

The Wonderful Counsellor: “Trust Me”

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning, Watermark. And for those of you who don't know me, my name is Alfie, and I help out. I serve with the outreach that Watermark does on HKU's campus.
- And in case you haven't noticed, it's Advent time. It's Christmas season. We all have different traditions for remembering Christmas. In my family, Christmas always started on December 1st, which was my little sister's birthday.
- It would always start with her birthday party, and us bringing out the Christmas tree and putting on these decorations to remember and begin our preparation for the Christmas season, for the Christmas time.
- Now that I don't live with my parents and my sister anymore, about three years ago, I put a Christmas ornament on the door of my house, and it stayed there for the past three years.
- I haven't moved it and touched it. I guess I've been doing a lot of preparing for Christmas. But this Christmas, this Advent season, as a family, we're going to be preparing for Christmas by looking at this passage in Isaiah.
- [1 : 0 9] And each week we'll be looking at a different part of Jesus' character. We'll be looking at who he is and why he calls out to us to trust him. The book of Isaiah was written about 800 years ago.
- Goodness, that's a lot of reverb. Can we do this? Am I standing wrongly? Isaiah was written about 800 years ago by this prophet. He lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, and he was calling out to these people to repent and turn back to God.
- If you want a summary of the book of Isaiah, you can read chapters 1 and 2, because it starts telling this story about how God has raised Israel like his own children, and he's given them so many good gifts. He's rescued them from slavery, but they still rebel.
- And because of that, God is bringing judgment. He's bringing judgment, but with that, he says he's going to fulfill a promise. He's going to bring hope. He's going to bring the light of a new kingdom that will come and will bring light and joy and hope to so many people.
- He says, to these people in darkness, to these people who are suffering under Assyria, who are away in Babylonian exile, he says, a child is coming, and his name will be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.
- [2 : 3 8] It's these four names that we'll be looking at over the next couple of weeks as we unpack what Christmas means and who Jesus is for us.
- That he isn't the kind of God that we take out at Christmastime, we put on our shelf, or we polish him off when we're in trouble. But every day, he's our savior. Every day, we need him.
- And today, we'll start by looking at Wonderful Counselor. Now, the difficulty with this kind of passage is that the word counselor has changed in the way that people use it over the past couple of years.
- If I was to say to you right now that you need to find a counselor, some of you will be outraged at the suggestion that something might be wrong with you. And others of you will say, actually, you know, I probably could use a counselor.

But that's because we mostly think of a counselor as someone who's there to help us with our personal problems, with our psychological problems, who's there to therapize us. But the counselor described in this passage that's described in Isaiah is quite different.

[3 : 49] The word here, it kind of relates to advising and planning. Think of a royal advisor or, you know, a wise man. If it really helps you, you can think about Yoda or the Jedi Council in Star Wars who were there to advise the Galactic Empire on how to run their wisdom, to give younger Jedi wisdom that they didn't have because they lacked experience.

A counselor in this passage, this wonderful counselor that Isaiah is talking about, is someone who comes and he gives wisdom. He teaches from his experience and he teaches from a place of knowing and seeing and understanding what is going on all around us.

So as we're unpacking this wonderful counselor, I'm going to try to answer three questions. The first is, why do we need a counselor at all? The second, why do we need a wonderful counselor?

And lastly, how is Jesus this great, wise, and wonderful counselor that we need? So why do we need a counselor?

Think about your morning. What happened between you waking up and getting here today, this Sunday? For me, my alarm went off early because I wanted to go for a run.

[5 : 14] And I stayed in bed and I thought, oh, I really don't want to run. I should probably sleep. Then I remember that actually I'd said that the past couple of days and haven't been running for a while. So I got up and went on that run.

I went on that run. I got home. I showered. I had a Snickers bar. I went to the community center. I printed off my notes. And I came here. It's fairly simple.

If you're a young, single, childless guy like me, you don't really need a counselor to get from bed to church in the morning. But some of you guys here have young children.

Some of you here have very sleepy teenagers. And getting into church on a Sunday, maybe you feel like you need a counselor. You need wisdom to figure out the mess of diapers and, you know, angsty teenagers before you get here on Sunday.

Now, if you're here and you're young and, you know, your Sunday is very simple, get to know your family here. Get to know some of the young people, the young babies, and the parents that take care of them because they're your family as well.

[6 : 19] Now, I'm not going to get sidetracked talking about that. We're going to look at this counselor. We may not face it every day. I really didn't face it this morning.

But at some point, we get to this place where we realize that we don't know which way we should take, what our next step forward should be. A singer, Bob Dylan, wrote a song about that.

He says that he's got mixed-up confusion and it's killing him. There's way too many people and they're all too hard to please. He says that his head is full of questions and his temperature is rising fast.

Well, I'm looking for some answers and I don't know who to ask. Bob Dylan was confused. Bob Dylan had questions. Bob Dylan needed to ask somebody for some help.

You know, like Bob Dylan and like me, it's usually only when we don't know what to do that we realize we need help. When the things that we try don't work anymore.

[7 : 25] That we come to the realization that maybe we're not as wise as we think we are. Because most of the lives, we live under this delusion that we know what to do.

We know how to make right decisions. We know how to go about our job and our family life and to deal with our relationships. And some of us even think that we've got it all together. We start giving out advice to different people. Thinking that because we've got this little part of our life in order that we can start telling everybody and adding confusion to their lives about how they should be doing it.

We need counselors because we don't know. We need counselors because we don't have all the knowledge. We need counselors because we don't have the skill to deal with that knowledge to help us understand and interpret the world around us and our different situations that we're facing day by day, week by week.

And it's not just us. King Ahaz, which you heard the scripture readings and the video that we had earlier in the service, he was the kind of person who needed a counselor as well.

In the two chapters before this prophecy for a wonderful counselor, we see a king. Ahaz is a ruler. And he's a guy that people are looking to because he's in a position of authority.

[8 : 41] They look to him because he should be the one that has everything under control. But today, he doesn't. Today, he hears that the kings of Syria and the kings of Israel are coming and they intend to wage war against him, to kill him, and replace him with a puppet king.

The Bible says that all of Judah, the king included, were shaking like trees in the wind. Now, I don't think anybody here today is a king.

But we all face situations like this where we feel trapped, where we feel lost and confused. Earlier this year, I got my tax bill and I looked at it and the number was huge.

They asked for money that was multiple times my salary and even if I did manage to pay it, I would have no more savings left and I'd be down to a couple of pieces of rice every day. I felt trapped.

It was, I walked around in a daze for a few days just looking at this piece of paper wondering, okay, if I look hard enough, maybe the decimal point will move over and this won't be so bad. I felt trapped and I needed a counselor.

[9 : 57] I needed someone who could see more than what I was seeing, which was just lots and lots of zeros. I needed someone who would look at this and tell me, actually, this is the way you should be reading it.

This is the way that you should be approaching this tax bill. The king Ahaz needed someone who was going to come and tell him that this is the way that you should look at this enemy that's coming on your doorstep.

And each of us face situations where we need someone to show us and to tell us how it is that we can look at and interpret and understand what's going on in our day-to-day lives.

When we feel trapped with a doctor's diagnosis, when we feel trapped with that phone call from your child's principal, when you feel trapped because your employer tells you that they simply can't afford to employ you anymore, we look at these situations where we're trapped and confused and we don't understand what's going on and we think that the situation is our biggest problem.

We think that the situation that we're in is the thing that we need to fix, that we're going to devote our energy and our heart and our mind and everything that we can gather and our resources to fixing.

[11 : 19] But in Isaiah chapter 7, God says something quite different. God says that what we need is we need faith.

God tells King Ahaz that if your faith is not firm, you will not stand firm. If your trust isn't in me, then you can't deal with this enemy.

In our trouble, God doesn't say that we need to fix our environment. He's a counselor that says, here's the big picture. Your feet are standing on jelly and you need a counselor who's going to look at this with your best interests at heart, who knows what is going on, who understands what is going on because he is a God who knows all and sees all that he has the wisdom and the experience and the knowledge to walk with us through it.

To Ahaz, God says, let me be your counselor. God says, don't be afraid of these people because they're a dying fire. They don't know it, but their end is coming.

And I'll give you a guarantee. I'll give you a promise. He said there would be a virgin who would give birth to a son, God with us. He says, when you're feeling like God is far away, when you're feeling trapped, God will be with you.

[12 : 54] We need counselors because we don't see that the situations that we enter are like a dying fire. They're temporary. They're not forever.

We need a wonderful counselor because our arrogance says that we're going to figure out a way to do it ourselves, that we don't need to trust God. We don't need to put our faith in God. We're like a toddler who's trying to put on his shoes and is crying because he's trying to put his left shoe on his right foot and it's not fitting.

And he's refusing to let mommy and daddy give him a hand. We need a counselor because sometimes we think that God is too close and interfering or he's too far off and he's untrustworthy.

The reality is that God is not untrustworthy. It's that we are not trusting. God comes and he gives us a promise in Isaiah that God will be with us.

that in those desperate moments that we are not alone, that he's bringing a counselor for us who will give wisdom and will shed light on what it is that we need to do.

[14 : 12] Why does the counselor we need have to be wonderful? Why does he have to be marvelous and without understanding? That's what the Hebrew word here means, that it's something that cannot be understood in human terms.

Why do we need a counselor that is wonderful? We don't have the answers and for most of the time I feel like I don't even know the questions that I'm supposed to be asking.

And when we go around and we gather counselors around us to help us deal with different aspects of day-to-day life, we go to a friend for advice, we read the Financial Times so we can know what's going on with the financial markets, we have our different gurus that we go to.

Some of you find them in the pages of the Cosmo magazine or Elle for your fashion tips. If I have anything to do with money, I go and ask my dad and he helps me understand what this tax bill means.

And if he has questions about exercise, he asks me and I still don't know why he asks me. But here in Asia, we have other things that we go to. We go and we go to gravestones and we burn justics and we worship our ancestors in hoping that they'll give us good fortune, that they'll be with us as we're working through our lives.

[15 : 29] Or we go to palm readers to read our future, then afterwards to the Feng Shui Master so he can help us adjust our future. But even when these things go against what God asks for us, even when they go against what society asks for us, we continue to seek these other counselors.

You know, just earlier this year in Tianjin, there was a communist party leader who was removed from his position because they found out that against his cultural environment, against the party which says that you shouldn't be looking to those things, he still went to his Feng Shui Master to figure out how it was that he was going to get his promotions, how it was he was going to advance through the ranks in the party.

And that's not the first time this has happened because God's people also turned away from what God had asked of them to find a different counselor, to find a counselor who would give them the answers they wanted when they wanted them.

We go, and we turn away from the counselor that God has given because we actually, we're pretty impatient. And I think this is the effect that Google has had on us because it teaches us that we get our answers right now, that we get them when we want it.

And if it's not Google, then we go on Facebook. And if not Facebook, then we look on Wikipedia to find answers to our questions. But instead of answers, we get information.

[17 : 01] And information isn't really wisdom. Google isn't really a wonderful counselor. You know, we turn to all these things because at the bottom of it, even as Christians, we don't trust an all-knowing, our all-wise, our loving Heavenly Father who sees us and wants to answer not just the question of what do I do today?

What do I do with my toddler who won't eat? What do I do with this really, really infuriating boss? But he goes and he sees the bottom of it.

He sees our hearts and he gives us wisdom to deal not just with the surface of things in our life, but with our hearts. Because we have deep heart questions that we need to answer.

We have deep heart questions that go beyond the crises that we face day by day. questions like, how am I going to deal with this guilt?

How am I going to deal with this sin that seems to have a stranglehold on me and I can't shake? God, how am I going to know what it is that you have planned for me in my life?

[18 : 24] Should I take this job? Should I quit the job that I'm in right now? How do I deal with injustice and poverty and discrimination that I see all around me?

How can I have this conversation with my father who's dying and I haven't talked to in years? We have all these questions and very often the answer we get from God either isn't one that we like or it doesn't come right away and it doesn't come in our schedule and we don't trust God and we run to Google and we run to our gurus to try and find our answer.

Because King Ahaz didn't trust God, because we didn't trust God, God says, you need a counselor. You need a wonderful counselor.

God sent an empire to destroy Judah because Ahaz wouldn't trust him. And even as this was happening, God called out to his people in Judah and he said, don't be distracted by what's happening around you.

Keep trusting me. Keep running to me. Keep fearing me. Keep holding on to my word. He says, run to me because there you'll find wisdom.

[19 : 52] There you'll find hope. There you'll find peace. In chapter 8, Isaiah says that even though God isn't happy with his children, even though God seems silent and far away, even when the enemy is knocking on the door that he's going to come through for them.

He says, patiently trust the Lord. Wait for God. Has anyone ever told you that when you're struggling? When you can't figure out and make sense of your crisis?

It says, patiently wait for God. That doesn't sound like the right response, but that's what God says. He says, patiently wait for me. God says that God knows that we're impatient and when those two years or three months or 30 seconds are up and we're tired of waiting for God, we'll run to something else.

We'll run to our Google and to our gurus to find our answers. He says that the people around you will say, forget God.

He's not going to help you. Go to the fortune tellers who make those chirping noises. They will help you out. They will give you wisdom. He says, they will say, go and ask the spirits of the dead and maybe you're looking at me right now and you're thinking, I've never done that before.

[21 : 16] I've never seen a fortune teller or ask spirits of the dead, but just because you don't do this doesn't mean that you're turning away from God. It doesn't mean that you are not running to God for your hope because we go to things that we think will give us salvation.

We go to our friends who we think will give us the answers to deal with our struggle. When God doesn't seem to work, when God doesn't seem to be answering your questions, who are you going to?

Who are you asking? Who are you hoping will give you wisdom? Who are you hoping will answer your questions? The Bible tells us that God will answer.

The Bible also tells us that the gods that we're looking for will leave us dead. Verses 21 and 22 of chapter 8 say that.

They say that for these people, they are going to be greatly troubled and distressed because their counselors will give them food for a little bit but it won't reach their hunger.

[22 : 32] It will give them a little bit of light but it won't show them the way. Because Google will give us three ways to fix our life now on our schedule and not God's.

The palm readers will tell us that this is your future and now you can be the driver of your destiny. Our counselors and gurus will speak to us on our terms and tell us that even as we're struggling, we can still be the rulers and the king of our little kingdoms.

And that's what Ahaz did. Ahaz said, actually, I don't want to wait on God. I don't want to wait for this promised child. I'm going to go to Assyria and I'm going to ask them to help me deal with Israel and Syria who are trying to kill us.

In the end, God used the same Assyria that Ahaz went to for help to conquer and to destroy the kingdom that he was trying to save. The Bible teaches us that our earthly counselors may do a good job at helping us right now but ultimately they will lead to our death.

that they're like they're like a little match that we're trying to light in a huge corn maze when God instead is offering us GPS and sunlight.

[24 : 02] The problem with our counselors, the problem with the Financial Times and Google and Wikipedia and social media and our fortune tellers is that they don't get to the heart of our matter.

They don't get to the bottom of our souls and our desires and the things that are taking our crises and making them seem eternal and all encompassing because your analyst will help you figure out how to make the most of the market but it may not tell you how to deal with greed.

Oprah will teach you how to make friends but she won't help you deal with the loneliness in your soul. You can do all the community service that you want but it won't deal with your guilt.

You can rearrange your office but it won't help you deal with the unease that you feel because you're out of control. You can go and get the best advisors who will help you get into the best companies in your field but they will let you down because you will get there and you're at the bottom and if you're a fresh guy you're going to be looking up and wondering how is it that I'm going to get to the top and you'll find mentors will help you get there but even though you get to the top it still won't deal with your longing for meaning and significance and belonging and love.

Our counselors don't reach the bottom of our troubled hearts. They just deal with things on the surface they make us feel satisfied and appeased now but not in the long term.

[25 : 56] In C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe* Edmund was tempted by the witch's Turkish delight it was tasty and delicious and made him want more but in the end he realized that the witch was just going to leave him with stale bread not more candy and that the promises that the witch gave him of being in control of his brothers and sisters actually were never going to come true.

We need a wonderful counselor a counselor who's going to understand our world and our lives beyond the surface because our earthly counselors will only touch the top of our problems that they'll never give us wisdom to deal with what's going on underneath.

They'll make us feel like the rulers of our lives but never really give us control like that toddler you know they're like a toddler going to another two year old to get them to explain shoelaces because we need a wonderful counselor because our earthly counselors can't explain what is going on beneath.

They can't give us peace and hope to work through the trouble that we're in. They can't give us wisdom that goes beyond the surface.

So where does Jesus come to this picture? How does Jesus come and how is he our wonderful counselor?

[27 : 42] How is he the answer to Ahaz's trouble? How is he our wise counselor who's going to come into our lives and give us wisdom and understanding and help us to walk through trouble?

You don't have to read much of the Bible or even be really familiar with it to know that Jesus was a wise counselor. If you're non-Christian you may even think that he is a wise teacher, a moral prophet.

But just another counselor, not really God. I think that for many of us we look at the things that Jesus said, we look at the things that he did and we think that they're foolish.

We might say that those are very holy things. Those are very good things. But in the bottom of our heart we think that the things that Jesus said are foolish. And if you look at Matthew chapter 5 and Matthew through Matthew chapter 7, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says all kinds of things which our earthly counselors, even our own selves would say are ridiculous, that there are no ways to deal.

There are not the ways to deal with the world. He says that it's not the proud and the strong that will inherit an earth, but the weak and the humble.

[29 : 01] He says that anger isn't just about you being right and you being justified, but that our anger should lead us to reconciliation and humility.

Jesus said that actually marriage is something that he wants us to work through when the going gets tough, not to cut and run at the earliest opportunity. he told his followers that actually they shouldn't seek retaliation for those who are hurting them and those who are trying to kill them, but instead they should love their enemies, they should serve their enemies.

He told these people that they shouldn't worry about treasures here on earth, but they should store up seemingly intangible heavenly treasures.

Now, if you took these things and you wrote them in the *Financial Times*, well, they wouldn't get published. They don't make sense. Our earthly counselors don't see this as a way to dealing with the world, a way for working through our trouble, a way for living wisely.

But these seemingly foolish things, they teach us to trust God. The very problem that Ahaz in the beginning had when God said if you're faith is not firm, then you won't be firm at all.

[30 : 25] They teach us to trust God and have faith and trust that he is going to be the one that is going to come through for us. The things that Jesus says are wise seem foolish because we aren't thinking of a God who is telling us these things, who says I'm going to be with you and I'm going to carry you through this seemingly foolish and ridiculous list of wise sayings.

And it's not just the things that Jesus says that are foolish. The way in which Jesus saves us is foolish. Couldn't he have saved us by raising up a giant army or through a political revolution?

Could he have saved us by any other way rather than being hung up on a cross? You know, the Greeks and the wise Jews of that day said that's ridiculous.

There's no way that he's our God and our Savior because a God shouldn't die. God shouldn't let himself be disgraced like that. And even the way in which Jesus comes into our life, the advent that we're remembering is foolish in our eyes because our wise counselor, shouldn't be born in a haystack.

Our wise counselor should be given all the privilege, should be the child of nobles, should be sent to the Oxforths and the Cambridges and getting his PhDs to understand the world so he can advise the wisest people on how to live their life.

[32 : 07] Instead, God asks Mary and Joseph to trust him. He asks the people of Judah to trust him because he's going to send them a wise counselor and he's going to be born to a young carpenter and his disgraced wife in a barn.

And this foolish birth is actually the greatest wisdom. wisdom. The apostle Paul, a church planter, wrote about 20 years after Jesus' death, he says that God chose things that are foolish to shame the wise.

He chose things that are weak to shame the strong, that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisest wisdom of man. Paul wrote that God is a great God who knows and sees and loves and cares and is looking out for your best.

That when he gives you wisdom, that tiny little bit of wisdom, wisdom, that is greater than anything any of your counselors or fortune tellers or Google or Wikipedia will ever tell you.

He says that Jesus, the baby, Jesus who taught, Jesus who eventually would die on a cross, became wisdom for us.

[33 : 56] Now here's the thing about a wonderful counselor. Jesus reaches the bottom of our hearts. He deals with our sin and our rebellion, the things that we do that go against God.

He deals with our arrogance that makes us say, no, we're going to put on the shoe ourself. He deals with that and he says, the way that you find wisdom isn't by being on the throne of your life, isn't by being in control, but by stepping off your throne.

letting Jesus sit in your place and saying that Jesus, you're going to be my king, my savior, my advisor, my counselor.

You're doing this picture of a toddler struggling to put a left shoe on his right. We need a loving heavenly father who's going to say, no, that's not the way you put on your shoes.

Jesus says, and to take us and gently put the shoe on our right foot and tie the knot in our laces for us. Jesus says that if you trust me, if you have faith in me, I'm going to send my Holy Spirit to be with you, to be your counselor, to walk you through your life.

[35 : 19] I think it can be really easy, and I think especially talking about Jesus as a wonderful counselor to think of Christianity as good advice. You know, that if we do all the things that Jesus says, if we stop looking for the advice, that we'll be happy.

That if we only go to our pastors to help us deal with our problems, that we'll have peace. That if we're at church every Sunday, that we're going to have meaning. a purpose in our life.

That if I use the Bible as my manual, then everything will be alright. But Christianity isn't just an encouragement for nice people who want religion.

Our wonderful counselor isn't there to help you have a little Jesus wisdom in your life. Because if we're doing that, if we're just using Christianity as another head on to the list of counselors that we have, then really we're missing a point.

We've just Christianized our counsel. Because Christianity is not good advice. It's good news. It's good news that says that God sees us in our struggle and he hasn't left us alone.

[36 : 41] He hasn't abandoned us. He's not far away. But he sent Jesus to walk through and struggle with us. To experience the troubles that we have.

To be rejected by his family and friends. To be betrayed by those who are close to him. To be persecuted by those who didn't like him.

So that he would be our savior. And when Jesus asked to be our counselor, he asks for us to trust him. He says that your greatest intentions aren't going to get you where you need to be.

But I can. And I'm going to accomplish all the wisdom that you cannot do. And I'm going to accomplish all the counsel that you need that you can't do by yourself.

That he's going to make us right with God. He's going to help us to trust God. He's going to give us the Holy Spirit. He's going to help us look at the financial times and understand it.

[37 : 50] Not in terms of us getting through our problems. But us following God. Who's going to look at the Google page that we found about how to feed our toddler.

And help us look at that. And help us understand actually what's going on in our own hearts and our desire for control. And trust God to be the one to walk us through this.

Christmas. At Christmas we can remember that God came to be our wonderful counselor. And we can choose to say, Jesus, I'm going to step off my throne of being in control of seeking my own counselors and not you.

And I'm going to follow you. This morning Jesus is calling to us and he says, I want to be your wise counselor.

I want to be your wonderful counselor. Will you trust me? will we trust God?

[39 : 07] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I need you. I need your wise counsel because I don't know what I'm doing.

I don't know how to work out my life. I don't even know what to ask.

But God, I thank you that you have not left us alone. You have given us a savior who is wise, who became wisdom for us, who did foolish things in our eyes, so that we can trust you, so we can walk through our day-to-day life and say that you, Jesus, are our king.

Well, this Christmas, Lord, help us to trust you. Help us to follow you, our wonderful counselor.

Amen.