

Christmas 2005

Robert Fulton was interested in power, steam power. Oh, he was well known as an inventor, engineer and even artist at the turn of the 19th century, but it was that obsession with the potential power in steam that intrigued him the most. So he set out to build a ship powered by steam. People laughed, they scoffed, they called his dream "Fulton's Folly". But in 1807, the 142 foot long and 14 foot wide "Clermont" was ready to take her maiden voyage up the Hudson River from New York City to Albany. As the crowds lined the pier laughing in derision, they yelled out insults at Fulton's Steamship. One spectator described his ship as "looking exactly like a backwoods sawmill mounted on a scow and set on fire." And suddenly, the inevitable chant began- "it won't go".

But Robert Fulton's "Clermont" did go. And as it set sail up that Hudson River, a new era in naval navigation was born. And predictably, as Fulton's Folly began to work its way up the river, the crowd's chant changed to "it won't stop".

Power. The fascination with power has lead people to make some remarkable inventions. And these innovations have added much to the quality of our lives. In fact, human history can be looked at as the story of human beings discovering and using new sources of power- and it often is by historians. First it was human-power, than horsepower, and the agricultural revolution was born. Then came steam power and the industrial revolution was born. Now we have atomic power and laser power and the technological revolution has been born. Each new source of power expands the potential of accomplishment. And with each new

source of power, the human race becomes more and more confident in our abilities and more and more arrogant even to the place of denying the existence of God.

Now we certainly appreciate the technological advances that have been made with each succeeding civilization, and we all enjoy a higher quality of life because of the many conveniences that we have. And I am sure that God is pleased, for He created us with the potential to accomplish great things. But if we are intoxicated by success to the point where we begin to compare human power favorably to God's power even to the point to claiming complete independence from God, then we are miserably deceived and in a very dangerous spiritual position.

Just over 25 years ago, on March 5, 1979, one of our satellites picked up a powerful burst of energy from a far away star's surface. Let me quote a paragraph from the Dallas Times Herald that described this explosion. "The burst of gamma radiation picked up by the satellite lasted for only one tenth of a second. But in that brief instant it emitted as much energy as the sun does over a period of 3,000 years. If the sun would have belched out that same amount of energy, this earth would have been vaporized immediately."

Now that's power. That's God's power. The power of the mighty God. The kind of power that was demonstrated in the incarnation of the God-man, Jesus Christ- for his name is the mighty God.

During this Christmas season, we have been looking at the names of Jesus Christ given hundreds of years before his coming by the prophet Isaiah.

He would be called wonderful- showing his distinctiveness in our lives

He would be called counselor- because he helps us with decisions in life

He would be called the mighty God- for he alone is strong enough to deal with the demands of life

He would be called the everlasting father- for he came to give to us new dimensions in life

He would be called the prince of peace- for he comforts our disturbances in life.

READ Isaiah 9:6,7

ISA 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.

ISA 9:7 Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.

We come this morning to the 3rd name given by Isaiah- the Mighty God. And we see in this name 3 implications that are made concerning Christ's person, his power and his potential in our lives. We would like to focus our attention on these 3 implications as we regard Jesus Christ as the Mighty God.

1. First of all, note with me the implication of this name on Christ's person.

Ever since Jesus Christ was born, there have been those who have tried to deny his claim to deity. Certainly, he could not have been God, they say, for it is impossible for God to become a man.

And so those early Jewish religious leaders claimed that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary and Joseph. And then after Christ's death, the Ebionites continued this claim that Christ was not really God. They said that he was just a man upon whom the office of Messiahship had descended at his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. This Messiahship left him just before his death, so he died the death of any other man, the Ebionites claimed. A couple of centuries later, Arius arose to continue the assault on Christ's person. Jesus did live before his birth, Arius conceded, but he was a created being like the other angels. And so on down through the centuries, many have sought to rob Christ of his claim to be God, for it certainly cannot be disputed from the Biblical accounts that Jesus Christ claimed to be God. He said boldly, "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30). He performed acts that only God could do, even to the point of raising the dead and forgiving sins. He accepted the worship only God deserves. Yet even today, there are many who seek to rob Jesus Christ of his deity.

William Spurrier places the contemporary attacks against Jesus Christ's deity into 3 major categories. There are those first of all who view Him as simply a great teacher. He is not to be worshiped, but his teachings are generally to be respected and followed. Then there are those who view Christ as a good, sincere man. He was one who believed in his own claims and had the courage to be

willing to die for his convictions. A third view emphasizes Christ as an example and model for us to follow. He set a new standard for nobility in humans, they say.

Now the Bible does not deny the truth of any of these assertions. Certainly, Jesus Christ was a great teacher, the best teacher who has ever lived. Without doubt, He was a good man, a man who had the courage of his convictions. And surely he was and remains a good model and example for us. But Jesus Christ was all of these because he was more than just all of these. The name that Isaiah chose for him was the mighty God. This should leave no doubt in our mind concerning his person. And the other names given to him corroborate His deity. "He will be called 'Jesus' for he will save his people from their sins," the angel declared to Mary. Jesus means Jehovah is our salvation- another indication of his deity. The angel gave to Joseph another name for Christ in the vision revealed to him. "Immanuel"- meaning God with us.

Jesus Christ deserves our faith, love, obedience, service and worship because he is God. His name is the mighty God.

2. But secondly, note the implication concerning his power. What a paradox it is that a newborn baby lying in a cattle's feeding trough should be called "the mighty God". Yet we really don't have to look beyond that manger scene to see evidences of the power of that newborn baby.

Christ's birth affected the heavens above. Suddenly, a star shone out in brilliance above all other stars. Now there are many explanations that have been

offered for this heavenly phenomenon- a lining up of planets, a comet, a new star created by God, and sometime we might be able to look into these different theories together- but suffice it for now to say that this simple heavenly phenomenon started in motion a chain of events that would rock the world.

Some Persian Magi who studied the movements of the stars immediately noted this new and unusual happening. These were influential men, great leaders in their country. They were recognized to be the scholars of the scholars. Yet, they were so impressed with this unusual heavenly sighting, that they dropped all of their responsibilities and projects, and decided to take a journey to follow this star to Judea. They were willing to take at least 3 years out of their lives, and finance this great undertaking out of their own pockets because they had seen this single star.

When they arrived in the Palestine region, the Persian Magi shook the entire court of Herod with their announcement. Herod, who had always shown some signs of paranoia, now really began to crack. He cruelly and irrationally ordered the mass slaughter of infants in the Bethlehem area, and he continued the last years of his life always looking over his shoulder fearful of another who was going to take the throne away from him. The entire nation of Israel was already affected by the birth of a baby in a stable before he was even able to walk or speak. This should not surprise us in the least, because Isaiah had prophesied before that the child born and the son given would be called the Mighty God.

So the name chosen by Isaiah, the mighty God, indicates both the divine person and the divine power of Jesus Christ.

3. But we must continue quickly to see another implication, and this is the one that I would like to focus on at some length this morning. Not only does this name speak to His person and His power, but it also speaks to the potential that this name has in the lives of those who embrace it. And this is brought out very clearly in the context of Isaiah's prophecy.

We must always remember that Isaiah was writing these words during most distressing times. Israel's illustrative history was being threatened, her very life was hanging by a thread. The cruel nation of Assyria was already making plans to assault the 10 northern tribes, and she would do so successfully during Isaiah's lifetime. In fact, most feel that Isaiah wrote these very words after this event had happened for he tells of the fall of Samaria in chapters 36-39. Assyria would wrench families from their homeland and family members from other family members as Jewish people were carted away as slaves into exile. And Assyria had covetous eyes on Judea also. Sennacherib's plans were to take Jerusalem and all of the Jewish people of the southern tribes away into captivity also. From a human standpoint, it appeared that nothing could stand in the path of such a powerful, mighty king. Sennacherib was a world conqueror- no human force could stand in his way. And he knew it and flaunted it. He loved to intimidate and display his mighty power. So he sent his messengers to challenge those on the walls of Jerusalem with imposing threats. And they were successful too, so successful that King Hezekiah's men finally begged them to speak only in Aramaic and not in Hebrew, for only the royal officials who dealt internationally knew the Aramaic,

but the masses of the soldiers who knew Hebrew were being disheartened by the taunts and threats of these envoys sent from the mighty king Sennacherib. But the Assyrians just laughed and continue to intimidate until the Jewish soldiers hearts were like putty.

Certainly, this life-threatening problem that Hezekiah and Isaiah who was in the palace with him, and the entire population of Jerusalem faced seemed to be insurmountable. The army of Assyria had already run roughshod over every nation surrounding them, Samaria and the 10 northern tribes had just fallen to their mighty hand. The city of Jerusalem didn't have the weapons or defenses necessary to withstand the force of their assault. And the Jewish army was disheartened. Their courage and strength were gone. What hope was left? Certainly there appeared to be none.

But in the midst of all this despair, there stood one prophet of God named Isaiah. He was the one who wrote those verses in Isaiah 9 just preceding this great prophecy that we have been studying these past weeks.

READ them with me starting in verse 2.

"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. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in

blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders. And he will be called . . . the mighty God." Is. 9:2-6

How could anyone be so naive or have the audacity to talk about a light in darkness, or enlarging the borders of the nation, or rejoicing, or dividing the plunder in such a time of national crisis? I mean these people weren't thinking about economic growth or quality of life - they were concerned with mere existence, keeping alive to see the sun rise tomorrow, getting enough food in the time of famine to feed their children. How could this prophet be so ludicrous as to see any ray of light in such a time of complete darkness?

Isaiah knew a God who was a mighty God. And he realized that in spite of Sennacherib's claim, there was only one in the universe who really deserved the adjective "mighty". So Isaiah came to Hezekiah the king at the most hopeless time, when Sennacherib and his men had already surrounded the city and were waiting to pounce on the city as a lion springs on its prey, and Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Don't worry about it. Sennacherib is not going to enter this city,. He won't even attempt it, but rather he is going to turn around and go home because God has said that he will defend this city."

One wonders what Hezekiah's reaction was. I am sure that there were many snickers around the royal court that day. Poor Isaiah. It's finally gone to his head. Perhaps it is the lack of food. Perhaps it is all the pressure. He's finally cracked up. But what happened? Let me read it for you.

"Then the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eight-five thousand men in the Assyrian Camp. When the people got up the next morning- there were all the dead bodies. So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and he stayed there. One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king." Isaiah 37:36-38.

Mighty King Sennacherib who had intimidated and threatened and bullied everyone into submission, had finally met the one who truly was mighty- God himself. He had been sent running back to his palace with his tail between his legs, fearful to ever leave again. And finally, he had become so inadequate as a leader that his own sons assassinated him.

Isaiah could have confidence in the midst of chaos because he knew the Mighty God, the God who delights in giving his strength to those who come to him in weaknesses. In another place, Isaiah would write "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

Now this process that Isaiah experienced is the very same process that continues today. Paul spoke of our hope being the fact that Jesus Christ the Messiah can dwell within us. "Christ in you the hope of glory" Paul said. When we trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord we initiate the most intimate of all relationships. We are placed into the body of Christ as a child of God, and he

comes to live and dwell within us in the person of the Holy Spirit. And the beauty of that relationship is that he desires to live His all-powerful, divine life through us. Now that mighty power will not always manifest itself in a physical manner as it did with Isaiah- it may but it does not always do so. It also manifests itself in growth of character, power for victorious living over unwanted habits, being able to live above petty circumstances in life, power to conquer anger and bitterness and depression and fear and anxiety in life. The mighty power is there, and it is God's desire that it be appropriated to each of our lives.

Perhaps you heard of the fellow who learned through reading the paper that his wealthy uncle had passed away. This young lad had run away from his home in New York State while in his early 20's and had journeyed out to the west coast to make his fortune. But life had not been kind to him, and after losing job after job, he had finally accepted his lot among the other street people, living in the alleys of L.A. But now he had found this paper in the garbage, and learned of his uncle's death. He had loved this uncle very much and had felt close to him, so he was deeply grieved at his loss. At once it hit him. He must go back to pay his final respects. He would never be able to make it back for the funeral, nor would he want to, for it would be too embarrassing for him. But he would go back and visit his uncle's gravesite and pay his final respects. So this man began the arduous journey across the states, hitchhiking, bumming rides in any way that he could, even hopping on a train for a stretch of his trip. And finally he arrived at his home town. He immediately went out to the cemetery where he imagined his uncle's

grave to be. While there speaking silently with his dear uncle, another relative came to place flowers there. Imagine his surprise when he learned that the courts had been trying to locate him, that his uncle had left him a sizeable inheritance, that he was a rich man. He had become rich upon the passing of his uncle. Yet he had traveled all the way across the U.S. as a pauper because he had not known that he could have just wired ahead for money.

Many Christians' lives are pictured in this man's experience. They have trusted in Jesus Christ, they have the mighty God living within them. Yet, they are still trying to live their lives in their own weakness. They have not as yet realized their potential for victory over sin. They have not yet realized the truth that Christ is the mighty God.

Yes, this name that Isaiah used indicates a truth concerning Christ's person- he is God. And a truth concerning his power- he is mighty. And it also indicates a truth concerning our potential if we know him as our Savior, for Christ desires to manifest his power in our lives. Is it possible for the Christian to live a victorious life? Oh yes, because dwelling within him is the one whose name is Mighty God.