

Sermon
Who Will Save Us?
Isaiah 7:10-14
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As we continue our study of Isaiah, today will look at Isaiah 7, the famous promise of Immanuel. It's like Christmas on this First Sunday of Lent. As we begin, let me ask you to consider whether it matters to you today that God is with you. We have nicely decorated homes, all sorts of accessories to beautify our homes and lives. Have you ever considered whether the Lord is simply a nice accessory, like an knickknack to be placed in your life? Or, is he central to who you are and how you live? How important to you is "God with us?"

[7:1] In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. [2] When the house of David was told, "Syria is in league with Ephraim," the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

[3] And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. [4] And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. [9b], If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.

[10] Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, [11] "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." [12] But

Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." [13] And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? [14] Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

I don't think I'm going to reveal any secrets if I let you guys know I'm not the biggest guy in the room. And if you, bless your heart, think I'm short now, you should have seen me in Junior High. I had coach who said that yes I'm small, but I'm quick and scrappy! That was a compliment, I think.

Although I'm small, I played football. And since I was a wee bit smaller than some of the other guys, they recognized that they needed to watch out for me. I remember one night at the high school football game, a minor scuffle broke out with guys from a rival school, and I was in the middle of it, Napoleon complex and all.

As I was about to be pummeled by some much larger guy, Michael Wheeler strode up. Michael was one of those guys on the other side of the growth curve from me...by the time he was in third grade, he was full grown with a beard and all. He was huge. Michael also was one of if not the best players on our team. And being my friend and on the football team with me, Michael came over as my protection. He arrived just in time! Boy was I glad I could trust in Michael Wheeler that night. He saved me from being beaten down, he saved me from feeling like a fool, he saved me from being all alone, he saved me by making me feel not so weak. Basically, Michael Wheeler, strong and powerful, became to me a kind of savior on that night.

And truth be told, I have been looking for other Michael Wheeler saviors all my life. And so have you. Whenever we have a situation

too large for us to handle, too risky for our sense of safety, too costly, we look around to trust the strongest person or thing to give us salvation or at least a sense of safety. And the stronger the Savior the better. And now as an adult, when the stakes are much higher than a black eye, where security impacts not only me, but my wife and my children; when employees depend on an employer; when friends deeply depend on one another for important and life changing support, we ask over and over again, Who will save me now?

We don't want some impotent answer; we want strength and power. We want to trust in someone who can DELIVER. None of us like to feel weak or needy. None of us like to feel vulnerable. So we pursue means such that we don't have to feel dependent. We search for things to trust in so we don't feel dependent on God. Yet God in this text shows us again he is worthy of our trust. He is the powerful one, and the strongest One, and we his children can rest in in his arms. Our Father LOVES weak and dependent children.

In our passage, Uzziah had died. Ahaz was now king of Judah, and his kingdom of Judah (the Southern kingdom) was under siege from Israel in the north, and Syria from the northeast. These two had joined forces and had a powerful army, aimed right at Judah...and at Ahaz as king.

In verse 1 we note the kings of Israel and Syria thought if they band together, they could attack Judah (the Southern kingdom), and replace King Ahaz with someone more to their liking. The country was threatened with destruction, and personally, Ahaz was on the chopping block.. And Ahaz was so afraid, that Isaiah tells us in **verse 2 that his heart shook!**

We may not be the head of state, but we know that gut level fear of Ahaz. It's almost like an allergy we have to feeling weakness; we hate feeling dependent! Whether we are threatened by job loss, or influence loss where we fear people no longer care what I think or we are threatened by illness and loss of life, or loss of relationship we know that ache of heart. Who can we trust to take the ache away?

In v. 4, God spoke to Ahaz and to us: **Be careful, be quiet, do not fear and do not let your heart be faint.** Essentially he repeated the same thing four time: Trust me! Trust me, God calls, because he you are weak. But also, trust me, because I am with you NOW.

1. Trust God, because we are weak.

King Ahaz was weak and afraid. V. 2, when Ahaz (called the house of David here—how far the mighty have fallen) hears that Syria is in league with Ephraim (another name for Israel), he worried that he and his people wouldn't survive. He was afraid they would be crushed and die, that the throne of David would finally be extinguished.

But God said no. My people will survive; my throne will endure.

V. 3, Ahaz had gone out to the water supply, which at that time was outside the city gates. He was worried about the place most vulnerable to attack. If this army captures our water, we're done for. So he was out inspecting when v. 3, Isaiah and his son Shear-jashub shows up. The margin in your Bible may tell you that this boy's name means "a remnant shall return, or a remnant shall repent." With either translation, this is really good news. A remenant will remain, the line of David the king will survive! The armies that seek to destroy you will not succeed. My people will

survive was the message! God brings Ahaz an object lesson in this boy. You are afraid these people will be wiped out, huh? Oh, hi, a remnant shall return, in other words, we will survive by God's hand!

It's a little like Finding Dory. Every time she turns around she forgets what is happening and has to reintroduce herself to what may be a long friend just forgotten. Every time Ahaz turns around he forgets the God who loves and protects his people, then Oh, hi, "a remnant shall return." Oh, hi, God will make sure we survive. O there you are, the throne will endure. I need that reminder, too, because I so easily forget. Remember, in Jesus, we are loved and protected. Can I trust you, God, then I turn around, oh, Hi, Jesus, the Lamb slain for me. Of course I can trust you.

If the object lesson was not enough, he continued, *v. 4, trust me, or have courage, why? Because, v. 5, these enemies are just smouldering stumps of firebrands, or a stick on fire that has long gone out.* One commentator roughly translated the image as they are burned out cigarette butts. They are NO worry to you. The point is that they are short term problems and NO match for the God who loves and protects his children. Have courage, because the outcome is in the Lord's hands, not in the circumstances that threaten to upend our lives.

The point for us is that God loves us enough to control and upend the evil that threatens to upend and control us! Do you trust him for that in your life right now? Whatever is threatening you, your family, do you trust that God cares and is powerful enough to be God even over that?

Ahaz struggled to believe it. In verses 10-11, God offered Ahaz a sign to assure him of his strength to fight for him. **Isaiah 7:10 [10] Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, [11] "Ask a sign of the LORD**

your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." **ASK ME ANYTHING.** Then in verse 12, Ahaz refused. ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test."

Why? Faith was no part of his plan. We are weak, but oh, how we love to pretend we are not. Ahaz used his religious appearance to cover over the state of his unbelieving and untrusting heart. He planned to ally himself with the enemy, Assyria! He didn't need God's help because he already thought he'd figured everything out and had a plan of attack—he recruited a bigger bully to fight the smaller bullies.

When he was threatened, he looked for a Michael Wheeler, a strong man to protect him. He knew he wanted to live; God can't be trusted with that goal. So I'll take matters into my own hands. I'll pursue my own means to save myself. And the strongest man around was Assyria, the arch enemy of God's people.

The people of Assyria was not nice people. They regularly practiced child sacrifice. And it was this group to whom Ahaz looked for strength and protection. Why? Because they had the strongest army around. He felt vulnerable, so he turned to strength he could see with his eyes...and that was the Assyrian Army. He paid tribute to Assyria, essentially selling put God's people to a pagan nation and king, all for the benefit of safety.

I don't know about you, but all too often that sums up my life pretty well. I HATE feeling dependent and weak. So we spend our lives looking for something apparent strength to give us security, while we leave God, who is our real strength, on the sidelines. What are some of those things we pursue to provide strength when we feel weak?

There are obvious answers. We use our measure of sufficient funds in the accounts to be our strength. We use power positions and whether we have enough authority to control our lives to be our strengths. But others are less obvious.

Sometimes our savior we look to for strength in life is our **professionalism**. Seeking advancement in my career and education as the measure of my worth as a human being...if I advance, I don't feel weak or impotent. Sometimes looking to our professionalism as a measure of strength leads us to neglect our families in pursuit not of the real gift and strengths in our families, but rather thinking that being better at work, working more, producing more, getting ahead, all these things will actually develop a keener sense of strength and meaning in life. When in truth we often sacrifice the best thing (our families and friends) for a good thing (productivity at work).

We may depend on our ability to **plan** adequately to be our strength. Like Ahaz, we may seek to size up our weaknesses, our vulnerabilities in life, and craft a plan to address these things. If we can plan well enough for enough contingencies in life, then we may begin to feel secure, to feel safe. Whether it is financial planning, or business planning, relational planning, or old-fashioned manipulation of another person, planning can offer the illusion of strength.

Planning is not evil. In fact, God commends wise persons who plan for the future. However, and I think you can note the difference. There is a planning that seeks to create a radical independence from needing anyone or anything outside of me and my plan. Planning can become a god of sorts that offers the illusion we are no longer dependent upon God, his ways, his providential care.

Where might be the crisis in your life where you fear God may not show up for you, so you are tempted to take matters into your own hands? Wherever you try, just like with Ahaz, your solution will be temporary. We are weak, but God, Immanuel, is not. He calls us to trust him. That is faith, as v. 9 calls us to have. Isaiah essentially calls us to live by faith, or we will find ourselves not living at all. Instead, we will be enslaved to whatever strength we have pursued. Yet, Faith lives according to what God has promised rather than what my eyes can see right now.

2. Trust God, because he is present with us now.

I'm not sure why this is, but it seems to be a rule of life. The crisis, the pain, is the place into which God steps today to magnify himself, to draw near, to enable us to feel him. When we are the most dependent, the most desperate, the most needy, when we are the weakest is when we sense God with us the most! When the pain comes, when the crisis is right in front of us, God shouts to us that we might experience his love, protection, and presence in a new way.

God invited Ahaz to ask for a sign, anything to shout in that megaphone of his crisis to prove to him that God was near. But Ahaz was deaf to the Lord. But God insisted on a sign.

[14] Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

On the one hand, this is the epitome of weakness. Ahaz wanted an army, but got a baby instead. Is there anybody else up there, God? But think more carefully about this sign. He says that by the time a young woman gets married, and has a baby, by the time he can, v. 15-16, **tell you right from wrong** your problem will be dealt with.

Soon, Ahaz—in a matter of months--all your temporary worries will go away, if you trust me. God with us is a sign that our enemies are doomed, Ahaz.

Yet God has done more than simply give a sign that he is with us. The sign has become a reality. Think about this with me. What Ahaz feared was not really the Syrian army; he feared what that army could do to him. He feared death! He feared being smashed! He feared the loss of his legacy! He feared being overrun and killed by this brutal enemy. Syria wasn't his ultimate enemy, death was! Being overrun by sin and idolatry was the REAL enemy that Ahaz has no resources to fight.

We fear the SAME things. We fear the power of death because we can't do anything to prevent it. We fear being overrun by sin, because in our own resources, we can't fight it. We fear idolatry because the minute we feel in control of these idols like money or power or sex or approval, they completely take over and dominate our lives. We can't defeat them on our own. We need more than a sign, too. We need the sign of Immanuel to become the reality of Immanuel, God with us.

This sign come reality is exactly what we see in Matthew 1:23, as Matthew quotes Is 7:14. A virgin named Mary gave birth, to the one called Immanuel, God with us, the Lord Jesus, a promise of a warrior born to save. This Immanuel, the Lord Jesus is, God made man, God in flesh appearing, to save his people from an enemy so much more powerful than some invading army. Jesus came to make war on and protect us from the enemy behind the enemy: our sin, death and the devil. For Immanuel was born in the cradle to go to the cross that we might live. This warrior Immanuel came to fight by losing, by losing his life, that we might gain fellowship with our heavenly Father.

And at times, it seems like when we feel the most loss, in the crisis, is when we know Immanuel most deeply. When we need Jesus the most is when he becomes the most glorious and present in our lives. When we have nothing else to trust is when we find Jesus to be the most trustworthy.

CS Lewis was a man who experience pain and difficulty his entire life; he was acquainted with weakness. His mother died when we was but a child. His father, then, emotionally checked out of his life. His teen years were filled with intense sickness. He fought and was wounded in WWI. Then, he married later in life to his Joy, only to lose her all too soon to cancer. He famously wrote in the book *The Problem of Pain*, "Pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pain. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

It is in pain and weakness, that God shouts to us: Immanuel! I love you and am with you. I sent my Son for you that we might dwell together. Can you hear his shout to you today? Don't try and hide your desperation, for it is in the midst of dependence the Lord shouts to you: Immanuel.

Whatever is your struggle, God is with you, beside you, in you and you in Him. No matter how lonely you feel, the message of Immanuel is you are not alone. He KNOWS you and has come for you. Trust him.