

## New Hope Sermon The Government shall be upon his shoulders.

### Introduction

Isaiah 9:6 is perhaps one of the most famous Christmas prophecies in the Old Testament. Many of you may even know v. 6 by heart or have sung it in Handel's Oratorio The Messiah. It's an amazing series of proclamations: Here is how I memorized it in the NIV

*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.*

*<sup>7</sup>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. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

Two weeks ago I preached on our call to work for justice in the world, and this Messianic prophecy is the global application of that emphasis. This Messiah will establish justice.

### Meanings of "The Government Shall Be Upon His Shoulders"

I was particularly struck this year by the phrase "the government shall be upon His shoulder. So I looked this passage up in the *NIV Application Commentary* and this is how commentator John Oswalt interprets it. First, he roots it in the historical context of Judah's oppression by Assyria and notes that "God is greater than Assyria and he promises that just as these people (the Israelites) have experienced the grief and despair of conquest, they will also experience the joy and triumph of victory (v. 3-5). It will come through the Messiah, the son of David who will sit on David's throne and establish justice." The African Bible Commentary adds: "While this child may be the young Hezekiah, his human attributes of wisdom, peace, uprightness and justice are combined with divine qualities that only God possesses when he is hailed as the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father" (African Bible Commentary, Isaiah Edouard Kitoko Nsiku, p.816). The people who heard Isaiah's prophecy would locate this prophecy in their contemporary context, hence the reference to the young Hezekiah. But as with most prophecy, there is future fulfillment ahead, which is realized in the Messiah, Jesus Christ's birth.

But Oswalt then has an interesting interpretation when he discusses the contemporary significance of the passage. He says: "The child born of the virgin is the Son of David but He is also the Son of God. The bulk of his ministry was in Galilee, but he was 'enthroned' on a cross in Jerusalem. By taking into himself the sin and oppression, the horror and tragedy of the world, he was able to give back righteousness and freedom, hope and fulfillment." Oswalt closes his commentary on Isa. 9:1-7 with these words: "The contemporary significance of this passage of Scripture comes down to this: have we allowed the Child-King to take over the government of our lives?" That's a vital question and one each Jesus-follower needs to answer. It is to be the foundation of the lives of every one of us. Jesus is not only Savior. He now reigns as Lord of the universe. Is He your Lord?

But there's more to this Messianic promise than that. Isa. 9:6 is not just an individual Lordship issue. The promise is global and communal. It's this broader global meaning that I want us to pursue today, as we continue thinking about the justice God seeks to bring to our broken world through Christ.

This pp. image pictures one layer of interpretation:

This is a picture of what happened on the cross. First of all, the governments of the world were responsible for Christ's death. They judged him and agreed he needed to be crucified. He was a threat to the Roman government and to the Jewish leaders as well. So his death was at their



hands. But, God had a deeper meaning in Christ's death. That is that Jesus Christ actually took on his shoulders all the sin and corruption and pride of the governments of the world and paid the price for their sin.

The second layer of meaning is the Jewish interpretation of the text. Naturally Jewish scholars don't embrace the interpretations from the cross perspective. They translate "the government shall be upon his shoulder" as "the authority shall be on his shoulder." They also say that when the coming Messiah will ascend the throne of David, all of the promises to David will be fulfilled through the Messiah. Christians believe those promises HAVE been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. But Jewish people are still waiting for the Messiah.

Finally, a third meaning of this phrase is implicit in the Message translation: This is what had captured my heart about this theme: *For a child has been born—for us! the gift of a son—for us! He'll take over the running of the world. His names will be: Amazing Counselor, Strong God, Eternal Father, Prince of Wholeness. His ruling authority will grow, and there'll be no limits to the wholeness he brings. He'll rule from the historic Davidic throne over that promised kingdom. He'll put that kingdom on a firm footing and keep it going with fair dealing and right living, beginning now and lasting always. The zeal of GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies will do all this.*"

Notice this emphasis: "*He'll take over the running of the world...His ruling authority will grow and there'll be no limit to the wholeness He brings.* The running of the world is absolutely global!!! So what does this mean for us and how do we apply it in our world?"

### **Characteristics of the Messiah-King who brings justice**

The characteristics of the Messiah's justice, when the government is upon his shoulders, is spelled out in Isa. 11 :2-5 *And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*

<sup>3</sup> *He will delight in obeying the LORD. He will not judge by appearance nor make a decision based on hearsay.* <sup>4</sup> *He will give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited.*

These are qualities of the justice seeker who is a follower of the Messiah-King. His followers must first be Spirit-filled with the Spirit's anointing of wisdom, understanding, counsel and might. As we engage with other's stories, we need God's Spirit of discernment to hear and correctly interpret what is being said and what is being felt emotionally. We need His knowledge of ourselves and of the issues in the areas that are inhibiting justice so we can be peacemakers and bring justice to others.

Notice also that the Messiah King does not judge by appearances or make decisions based on hearsay. That's what happens when our stereotypes determine how we view others and relate to them.

Instead, the Messiah King and His followers will "give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited." This emphasis is in keeping with a top concern among millennials globally today: According to a survey highlighted by USA Today, Millennials around the world are most concerned about one issue: social and economic equality. More than 1,000 young leaders, ages 20 to 30, from 125 countries were canvassed for the survey. The survey showed that 65 percent of the Millennials said one of their top three goals in selecting a job was to make a difference in society, their city, or country. Asked about the top three issues facing the world today, 56 percent named social and economic inequality, 42 percent included climate change and environmental preservation, and 33 percent identified education.

Half said their national government was neither fair nor honest. And 46 percent had the same view about the media, while 35 percent said they distrusted religious leaders. The most admired figure among the Millennials was the late Nelson Mandela, followed by Pope Francis. Adapted from Greg Zoroya, "Millennials worry most about inequality, survey says," USA Today (10-26-15) I was fascinated that the image used to illustrate the millennials's top concern was of people's feet. Can you picture the rest of the picture and its setting? What's wrong in this scene?



Dr. Robertson McQuilkin of Columbia International University tells a story about visiting his son who was working and living in the slums of Calcutta (a city of fifteen million) India. McQuilkin was a seasoned world traveler, but here the squalor of poverty that he witnessed on the drive from the airport simply overwhelmed him. The smells of humanity and sewer water combined with a million people living on the streets brought him to tears. His driver noticed this and said to him, "Don't worry, Dr. McQuilkin. In a few days you'll get used to it." McQuilkin responded, "That's exactly what I *don't* want to happen. I don't want to get used to it." Paul Borthwick, Great Commission, Great Compassion (IVP Books, 2015), page 65

It says a lot about the man that the squalor brought him to tears. It says a lot about the taxi driver that he had "gotten used to it." And it says a lot about the heart of Christ that we are NOT to get used to it – as



McQuilken's son did not – instead he had given his life to bring justice and love and relief in the midst of this desperate situation.

When I was in India in the mid 80's leading a team from our Baltimore church, I was aghast at the squalor. It began when I saw the paper thin "shanties" just mere feet from runways of the Bombay International Airport where we initially landed. I had brought the team there to learn from Indian Christian leaders about how the Indian

churches were bringing justice in their country and learn how we could also support their work. Since most people in our 750 member church had never witnessed such squalor and need firsthand, I put together a slide show as my main teaching tool to shock our people into awareness of the need so they would want to address the issue: How then should we live?... And Give...And serve?

### **The Model of St. Nicholas**

This Christmas St. Nicholas's model comes to mind. Today's modern Santa Claus is supposedly derived from his model but see if you recognize how far from his original intent our commercialized Christmas has gone. "Many people don't realize that Santa Claus, based on the real historical person of Saint Nicholas, a leader in the early church from the city of Myra, also has another less-known title—the patron saint of pawnshops. How could this jolly old fellow be known as the patron saint of such a seedy business? In the Middle Ages, *montes pietatis* were charities similar to urban food banks... These charities provided low-interest loans to poor families. Started by Franciscans, they became widespread throughout Europe...In the 1300s, people in poverty met caring friars when they entered the doors of pawnshops. The shops existed to help the poor get back on their feet. These friars had their best interests in mind. Adapted from Peter Greer, "Santa Claus—Patron Saint of Pawn Shops," Peter K. Greer blog (12-5-13).

Beloved, what is the legacy we are leaving behind? St. Nicholas's legacy followed in the steps of his Christ – to care for the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited.” Our modern world has totally perverted that legacy, but God has not forgotten and still seeks those who will follow in Christ's steps as a justice seeker.

### **A description of the poor**

Gary Haugen, an ardent Christ-follower and the President of International Justice Mission, has seen global poverty up close for the last two decades. Here's how Haugen describes what it means to be poor:

“I recall the way an old history professor of mine defined poverty: He said the poor are the ones who can never afford to have any bad luck. They can't get an infection because they don't have access to any medicine. They can't get sick or miss their bus or get injured because they will lose their menial labor job if they don't show up for work. They can't misplace their pocket change because it's actually the only money they have left for food. They can't have their goats get sick because it's the only source of milk they have. On and on it goes.

Of course the bad news is, everybody has bad luck. It's just that most of us have margins of resources and access to support that allow us to weather the storm, because we're not trying to live off \$2.00 a day.”

In his book *“The Locust Effect*, Gary Haugen argues that for millions of people around the globe, poverty is fueled by violence and man-inflicted suffering.” This is what drove the focus of their mission on rescuing girls in the sex traffic industry. Haugen writes, “The relentless threat of violence is part of the core subtext of their lives, but we are unlikely to see it, and they are unlikely to tell us about it. We would be wise, however, to not be fooled—because, like grief, the thing we cannot see may be the deepest part of their day.” For instance,..in the U.S., there is one prosecutor for every 12,000 citizens. In Malawi, there is one prosecutor for every 1.5 million citizens. As New York Times columnist David Brooks writes, “Unless cruelty is tamed, poverty will persist.” These are the kinds of issues our Cathy Shi would consider if she takes that masters in public policy.

### **Tsegaab's mission**

Our own Tsegaab is seeking to work for justice when he returns to Ethiopia. In outreach to students in a local high school, he hopes to “equip Christians to take the lead in advocacy against gender-based violence, addiction, anti-cheating of exams, supporting the needy, integrated response on reproductive health and support for students with disabilities.” In that list, are a number of groups who are being exploited and marginalized – Notice his mention of the girls facing “gender-based violence” because of forced marriages when they are young teenagers, the cultural mandate to cut the girls' clitorises, the easy rape and exploitation of their sexuality, and those who are trapped as prostitutes in the sex industry. Tsegaab also mentions the poor and needy and “students with disabilities.”

Tsegaab is also considering work with a non-profit group that targets getting proper food and nutrition to babies and training young parents in nutrition and proper care for their infants. “In general, the reality is the health problems of mothers and children are related to fertility and childbirth. The maternal mortality rate of 673 per 100,000 live births and infant mortality rate of 77 per 1,000 live births are among the highest in the world (3). There is an increasing trend in the incidence of adolescent pregnancy, contributing to more than 30 percent of the death toll arising from unsafe abortion (14–16). About 90 percent of women gave delivery at home (EDHS, 2005), only 28 percent of women receive antenatal care and skilled personnel attend only 7 percent of births. Postnatal care is extremely low in Ethiopia (17, 18). The low status of women in Ethiopia underpins and often directly undermines each of the negative reproductive health outcomes. Most of Ethiopian women, especially rural women, lack the reproductive and social self-determination needed to exercise their reproductive rights, a condition that,

in turn, perpetuates their low reproductive health and social status.” (Child Mortality Rate in Ethiopia [A Sathiya Susuman](#))

Beloved, given that one major role of the Messiah King was to bring justice to the world, I think we need God’s heart for the oppressed and exploited just like the Messiah King who will ‘give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited.’ Samuel Rodriguez said, “Our hope as a nation does not rest in the hands of Donkeys or Elephants (U.S. symbols for the Republican or Democratic party) to bring justice in our land. Our hope rests in the Lamb of God” Amen. Justice should not be locked in political backstabbing and inertia. God is actively seeking – through His people – to bring justice by the power and anointing of the Spirit of God.



How wonderful that we follow the Messiah who will take over the running of the world and bring wholeness to all people who turn to Him. Even now He is the One who has the government on His shoulders. He will return to rule the entire world with justice and righteousness. But, till then, may we follow our Messiah’s model and the model of so many around the world who are working to reduce poverty and fight for justice for the oppressed and exploited. In every way possible. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson 11/17/19