement has led to various attempts to explain it away, even by some who accept the deity of Christ. They just don’t see how Isaiah could have figured this out. Some have suggested that the name is simply hyperbolic, perhaps court flattery, which was common in those days. Others see it as depicting a god-like hero.

But these explanations all run headlong into Isaiah’s own use of the term and the facts of Jewish theology. Though ancient Near Eastern kings were often flattered by divine designations, the Jews were much more circumspect about such matters. The metaphysics of the other religions contemplated gods who were more like humans on steroids or comic book heroes. But in Jewish theology God was holy, separate from, and transcendent with respect to his creation. So, divine language was not used loosely with respect to royalty.

The Hebrew for “Mighty God” is *El gibbor*. The word *El* is translated “God.” Though *El* may occasionally occur in Semitic languages in a human context, in Isaiah *El* always refers to God. And the only other occurrence of *El gibbor* in Scripture is also in Isaiah, which gives us more insight into how the prophet uses this name.

Just turn to Isaiah 10:21. There it says that the remnant will return to the *Mighty God*. Clearly, *Mighty God* refers to the same one mentioned at the end of v. 20, *the Holy One of Israel*. Which shows that Isaiah considered *El gibbor* a divine name and would not have used it just one chapter earlier as a way to describe a human subject.

But how could Isaiah have said such a thing more than 700 years before the birth of Christ? The answer probably *is not* that Isaiah understood the Trinity. The answer *is* that it wasn't his idea. 2 Peter 1:21: "For prophecy never had its origin in human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." So, the prophets sometimes said things that not even they did not understand. And that appears to be the case here.

It is significant that Christ is called *Mighty God*, because it underscores the fact that he is, in fact, God in the flesh. But we saw last week how even the name *Wonderful Counselor* supports the deity of Christ, and next week's focus, *Everlasting Father*, certainly does so as well. What gives this name its uniqueness is that the quality of *might* that is attributed to God. So, let's think about that aspect of the name for a bit.

In contrast to *El*, the word *gibbor* is most often used of men. And depending on the context, it is translated in a variety of ways. Just to give you a flavor of this word, let me share a few of the ways it's used.

In Joshua *gibbor* is translated as *fighting men*. The Angel of the Lord calls Gideon *gibbor*, translated *mighty warrior*. In the book of Ruth, Boaz is called a *gibbor*, *a man of standing*. When King Saul is looking for a harpist, one of his servants recommends David, because he is a *gibbor*, *a brave man*. Later, when David cuts off Goliath's head, the Philistines saw that their *gibbor*, their *hero* was dead. In Nehemiah they are called *able men*. In Ezra a *powerful official*. And in Psalm 19:5 a *gibbor* is a *champion athlete*, who rejoices to run his course.

The most common translation for *gibbor* is *warrior* or *hero*, but, as you can see from the examples, it usually has to do with the sense of applied might or capability. Its not just strength for the sake of strength, like some of today's musclepersons. They spend hours in the weight room to achieve a certain look, but not because of any practical need for such a physique. They're not doing laundry on their washboard abs. You don't need Popeye-like forearms to drive a car or do data entry. They just preen in front of the mirror at the gym or pose on the cover of fitness magazines, flexing their aesthetic muscle.

I think that's the way a lot of people see God—kind of an infinite mass of decorative muscle. We praise him for being mighty, even though we're not quite sure what he does with all that power. Something spiritual probably. We just think it's cool to be on a team whose captain is kind of buff.

Ask any believer if God is mighty. I don't think you'll get any naysayers. Then ask what he's done for them lately that required such supernatural strength, and you're likely to get a lot of "Well, uh..."

God's might is not just for show. He is mighty in terms of his heroic capability. He is a deliverer who comes to fight for you when you cannot manage alone. Someone who can boldly proclaim, "Here I come to save the day."

This is the God of the Bible, and the pages of Scripture are filled with stories of his mighty acts. Remember his heroic rescue in the Exodus, when God saved his people against seemingly insurmountable odds?

When God first called Moses in Exodus 3:19, he warned him that this was a God-sized job. “But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a *mighty hand* compels him.”

If you remember, however, the plan doesn’t seem to be working too well at first. In fact, things appear to be getting worse rather than better.

This prompts Moses to come back to God in Exodus 5:22: “Moses returned to the LORD and said, ‘O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? ²³Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.’”

To which God responds in Exodus 6:1: “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my *mighty hand* he will let them go; because of my *mighty hand* he will drive them out of his country... (Exodus 6:6) I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with *mighty acts* of judgment.” And he did.

Oh, there were plenty more complications to come. Finally, Pharaoh’s army had the Israelites pinned between the devil and the deep Red Sea. And just when it looks like they’re toast, they hear a voice from heaven, saying, “Here I come to save the day!” (I paraphrased that part a little bit.) Then the waters parted, and the Israelites walked to safety on dry ground.

We don’t serve some preening super-duper deity who sits off in space admiring his biceps. We serve a mighty Savior, a hero who comes to save the day. The whole point of theological might is to be stronger than something else. Otherwise that strength is pretty meaningless to those in need. And our Savior is stronger than at least four types of challenges we face.

Our Savior is stronger than threats. Threats are those situations that hold the potential to ruin what we are or what we want to be. Threats are those situations that hold the potential for keeping us from doing what we want to do.

The classic situational analysis is the SWOT analysis. SWOT—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. When sickness threatens your health, when disagreements threaten your relationships, when setbacks threaten your dreams—that’s when it matters that your Savior is stronger than something else.

Our Savior is also stronger than the unknown. Many of us are fearful, even if we’re not sure just what we’re afraid of. We’re afraid of what might happen if we take a risk, if unforeseen trouble comes our way, if we do something when we shouldn’t or don’t do

something when we should. But whatever that fill-in-the-blank factor may be, your Savior is stronger.

“Yeah, but what if that threat is X,Y, or Z?!!!” It doesn’t matter if it’s ABC, XYZ, or LMNOP. Ephesians 1:19 promises “his incomparably great power for us who believe.” And if it’s *incomparably* great power, then by definition it doesn’t matter what you *compare* it to. Your Savior is stronger.

Our Savior is also stronger than people. Ever notice how many of your problems are caused by people? People who use you, people who abuse you, people who ignore you, people who don’t keep their promises when you wish they had, people who do keep their promises when you wish they hadn’t. And those closest to you can hurt you the most, because rejection really matters when it comes from people we care about.

This Mighty God, as the verse goes on to say, is also the Prince of Peace. He is the ultimate reconciler of people to God and people to one another. And for those who resist his grace, for those who persist in their mistreatment of God’s own, there will be a day of reckoning. One way or another, your Savior takes care of people problems.

Your Savior is also stronger than the supernatural. Now, I’m not one of those people who see demons behind every tree, but Scripture is clear that ultimately our battle is ultimately not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers. Your constant failings, the resistance that you find to your prayers, and even the lack of justice in the world are all energized by supernatural evil.

Cindi is taking a class this fall on *Understanding Islam*. One of the speakers was commenting on how difficult it was to convince Muslims about Christian doctrine. But, he added, Islamic popular religion is often laced with jinns and oppressive spirits who are a great source of trouble. And their faith reportedly has little impact, little power, over such spirits. So, some have turned to Christ as Savior, simply because they’re looking for something stronger than the supernatural.

Might matters. In a world in which God’s people are opposed and oppressed, in a life that will inevitably have its share of disasters and disappointments, we need someone on whom we can call. Someone who will say, “Here I come to save the day,” someone who is stronger than our difficulties, and someone who cares enough to get involved. And that someone is the Mighty God. Moving the Apostle Paul to say, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

All of which I find enormously encouraging until I think about the fact that it’s just not that simple. Let’s be honest; it doesn’t always work out in such a clean, melodramatic fashion. Sometimes we call and call and call, but there is no voice from the sky, nor does anyone come to our rescue. So, how do we reconcile that reality with a Savior who is the Mighty God?

Even though life continues to be full of unresolved challenges, might still matters. Because if God were incapable of resolving our situations, then when trouble came, we would just be on our own. And the reason for our unresolved issues would be obvious.

But if, at any moment he can say, “Here I come to save the day,” and instantaneously vanquish any and all problems, then when troubles linger we understand that there must be another reason other than God’s impotence. Isaiah 50:2 says, “Was my arm too short to deliver you? Do I lack the strength to rescue you? By a mere rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn rivers into a desert.”

So, if trouble persists in spite of a mighty and interested God, why could that be? It’s important to recognize that though God’s might is used on our behalf, our well-being is both an end in itself as well as a means to a greater end. God delights in rescuing his children, but the ultimate objective of God’s might is his own glory and not our comfort.

Theoretically, that is also our order of priorities, at least when we’re not suffering. But remember the Exodus, the quintessential “Here I come to save the day” rescue of all time. Sure, God showed up and showed out in spectacular fashion, but that was after centuries of servitude. That was after miraculous plagues that didn’t do the trick. That was after aborted exits from Egypt. That was after what looked like the ultimate letdown, when after finally leaving the land, Pharaoh’s army pursued them. That was after they had concluded that they would have been better off as slaves.

We see the happy ending, but we easily forget the angst that led up to it. There was a day to save, but only because the situation had become so dire in the first place. Why did God wait so long to do something?

God is not a machine. Machines can be powerful, but they lack discretion. Machines cannot refuse to use their power as they are programmed. They have no sense of the higher good, no sense of timing.

Don’t believe me? Fill up your blender with grape juice. Right up to the brim. Now, make sure the lid is off, and push the maximum speed button. Is this a good idea? No. Will the blender figure that out? No. You’re going to have quite a mess on your hands, not because the blender has no power, but precisely because your blender has stupid power—and your blender apparently has an owner who contributes very little to the intellectual mix.

God is not a machine. He intervenes when he does and in the way he does according to his purposes. As we said, the ultimate purpose is his own glory, and we may or may not see what God sees in that regard. But the mere fact that God possesses the power does not, in itself, compel him to act.

Keep in mind that God deals with many situations providentially rather than miraculously. For instance, most of the time when we get sick, God heals us through the

natural healing processes he has created. So, the fact that you're ill for a week or two does not mean that God doesn't care or that he is not working it out through other means.

Since God is mighty, he could have prevented the trouble we are facing in the first place. His might means that there is a reason for our trials. So, then, why is life annoying? And hard?

The most fundamental reason is that we live in a fallen world, and until we reach God's eternal kingdom, suffering is the rule and not the exception. Some of us don't quite get that. We think that every time something goes wrong God must be picking on us. Ever think that up until that time maybe you might just have been living on a cloud of blessing?

But why do we suffer the way we do, and for the time we do? And why does God sometimes intervene marvelously the way he does? Long-term trouble has a way of drawing us to God that a quick fix does not. Waiting builds faith and dependence. Summoning God like a genie from a bottle puts us in charge, but protracted problems pull us into a partnership with God. They force us not just to pray but to keep on praying. They force us to submit ourselves to God's timing and to whatever will ultimately bring him the greatest glory. They force us to rejoice in tribulation and not just in spite of it.

John 16:33 tells us, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Now, when Jesus said this the work was not yet done. He's speaking prophetically about the ultimate result of his work. After all, he was about to be tortured and crucified.

But notice that Jesus does not say, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I'm going to make all those troubles go away." The promise is that God is about dismantling the spiritual reality that is behind our troubles. And along the way he will resolve many of our troubles, too, in a way that points to his ultimate victory.

Just because God intervenes, that doesn't mean we won't have troubles. It only means we won't have that particular trouble for a while. Because God's rescue stands out by virtue of being the exception. The rule still remains that in this world we will have trouble. Get over it! Praise God when he does save the day, and rejoice that it is evidence that he is saving our forever as well. Because, as the Mighty God, he will indeed overcome the world.

When I was twenty-one I did a one-year pastoral internship. And one of the experiences I had was to start a bus route and bring children to church. Which also meant I had to learn to drive a bus. I had one lesson of about fifteen minutes and was proclaimed road-ready—by someone who clearly didn't have the gift of teaching.

The next day they asked me to drive a bus full of people to a Cincinnati Reds baseball game, and they sweetened the pot with a free ticket. Since I was making all of \$77 a week

in this full-time internship, free plus anything sounded good. So, summoning all my extensive training, I accepted.

It was a drive of about an hour and a half, the final portion of which required that I pilot this wide-bodied behemoth through downtown traffic at rush hour, negotiate my way through the thousands of vehicles headed to the game, drop off the passengers, and find somewhere to park the bus. Fortunately, nobody died.

I did notice, however, that driving a bus, even if you don't know what you're doing, you have one big advantage. And that big advantage is—you're driving a bus, and buses are big. When you turn on your turn signal, people might say, "Now what's this idiot going to do?" But when you start to do it, guess what? They get out of the way.

The reason is simple. If you're in a car and you collide with a bus, you lose. You may have the right of way. Doesn't matter. You still lose. Might matters. When God says, "Here I come to save the day!" there's nothing that's going to stand in his way. Because he's driving the bus.

We started out today with the Mighty Mouse theme song. Overwhelmed as I'm sure you were with the pure production value of that presentation, you might not have been focusing on the lyrics. But, for a cartoon, the words contain some better than average theology if applied to the Mighty God.

"So, though we are in danger
We never despair
'Cause we know that where there's danger he is there!
He is there! On the land! On the sea! In the air!

We're not worryin' at all
We're just listenin' for his call:
"Here I come to save the day!"
That means the Mighty God is on the way!

The Jesus who was born into our world to fulfill Isaiah's promise of a Mighty God is not just a guy who almost made it big but ended up on a cross. He is God who came to redeem and to rescue. And he is mighty, stronger than any challenge we can face. But he is also wise. His might is directed toward the accomplishment of his purposes. And even though his purposes may sometimes be mysterious, the Mighty God remains our refuge, our source of strength, our way when there is no way.

"So though we are in danger, we never despair. 'Cause we know that where there's danger, he is there." Anywhere, anytime, any difficulty. I trust that you're "not worryin' at all." That you're "just listenin' for his call. 'Here I come to save the day.'"