

“Almighty God”

Isaiah 9:1-7

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I love George Frederick Handel’s oratorio the *Messiah*. If I can, I like to listen to this piece of music all the way through at one sitting. It’s one of the world’s greatest pieces of music.

Patrick Kavanaugh tells about how Handel wrote *The Messiah*<sup>1</sup>. A Dublin charity commissioned him to compose the work for a benefit performance. Handel got caught up in it like a spiritual vision. He wrote furiously, and he finished the 260 page work in 24 days. The oratorio premiered in 1742; it raised 400 pounds and made it possible for 172 men to get out of debtors’ prison.

At one performance in London, King George II showed up in the audience. When the first notes of the majestic Hallelujah Chorus rang out, the king was so overwhelmed and inspired by the words, “The King of Kings and Lord of Lords” in the Hallelujah Chorus that he stood up, and the audience stood, too, in respect. That’s how the custom of standing for the Hallelujah Chorus began—it honors the one who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Handel himself said, “I think I did see all Heaven before me and the great God Himself.”<sup>2</sup>

That’s the vision Isaiah the prophet had, like he writes in chapter six of his book,

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:1-3).

During this season, we’re looking at a passage that Isaiah wrote 700 years before Jesus’ earthly career. Isaiah gives us a picture of a future in which God comes into this dark world to save us, and he does it through his Son Jesus.

That’s what why the church calls this season Advent, because it means the Coming, the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, the King God sends to save us. And so every Advent or Christmas season we look back because Jesus Christ is an event, a real person who came concretely into a specific time and place in history. And every Christmas we look forward to the time he will come again.

Handel also picked up on that phrase God gave the prophet Isaiah, “For unto us a child is born; a Son is given; and his named shall be called, Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” Those names of chapter 9 belong to Jesus. He is the

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Kavanaugh, *Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 27.

Lord God omnipotent who will reign forever and ever. They're all amazing names, but the greatest is the one we consider today, "Almighty God." It means mighty one, giant, champion, strength and power.

If he is almighty, then how does God reveal his strength? Let me reflect on two ways.

First, he shows his strength in creation.

Isaiah says,

"[God] has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand  
and marked off the heavens with a span,  
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure  
and weighed the mounts in scales  
and the hills in a balance" (Isaiah 40:12).

There's a story in the Bible of a guy named Job who loses everything. He complains to God and demands to see justice. He complains and asks some really good questions about God for most of 38 chapters in the book of Job, and doesn't get an answer. Finally, God appears to him, and he says,

"Where were you," He asked, "when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! ... To what were its foundations fastened?" (Job 38:4-6)

God is making the point that he is God, and he's doing something in the world beyond all we can imagine. As the prophet Jeremiah says,

"LORD God, it is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you" (Jeremiah 32:16-17).

Isaiah says that God who created everything also comes into his creation in the flesh, born as a human baby. Christmas celebrates the fact that Jesus is Emanuel, God with us. The baby in the manger is also the God who made everything that is. Like John says in his gospel,

"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made"  
John 1:4)

Like Paul says in Colossians,

"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Colossians 1:16).

And in the introduction to the book of Hebrews,

In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Hebrews 1:2)

Jesus is the Mighty God who made the heavens and the earth and nothing, absolutely nothing is too hard for him. The light and darkness, the world and everything in it, the whole creation

came from his hand. He knows what he's doing, even when we can't see it. He's the CEO of the universe, the Commander-in-Chief of the cosmos.

Lift your eyes to the heavens, or look at the vastness of the ocean, and be amazed at the greatness of the Creator. This last week I was in California for a consultation at Fuller Seminary, and on Thanksgiving I walked along the breakwater at the Santa Barbara harbor. It was 80 degrees, and as the sun started to go down, dolphins leapt out of the water and the breaking waves sprayed in the air. What glory we see in creation! Or what about the beauty of our area in Northeast Ohio, with the hills and the forests and the starry skies? Did you know out of all the thousands of stars we see in the fall skies, some of the points of light are actually not stars but whole galaxies bigger than our own? What glory!

Our Mighty God is awesomely powerful in His creation.

### Second, God shows his strength in redemption.

David writes in the Psalms,

“Blessed is he whose *help* is the God of Jacob,  
 whose hope is in the LORD his God,  
 the Maker of heaven and earth,  
 the sea, and everything in them—  
 the LORD, who remains faithful forever.  
 He upholds the cause of the oppressed  
 and gives food to the hungry.  
 The LORD sets prisoners free” (Psalm 146:5-7).

Do you see how the Bible links the two ideas of creation and redemption? God created everything that exists through his power; therefore, the one who made everything is able to take care of us. He shows his power over our enemies. God, who is the Creator, is also God the Redeemer.

All of us fall short of who we want to be and who God made us to be. That's human wrongdoing, and the Bible calls it “sin.” The good news is, God doesn't leave us there. He loves us so much he comes to rescue us. In the same place where Isaiah talks about the immense creative power of God, he says that God puts all that power to save people. He says,

See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. (Isaiah 40:10)

He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
 He gathers the lambs in his arms  
 and carries them close to his heart;  
 he gently leads those that have young. (Isaiah 40:11)

“Almighty God” means he's the warrior who defeats his enemies. The prophet Zephaniah says,

“Do not fear, O Zion...  
 The LORD, your God, is in your midst,  
 a warrior who gives victory;  
 he will rejoice over you with gladness,

he will renew you in his love;  
 he will exult over you with loud singing  
 as on a day of festival.  
 I will remove disaster from you...

I will deal with all your oppressors  
 at that time.  
 And I will save the lame  
 and gather the outcast,  
 and I will change their shame into praise  
 and renown in all the earth" (Zephaniah 3:16-19).

In the Bible, a redeemer is someone who buys someone else's freedom. God redeemed Israel with the same power he used to make the heavens and the earth. That's why he's called their Redeemer. Just like he redeemed Israel from all its enemies, Jesus redeems us from ours, too. We can trust God, because he is our Mighty Warrior who is *for* us, and he will give us to victory. Because he's the warrior who is also a Savior, a redeemer who is for us.

So our God is a powerful Creator, but he's even mightier as our Redeemer. That's what Isaiah's talking about, because his prophecy looks to a new day that's coming, a day when God will:

"...wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

That's Isaiah's vision. He says,

"In that day the remnant of Israel,  
 the survivors of the house of Jacob...  
 will truly rely on the LORD,  
 the Holy One of Israel.

A remnant will return,  
 a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God" (Isaiah 10:20-21).

Then you will look and be radiant,  
 your heart will throb and swell with joy;  
 the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,  
 to you the riches of the nations will come" (Isaiah 60:5).

How does that vision come to be? It will happen because of the Savior God promises: Jesus Christ, God with us:

"Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your *Savior*,  
 your *Redeemer*, the *Mighty One of Jacob*" (Isaiah 60:16b).

God fulfills that promise when Jesus returns and reigns over the whole earth as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He's for us, our Mighty God.

What does that mean for us?

It means we can be strong and courageous! Are you worried about money in a deep recession? You can trust God, who has all the resources in the world, and he says he is for you. Are you tired of keeping on, being faithful, resisting temptation? God will strengthen you to show the people in your life and community the real Jesus through acts of service.

Jimi Hendrix, the great guitar player, said "When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace." He was right, even though he didn't know that kind of love can only come from Jesus. He is the mighty one, and his power is the kind that loves and serves and lays itself down for the sake of others.

God is mighty in *creation* and *redemption*. And you can trust Jesus, because the one who made the world and holds it in his hands is the one who saves us. He's Almighty God, and he gives strength to everyone who calls on him. Alleluia!