

This morning, we begin a sermon series during the Advent season, we'll be looking at four of the names of Christ, found in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. These names are prophetic descriptions of the King who was to come. They told God's people what kind of deliverer God would send them and what kind of savior they should look for.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

This morning, we consider the first name, "Wonderful Counselor." There are so many people who are confused, depressed, and anxious. They are searching for advice and counsel from religions, secular philosophies, or self-care books. But we have someone that takes us back to the source of true wisdom, "Wonderful Counselor".

The Hebrew word translated "wonderful" means something so tremendous and so amazing that it is literally beyond description, and something that transcends human experience or imagination. So when the Scriptures refer to a "wonderful" counselor, it doesn't just mean that he's good at giving advice. It means that he understands things which are beyond the ability of our finite minds to comprehend. So we have someone who is abundantly qualified to guide and direct our lives. Someone who is never confused or mistaken. Someone who will never lead us astray. Jesus Christ is our Wonderful Counselor.

Do we really see Jesus as a Wonderful Counselor whose guidance is superior to any other? Do we believe him when he claims to be able to lead us into

"abundant" life? When it comes to living our daily lives, do we really look to him for practical guidance?

Perhaps, do we look first to the advice of our friends, our family, our co-workers and then go to Jesus as a last resort? Or do we go first to the professionals and the experts and the authorities to help us with our problems, rather than to our Wonderful counselor? I'm not saying we should never seek help from other people, or that no one should ever see a professional counselor.

What I'm saying is that we should view other sources of help as secondary, not primary. Any counselor we consult can help us to understand and apply God's wisdom in our lives. It may be good advice as far as it goes, but it's going to be inferior to the teachings and example of Christ. Jesus is the only person who has ever lived a completely authentic human life, the kind of life that God intended for us to live. He's the only one who truly understands how life works.

This morning, my goal is simple. I want to convince you to look to Christ first whenever you need advice, or guidance, or counsel. How do we receive His guidance? How do we receive His advice and counsel for the specific issues we are dealing with?

First, you have to read and understand God's word. And I don't mean just looking for a few verses which speak directly to the issue you care about. I mean becoming familiar with the Bible as a whole.

"Well", you might say, "of course God knows everything. But he never intended that we should look only to him for instruction in how to live. He didn't intend for

the Bible alone to guide us through life. He expects us to seek out the advice of experts."

We can discover many things about life without reading the Bible or knowing God. Over the centuries, people have used their intelligence and powers of observation to learn a great deal about how the world works. It's called "common grace" or "general revelation".

Paul says in Romans 1:20, "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made."

Here's the problem: God's truth mixed with error. God's wisdom combined with foolishness; light combined with darkness. The only way to separate the truth from the error in these alternative sources of wisdom is to compare them to the Word of God.

So, it is not wrong to read the sacred texts of other religions, or to read secular self-help books as long as you keep in mind the need for discernment, the need to constantly compare what you're reading to the truth of the Bible. We have to read the Bible to receive Jesus' advice and counsel.

The second thing you need to do to receive Jesus' guidance is to pray. Because when we pray, He guides our prayers and changes our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Apostle Paul teaches us in Ephesians 6:18, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

What does it mean to "pray in the Spirit"? It doesn't mean to speak in tongues, or pray in some kind of altered state of consciousness. It means to pray in the power and freedom that the indwelling Spirit gives us. It means to rely on

Christ, trusting that our prayers will be heard because of his merit, rather than our own righteousness.

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.(John 14:26)

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God through Jesus Christ. As we pray, the Holy Spirit becomes our Counselor. As we pray, and as we read, the Spirit opens our minds to understand, and opens our hearts to accept the wisdom we need.

For instance, if we need guidance and direction regarding an issue in our family; as we read the Scriptures, and as we pray about the issue, the Holy Spirit works in our heart and mind to give us the insight we need. It doesn't always come quickly. Sometimes we have to continue asking, and seeking, and knocking. But the Spirit will give us the wisdom we need, because He is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of wisdom. If you believe in Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit dwells in you. And He will direct your path. We have to pray in the name of Jesus Christ, a Wonderful Counselor.

God wants to reveal His will to us. He doesn't intend for us to grope around in the dark, looking in vain for some guidance or help. Nor does God intend for us to seek wisdom and insight from the world. God wants us to walk with Him, for our lives to be guided by Him. And for that purpose God sent His only Son, and has given us His Word, and His Spirit. We have to place our trust in God, then we will find that His counsel is the only counsel we will ever need, and the best we could ever find.