

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:1-7

It's been said that great works are performed not by strength nor by skill but by perseverance. This is a truth we clearly see in the life of Abraham Lincoln, the President of the United States during the Civil War between the north and the south, when over 620,000 men lost their lives from 1861 to 1865. Lincoln's ability to lead a divided country was reflected in how he persevered in his own life.

1816: Lincoln's family was forced out of their home. Abraham (age 9) had to work to support them.

1818: Lincoln's mother died.

1831: At age 22, Abraham lost his job because his family needed to move again.

1832: Lincoln ran for a seat in the state legislature of Illinois. He lost.

1832: He lost his new job. And so he applied to go law school. His application was rejected.

1833: At age 25, Lincoln started a dry goods store with a business partner. Unfortunately, his partner died causing the business to fail and by the end of the year Lincoln was bankrupt. He spent the next 17 years of his life paying off that debt.

1834: Lincoln ran for a seat in a state legislature of Illinois again. This time he won.

1835: Abraham got engaged to be married to his sweetheart Ann Rutledge. Not long after, she dies.

1836: Broken-hearted, Lincoln had a total nervous breakdown and was in bed for six months.

1838: He sought to become speaker of the state legislature. He was defeated.

1840: He ran for the office of serving as a federal elector. He was defeated.

1843: He ran for a seat in Congress in Washington DC for the state of Illinois. He lost.

1846: He ran for a seat in Congress in Washington DC for the state of Illinois again. This time he won.

1848: He runs for re-election to Congress for the state of Illinois – and he lost.

1849: A position of land officer was offered to him. When he agreed to do so, the offer was withdrawn.

1854: Lincoln ran for the Illinois seat in the United States. Senate. He lost.

1856: Lincoln ran for the Vice-Presidential nomination at his party's national convention. He lost.

1858: He ran for U.S. Senate again. He lost again.

1860: Lincoln ran for the position of the President of the United States. He wins.

1861: The American Civil War begins. Over 620,000 men will lose their lives. Millions will be crippled.

1865: The Civil War ends on April 9th. Five days later President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated.

Abraham Lincoln is considered to be, next to George Washington, the greatest president in the history of the United States. He leaves a legacy of perseverance that ultimately united a divided nation and abolished the practice slavery. If you were look at Lincoln's legacy, in the context of the history of failures in his life, you could truly say that great works are performed not by strength nor by skill but by perseverance. In reading through the Old Testament we could say the same thing about how God works through God's people. God had promised that out of a line of people – out of Adam and Eve, out

of Abraham, out of Jacob, out of the line of David – a Savior, a Redeemer, the long-awaited Messiah would come to save the world from its sin and the darkness of death.

But in reading of the lives of the people from whom God had promised His deliverer would come - it is clear by the standards of both God and man, that in so many ways, they were failures. The promised line of God ended up being a people of great deceit and moral decay, with blatant sin running amuck in their lives. Surely not the kind of people that you would want the Son of God, the royal blood of that the Almighty King of the universe would flow from. But it was through this long line of people, with their great heritage of sin – failure after failure after failure after failure – that the long-promised Savior, the Son of God, came into the world. By God’s perseverance, in the midst of such failed lives, the world now has hope where there once was despair. It was through the perseverance of God that Jesus was born. We hear of God’s perseverance in the words of our text from Micah 5:2.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

The prophet Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. While Isaiah preached in the city of Jerusalem, Micah preached in the small town of Moresheth, about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. While they both spoke in dramatically different venues, they still both preached the same message. In their respective contexts, both pronounced God’s judgment and wrath upon those who had rejected God, but they also both proclaimed God’s promise and hope for those who would turn back to God. In what we read today the prophet Micah tells us that promise, that hope, would come out of a small, insignificant town called Bethlehem. Out of “*you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel*” The word “*ruler*” here is the word “*maw-shal*” in the Hebrew. It’s from where we get our English word *marshal* which means “one who watches over, reigns over, has control over.”

This “*ruler*” who would come, would have a divine source: “*whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*” In the original Hebrew this phrase literally means “one who has been concealed or hidden from the beginning and who is now revealed.” What Micah was saying here, is that the Savior would come into the world in a “concealed or hidden” manner. He would not be recognized as the Savior because He would not look like a Savior. He would not be recognized as a King because He would not come as a King. The “*ruler*” to come would not be born in a castle of blue-blooded royalty of kings and queens and princes. He would be a common man without servants, crowns and jewels. The Savior, the coming King would enter this world through a “hidden or concealed” heritage.

Even so, his origin, Micah wrote, would come from the very beginning of time – “*from of old, from ancient days.*” Last week we saw this, as we looked at the first promise of God to His people regarding the coming of Christ from Genesis 3:15 at the very moment sin entered the world. Today we read that God’s promised hope, born of the words of God in the Garden of Eden, would come to fruition quietly – concealed and hidden – in a small insignificant, out of the way place called Bethlehem. It would come in the smallest of places, when it was least expected. When it seemed as though God had abandoned His people; when the world seemed to be turned upside down; when by all appearances and from all indications all was lost and there was no hope - it would be at that time that the Savior would come.

Those days seemed at hand at the time of Isaiah and Micah. The world had become so corrupt that there was no longer a standard of morality. The people of their day saw little need for God. In the midst comfort and prosperity the hearts of God’s people had grown spiritually lazy and numb – and they wandered away from God and followed their own shadow. In many ways it sounds much like our world today. There is a sense among us that we have gone far off the slippery slope of sin and deadly consequences cannot be far behind. That may very well be true. But it was also true in the time of Isaiah and Micah. Despite of their rejection of God, their wandering from God, their defeat and their

ultimate exile - God's promised His hope would still prevail. Over 700 years later, Jesus was born into this world. He walked this earth, he lived among us. He was crucified, dead, and buried. But three days later He rose from the dead - prevailing, persevering over the power of sin and death, bringing eternal life to those who joyfully surrender their hearts and lives to him as their Lord and Savior.

That was the hope Micah and Isaiah proclaimed – and that is our hope that we can proclaim today. It is here we look at the words of not only the prophet Micah but also those of Isaiah: *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).* As in this Christmas season we are walking through the names of Christ from Isaiah 6 - we see today that not only is Jesus our *“Wonderful Counselor”* but that He is also appropriately worthy of the name *“Mighty God.”*

“Mighty God” in the original Hebrew is *el-ghib-bore*. The word *el* is the Hebrew word for *“God”* here and the literal translation of *ghib-bore* is *“having the power to prevail.”* And so the literal meaning of Isaiah's words *“Mighty God”* means *“God who powerfully prevails.”* God's promised hope *would happen* in spite of *could happen* because God *will* powerfully prevail. In spite of the continuous failures of God's people, God's promise, the Savior would come. Throughout all generations, from the first sin committed by Adam and Eve; throughout all of the turning away from God and the worship of idols; throughout the self-enthronement of fallen humanity; in spite of the dark record of his ancestors - the Savior would come: *God would powerfully prevail.* Throughout all of the turmoil and conflict of the world, in spite of the turbulent history of God's people, Israel, the Messiah would be born – *God would powerfully prevail.* In spite of it all, the promised hope of God would persevere, *God would prevail.* Jesus is our *“Wonderful Counselor.”* He was the act of God's will which caused a wonderful thing to happen because of God's steadfast love for His people, which He carried out according to His sovereign plan and divine purpose. And it all came to be because Jesus, our *“Mighty God”* - *powerfully prevailed.*

For the Jewish people the concept of *“Mighty God”* was who they were. Their name Israel (*“Yisra'el”*) in Hebrew means *“God prevails.”* In being the chosen people of God who had gone through great persecution by the world and who were wrestling with their own wayward hearts, God had always prevailed. Even in their unfaithfulness, God had been faithful. His *“hesed”* – His steadfast covenant of love and grace and faithfulness towards His people – had always been active and at work, regardless of their circumstances. The reason there are such long genealogy lists in some books of the Bible is to give testimony to the Jewish people that God has prevailed generation after generation throughout all of their history. They are *Israel* – the people of God through whom God has always prevailed.

Not only is that true for the people of Israel - it is also true for all those who are followers of Jesus Christ. Just as God's promise of God's hope prevailed throughout all the Old Testament age and on into the New Testament age - in Christ Jesus today we also have the power of *“Mighty God.”* The same Jesus who powerfully prevailed over death on a cross at Calvary, is the same Jesus who will powerfully prevail in our own lives as we struggle with the world and with the sin that lives so deeply alive within us. Whatever stands before us, whatever obstacles we face, the power of the risen Christ will prevail. Whatever opposition, whatever evil, whatever force stands in our way, God will prevail. Some 2000 years ago the power of the Creator Himself rose up against the shadow of death that cast itself upon the grave of our Savior; the sacrificial Lamb of God powerfully prevailed when all seemed lost. Jesus is our promise, Jesus is our hope, Jesus is our victory! In Christ we cannot and we will not lose. Even when death comes knocking on our door, Jesus is our *“Mighty God”* who will give us everlasting life!

In Romans 8:38-39 the apostle Paul writes: *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* We celebrate Christ's birth with that hope. The birth of the one who would save us from our sins was promised us from the days of eternity - signaling the fulfillment of God's promise for all who hear the call of Jesus to deny

themselves, take up their crosses and follow Him. Because Jesus is our “Mighty God” Colossians 1:10-14 tells us we can “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

As followers of Jesus - our walk, our talk, our lifestyles, our attitudes are to reflect that. Brothers and sisters, we are those who face certain death, but who have God’s promised hope of eternal life! In this season, we are to live out the birth of our “Mighty God” in our very own lives. This is not about Santa Claus or Christmas trees or presents or family gatherings. This season is about the “Mighty God” who died for our sins by powerfully prevailing over death in order that we might receive a complete and full pardon and have life everlasting. This season is about how our “Mighty God” will cast out the certainty of the promise of death for all who receive Him. This season is about the promise of God that despite the multitudes of our failures in this life - we have a “Mighty God” who prevails for us! Amen!

There is a question that begs to be asked of each one of us who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, our “Mighty God” – and that question is: *How has God prevailed in our lives?* As I reflect on my own life, there is no question. In being raised in home that was painful, difficult and abusive - God prevailed in saving my Grandma Helen, so she could love me and pray for me - and put others in my path to point me to Jesus. Though I was living a sinful life, our “Mighty God” still reached down and claimed me. God’s faithfulness to me has prevailed in spite of my wayward ways. Personally, I have looked at the face of death four different times – as an infant I got whooping cough and was given less than a few weeks to live; at the age of 20 I got an appendicitis that burst and I spent 10 days in intensive care; 10 years later I fell through the ice into the freezing waters of a river in northern Minnesota, only to somehow crawl out and get back home; and I also faced death for my sins every day of my life until the day I gave my heart and life to Jesus. In all those circumstances *God prevailed.*

Charles Spurgeon once said, “By perseverance the snail reached the ark.” Sometimes life feels that way. We all face obstacles and issues, trials and troubles, problems and difficulties in life. Tragedy and catastrophe, affliction and suffering, pain and heartache will be our lot in life as long as we walk this earth. Sin will continue to dog us until the day we die. We are a broken people who live in a broken world. Money, power, ignorance and arrogance may insulate us for a while, but someday we all will face the reality of death. The truth is, life is not easy and it is not fair. Someday we will all die. As we walk this earth we will continue to stumble until the day we cannot get up and walk any more.

In 1992 Beth Anne DeCiantis was one of many runners who were attempting to qualify for the Olympic trials in the marathon. In order to qualify for the Olympic trials, a female runner must complete the 26-mile, 385 yard race in less than 2 hours and 45 minutes. Beth started out strong but began to have some serious trouble around mile 23. She reached the final straightaway at 2 hours 43 minutes with just 2 minutes to qualify. Two hundred yards from the finish, she stumbled and fell. Dazed, she stayed on the ground for 20 seconds. The crowd began to yell, “Get up and run!” The clock was ticking – 2 hours 44 minutes, less than a minute to go. Beth Anne staggered to her feet and began walking. Five yards short of the finish, with ten seconds to go, her legs gave out and she fell again. She began to crawl and with the crowd cheering her on she crossed the finish line on her hands and knees. Her final time? Two hours, 44 minutes and 57 seconds.

Romans 5:6 says: “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” Were it not for God, we would never finish the race of life. God always prevails, just at the right time. He always has and He always will. The author of Hebrews 12:1-2 writes: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for

*the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Throughout history, God has prevailed. At the Garden of Eden, as sin entered the world, a pale was cast across history. But **God prevailed**. In the days of Micah and Isaiah, when the hearts of God’s people grew cold for Him and their judgment stood nigh, their future looked dim - **God prevailed**. As the long-awaited Savior was hammered to a cross at Calvary, all seemed lost. But the power of our “**Mighty God**” prevailed. Jesus – our “**Mighty God**” - still powerfully prevails today.*

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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 he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. **Colossians 1:15-18***

There is another question that also begs to be asked of those of us who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, our “Mighty God” – and that question is: While our “Mighty God” - Jesus - does prevail for us, how do we prevail for him? In other words – in the face of all the struggles, trials, pains and sufferings we experience in life - do we prevail in trusting him, in loving him, in seeking him, in being grateful to him, in finding our greatest joy and satisfaction in him? Another word that is often used for prevail is the word *persevere*. Persevere is a compound word in the English language. The word *per* is a prefix which means “through.” And of course we know that the word *severe* which means “extremely harsh, serious or grievous.” And so to *persevere* then means “to get through extremely harsh circumstances.”

In all of the struggles and trials we go through in this life - we can prevail, we can persevere when we fully embrace the reality that God has prevailed and will always prevail until the end of time. In John 16:33 Jesus tells us: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” What that means is that because Jesus is our “Mighty God” we can run with endurance the race that is set before us, free of our sin, which so easily entangles us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Jesus has come. He is with us. He has and is and will always prevail. Like Abraham Lincoln, we can persevere in our continuous failures in the midst of discouraging odds – knowing that He leads us through the war of life and he gave his life, so we might be reunited to God and free from the slavery of sin and death. We are to be like Beth the marathon runner, giving our all, in the midst of weakness and stumbling, knowing that by the power of our “Mighty God” - we will finish the race and prevail to the very end, even if it seems like all seems lost.

Great works are performed not by strength nor by skill but by perseverance. Out of our failure to trust God or love God or seek God or obey God or follow God or live for God or honor God or worship God or please God or surrender to God or find our greatest joy and satisfaction in God - *Jesus was born!* God is still at work prevailing and persevering in the lives of those who trust Him, who love Him, who seek Him, who live for Him, who honor Him, who worship Him, who please Him, who surrender to Him, who humbly find their greatest joy and satisfaction in Him. The truth of history and the truth of our lives clearly tells us that *God will prevail*. In the season of celebrating the birth of God’s promised hope, may we know the never-ending joyful reality of the prevailing mercy, grace and love of our “Mighty God” - that powerfully persevered on the cross - and that will continue to joyfully prevail and powerfully persevere over and in spite of every failure we experience in this life – until the day He calls us and takes us home to live with Him in glory, forever and ever!

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little

while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith-- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:3-9

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