

THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

12-16-07
Ken Peterson

Isaiah 9:1-2 & 6-7

TEXT: *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.* (Isa 9:6)

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt like the weight of the world was on your shoulders? We've seen pictures of the mythical Atlas, with head bowed, holding the world on his muscular shoulders. Sometimes the responsibilities that are on us and the burdens of life we are called upon to bear can feel like that. I read the other day that the word "oppressed" comes from a popular torture technique around the time of the reformation in which martyrs were placed under a board on which heavy boulders were piled to literally *press* the life out of them. The idea was to get them to recant their so-called heresy before the life was pressed out of them. That gives us a pretty vivid image of what it can feel like emotionally when we are oppressed by our circumstances.

When I was in grade school and we had to memorize poems, one I learned was The Man With a Hoe, by Edwin Markham. The first lines are,

*Bowed by the weight of centuries,
he leans upon his hoe and gazes on the ground.
The emptiness of ages in his face,
and on his back the burden of the world.*

Do you know people like that? They probably aren't leaning on a hoe, but they are burdened, maybe even literally bowed down or at least their shoulders are slumping.

Sometimes people come to me under crushing loads. They've given up hope and can see no way out. I expect that may describe someone here. There is the press of finances, health worries, employment concerns, family members or close friends who weigh heavy on our hearts because they are away from God, and all our feelings of inadequacy for handling what life throws at us. If you're feeling stressed, you're in good company since 86% of Americans are chronically stressed out. And, research shows that Christmas preparations themselves can put us into one of the highest stress times of the year.

That wonderful phrase in our text has been percolating through my thoughts this week, *and the government will be on His shoulders*. This is great news for anyone feeling overwhelmed. If you feel weighed down by the burdens of life, you're doing too much governing— trying to govern the world or at least your world, other people, and managing the events of life. God sent Jesus to us to do all that.

How do we get the government off our shoulders and onto His shoulders?

NEVERTHELESS

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. (Isa 9:1)

“Nevertheless” is a great word— a word that sparks hope. These wonderful Messianic prophecies are set in the midst of warnings of terrible times coming. Assyria has already conquered the Northern kingdom of Israel and is about to come upon the Southern kingdom of Judah with terrible destruction. Yet, woven through these events (chapters 7-11) are some of the most wonderful messages of hope in what God will bring through Jesus, the Messiah. “Nevertheless,” in spite of punishment for Israel’s apostasy, in spite of the troubles coming, God is still mindful of His people and will provide for them in blessing in ways they cannot even comprehend. Assuring promises are given, all fulfilled in Jesus.

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. (Isa 9:1) Do you know about gloom? We refer to a “gloomy outlook” for bad medical prognosis or for the economy or our emotional state. The other morning as I was in this sanctuary praying for you and other needs, this word “nevertheless” began to burn into my soul. Some of you are in great distress and at the moment your lives feel cast in deep shadows of gloom. Yes, that may be now, but “nevertheless” there is a decreed end— Jesus is coming! The NLT puts it, *that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever.* With Jesus’ coming, all that is changed!

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.* (Isa 9:2)

Under the inspiration of the Spirit, a particular group of people is mentioned who have suffered more than most of Israel— the land of Zebulum and Naphtali. They are the northernmost tribes of Israel and consequently suffered the first and longest assaults as the Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser III attacked from the North. So this “nevertheless” is not for just minor problems, but it is for the very worst, even those on the front-lines in fighting the enemy. Right where it has been the worst is where Jesus comes to begin His ministry. As our text says, *he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan.* The major road between Egypt and Damascus passed through Galilee (*the land of Zebulum and Naphtali*) and was called “*the way of the sea.*” And, where did Jesus’ ministry, bringing light, begin and center through the early years? Yes, in Galilee, just as Isaiah prophecies 700 years before His coming.

RESIGNING AS MANAGER

Many of us are under the illusion that we’re to manage, to govern our own affairs. Sometimes it takes a crisis for us to realize our lives are unmanageable. Some have never figured that out. But the sooner we discover it, the better. God has provided someone else, Jesus, to bear the weight of our problems and the pressure of managing things.

I read about Dr. George McCauslin, a YMCA director in western Pennsylvania. The YMCA was losing membership, it had major financial difficulties, and terrible staff problems. He was working 85 hours a week trying to turn things around. He couldn’t sleep at night and couldn’t

stop fretting and worrying when he did have time off. He went to a therapist who told him he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. George knew he had to do something. He took an afternoon off and took a long walk in the Pennsylvania woods. As he walked and prayed, he finally began to feel his tense body relax. He realized he had to let his burdens go, but didn't know how. Finally, as he sat under a tree, he wrote God a letter, "Dear God, today I hereby resign as general manager of the universe. Love, George." And he said, "Wonder of wonders, God accepted my resignation."

Jill Briscoe who refers to herself as a world-class worrier, writes these words:

*Well, I'm done, my nerves were on the rack,
I've laid them down today,
It was the last straw broke the camel's back,
I've laid that down today.
And I'll not fuel or fret or fuss or fight.
I walk by faith a bit and not by sight.
I think the universe will work all right.
I've laid it down today.*

*So here and now, the overweight, the worry,
I lay it down today, the all-too-anxious heart,
the tearing hurry, I lay those down today,
O eager hands, O feet so prone to run.
I think He who made the stars and sun
Can mind the things you've had to leave undone.
I'll lay it down tonight.*

Then we are given four descriptive names that can help us lay down the parts of our lives that weigh us down.

HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED... WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

Turning the government of our lives to Jesus doesn't mean we sit back and do nothing. But how are we to know what to do and what not to do? It is good to know that in Jesus we have a wonderful counselor to help us sort through all the demands and cares of life. When we face decisions, forks in the road, which one should we take? We try to think through the implications of each option— there are too many unknowns. But we have a God to whom the future is not veiled. When He is leading, we can be sure of what to say "yes" to and what to say "no" to.

I've read about why animal trainers carry a chair with four legs into a cage of lions or tigers. While they have their whips and a pistol, the chair is their most important tool. How is that any defense against a huge lion or tiger? Well, they say that as the trainer thrusts the legs of the chair toward the animal, the animal tries to focus on all four legs at once and a kind of paralysis overwhelms the animal.

I don't know if that is right, but for us, if we try to focus on too much, we become weak,

fragmented and unable to do much. We need a Counselor to let us know what the current focus needs to be. As people came to Jesus in his earthly ministry, we see His unerring ability to put His finger on the real problem, no matter what the person was saying or asking for. He heals, forgives sins, reveals hearts, and gives direction— always right on target to what is really needed, even if the person doesn't know what that is.

As we walk with Jesus, He gives us the Holy Spirit as “another Counselor” (Jn. 14:16), who is with us always to give inner direction. Remember Jesus' wonderful promise in Matt 11:28-30,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

My yoke is easy means that it just fits, it is customized, it is easy on our shoulders. He doesn't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on us. But, as Jesus says, *learn from me*. This is Spirit-guided process.

HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED... MIGHTY GOD

As we turn the management of our lives over to Jesus, it is important to know that He is perfectly capable of handling it all. As the angel Gabriel affirms to Mary in the annunciation, *Nothing is impossible with God* (Lk. 1:37). That's wonderfully assuring. Whatever is needed— a miracle, healing, strength for the day, power to overcome, material provisions, and even defeating the enemies that would destroy us.

A few years ago, in Ohio, I sat under the teaching of Wesley DUEWELL who has written a number of books on intercessory prayer and revival. One story he shares took place in 1960 in Kenya. It was during the Mau Mau uprising there. Missionaries Matt and Lora HIGGENS were returning one night to Nairobi and had to pass through the heart of Mau Mau territory where missionaries had been killed and dismembered. In the middle of that area, 17 mi. from Nairobi, their Land Rover stopped. Matt tried to repair it in the dark to no avail. So, they spent the night in the car, claiming Ps. 4:8,

I will lie down and sleep in peace,

For you alone, O Lord make me to dwell in safety.

In the morning, they were able to repair their Land Rover and make it safely home. A few weeks later, Matt and Lora were due to return to America on furlough. The night before they left, a local pastor told them that a member of the Mau Mau had confessed that he and three others approached the HIGGENS' Land Rover that night to kill them. When they approached the car, there were 16 big men surrounding the car, so they left in fear. Matt and Lora were puzzled, since they knew nothing of this. While on furlough, a friend of theirs asked if they had been in particular danger on March 23. He went on to say that God had placed a heavy burden on his heart to pray for them. He called together some of the men of the church and 16 men came together and prayed until the burden lifted. As Matt and Lora thought back, the time corresponded perfectly to that night in the Land Rover stuck in Mau Mau territory. Did God send 16 angels to represent those 16 prayer warriors?

HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED... EVERLASTING FATHER

Jesus introduced us to God as Father. Throughout the whole Old Testament, no one ever knew

God as Father. But, because of Jesus' redemptive, saving work, we can be born again into the family of God and God becomes our Father. We are loved unconditionally and eternally. That acceptance by the Creator of the universe is deeply healing to our souls.

Often our drivenness and frantic attempt to control everything is rooted in a longing to be significant, accepted, and valued. So much of our sense of worth comes from our birth families, and no earthly parent has ever been perfect in shaping our personalities. We all lack some inner wholeness. But, we have a heavenly Father who loves us perfectly, accepts us, and even celebrates our uniqueness. That is nurturing and healing at the deepest levels. The more we know Him and live within that assurance, the healthier we become.

HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED... PRINCE OF PEACE

The message of the Angels to the shepherds the night of Jesus' birth was:

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.

Inner peace is a product of a relationship with the Prince of Peace. The night before His own death, Jesus in His teaching on the Holy Spirit says,

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

This peace is not tied to what is going on around us. It is just Jesus in our hearts. We can know that peace in the midst of chaos, pressure, and trouble. It is an inner quiet nothing outside us can touch. It is one of the manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

We await the day of Christ's return, His second Advent, when He will indeed rule all the nations and the whole world will be at peace. In the meantime, we are called to be peacemakers and do our best to bring about peace wherever we can. This is God's call to us, though we know our work is only stop-gap until Christ's return in power and glory.

CONCLUSION

These names form a quadrilateral describing for us a total Christ for our total needs. I've also been thinking of that prepositional phrase, "to us." This is not to people in general or our world in general— it is TO US. Four wonderful God-names given to each of us so there will be no more gloom, darkness, or we need not be intimidated by the shadow of death. In Jesus "great light" has come, a new day has dawned. No matter what we face, there is God's "nevertheless." He will always have the final word and it will be glorious beyond our imagining.

But, it all begins with our taking the government, the management of affairs, off our shoulders and placing it all on His capable shoulders. In doing that, our lives can be boundaried by THE Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.