

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,

**because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Our Wonderful Counselor

1. He speaks the Word of the Lord
2. His Word brings comfort.

You know many passages of Scripture by heart from many different books of the Bible. Isaiah 9:6 is certainly one of those passages. It is treasured by millions of people. It is a unique passage in that even many unbelievers know it thanks to Handel's Messiah. It is hard not to read or hear these words and not have Handel's masterpiece pop into your head. In this verse we see that Christ, the child born of a virgin, will be called four different names. Today we talk about the first—Wonderful Counselor. Now, it is true that it could be five names—I'm sure some of you are singing it in your head and you remember there being a pause: Wonderful, Counselor. And it certainly is a possibility that Christ is called both Wonderful and Counselor as the King James translation and thus Handel have it. But

a better translation is to have it as the NIV has it—one name, a noun with an adjective: Wonderful Counselor.

Why does someone go to a counselor? Usually someone goes and sees a counselor if they are having some sort of problem. Part of my calling is to a Christian counselor. A couple might come in if they are having problems with their marriage—maybe it's a simple disagreement or something much more serious. Someone may come in if he has been caught up in some sort of behavior that he isn't proud of and the guilt weighs heavily upon him, or if someone has mistreated them and they want advice on what to do, or simply for some good advice. A college student might see a counselor because of homesickness, because she is struggling to adapt to the college life, or simply for direction on what major to switch to.

What are they looking for? Help. Advice. A secular counselor is able to provide a safe and comfortable environment to allow others to share struggles and receive feedback—the objective is to help someone cope with problems and give tools to help overcome those problems. A Christian counselor uses God's Word as a foundation. He will use the law to convict and the gospel to comfort. He will use Christ's love for all people to encourage a God-pleasing life. So he will use God's Word both to comfort the sinner that he is forgiven as well as a guide on what to do going forward.

Here Jesus is called a counselor. But who exactly does he counsel? All of us. You may think to yourself that only those who have problems need a counselor. And that is exactly right—and we have problems, many problems. The words of chapter 61 were written by Isaiah to first comfort those who were in exile in Babylon. They were poor and broken—taken captive to a foreign land where they lived as prisoners.

But as know from reading Jesus' words recorded in Luke 4, this prophecy isn't fulfilled only in those who would declare the return from exile. We can picture Jesus speaking here. These are his words that he is speaking to us. We are the poor and the brokenhearted. We are the captives and the prisoners. We are those who mourn and grieve. Why? Because of sin. We know who we are and we know what we've done. And our sins weigh heavily upon us. We know what our sins deserve—severe, yet just punishment: eternal death. We

are held captive to our own sins, prisoners who we are and what we've done. We can't do anything to save ourselves.

But it's not just our own sins—it's the sin of others and the effects of sin in this world. Our hearts are broken again and again—a loved one betrays you and stomps on your heart, a family member gets cancer and dies, people disappoint you and let you down. You are held captive by the mistakes of others, often not even realizing the consequences they have on you—the lack of love from a parent, the bitterness of a spouse, or the vindictiveness of a co-worker. You are a prisoner to sin and you need help. You need a counselor.

A counselor's job is to listen and then to give counsel—advice, knowledge, and so on. As God, Christ knows our every need and weakness. He is able to read your heart and he knows your emotions—and he listens to your every prayer. And he gives us counsel. As Jesus said in verse one, **the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.** The Lord was chosen to preach the good news, that is the gospel. So his counsel isn't advice, but words of comfort and compassion.

And he still does this through his Word. It is through the Word that our Counselor comes to us. We don't have to set up an appointment. We don't have to pay for anything. His word is available to us in many different formats whenever we want to access it. And in the Bible our counselor talks to us. And wherever his counsel, he is at work comforting our hearts.

He does that through the good news—the gospel. This is why he came to earth: to tell us what he would do and did to save us. He lived a perfect life and gave it to us while he took our sins upon himself. He suffered through hell and rose from the dead three days after he died. Through this work of Jesus we have been released from our sins and their condemnation. We are no longer prisoners of who we are and what we've done—for Christ's perfection is now ours. We have been freed from sin's captivity because Christ became captive to death.

2. And when we die or when the Lord returns we will pass from this world of sin—filled with sickness, pain, sorrow, and the sins of others. The day of vengeance for the unbelieving world will be a day of rejoicing for us, for our Savior comes to take us home. And there in heaven we will wear the victor's crown—a crown of beauty. We will

join all believers in praising our Savior, no longer filled with grief or sorrow because we'll be free from sins and its effects.

And that is why Jesus is called a wonderful counselor. A regular counselor might not be able to give much comfort. Words of advice are given—tools to help you through your issue, ideas to make your life better and to move on in your life. But no real comfort or compassion is given.

But the Wonderful Counselor offers only words of comfort and compassion. He doesn't require us to do anything. He doesn't go through a list of steps to follow to make our situation better. He doesn't give us tools to us or demands to follow through on. He has already taken care of all our problems for us. All that is left for him to do is to proclaim this good news, to tell us and remind us of his grace, and to assure us that we are free from our sins and released from sin's captivity.

Many people don't want to go to a counselor—they see it as a sign of weakness. Many figure that they can handle their problems themselves. And maybe they can. But we can't handle the problem of sin its condemnation. There is nothing we can come up with on our own that would fix this spiritual problem. And when you find a good counselor you are willing to recommend him to someone who is looking for a counselor. Jesus is not just a Wonderful Counselor, but he is the best counselor. And we do more than recommend him to others—we share his Word with them so that they too may believe and be comforted.

By his preaching, Jesus—this servant of the Lord, brings the mourners, captive to sin, freedom and joy. He makes us into strong trees of holiness; and gives salvation to us who had at one time despaired. He's no regular counselor. He is one filled with words of compassion and comfort. They forgive and reassure. They lift-up and encourage. And so we turn to Jesus, our Lord. We do so regularly and without hesitation. We do well to turn to his Word again and again—on a daily basis so that we may not become discouraged or fall into despair because of our great and many sins; but be lifted up and encouraged by God's grace. We turn to him, for only he has the solution to our biggest problem. And it is given free of charge—a gift for us by the shedding of his blood on the cross. He truly is a Wonderful Counselor. Amen.