

**ISAIAH 9:6.**

For a child is born to us,  
a son is given to us,  
and the government will be on his shoulders—  
and his name will be  
Wonderful,  
Counselor,  
God the Champion,  
Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace.

How should government be done?

Everyone seems to have an opinion on how to answer that question these days. People continue to ask questions like, “Should the government regulate the availability and affordability of health insurance?” “Should the government regulate social media?” “Should the government be able to operate on an unbalanced budget, or over budget?” “Should the government use tax dollars to fund this or that?” — All of these are hot button topics, topics which, if we decided to debate them today, could even ruin our Christmas celebration.

Guess what? The child lying in the manger, whose birth we are celebrating, also has very strong convictions about how government should be done. Oh, as true man, he doesn’t have those convictions yet. His only thoughts at this point have to do with sleep, food, and staying clean and warm. But as true God, the reason he came was to take the throne of his father David and reign over the house of Jacob forever, and to do that a very particular way, a very different way from the way the world does it.

Last year we considered this text on Christmas Day, and we spent all our time just on the words, “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us.” We considered how the Christ-child is God’s most precious gift to us—a gift he didn’t have to give us, a gift he should not have given us, in a way, but a gift he freely, gladly, and generously gave to us anyway.

This morning we want to move on and consider just the next phrase: “And the government will be on his shoulders.”

**1.**

In order to understand this phrase, we first need to know what the Christ-child’s government is. The Christ-child’s *government* is the same as his *kingdom*. Paul says that God the Father has rescued *us* from the dominion of darkness and has brought *us* into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Col 1:13). He says that God calls *us* into his kingdom and glory (1Th 2:12). And the apostle John says more explicitly that Jesus has made *us* to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Rev 1:6).

We are Christ’s government and kingdom. We are his dominion, as are all those who believe in him. Christ’s government is his Church, the sum total of all who believe in him as their Savior.

Next we need to know what it means that his government is on his shoulders. In the next chapter of Isaiah, the Lord tells his people not to be afraid of the Assyrians. Here’s why: “He [the LORD] will remove the burden that [the Assyrian] placed on your shoulder and the yoke he

placed on your neck” (Isa. 10:27). For something to be on someone’s shoulders means that that something is a burden that he carries. That person is like a beast of burden with a load tied on his shoulders, at the bottom of his neck.

So the Christ-child’s way of doing government is to load you and me and all believers up onto his shoulders and carry us as his burden.

This shows us first of all that the Christ-child does government differently from the way the world does government. Jesus himself explained this concept of doing government to his disciples. He said, “You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It will not be that way among you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25–28).

The way the world does government is backwards from the way Jesus does government. Jesus’s government is on his shoulders. In worldly government, the government is not on the ruler’s shoulders, but the ruler sits on the government’s shoulders. The ruler does not go about like a donkey with his citizens on his back. No, he sits on the shoulders of his citizens and tells them to do this or that and they must do it.

We admire those who truly view ruling positions as positions of service. Cincinnati in Ohio is named after the Roman dictator Cincinnatus. Cincinnatus was appointed absolute dictator by the Roman senate during a wartime emergency. He was ploughing on his farm when a group of senators brought him the news. He put down his plough, accompanied them to Rome, amassed an army, led them into battle, defeated the enemy, immediately resigned his dictatorship, and returned to his farm, just sixteen days after he had been appointed dictator.

That’s awesome. But that’s also not normal. Even in a country like ours where the government is specifically set up to prevent any one man from having absolute power, those who are elected tend to infringe on the limits of their power whenever possible. Regardless of what you think about executive orders by the president, they’re a lot more common today than they were in the past. Rulers do not carry the citizens; the citizens carry them. And the Bible even defends this principle and tells us to follow their orders as they sit on our shoulders, unless their orders contradict God’s commands, because when we’re talking about society, and not the Church, might needs to be right. Laws and force and obedience are the only things that prevent chaos in the secular world.

The head of the household even sits on the shoulders of his family at home. That was one of the first consequences God mentioned as a result of the fall into sin. Adam was always the head of the household, but he never had to sit on the shoulders of his wife, so to speak, until the fall. Once the fall into sin happened, what did God say to Eve? “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” In other words, no longer will husband and wife live in perfect head-and-helper harmony. Instead each is going to abuse the role assigned to him or her. The wife will desire the headship position her husband has, and the husband will turn headship into dictatorship. We would like to hope that this never happens in Christian families. It shouldn’t, and perhaps in a select few, it doesn’t. But the fact is that it does happen in many, and perhaps sometimes the husband or father even needs to take a more commanding approach in order to keep order in his family and to keep the family together.

This is natural, worldly government. The family carries its head on their shoulders. The towns and cities carry their chairmen and mayors on their shoulders. The nation carries their rulers on their shoulders. The rulers say, “Do this. Do that.” And those carrying them must comply.

But the Christ-child says, “No, that’s not how I’m going to do it. For me, it’s going to be the other way around.” Christ loads his government, his citizens, up onto his shoulders. He carries them. He serves them.

## 2.

“The government will be on his shoulders.” That not only shows us that he does government differently. It also shows us where to find Christ’s government.

If you want to find the government of earthly rulers, you look beneath them. You look at what they sit on. You look at what they rule. If you want to find the government of President Biden, you look at the nation he presides over—the United States of America. If you want to find the government of Governor Noem, you look at the state she governs—South Dakota. If you want to find your own government, look at what you have charge of—whether your house or your work or what have you.

But if you want to find this Child’s government, you do not look beneath him, you look above him. You look on his shoulders. You do not look at whom he rules with absolute power. You look at whom he serves with absolute love.

Isn’t that the simplest definition of the Christian Church you have ever heard? Christ’s Church is those who sit on his shoulders. Christ’s Church is not those who carry him around, but those who let themselves be carried by him. It isn’t our service to Christ that defines us; it’s his service to us that defines us as Christians.

Now don’t get the wrong impression. Just because Christ doesn’t sit on our shoulders like ordinary rulers do, but we sit on his, that doesn’t mean that we get to be Christ’s boss. We are not his rider but his burden. When we want to be his rider, when we want to take the teachings and the affairs and the welfare of the Church into our own hands and control, we are not acting as citizens in this Child’s government. The moment we desire that, we are refusing to let him do government his way, refusing to let him carry us. That will only lead us off the path to heaven and into the Abyss of hell.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells the parable of the shepherd who has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. He tells how that shepherd will leave the ninety-nine and go after the lost sheep until he finds it. “And when he finds it,” he says, “he joyfully puts it *on his shoulders* and goes home.”

Imagine how absurd it would be if this sheep was lost—lost because of his own foolishness, stuck in the briars, easy prey for the predators, bleating, bleeding, and helpless—and the shepherd found it and said, “Alright, little guy, come on. I’m going to put you on my shoulders and carry you home,” and the sheep replied, “No, that’s okay, dear shepherd. You don’t need to carry me. I will carry you. Go ahead, climb on!” Martin Luther imagined such a scenario and he basically said: “I think that stupid sheep would have quite a time of it.”

No, that sheep will gladly let himself be carried by his shepherd. The shepherd has found it. The shepherd has rescued it. The shepherd loves it. The shepherd knows best. The shepherd knows the way home.

So too, dear friends, being in the government of this little Child in the manger is quite simple. He came down from heaven to carry you. We were lost and condemned because of our sins, incurring the wrath of God with every breath we took, stuck in the briars of all the sadness and misery that comes with our sin, easy prey for Satan, the roaring lion who prowls around looking for someone to devour. But here came Jesus, from heaven above down into the valley of the shadow of death. “Go ahead, climb on,” he said to us. “I will take up your infirmities and carry your sorrows. I will bear your sins. I will take up your burden, so that it is no longer yours, but mine. Climb on. I will lead you safely to my home in heaven.”

And he bowed his head and lowered his shoulders and waited.

Brothers and sisters, there lies the Child in the manger. A manger sits on the ground. You do not need a ladder to get into it. There is nothing you need to do, no green card you need to pay for or earn before you can become a member of this Child’s government. Just climb onto this infant’s shoulders as he wishes. Don’t worry, he is no ordinary infant. His shoulders are strong enough; they will hold you. Let him carry you through his merciful ministry and all the way to the cross. Let him pay for your sins there. Let him carry you out of death’s tomb to eternal life in the glorious presence of God his Father.

That’s the way this Child does government. It’s all on his shoulders. He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many—to give his life as a ransom for you.

Merry Christmas and happy New Year, from God to you! Amen.