

Immanuel - God with Us

Isaiah 7:14

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We'll be reading Isaiah chapter number 7 verse 10 through to verse number 14. Isaiah chapter 7 verse 10: "Moreover the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 'Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.' But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord.' Then he said, 'Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.'"

Father, as we come to Your word now, help us to know not only in our minds but in our hearts and in this place what it means that Immanuel has come and that You are God with us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

This prophecy concerning the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ was given by the prophet Isaiah 700 years before Christ was born in Bethlehem. During the years of the prophet Isaiah, he saw a vision of the Lord in the previous chapter, high and lifted up as the sovereign God who is enthroned over all. A God who is worshipped by the angels, a God that he was honored and who is enthroned and adored. And this God commissioned Isaiah as a prophet to the people of Judah who were to be and were a rebellious house. They were not going to respond positively to the message of Isaiah.

And there was a time where King Uzziah died and his son Jotham took over. And then after Jotham, there was this king called Ahaz. And Ahaz, according to scripture in other places in Second Kings and Chronicles, is told is spoken of as a very wicked king, a king that disobeyed God, a king that did not care for the things of God. And in chapter number seven of Isaiah, this prophecy comes to us in a context where Syria and Israel, the northern tribes of Israel, are trying to overthrow Ahaz as king in Judah so that they can have Judah join them in an attack against Assyria because Assyria was coming in and threatening the land.

And in this plan, what they were seeking to do was overthrow Ahaz, who was one of the sons of David in that lineage, and install Tabil, who was a king not of the Davidic dynasty. And God promises here in this text of

scripture, especially in the end of verse number nine, He says to Ahaz, "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established." So God says, "I can deliver you. There's nothing too hard for Me to do. But if you do not believe, which this king was not believing in God, then you will not be established." But the opposite also would be true, that if you do believe in God, if you do trust in Me as the sovereign Lord, the ruler of heaven and earth, then you will be established.

And then God tests the faith of Ahaz and says, "You ask a sign, any sign, whatever sign you want in the earth above, in the heaven beneath, and I will do it. Ask for My help." And King Ahaz, a wicked king as he was, his faith was tested and found to be wanting. He doesn't believe in God. He doesn't really trust in the Lord. He's already made plans for the defeat of Israel and Syria. He's already made alliances or seeking to make alliances with Assyria himself so that he can be protected.

And he gives this pious answer to God, saying, "I'm not going to test the Lord," when it was God Himself asking him to ask for a sign in heaven above. And by him saying, "Oh, I'm not going to test the Lord, I'm not going to ask for something from the Lord," this was an undermining of God's omnipotence, who was saying to him, "I will do this thing for you." It was a sign of his unbelief. And God, in one sense, rebukes him, saying, "What do you think, that you're going to weary God by asking Him? It is God that is asking you to say, 'Ask what you will, and I will do it for you.' Do you think it's too hard for God? Do you not trust in God?" But as I said before, Ahaz had other plans. He made an alliance with the Assyrians for his defense and did not depend on the Lord his God.

And it is in this very context that the prophet goes on to say that God, the Lord Himself, will give you a sign. You may not ask for a sign, but God Himself will give you a sign, and a sign God will give and He will bring to pass. And the sign or the miracle or the thing that that God was going to do was that He was going to cause a virgin to conceive and bear a son and shall call His name Immanuel. Now to the modern mind, that is absolutely crazy and insane. In fact, not even to the modern mind, even to the ancient mind. But given in the context of what we're what is being said here, is there anything too hard for the Lord?

You see, God is able, the one who spoke the world into existence and caused there to be something out of nothing, there's nothing too hard for Him so that a virgin may conceive and bear a son. And God basically makes a promise here that a virgin will conceive and bear a son and shall call His name Immanuel. Now at the heart of this prophecy is hope. Hope. And what he's simply saying is that God Himself would do something, and He would do something that will evidence that God is with His people. In fact,

as Matthew picks it up and says, it shows us that it is God with us, which Immanuel actually means.

And so God makes a promise of hope and help from Himself in none other than Immanuel. And although Ahaz would not trust in the Lord and although Ahaz would not experience and know this Immanuel in his time of faithlessness and rebellion against God, God would still perform the promise that He made to David. And God would send His son in the fullness of time. As we are remembering here this morning in Bethlehem, in a manger, born the one who is Immanuel, God with us.

And so in Matthew chapter 1 verse 23, we see Joseph being told by the angel that the woman that you're betrothed with, engaged to, that you've never had relations with, she's with child. And Joseph says to himself, "I don't know what to do. Maybe let's just divorce her secretly so we don't make a public spectacle of this whole thing." But the angel comforts him and says, "No, no, this is what the Lord has done. She has not been unfaithful. God has been faithful according to the promises that He has made 700 years ago to a wicked King Ahaz regarding the hope of his people. And therefore, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call His name, it should be called Immanuel, which being interpreted is God with us."

This was God Himself giving a sign of hope, a sign of His presence among His people. And what becomes very interesting in the next chapter of Isaiah and following is that there is this reference to Immanuel that appears in two other places. And in chapter number eight verse eight to 10 is where they are found. And let me read these passages to you. God is going to judge Judah for their rebellion. God is going to send Assyria to Judah to destroy them for their faithlessness and apostasy. But it says this in chapter eight verse eight to 10: "He will pass through Judah. He will overflow and pass over. He will reach up to the neck, and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel. Assyria will come in, and he will cover and destroy and plunder. But then there's this cry of 'O Immanuel.' A glimmer of hope. A remembrance of the promise. And then more hope in verse number nine: 'Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken into pieces. Give ear, all you from far countries. Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces. Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces.' Listen to this now: 'Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. Speak the word, but it will not stand. For God is with us.'"

And Isaiah is reminding Judah and reminding these people that the hope of their salvation and deliverance is found in none other than Immanuel. That although destruction shall come, although plundering shall happen, although they shall be scattered and destroyed, there is one who is coming

whose name who is Immanuel, who is none other than God with us. Who is none other than God with us.

And the sign of a virgin conceiving was none other than the sign of God with His people. The hope of Judah is the hope of Immanuel. Why will their enemies not be able to finally and utterly conquer them? Why is it that they will not be finally and utterly destroyed? It is because of Immanuel. Because God has made promises concerning Him. And the promise is a promise of hope.

Now note this: The hope of Judah did not rest in King Ahaz's alliance with Assyria. It did not rest in Syria or in Israel. It did not rest in the powers of the nations that surrounded them. The hope of His people has always been in none other than Immanuel. The hope of God's people throughout all of the history of mankind has been in none other than God being with them. This is found to be right throughout the scriptures. The hope of all the saints throughout the history of mankind has always been the presence of their God with them. God would come to the aid of His people. God would help His people.

And I cannot help but think of the time when Moses was told by God, "Hey, I'm going to send an angel up before you. How about you go with that angel and you can enter the land of Canaan?" And you know what Moses says? He says, "No, Lord, no, no. If You don't go up with us, I'm not going. If I don't have You, I'm not going." Because in the very depths of the convictions of Moses' heart, he understood that the presence of God is the salvation of God. That God with us is everything to us. If God is with His people, that is where their hope lies. Their hope doesn't lie within their alliances with the world. Their hope doesn't lie in the powers that are around them. But none other than the presence of their God with them. God will be with His people is the promise of Immanuel.

And the beautiful thing about this is that when Matthew picks this up in Matthew chapter 1 verse 23, he interprets the word Immanuel. And I believe he does that to help us realize that this has got nothing to do solely with the Jewish people alone. Immanuel is God with us. With us of every kindred, us of every tribe, us of every nation that believe, unlike wicked Ahaz, but believe in the God who is with His people.

The visitation of God has always been the hope of His people. And the hope of Christmas is the condescension of God. The hope of Christmas is nothing else than the visitation of God. You see, the prophecy made 700 years before ultimately had reference to Christ. "The Virgin will conceive and bear a son." I don't believe it. I don't understand it. It doesn't make sense to me. "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the

flesh." Do we believe God is the question? Is there anything too hard for God is really the ultimate question at stake here. Because for wicked Ahaz, he couldn't ask a sign from the Lord because he believed not in the Lord. And a failure ultimately to believe in miracles is a failure ultimately to believe in the sovereignty of God and the power of God, the one who spoke the world into existence, the one who upholds all things by the word of His power. And if God is for us, there's nothing too hard for Him. If God is with us, then what can He not do?

And so the hope of the people is none other than the hope of Immanuel, which is the presence of God. But if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Matthew chapter one as I make another just point of this text as we come to think a little more on this. In Matthew chapter number one, the promise concerning Immanuel is connected to a promise that precedes it. The Lord Jesus here is given two names by which He is known in this one single text. In verse 21, He says, "And she will bring forth a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us.'"

Notice the connection here. This baby that will be born of a virgin is going to be God with us, but He's also going to be the salvation of God. And what the writer here is trying to help us understand, and what the Holy Spirit is seeking to communicate to us here, is that the name Jesus and the name Immanuel are one in this sense that when God visits His people, He saves His people.

You see, the hope of Judah was not just this sense of God around them. The visitation of God always had to do with the deliverance of His people. And the blessedness of this truth of these two names going together helps us realize that when Jesus came into the world, He came not to overthrow the Romans. He came to save His people from their sins in the visitation of God Himself. Here we have God with us. Jesus is none other than God the Son who is with us. And He has come into the world 2000 years ago, and He has visited His people to redeem His people. Luke chapter 1 verse 68 says this: "When Simeon is declaring this child to be the Lord, he says, 'Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people.' He shall save His people from their sins. God with us."

The hope of Judah laid in the visitation of God. But what hope? The hope of salvation. The hope of salvation from what? From sin. The hope of salvation to what? To fellowship with God. So God came to be with us that we might be with Him. And that we might be with Him so that our sins, which were many, might be paid for. That this baby born in Bethle-

hem would not only be born and live a life that is perfect and sinless, but He would go to an old rugged cross to die for the sins of His people, that we might be free. That we might know not only God with us but that we might be brought into fellowship with God. This Immanuel is none other than the Savior. This is the God who saves that has visited His people. And Christmas is all about this. It's all about the saving presence and power of God. That He has come into the world.

And my friend, yes, you might say, well, we know there's visitations of God in the Old Testament. In many theophanies, God appeared to Abraham and promised Sarah to have a child. God appeared to Moses, and God appeared in the burning bush. And you can go through scripture, and God appeared to Samson's parents there. And the angel of the Lord represented God here and there. But never did God visit His people like this before. He took upon Himself human nature. He was made in the likeness of men. He was born as a babe in Bethlehem. Here, the creator of the entire universe condescends into our broken world to bring salvation as God with us.

Through a conception of the Holy Spirit, through a lowly birth, the messiness of birth, born in that little town of Bethlehem, unrecognized, unacknowledged, laid in a humble manger in a stable with animals around Him because there was no place for Him in the inn. The condescension of God. Why? Why? So that God might be with us. And so that we might be with God. So that God, that we might be His people, and He might be our God. So God Himself came with the sign of the Virgin Mary, born in Bethlehem, to bring us peace.

Maybe you're thinking today, "I feel hopeless and helpless." God has given you a sign. You say, "No, no, I want to be in the position of Ahaz and ask for whatever I want from God." God has given the answer. He has given you a sign. The only sign of your hope is in Jesus. He is God's hope. He is God's salvation. He is God with us. Do not be like Ahaz in unbelief, but come and behold the wondrous mystery of a baby born in Bethlehem who is none other than God Himself, manifest in the flesh. The Lord Himself has given one for us.

And what we see in scripture is that we ought to lay hold of Him. We ought to come to Him. We ought to come and worship Him who was born in Bethlehem. You look upon your oppression, and you wonder whether there is any hope of deliverance, any hope of salvation, any light at the end of this very dark tunnel. My friend, the hope of God is God with us, and God with us is none other than Christ, who is Immanuel. As you come to Him, as you believe in Him, as you lay hold on Him, then you will know what it means to have God with you.

You see, He has come to deliver us from our oppressors, from sin, from Satan, from our anger, from our pride, from our bitterness, from the very things that break up the relationships that we most love. He has come to rescue us from our sin, the very things that we hate most about ourselves, the very things that cause us to lay our heads down on the pillow and find no rest to sleep. The oppression of our souls is due to sin and Satan, and the condemnation of our consciences lays heavy upon us because of our guilt and shame. "They shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." "They shall call His name Immanuel because the visitation of God shall be for the salvation of our sins." A cleansing of conscience, being made new in our hearts.

Are you looking at Him this Christmas? "Who is He in yonder stall, at His feet the shepherds fall?" It's the Lord, a wondrous story. It's the Lord, the King of glory. At His feet, we humbly fall. Crown Him, crown Him, Lord of all. We cannot be indifferent to this babe in the manger. He is none other but God manifest in the flesh. As the scripture says, He is destined for the rise and fall and rising of many in Israel. And for many of us today, if we reject Him, He will be to our destruction. For we have not taken up the hope of the Lord Himself. For we have been visited by God but have rejected the visitation of the Lord, and therefore there is nothing left to us but the judgment of the visitation of God.

Yet He is also destined for the rising of many in Israel. For those who, like the shepherds, for those who, like the wise men, for those who come to worship Him, you shall rise with Him. To new life, you shall rise with Him to peace, you shall rise with Him to know the presence of God among us. But for many, He will be none other than a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, the stone which the builders rejected that has become the chief cornerstone.

You say, "Well, I believe in Him. He is my hope." Well, let me encourage you, Christian, let us reconsider Christmas in light of this one who is Immanuel. You see, the world's comprehension is that of joviality and light-heartedness that surrounds the season, and there is a great place for that. But let your rejoicing be in this, that God has visited His people, that He has come down, that He has taken on human flesh, and that He has suffered and bled and died for our redemption.

The Christmas spirit, at the heart of it, is this condescension of God, that He who was rich became poor for our sakes, that we through His poverty might be made rich. That's the Christmas spirit, the humble rejoicing in the grace of God for us who deserve none other than the judgment of God. Let us believe in Him, let us rejoice in Him, because His name is Jesus, and His name is Emmanuel.

Let us pray.