

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. As we count down to Christmas, I'm going to continue our Advent focus...

And I want to begin by telling you a story that I heard this past week.

illus: every Wednesday morning at 6:30 a.m., I lead a Bible Study in Edgemont Village. I started this Bible study with a few friends from our church, and our desire was to make room for people that may not attend church—people who may be thinking about the spiritual side of life, who may be interested in learning more about Jesus, but haven't "crossed the line" of faith.

We just finished going through the Book of Matthew, and in the New Year we are going to sink our teeth into the Book of John—we want to explore who Jesus was and what it means to follow Him.

Just this week, I met with a guy from the group who is exploring faith in Jesus. He grew up going to a Catholic school and attending Mass, but he left his faith behind when he was 18. In the last 8 weeks, He's been attending our Bible Study and he's been attending the Alpha Course at a church in Vancouver.

A few weeks ago, he arrived at Alpha and began to talk with his table mates, only to discover that one of his leaders was missing. He asked the other leader—her husband—where she was and found out that she had been to the doctor and wasn't feeling well. The following week, she was back at Alpha but she shared the reason she wasn't feeling well. She was 6-7 months pregnant and she had just discovered that all was not well with her baby. The baby's internal organs were not developing as they should—the doctors were

concerned about the underdeveloped lungs. The doctors told her that the baby would likely die shortly after birth, or, if the baby lived, the baby would need help from machines in order to breathe.

What do you do when you receive news like this? Where do you turn? There comes a time when every one of us needs a strength that is greater than our own. This young couple certainly did and so they invited a few people from their church's leadership team and prayer team to pray for their baby.

She began to feel something happening the moment they began to pray—she described feeling a physical sensation of heat in her womb, and feeling as though her womb expanding. And when she went to her doctors four days later, they used scanning equipment to look at her baby and they couldn't find a single thing wrong. Underdeveloped organs were now fully developed, including a perfectly healthy set of lungs. The doctor told her, "*There is no medical explanation for what has happened to your baby.*"

My friend said, "*So that's a miracle, right?*" Yes, that's a miracle. As I was sitting, listening to my seeking friend tell this story, I marvelled at the goodness of God, both to this couple, and to my friend. The past few months we have been reading through Matthew, reminding one another that when we look at Jesus, we see what God is like. And right in front of his eyes, my friend is witnessing the power of Jesus. We talked about the strength of Jesus—how He uses His power, not for Himself, but for the sake of the world He loves.

As my new friend thinks about the challenges that lie before him, he is beginning to understand that he is not alone—God is with him and for him. He's beginning to realize that he doesn't have to rely on his

own ingenuity or strength; God is wise enough to guide his life and strong enough to call upon on in every challenge.

I wonder, *where do you need the strength of Jesus today?*

At this time, please open your Bible, or fire up your Bible App and turn with me to Isaiah 9:6-7. And as you turn there, allow me to provide a little context for what we're about to read.

The nation of Israel frequently found itself in trouble because of choices they had made to abandon God and go their own way. Whenever Israel flourished, they forgot God—they forgot they needed God, that He was the source of their life, their peace, their protection. When they forgot they needed God, they began to rely on self, or others—they chased after worthless idols and worthless pleasures. We have a lot in common with the ancient Israelites, when things are calm and stable in our lives, we exhibit the same tendencies towards forgetfulness, self-reliance, and the pursuit of worthless “pleasures”.

The original sin of humanity was independence—*I don't need God, He's in my way, I can manage on my own*. Isn't it ironic? Humanity's original sin is unapologetically one of the fundamental values in contemporary Western society. Stand on your own two feet; do it yourself; I did it my way. As Simon and Garfunkel once sang, “*I am a Rock, I am an Island*”.

In **Isaiah 9:6-7**, we encounter a prophetic word that anticipates the coming of Jesus—Isaiah makes the case for a faith-filled-dependence on God. Allow me to read this text for you.

“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. Of the greatness 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.”

4 Lies: Every movement away from God begins with believing a lie. The great lie—as old as Eden itself—is that *God is not sufficient for your needs to be met or for your longings to be fulfilled*. When we swallow this lie, humanity's original sin—independence—predictably follows behind.

This past week, I've been meditating on the Messianic titles in Isaiah 9:6, and I suspect these four were specifically chosen to counteract the lies that most of us tend to believe about God. Let me offer to you four variations of the great lie. We cannot trust God with our lives because...

(1) He is not wise enough; (2) He is not strong enough; (3) He is not loving enough; and (4) He cannot restore what's been broken.

To counteract these lies, God promises to send a child, a Son, and this Son will be living proof that God can be trusted. This Son will be called: **(1) Wonderful Counselor** (Wise Advisor, Extraordinary Strategist); **(2) Mighty God**; **(3) Everlasting Father**; and **(4) Prince of Peace**. In the time remaining, I want to talk about how Jesus demonstrated God's mighty strength, and why we can trust Him in our weakness.

Jesus—God’s Mighty Strength On Display: Here are a few places where God’s mighty strength was on display through Jesus:

- in His powerful words—when Jesus spoke, people recognized the power, the authority, of His words. In Luke 24:32, two listeners remark “*Were our hearts not burning within us while...he opened the Scriptures to us?*”
- Jesus displayed strength to resist temptation (Mt. 4:1-7; 16:23; John 6:15).
- He displayed the strength of humility and sacrifice (John 13:3-5; John 15:13).
- He displayed the strength of loyalty—He didn’t give up on people when they failed (John 21:15-19).
- He displayed the strength to surrender to God’s will, knowing it would cost Him His life (Luke 22:42).
- He displayed the strength to forgive the friends who betrayed Him and the enemies who plotted His execution (Luke 23:34).
- Jesus demonstrated power over sickness and oppression. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and restored people suffering from paralysis.
- Jesus even demonstrated power over creation (Mark 4:35-41).

I want to tell you a quick Jesus story, taken from Mark 4. Jesus and His disciples were in a boat, making their way across the Sea of Galilee—Jesus was exhausted and curled up in the front of the boat to catch up on some much needed rest. Mark tells us that a furious squall came up, and the waves began to break over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. The disciples did what any of us would do—they panicked and woke Jesus up. Most people, in the face of dangerous weather, have to wait out the storm, but Jesus isn’t like

most people. Jesus got up and spoke to the storm saying, “*Quiet! Be still!*” and the storm subsided.

The reason I like this story so much is that it resonates with my own life experience. I’m not much of a sailor, but I know what it’s like to get knocked around in life, to be buffeted by fear, or to feel like I’m drowning in a sea of difficulty. I’ve also experienced the fear that God might be sleeping and completely unaware of the trouble I’m in.

Do you feel like your life has been caught up in a storm?

Some of you are facing joblessness, while others of you have so much work that you’re a candidate for a heart attack. Some of you are facing tremendous pressure and expectation at school, some of you are facing divorce, some of you are snowed under by debt, and others of you are plagued by a dark depression. We all know the power of a storm, and, our own powerlessness in the face of it.

All of us have a box that we label with the word “**control**”. We try to stuff all kinds of things into this box—we might try to control our health, our finances, our future, our spouse, our kids, our pastor, our surroundings; there’s no end to what we try to control.

And the problem for us, living in the West, is that we live under the illusion that we are bright enough, capable enough, powerful enough to control everyone and everything around us. But every one of us, at one time or another, find ourselves faced with something too big to fix or control.

When that happens, our frustration leads us to redouble our efforts. But when our best efforts fall flat, our frustration quickly gives way to fear. I wonder, *where do you need the strength of Jesus today?*

In the story I just related to you, Jesus spoke to the storm, it died down—everything and everyone experienced peace because the storm stopped raging. In my experience, sometimes Jesus exercises strength to calm the storm, and at other times Jesus' strength enables us to stand as the storm rages on.

It seems to me that so much of our experience of life comes down to a choice—*independence or surrender*. The reason we surrender is because Jesus is a *Wonderful Counsellor*. He knows us inside and out, He understands the complexities of our circumstances, and He is a wise strategist—Jesus can see His way through even the most tangled mess. Psalm 139:12 says, *“You can see in the dark, for it is not dark to Your eyes. For You the night is just as bright as the day. Darkness and light are the same to Your eyes.”*

The reason we surrender is because Jesus is *Mighty* and Strong. He can do abundantly more than we ask or imagine.¹ We may feel helpless but He is our Helper—He promises to be strength in our weakness.

Do you need His strength to resist temptation? To humble yourself? To persevere with difficult people, or in difficult circumstances? Do you need the strength of Jesus to forgive friends, family, or enemies? Do you need the strength of Jesus at work in your physical body?

illus: Allow me to use an analogy. Every sailor understands the importance of an anchor—it's the anchor that enables a sailor to rest at night.

When you sail into a bay to spend the night you're looking for two things: (1) solid ground, and (2) the right length of chain. You don't want to drop an anchor on a sandy floor because it won't hold—you need something immovable.

The length of chain is determined by the weather. If the water is calm, and the ocean floor is 10 feet beneath you, you only need about 20 feet of chain—as you sleep, the boat will swivel around the anchor point.

But if the wind is howling and the waves are high, solid ground and the right length of chain even more important. The ocean floor may still be 10 feet beneath you, but the size of the waves requires 50 or 100 feet of chain. Over time, a sailor learns to trust that the anchor will hold.

All of us discover at one point or another that we are powerless to change ourselves, to change our circumstances, or to change the people around us. When we make this discovery, we are poised to make an even greater discovery—God is with us, He is for us, and His power is stronger than whatever we face. The greater the storm, the greater our need to anchor ourselves in Christ; when we rest in Jesus, the anchor will hold. I wonder, *where do you need the strength of Jesus today?*

Pray

¹ Ephesians 3:20.

