

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Dr. Gordon Hughes

Who Jesus is: Mighty God and Immanuel

Hello. Today we are continuing our series of talks on 'Who Jesus is'. The series is based on that well-known prophecy in Isaiah 9:6: *"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* Last week, we considered His name, or title, as 'Wonderful Counsellor'. Today's subject is the 'Mighty God'. We will look, first, at this word 'God' and then at the word 'Mighty'. Finally, we will consider some of the implications for us today as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ.

God

You have probably heard of the saying, 'Familiarity breeds contempt'. There is a real danger that we become so familiar with the good news of the Lord Jesus come to be the Saviour of the world (see 1 John 4:14) that we begin to lose the sense of wonder that we are speaking of no less a person that God Himself coming into our world! My prayer today is that we might recover something of that sense of wonder and worship as we consider Him.

There is an intriguing statement in Daniel 2:11. King Nebuchadnezzar had had a dream but when morning came, he could no longer remember what it was. He called his wise men and ordered them, on pain of death, to tell him both the dream and its meaning. They replied, *"It is a difficult thing that the king requires, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."*

In those words, *"...the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh"*, we cannot but sense the despair that these wise men felt that such an event was utterly impossible. We should remember that these were not ignorant men. They represented the crème de la crème of Babylon at that time. Babylon itself was no mean city, the hanging gardens of Babylon were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. They demonstrate the skill and understanding there was in the Babylonian empire at that time. Yet never in all their wisdom could these men envisage a time when their gods would dwell amongst them! Yet what they failed to grasp we, whatever our limits of understanding and experience, are privileged to know! So Paul could write to his young son in the faith, Timothy, *"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory"* (1 Timothy 3:16).

The prophet, Isaiah, had earlier spoken to the people, *"Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel"* (Isaiah 7:13-14). That name, 'Immanuel', means 'God with us'! (Matthew 1:23).

Matthew leaves us in no doubt as to when this prophecy was fulfilled. He tells us, first, of the angel's message concerning Mary, *"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."* Then, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he adds this comment, *"Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us'"* (Matthew 1:21-23).

Never let us lose that sense of wonder that the eternal God has Himself been in this world! The Apostle John, as he came to the end of his life, never lost that sense of wonder. He writes, *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us"* (1 John 1:1-2).

Charles Wesley captures something of that same spirit in one of his carols:

*"Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man."*

Yes, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself, came into our world accepting all the limitations that belong to our human condition, sin apart! (see Hebrews 4:15). Like all of us, He came into our world through a human mother, a tiny baby with a span of some 24 inches, or 60 centimetres. His life span was some 33 years, considerably shorter than Moses' declaration: *"The days of our lives are seventy years"* (Psalm 90:10). That life was cut short at Calvary where He voluntarily laid down His life to pay the penalty for our sins. Isaiah would later prophesy of Him: *"For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken"* (Isaiah 53:8).

In passing, we might note that this name 'God with us' is the first of a series of three statements in Scripture:

- *"God with us"* (Matthew 1:23);
- *"God for us"* (Romans 8:31); and
- *"God in us"* (Colossians 1:27).

What a great God we have!

Mighty

There was a time when Elijah, the prophet of God, challenged the people of Israel to cease following the idol god, Baal, and to turn to the living God. A contest was arranged on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20-40). Elijah would prepare a sacrifice; the prophets of Baal would do similarly. Elijah then challenged the prophets of Baal and the people of Israel: *"Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God"* (1 Kings 18:24).

"So [the prophets of Baal] ... called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, 'O Baal, hear us!' ... And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, 'Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened'" (1 Kings 18:26-27). But, of course, there could be no answer from Baal! That idol god, made by man from wood or stone, could have no power, no might in him!

But not so our Lord Jesus Christ! He is the Mighty God! John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus. He could declare to the people, *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire"* (Matthew 3:11).

It will be helpful here to look at some of the incidents in the life of the Lord Jesus that plainly show Him as the Mighty God.

Early in His ministry, Jesus sailed with His disciples across the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us, *"On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, 'Let us cross over to the other side.' Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was ... And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?' Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, 'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?' And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, 'Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!'"* (Mark 4:35-41)

Yes, as that perfect Man, tired out at the end of the day, just as we grow tired, He would sleep, even under conditions where seasoned fishermen were in fear of drowning! But it was as the Mighty God that He stood up in that boat and commanded the wind and wave to cease! No ordinary man could do that.

Henry of Huntingdon, the 12th century chronicler, tells us how King Canute set his throne by the seashore and commanded the tide to halt and not wet his feet and robes. That poor king must have got his feet wet! Henry goes on to tell us that Canute subsequently declared, *"Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings, for there is none worthy of the name, but He whom heaven, earth and sea obey by eternal laws."*

Centuries earlier, when Job was almost at the end of his tether in his desire to establish his own righteousness before God, God spoke directly to him so that Job might realise his utter smallness. God challenges Job, *"Who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb; when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band; when I fixed My limit for it, and set bars and doors; when I said, 'Thus far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!'"* (Job 38:8-11).

Mark also tells us what happened when Jesus and His disciples arrived at the other side of the lake: *"And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his*

dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him" (Mark 5:2-4). But Jesus commanded the demons to come out of him, so that when his fellow countrymen came out to see him, they "saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15). No man had been able to help that demon possessed man, but the Mighty God did!

Almost at the end of His ministry, the Lord Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary, whose brother, Lazarus, had died (John 11:1-44). As Jesus stood before the open cave where the body of Lazarus lay, we read, "[Jesus] cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said, 'Loose him, and let him go'" (John 11:43-44).

But it is on the cross of Calvary that we see Him supremely as the Mighty God! That might seem a surprising statement to make. To many, the cross would seem to be a symbol of weakness, of defeat, of shame. Where is the Mighty God in all that? Yet before the cross, Jesus had plainly told His disciples, "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received of My Father" (John 10:17-18).

Pilate, who signed the order for Jesus to be crucified, did not take His life from Him. The Roman soldiers, who nailed Him to the cross, did not take His life from Him. That soldier who plunged his spear into Jesus' side did not take His life from Him, for John tells us, "But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:33-34).

Jesus alone, as the Mighty God, chose that moment when He would lay down His life as the sacrifice for our sins. After that loud victory shout, "It is finished" (John 19:30), after that whisper to His Father, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46), then, and then only do we read, "And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit" (John 19:30).

None of us can determine the time of our dying, that precise moment when the spirit leaves the body. Not even the would-be suicide has control over that exact second. Only God has that control. And Jesus as the Mighty God laid down His life at the precise moment of His choosing. And as the Mighty God, on the first Easter Day, He took up His life again in resurrection power!

Yet to faith, even as that tiny Babe in Bethlehem's manger, so dependent upon His mother, Mary, He is still the Mighty God. He is still that One upon whom our universe depends. Paul writes to the Colossians, "For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through Him and for Him, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). Note those words, "and in Him all things hold together." Even in Bethlehem's manger, those words were true of Him. From the cradle to the cross and in resurrection, He is indeed the Mighty God!

The implications for us today

Does it really matter to us today that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Mighty God? I believe that there are at least three important consequences for us today.

1. He is able to save

Hebrews 7:25 tells us, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them." There is absolutely no one outside the ability of His saving grace! There is no situation in which the child of God may be found which is outside the reach of that same saving grace!

2. He is able to keep

Jude 24-25 tells us, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen." Whatever the pitfalls each of us may meet in our Christian lives, as the Mighty God, He is able to keep us from them! The children's chorus reminds us:

*I have a Saviour who's mighty to keep,
Mighty to keep, mighty to keep;
I have a Saviour who's mighty to keep,
Mighty to keep evermore.*

Herbert H. Booth (1862-1926)

3. He is able to do

Ephesians 3:20-21 tells us, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

May we today have our hearts and minds open to the fact that our Saviour is indeed the Mighty God!

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