

Isaiah 9:6-7

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.

The aim of today's message is encouragement. I just want you to sit back, listen, and be encouraged.

Every word is true...  
His word will not return void.

**We can see this in the fulfillment of various prophecies.**

There are many OT prophecies made, hundreds and hundreds of years prior to the time of Christ — that are fulfilled by Jesus. Actually, I should say they were fulfilled in the person of Jesus. What I mean is that a fair number of the prophecies concerning Jesus weren't things he could do but rather, they were things that had to be done to him. Which you know, adds a tremendous amount of complexity and variability to the issue.

How many prophecies are we talking about? People count them differently. There was a man named Alfred Eldersheim who counted 456 prophecies fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. That's on the high end. Others have a much smaller number.

But when people trained in probabilistic statistics, etc... tried to come up with a number — odds — of one person fulfilling everything, they went very conservative. One of the most famous papers takes eight specific Old Testament prophecies and asks, what are the odds?

Just with eight, the odds wound up being 10 to the 17th power. What does a number like that even mean? One article says if you covered the state of Texas with silver dollars — stacked 2 feet high — the chances of picking the one correct silver dollar out of all them — are similar to the chances of just eight of the messianic prophecies coming true.

**But there's one prophecy, mentioned twice in our text, that gets almost no attention.**

Namely the phrase — “the government will be upon his shoulder”

That's a funny phrase. What does it mean? It means that Jesus will take responsibility for the governing of the world.

Now, didn't he always take responsibility? Well, in some sense yes. But make no mistake. This text is saying something will change in the world as a result of the incarnation. Something related to governance.

**And now we can ask — well — has it?**

The theological answer is plain. The most quoted Old Testament texts by the apostles:

Psalm 110:1

The Lord says to my Lord:  
“Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

That's what is happening now. But would we know it by looking at the world? Can we see that prophecy made in Isaiah 9 or Psalm 110 or Psalm 2 or Isaiah 53 — can we observe its fulfillment in the world?

Recently, a new kind of genre of history has emerged on the scene. I tend to think of it as “the history of morality.”<sup>1</sup>

The most famous recent work would probably be Tom Holland's *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution ReMade the World*

But there are other books.

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche was one of the first to trace much of our western morality back to Christianity. He did so from a position of antagonism toward many Christian virtues, equality in particular.

## **The Book That Made Your World — How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization**

“The Bible created the modern world of science and learning because it gave us the Creator’s vision of what reality is all about. That is what made the modern West a reading and thinking civilization. Postmodern people see little point in reading books that do not contribute directly to their career or pleasure. This is a logical outcome of atheism, which has now realized that the human mind cannot possibly know what is true and right.” — Vishal Mangalwadi

## **Rodney Stark, The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion**

“In fact, all known societies above the very primitive level have been slave societies—even many of the Northwest American Indian tribes had slaves long before Columbus’s voyage.<sup>46</sup> Amid this universal slavery, only one civilization ever rejected human bondage: Christendom. And it did it twice!”

## **The WEIRDEST People in the World, Joseph Henrich**

In 19th-century Switzerland, other aftershocks of the Reformation have been detected in a battery of cognitive tests given to Swiss army recruits. Young men from all-Protestant districts were not only 11 percentile points more likely to be “high performers” on reading tests compared to those from all-Catholic districts, but this advantage bled over into their scores in math, history, and writing.

### **Anticipating objections:**

Now before I go any further, I want to anticipate a possible objection. All of the good that has been done has also been accompanied with bad. Christians have used Christianity to justify their own sin. And then of course, there are many times when Christians fail to live up to the gospel ideals.

British Independence Joke: One holiday celebrated on different days by 58 unique countries. The dates of their celebration are very different — but all celebrate the same thing. Some people somewhere in the world celebrate this every 7 days. And I am speaking of course of Independence from the British.

The British had two main hobbies — tea and colonizing stuff. And the whole time, a Christian nation.

Tom Holland summarizes this so well...

Repeatedly, whether crashing through the canals of Tenochtitlan, or settling the estuaries of Massachusetts, or trekking deep into the Transvaal, the confidence that had enabled Europeans to believe themselves superior to those they were displacing was derived from Christianity. Repeatedly, though...it was Christianity that...provided the colonized and the enslaved with the surest voice. The paradox was profound. No other conquerors, carving out empires for themselves, had done so as the servants of a man tortured to death on the orders of a colonial official. No other conquerors...had installed...an emblem of power so deeply ambivalent as to render problematic the very notion of power.

This is the kind of stuff present in the history of Christianity. We get stuff wrong — and we act like the world. The British sometimes acted like Assyria or Babylon or Alexander the Great or Caesar — but... there was always, in the end, a kind of systemic repentance. A piper to pay. The British did not lose control over most of the world. Truth is, they gave it up voluntarily — over and over again. Not everywhere. Not here. But in many places.

**Christians haven't been perfect. Not by a long shot. But in his book on Moral History (called *The Air We Breathe*) — Glen Scrivener talks about Christianity being a song** — and Christians themselves being singers. Not all of them sing the song very well. But the song itself is very very good.

So that's the objection I wanted to anticipate. Now I want to turn to examining the development of a particular moral virtue which seems undeniably downstream from Bethlehem.

We're going to deal specifically with the idea of equality. But these moral historians identify many morals that must be attributed to Christianity.

Even honest Atheists seem to be more and more open to coming to terms with the root of many virtues.

Speaking specifically of the virtue of Perseverance, atheist George Sciallabba writes,

Perseverance in virtue will sometimes require self-sacrifice. And self-sacrifice seems to require some transcendental justification or motivation, of which the most common, and perhaps the most logical, is belief in the existence of God.

And then he goes on to comment more generally,

And there is the quick of my discomfort: the suspicion, powerfully and plausibly albeit tactfully and tentatively expressed, that the ideals I most prize are at bottom inadequate. I confess I see no alternative to living with this suspicion, perhaps permanently.”

### **EQUALITY: Where Did Our Commitment to Equality Come From?**

Now let’s talk about about just one aspect. The idea of equality. I like using equality for this kind of discussion because it is absolutely not a scientific idea.

“Most legal systems in the world today are based on a belief in human rights. But what are human rights? Human rights...like God and heaven, are just a story we’ve invented. They’re not objective reality. They’re not a biological fact about Homo sapiens. Take a human being, cut him open, look inside, you will find the heart, the kidneys, neurons, hormones, DNA. But you won’t find any rights. The only place you find rights is in the stories that we have invented and spread...they may be very positive stories, very good stories. But they are still just fictional stories that we have invented.” — Yuval Noah Harari, Author of Sapiens

And in another place Harari comments, “Human rights are as fictional as the God who underwrites them.”

And it isn’t a historical idea either. Take this from Glen Scrivener...

Imagine there’s another guest on the TV show. Plato is brought in, blinking at the studio lights and baffled by the technology. He’s asked whether he agrees with the claim: “Some lives are worth more than others”. The ancient thinker frowns: what is the debate exactly? It is trivially obvious to the father of Western philosophy that lives are of unequal value. Some are men, and some are women; some are Greeks, and some are barbarians; some are free, and some are slaves. There are rich and poor, wise and foolish, strong and weak. All that we see in nature is difference. Compare any two people concerning any one attribute and what will you conclude? This one has more than that one. This, of course, is the definition of unequal. To insist that two people are equal really, when every human trait betrays

inequality, raises the question: Equal how? Where is this magical realm where their “equality” exists? Can you show it to me? If Plato was being polite, he might say, “Your faith in ‘equality’ fascinates me, and I’d like to be able to see what you see. Clearly ‘equality’ is very important to you. You live your life in the light of this belief, and I can respect that. But to me it looks as if you’ve just decided to believe in something with no reason or evidence. I’m afraid I’m not convinced.”  
— Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe*

Indeed, I am reading another book right now on NeoPlatonism written by Mr. Rushdoony:

The gospel of Sir Thomas More was his Utopia, wherein man's mind imposed its idea on all of the world of matter. For More, wives were to be selected after being inspected naked; their minds were not important enough to count, so unimportant was matter or particularity, so little was it the world of spirit, that wives were to be chosen without regard to the unity of mind and matter, naked on inspection like cattle. For Aristotle, women were misbegotten males, an inferior form of humanity (more material), and Plato wondered as to whether women could be called reasonable creatures. Aristotle held that men, slaves, women, and children all have souls. However, "although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. Women thus have less soul than men and are thus more material. As a result, the neoplatonist tradition has tended strongly toward a hostility to women as the principle of sensuality and materialism. The implication of More's principle, which he applied to his daughter, was that women are at best essentially flesh rather than spirit, and hence, like cattle, to be inspected physically before marriage.

The feminist movement, despite its serious errors, has some justification, in that the neoplatonist movement has consistently treated women with contempt. In the Bible, women are presented as no less intelligent than men, nor any the less capable of redemption; the question is one of authority, not of humanity or dignity, whereas in the neoplatonist tradition women are seen at times almost as a different species or at best a very inferior form of man.

The influence of Hellenic thought on Islam is a marked one, and women are the victims of it. Islam is a good example of men setting up a sexual order for their gratification, all the while insisting that men are rational and spiritual, and that women are coarse, materialistic, and sensual in nature. They are also supposedly inferior to men. The Bible teaches, not the inferiority of women, but their subordination, a very different thing.

Insert Roman letter:

I am still in Alexandria...I beg and plead with you to take care of our little child, and as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. In the meantime, if (good fortune to you!), you give birth, if it's a boy, let it live. If it is a girl, expose it.

Meanwhile, Christians would patrol the garbage heaps, looking for children to save. The word “foundling” — a very old word — has to do with this very phenomenon.

And again, we're asking, “can we trace historical evidence back to this claim in Isaiah 9:6-7 — that Jesus, after his incarnation — is running things, governing things, in a new way?”

And by doing a little moral history this morning, we can see one area — the idea of equality — that is directly attributable to the Christian gospel.

**NOW I WANT TO WRAP UP BY TRYING TO UNDERSTAND HOW THIS HAS HAPPENED. DEVOTING NEXT WEEK TO ANSWERING THIS QUESTION MORE THOROUGHLY**

A partial explanation is offered simply when we consider the revolutionary idea of Christianity.

“If natural selection means the survival of the fittest and the sacrifice of the weakest, Christianity is about the sacrifice of the Fittest (Jesus Christ) for the survival of the weakest (us).” — Glen Scrivener

In 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 Paul writes,

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father, reigning until his enemies are made his footstool. Many of his enemies are ideas — arguments — lofty opinions —

And one of the most lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God is simply this — “Some people are more important than others.”

It is the most natural, scientific, and historically consistent way of thinking. But... around 32 AD people started thinking differently. And that new way of thinking — driven by divine power — has destroyed the old way and is destroying the old way.

And this is all tied to the coming of Jesus Christ...

Tied explicitly in a passage like Philippians 2...

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. — Philippians 2:1-11