

20241208 Who is in Charge Here? – Ps David

Isaiah 9:6

In early April 1865, the Civil War that had torn America apart was drawing to a close. John Wilkes Booth fired a bullet into the head of Abraham Lincoln. He died a few hours later.

The news deeply troubled a young minister in Philadelphia named Phillips Brooks. When the slain president's body lay in state in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Brooks went to pay his respects. Later he preached a sermon on Abraham Lincoln's legacy, which became a very famous sermon.

When Phillip the minister had difficulty coming out of his sorrow, a few months later, hoping to lift his spirits, the church sent him to the Holy Land. The itinerary included a horseback ride from Jerusalem to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. Back then it was a small village, unlike the busy city today. By nightfall, the pastor was in the field where, according to tradition, the shepherds heard the angelic announcement. Then he attended the Christmas Eve service at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Something about the beauty and simplicity of that visit stayed with Phillips Brooks when he returned to America. Three years later he wrote a Christmas poem for the children's service at Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia. He then gave it to Lewis Redner, the church organist, who composed the music in time for the children to sing it in the service. It became a favourite Christmas carol when it was published in 1874.

The first verse gives us a poetic picture of Bethlehem as Phillips Brooks saw it:

O little town of Bethlehem
 How still we see thee lie
 Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
 The silent stars go by
 Yet in thy dark streets shineth
 The everlasting Light
 The hopes and fears of all the years
 Are met in thee tonight

The last two lines remind us that Bethlehem was more than a scenic picture by-way in the Holy Land:

The hopes and fears of all the years
 Are met in thee tonight.

More fears than hopes

It seems like we end the year with more fears than hopes, given the shaky state of the world. The headlines tell a grim story:

Mass stabbing in eastern China

--Stabbing on Auckland Bus.

--Russia Ukraine War Live: Putin Allows Use Of Nuclear Weapons On 1,000th Day Of War.

--Rocket attacks in Israel.

--Christians Murdered in Nigeria.

Bad news everywhere.

We live in dark days, and it is easy to be discouraged. There is so much hatred everywhere. If you turn on the TV, you hear politicians shouting at each other, accusing each other, slandering each other. It feels like the whole country's national average blood pressure has gone up by 100 points in the last few months.

We are an angry, unhappy nation right now and don't know when it will all end.

Where is the hope?

With these scenes around us, we have the words of the angel to the terrified shepherds, "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people" (Luke 2:10).

Where is the good news the angel promised?

Let's wind the clock back across the centuries, back to Bethlehem, all the way back to the time of Isaiah the prophet, seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. He gave us the real answer to that question:

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

**"For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,"**

God answers our anxiety with a manger in Bethlehem. There we find the baby who brings us peace now and one day will bring peace to the whole world.

His name shall be called . . .

Wonderful Counselor, because he has the answers we need.

Mighty God, because he has the power to help us.

Everlasting Father, because he knows us and loves us anyway.

Prince of Peace, because he alone can fix what is broken.

I am glad Christmas is coming.

It can't get here soon enough, it reminds us of joy and hope in Christ.

We need to resign as general manager of the universe.

A few weeks ago, a very challenging thing happened. I was so discouraged and tired of all these challenges. I hardly slept that night and was spiritually crushed, I was already busy with

our church's Carols evening program, and I had a wedding to officiate on the next Saturday. I didn't have the strength to run the Christmas Market Day at Mairangi Bay or Carols evening at Mairangi Bay, so I decided to cancel them, but in my heart, I knew God didn't want me to cancel them.

On the next day, God spoke to me through Our Daily Bread to let go of the burden so that God could make things right. When I went to church and opened YouTube to listen to instrumental music to soak in the Lord, the music that appeared was about casting a burden on God.

My Spirit was renewed and strengthened. I was then able to accept the challenges of running all these activities. Amazingly God gave me ideas for the Christmas program, God provided the volunteers, and we had a good discussion with the people involved. For the Market Day God provided people as well, and it went very well despite the rainy day. For Carols in Mairangi Bay, we have a choir to join us.

Maybe you are like me, have a heavy burden on you, but you don't know what to do about it. You have to bear the heavy burden of financial pressure. You have to bear the burden of the future direction of your family, you have to bear the burden of someone else's illness.

“The government shall be upon his shoulders.”

The word “shoulder” in Hebrew is the word *shekem*, referring to the neck area between the shoulders where burdens are placed. The divine government is borne by and rests upon the foundation or shoulder of the Christ. He will rule the whole world.

Isaiah 22:22 (NIV)

²²I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

That means Jesus can bear the full weight of the world and all its problems. Since this is true, wouldn't He be able to bear your burden?

I know it's easy to say but hard to believe.

In one of his books, David Jeremiah mentions a man named George McCauslin. Many years ago, he served as director of the YMCA in western Pennsylvania. It was a difficult situation because the YMCA was losing money, membership, and staff. McCauslin worked 85 hours a week trying to fix things. He couldn't sleep at night. Even when he was away from the job, he was worrying and fretting about problems he couldn't solve. A therapist warned that he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Somehow, he needed to let go and let God take charge of his problems. But how do you do something like that?

The breakthrough came one day when he took a notebook and ventured into a forest not far from where he lived. As he walked through the woods, he could feel his muscles starting to relax. Sitting down under a tree, he sighed and felt at ease for the first time in months. Taking out his notebook, he decided to let go of the burdens of his life. He wrote God a letter that

simply said, “Dear God, Today I hereby resign as general manager of the universe. Love, George.” Looking back at that moment, he reflected with a twinkle in his eye, “And wonder of wonders, God accepted my resignation.”

Many of us need to resign as general manager of the universe. Are you worn out from trying to help your children and your grandchildren, worn out from taking care of your parents, or getting your relationships sorted out? Are you exhausted from trying to repair broken people and messed-up situations all around you? No wonder you are tired all the time.

Remember this, “He’s God and we are not.” If you understand that truth, then you don’t have to take on impossible burdens that only God can handle.

Many of us need to resign as general manager of the universe.

In the movie “Rudy,” there is a scene where the young man despairs of never making it to the Notre Dame football team. He is too small, too slow, too weak, and in every way fails to meet the challenge. Totally discouraged, he goes to a priest and asks if he will ever make the team. The priest smiles and says that in 35 years he has learned only two things for certain: “First, there is a God, and second, I’m not him.”

Christmas is important for many reasons, but among other things, it reminds us we are not in charge. That’s always a good thing to remember.

We all like to feel indispensable as if the world can’t get along without us. But as Charles de Gaulle once observed, “The graveyards are filled with indispensable men.” Those who thought they were indispensable are no longer here, yet the world is still going. We’re not as important as we think we are.

It’s a humbling thing to realize the world was spinning along just fine before we showed up, and it will keep spinning after we are gone. For that matter, God was doing fine before we appeared, and he will still be on his throne after we are gone. We often have pressure and burdens because we want our ways to be done. But we need to remember it is not about us but about God.

I think it was A. W. Tozer who said that if every man on earth became an atheist, nothing about God would change. We all know these things are true, but we live as if they aren’t. That is, we act as if we are indispensable, but we are very dispensable indeed. If we can embrace that, then we have a mature spiritual life. This may be the ultimate reality check.

What must we do? You have got to bow down.

If you ever visit the Holy Land, one of the sites you will visit is the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The church is built over the spot where presumed Mary gave birth to Jesus. To get to the church, you first walk across a broad plaza and then come to a tiny entrance. In fact, it’s so tiny you have to duck down to get inside. The entry is low because several centuries ago the local prominent people liked to ride their horses right into the sanctuary. The priests felt

that was inappropriate, so they lowered the entrance to force the great men to dismount before entering the church.

Get off your high horse!

There is a lesson here if we will receive it. If we want to come to the Lord's presence to ask for his help, we need to bow down, we need to humble ourselves and submit to his authority.

You could be a king like Herod, but you have got to bow down.

You could be a shepherd, but you have got to bow down.

You could be a Wise Man, but you have got to bow down.

Let us bow down to God's authority, let us submit to His way, then we will be set free from our burden.

Many of us approach the end of the year with a heavy load of worries about the future. There are career questions, health issues, family problems, church issues, a marriage that needs repair, a host of financial difficulties, and an armful of unfulfilled dreams. We wonder if next year will simply mean more of the same. Sometimes we feel everything depends on us, and we are "totally personally, responsible for everything."

Time to rest on his shoulder

Christmas reminds us God is God and we are not. He can arrange for a virgin to become pregnant. He can cause a Roman emperor to order a census at precisely the right moment in history. He can ensure the baby will be born at exactly the place prophesied 700 years earlier. He can put a star in the sky at the right moment. He can bring together angels, shepherds, and Wise Men to celebrate that miraculous birth. And he can take a tiny baby born in a stable and make that baby the Savior of the world.

If God can do all that, what are you so worried about?

Christmas means Jesus can carry the full weight of all your problems, for **"the government will be on his shoulders."**

So, if the question is, "Who's in charge here?" then the answer comes from heaven. Our Lord is in charge. He reigns from heaven above the chaos we see around us.

Are you tired of trying to run the universe? I urge you to lay our burden on his shoulder, he will carry it for you.

Like the angel said, "Fear not!" We need not be afraid. That baby in the manger is God's answer, not just for us personally, but for the whole world.