

COUNSELOR ISAIAH 9:6B

CHRISTMAS 2005

Before Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the U.S. in 1860, he was recognized as a chronic loser among politicians. He had failed twice to be elected to Congress. And then after he finally was elected on his third try to a brief 2 year term, he was rejected by the people in his bid for re-election. At age 45, he had run for the Senate- he lost. At age 47 he made an unsuccessful bid as a vice-presidential candidate. At age 49, he ran again for the Senate- he lost again. So when he decided to run for the highest office, the office of President only 2 years later at age 51, he was not given much of a chance by many for he had the reputation of being a loser- a loser at the national level.

But there was one person who believed in him- an adviser named Bedell who gave to Lincoln some very sound counsel. Now how much impact Bedell had on Lincoln's career and the subsequent course of our nation's history we will never know for sure, but we do know that this adviser named Bedell did give to Lincoln some wise counsel. "One of your hindrances is your image" Bedell told Lincoln. "Your personal appearance is detracting from the wisdom of your words so that

the people are not really hearing what you are saying. Your face is gaunt to begin with, and then there is that unusual curvature on your upper lip, and that outstanding mole on your right cheek. These are distractions. You must draw people's attention away from them." By now you have probably guessed Bedell's advise to Lincoln. And Abraham Lincoln took this advise although reluctantly. Because up to this time, Abraham Lincoln had always been clean-shaven- but from this point on, he would always have a beard, and most Americans would hardly recognize a picture of him today without that familiar beard - the beard that Bedell recommended that Lincoln grow.

The impact of that single feature in changing the image of Abraham Lincoln is hard to calculate. But listen to a quote from an article in the N.Y. Times written by a reporter named John Winchell during Lincoln's political campaign. "I was struck with a simplicity, the kindness and the dignity of his deportment, so different from the clownish manners with which it was then customary to invest him. His face was a pleasant surprise formed as my expectations had been from the general belief of his ugliness. I remember thinking how much better looking he was then I had anticipated, and I was wondering that anyone should consider

him ugly."

Yes, there had been a problem with Lincoln's appearance, distractions that were hiding his real character. And Bedell was able to pin-point these, correct them, and thus Abraham Lincoln was able to reverse a long string of political defeats in becoming the 16th president of the U.S. Bedell proved to be a good counselor even though she didn't personally vote for Abraham Lincoln. You see, Grace Bedell couldn't have voted for him, for she was only 11 years old. Yet Abraham Lincoln was wise enough to listen to this sound advice from a young lady who honestly assessed his appearance, and Lincoln won the election. I guess you could say that he won by a whisker.

Recognizing the need for good counsel is a trait of a growing person. Being able to discern good counsel is a trait of a wise person. Having the humility and honesty to take good counsel to heart and apply it is a trait of a successful person.

We all have those in our lives who have provided good counsel for us, and we have grown to appreciate them and their contribution to our lives. But there is one whose counsel is in a class by itself. His counsel is the best because it is always true, it is always timely and appropriate, it reaches into the innermost recesses of

our needs, it is not mere human suggestion but rather it is divine counsel. It comes from the one whose very name is counselor.

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

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.

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.

We come this morning to the second name given by Isaiah- Counselor. Jesus

Christ as counselor is able to help with decisions in our lives. He is able to provide direction for us. He is able to help us solve problems. He comes to us in our time of need and provides the encouragement and strength necessary to get us through the storms of life.

And this name of Jesus, Counselor, is especially appropriate for us to consider during this season of the year. For the Christmas season often seems to add to our concerns in life. The busyness of this time of year can easily put more pressure on our schedules. The added financial pressures of gift giving can add stresses to our pocketbooks. The height of the emotional pitch of this season can easily bring recent losses that we have suffered to the forefront of our minds. The special focus on personal relationships can often bring on delicate issues which need to be addressed. This is a season that has such high expectations of joy and peace that for someone who doesn't have joy and peace in his or her life, the despair and depression can be especially acute. I have had many people in my ministry who tell me that they frankly hate the Christmas season. For them, this season just magnifies the unhappiness that they feel in their lives. Certainly, at this time of year especially, we need to know the one whose name is Counselor- the one who

is willing and able to heal wounds in our spirits and give wise advise and guidance to us in every single area of our life.

How is Jesus Christ our counselor? How is he able to help us with decisions and direction in life? I would like to discuss 4 ways in which Jesus Christ fulfills his name of Counselor in His ministry in our lives.

1. Jesus Christ is our counselor in the example of the life he lived. The perfect life of Christ provides guidance for us in living our lives. Jesus showed us how to live in differing life circumstances and he showed us how to respond to the many curves that life can throw at us.

I Peter 2:21 speaks of Christ living as our example when it says, "to this you were called, because Christ suffered for you leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Charles Sheldon picked up on the last phrase in that verse and developed it into a great thesis in his book entitled "in His Steps" where he advocated the concept that Christ came as our example to show us how to live. This concept has been further promoted in recent years by the colorful wristbands with the letters WWJD on them – what would Jesus do. It is good for us to preface every action by the consideration of how Christ would act if He were in

this very situation. We should try to live our lives walking in the steps of Christ. For He came to live as our counselor, showing us by His example how to live.

You see, Christ didn't have to spend as much time as he did here upon the earth in order to provide the perfect atonement for man's sins. He was just as much the sinless son of God as a babe in the manger as he was at 33 years of age. So it would have been perfectly possible for him to die at a younger age after having demonstrated his worthiness as the spotless lamb of God. But he didn't follow that pattern.

No, he lived for 30 years in relative obscurity, working hard, growing in his physical and intellectual stature, developing in his social skills and spiritual maturity. And in his example, he counseled us in the basic disciplines of life. He demonstrated the importance of discipline in work habits and the need for balance in our lives, because he was perfectly balanced in life.

And then in the many details that we are given of His public ministry, Christ counseled us by His example how to face varying situations. How do we face temptation when the enemy of God comes to us trying to trip us up in our Spiritual walk? We look to Christ on the mount of temptation and see how he battled the

enemy victoriously, wielding the word of God like a piercing sword as he defended himself against Satan's onslaughts. How do we handle victories? Probably more people are ultimately destroyed by success and victories in life than by any other enemy. We look to Christ, and we see the humility with which he walked in life, his continual dependence upon the Spirit of God, the fact that he would often follow victories with long seasons of prayer realizing the fact that victories bring a sense of vulnerability. How do we handle failure? Again we look to Christ as he is journeying to the cross, as his followers in whom he had divested so much time and energy had all deserted him. One has betrayed him, another denied him and cursed against him, yet we see his commitment to them, we see his steadfast love, we see his dedication to doing the will of the father. How do we handle depression? We walk with Christ into the garden of Gethsemane and see him sweat great drops of blood from his brow as his soul was sorrowful even unto death. We see his commitment to the will of God in spite of the emotional turmoil of the time. We see him making decisions based upon what was right or wrong rather than his vacillating feelings. How do we handle confrontation? We see Christ stand courageously before the Pharisees, not willing

to acknowledge or accept their erroneous teachings. We see him confront the error in his disciples in quite a different manner, and personal differences in his family in still another way.

Jesus Christ faced a similar life to what we all face. He was tempted in all points like as we are. Yet he never sinned once, so we have the confidence that he is the perfect pattern to follow. He can counsel us with that perfect life, and we can strive to walk in his steps. Yes, he is the counselor in that His life presents the perfect model for us to follow.

2. But Christ also counsels us with his presence. In times of need, we want a counselor who is accessible to us, one who is readily available. Jesus Christ is such a counselor. For even though earthly friends might leave us and at times forsake us, Christ has promised never to leave nor forsake him own.

Christ's closing words to his disciples before his ascension into heaven were words of commission and words of comfort. He first of all commanded them to “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the H.S., teaching them to obey everything that he had commanded.” Then he concluded with the words of comfort- “and surely I will be

with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matt. 28:19,20.

What he wanted to leave foremost in the minds and hearts of his disciples was the fact that even though he was going to bodily ascend into heaven, his spiritual presence would continue with them. And he would never leave them nor forsake them. He would always be there as their counselor and guide.

Henry Morehouse once felt unusually burdened under the stresses and pressures of work. It was one of those times when everything had piled up on him. His wife had called the office to ask him to pick up something from the store on the way home, and he had responded inwardly in a negative way. Just another burden, something else to remember. Well, he arrived home with his package, and he was greeted at the door by his invalid daughter who was confined to a wheelchair. "Where's mother?" asked Henry. "She's upstairs" replied the daughter. "Well, tell her I have a package for her when she comes down." continued Henry. "Daddy, let me take the package up to her" insisted his daughter. "How can you? You can't go up the stairs yourself, let alone carry a package up to your mother." "I know, daddy. But if you give to me the package I will hold it while you carry me up the stairs to mother."

Mr. Moorhouse said that he realized his error at that moment. Here he had been trying to carry the burdens of life on his shoulders ignoring the presence of Jesus Christ within him. So he handed the package to his daughter and picked her up cheerfully, and it seemed that his journey up the stairs was lighter than his entrance through the door because of the spiritual truth that his daughter had inadvertently taught him.

If we know Jesus Christ as our Savior, His presence never leaves us. He has promised to never leave nor forsake us. Therefore, he is always with us to counsel us.

3. And this brings us to an important 3rd point that shows just how Christ's presence is personally experienced in our lives. As he was preparing to leave this earth, on the very night in which he was betrayed, Jesus told his disciples that it was going to be good for them that he would leave them. Now they couldn't understand this at all at the time. Good for them to be without Jesus Christ? He had been their leader, their guide, they had committed their lives to him. How could it possibly be good for them for him to leave? But Jesus insisted that it would be good. And he gave to them the reason for it being good for him to leave

them on that very night.

"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

John 16:7

Who is this counselor that Jesus is speaking of here? The context tells us very clearly who he is. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever- the Spirit of truth." John 14:16,17a.

Jesus promised his disciples that he would send to them another counselor after he left this earth. And those 2 words that he used - another counselor - are filled with great spiritual truth for each of us.

There are actually 2 words that Jesus could have used that would have been translated another in English. One literally means "another of a different kind" while the other means "another of the same kind".

Now we assume this distinction in the English language so we use the same word. Someone has said that there is perhaps only one day on which more gifts are exchanged than Christmas day- that is the day after Christmas. And while that is an obvious exaggeration, there is a measure of truth in that statement, isn't

there? When we are given another gift to open, it could either be another of the same kind just like the 3 other pok-a-dot ties that we have already received, or it could be another gift that is distinct from all others. And if it is another pok-a-dot tie, we will be with many others waiting in lines after Christmas to exchange our gift.

The word used by Christ means "another of the same kind". Another just like me. The Holy Spirit of God whom Christ sent was the third person of the Godhead, with all the capabilities to counsel that Jesus himself has because he likewise is divine by nature.

The other word that is of interest is the term translated "counselor" in my translation. It is rendered comforter or encourager in some others. It is a word formed from 2 Greek terms which means "one called alongside to help in time of need". The Holy Spirit of God has been given to us at Salvation to indwell us forever, and one of his purposes is to walk with us helping us in our times of need.

Whereas God the Father gave to us the great gift of his son, Jesus Christ during that first Christmas season, Jesus Christ gave to us the great gift of the Holy Spirit

on the Day of Pentecost after he had ascended back to heaven. Not only will his presence continue to be with us, but the Holy Spirit will also indwell us leading us into all truth.

I'm sure that most of us have at one time or another longed for those days when Jesus walked here upon the earth. Oh, to have been able to walk with him, hearing him teach, watching him heal, being able to tell him our problems. But the simple reason that Jesus gave to his disciples is just as true today as it was when he spoke it. It is good for us that he is not here. For now we not only have his presence, but we also have the Holy Spirit who is called the 'counselor' also indwelling us. We have two whose names are counselor- Jesus Christ himself, and the Holy Spirit of God.

4. And so Christ is our counselor in that he modeled Godly living by his life, in that he is ever present with us, and that he has sent another counselor, the Spirit, to indwell us.

But notice with me finally that Christ is our counselor through the Word of God that he has given to us. The Psalmist said, "Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors." Psalm 119:24.

Later in that same Psalm the author says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Ps. 119:105 The Bible teaches us how to live aright.

Recently, I read in a Christian magazine the testimony of a GI who before his conversion had been a proud agnostic. Shortly after W.W.II he had entered a south sea Island to restore occupation. One of the Island nationals, thinking that this American would be excited to hear that Christianity had already been brought to the island by a missionary, came up to him proudly displaying parts of a Bible which had been translated into his language. The agnostic GI laughed and scoffed saying through an interpreter, "We've outgrown that sort of thing." The national smiled and said back through the interpreter, "It's good for you that we haven't. If it wasn't for this book, you'd have been a meal by now." It was this testimony that helped to lead this hardened GI to conversion for he began to recognize the power of the Bible to counsel in our daily practices if we will follow its leading.

As Charles Hadden Spurgeon once said, "A Bible which is falling apart usually belongs to someone who is not."

Problems. We all have them. And to a great degree, the growth and quality of our live will be in direct proportion to how effectively we handle our problems.

Problems can bring great despair and discouragement to us or they can bring tremendous growth as we work towards solutions. But we all need a counselor to help us with our problems. Happily, if we know Jesus Christ, we have the perfect counselor, for his name is counselor.

He counsels us through the perfect life that he lived. He has set forth an example so that we might see how to effectively live and overcome temptation, depression, conflicts of many kinds, victories, and all kinds of other common problems that we all face. Are we following his example? Are we truly seeking to walk in his steps?

He continues to counsel us with his presence, for he has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. And he has even given to us another counselor, the Holy Spirit of God, who will likewise guide and lead us into truth. Are we sensitive to his presence within us? Or are we ignoring their presence and quenching the Spirit of God within?

And He has given to us the very Word of God- designed to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths, designed to counsel us and help us with our journey

through life. Are we studying it? Are we following its advice to us?

We needn't walk through life alone, for we have a counselor who is walking with us. He is Jesus Christ our Savior- His name is counselor.