

“THE NEWS OF IMMANUEL.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Isaiah 7:1-16

Introduction.

Before I read our text let me give you a very brief context. After Solomon died, Israel split into two nations. The 10 northern tribes were Israel, which is also sometimes referred to as Ephraim and the capital is Samaria. The two southern tribes were Judah, sometimes referred to as the house of David, and the capital of Judah is Jerusalem. At the time of our text Pekah is king of Israel and Ahaz is king of Judah.

Text: Isaiah 7:1-16

In the basement of the West Wing of the White House there is a large room called the Situation Room, or War Room. It is a place where high level secure meetings take place, often meetings filled with tension, drama and serious consequences.

Crises have a way of bring the worst and the best out of people. Crises have a way of exposing our faith, they test what we are trusting in. That has been illustrated over and over these past three weeks in our county. I wonder how much prayer has ever gone on in that White House Situation Room?

What is going on in Israel is a Situation Room kind of experience, so significant that it merits a supernatural sign from heaven which has serious consequences. The situation and the sign.

The situation, 7:1-9.

Things are falling apart in Judah, the wheels are coming off the small kingdom. You can read all about it in II Kings 16 and II Chronicles 28.

Syria/Aram and Edom had already taken Elath, a seaport of the Gulf of Aqabah to the south, a huge economic and commercial center. Judah lost control of the King's Highway, the major north-south trade route. Edomites were continuing to put military pressure on Judah. The Philistines to the southwest were taking over towns and villages right and left. Syria had formed an alliance with Israel to the north and was moving south with one defeat after another. And now Syria and Israel are on Jerusalem's front porch.

The reason behind this was Syria and Israel were afraid of the mighty nation of Assyria and wanted to form a stronger defensive line. They had asked Ahaz to join them, but Ahaz had

refused so he needed to be gotten out of the way. Their plan was to overrun Jerusalem and install their own puppet king on the throne of David/Ahaz, a son of Tabeel.

The scene opens with King Ahaz huddled in his Situation Room with his Secretary of State and all his foreign policy advisors and they are all shaking in their boots, or in their sandals as the case may be. Ahaz is running out of options. It is all fear and no faith.

Now someone might ask who cares about what happens to some kings in some little backwater nations on a chunk of real estate about the size of Maryland. I will tell you why it matters. The reputation of Yahweh, the true and living God, is at stake. Why? Because of a promise God made to King David. In II Samuel 7:16 God said to David:

II Samuel 7:16 Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.

The entire flow of redemptive Biblical history follows this promise. In David's last words in II Samuel 23 he tells a prophecy that the last king in the line of David will be a just ruler, a righteous one who will fear God. In other words, the Messiah will sit on David's throne.

God made a promise and now the whole thing is in jeopardy, the dynasty of David is about to go down the tubes, the covenant promise God made to David is about to become a lie if Syria and Israel destroy Judah, the house of David. So yes this does matter, there is much at stake.

One afternoon Ahaz decides to get out of that smoked fill, pressure-cooker Situation Room to get some fresh air and inspect Jerusalem's water supply. God sends Isaiah there to encourage Ahaz.

Isaiah urges Ahaz to be quiet, don't be afraid or become faint of heart. Relax, don't panic, don't worry about those two hot-headed firebrands, Rezin and Pekah. God knows everything that is going on, He knows what everyone is thinking. Their plans are going to come to nothing, they will fall flat on their faces. In fact, in 65 years Israel/Ephraim will be no more.

Syria and Israel will gain nothing by making an alliance, which Ahaz should make note of. Jerusalem will stand. No son of Tabeel was going to sit on David's throne. God is never passive in human history. God never just stands on the sidelines as a spectator.

This is the sure and certain word of the Lord. It doesn't matter if Ahaz believes it or not, it will happen. To this point I want to say a word to anyone here who is questioning God, or God's Word, questioning whether God exists, or God is in control of history, or whether the things in the Bible actually happened, or whether there is eternal life, or a heaven or a hell.

Whether or not you believe those things doesn't change one bit the reality of those things. It doesn't say, "If you don't believe my Word, it will fall." It says, "If you don't believe my Word, you will fall."

The Word of God is sure and certain. We come and go, mankind is like a wisp of smoke, here today, gone tomorrow, but the Word of the Lord stands forever. Our only wise response is to believe.

“If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all” meaning “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” You must live by faith or you will not live at all. God is saying, “If you treat me as irrelevant, you will become irrelevant.”

If God says it will happen, it will happen. If God says it won't happen, it won't happen.

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

The sign, 7:10-16.

In verse 10 God makes an incredible offer to Ahaz. Ask God for a sign, any sign, from as high as heaven to as low as hell. Make it as high or low as you want, as big or small as you desire. It is like handing him a blank check and saying write in any amount you want.

Ask for visible proof that what God has said is true and reliable. God is willing to do anything to get Ahaz to trust Him. And Ahaz tries God's patience. He makes it sound humble and pious. “Oh I would never do such a thing as test God.”

Yes, the Bible elsewhere says don't put God to the test and the reason is it shows a lack of faith. But when God commands us to do something, it is not testing God to do it. God commanded Ahaz to do something and Ahaz refused, this is stubborn rebellion born out of lack of trust in the power and faithfulness of God.

The truth is he has already made an alliance with Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria to help him.

II Kings 16:7 Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, “I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.”

So he doesn't really need God at this point. If he got a sign from God then he would have to obey God and he has no interest or desire to do so. He is trusting himself, his schemes, his plans.

So what happens? Instead of a sign being offered to Ahaz, a sign is imposed on Ahaz.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

The sign becomes a form of judgment on Ahaz. This prophecy is news but it is bad news for Ahaz. If Ahaz had asked for a sign, he would have received a sign that would have benefitted and blessed him, it would have helped him and strengthened his faith.

Instead now God takes matters into His own hands. God gives a sign, but it will be too late to do Ahaz any good. Ahaz will receive a king, but it will be the king of Assyria, not Immanuel. Ahaz wants “Assyria with us,” not “God with us.”

The question is when does this sign happen? Was there a son born to a virgin whose name was Immanuel in the time of Ahaz? There are many opinions on this matter, but I cast my lot with those who say no. This is a prophecy that will be fulfilled in the distant future.

1. The use of the word behold is often used in the OT to announce a birth of unusual significance and importance. The birth must be a sign beyond what a normal birth would be. This is not a normal birth, but a miraculous birth.
2. The word you in verse 11 is singular, meaning a sign for Ahaz, but the word you in verse 14 changes to the plural, meaning this is not a sign for Ahaz but the nation, for the people of God.
3. The particular Hebrew word for virgin clearly means the mother must be an unmarried virgin. She must be a good woman, above reproach. In other words, the child cannot be illegitimate, but born of extraordinary circumstances, in order to be a sign from God. In all of history there is only one woman to whom this could apply, Mary, the mother of our Lord.
4. The name Immanuel signifies deity. The very presence of this child means God has come to His people to be present with His people. It can only be applied to Jesus the Christ, the Son of the virgin Mary. No one else in the OT bears this name.
5. The close connection to Isaiah 9:6-7 shows this child must be truly divine.
6. And of course, the NT fulfilment of this prophecy makes its meaning in the OT to be future and not present. Isaiah 7:14 finds its fulfillment not in the OT but in the NT.
7. Curds and honey are the diet of a desolate land, a land long fallen and in great need. Immanuel will come when the house of David has been reduced to nothing. The references in 15-16 can mean before this child comes to maturity, Israel will fall to Assyria and be exiled, and ultimately Judah will fall and be exiled by Babylon.

Ahaz of the house of David has rejected the covenant of David and he will be removed. But God’s promise will still be fulfilled.

The sign fulfilled, Matthew 1:18-25.

Seven centuries after Isaiah spoke, God brought to pass the exact word promised and prophesied. God sends an angel to announce the fulfilment of this prophecy to both Joseph and Mary.

Matthew 1:20-23 Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” ... 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

Luke 1:26-27, 32-33 The angel Gabriel was sent ... 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. ... 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

By the power of the Holy Spirit of God, Jesus is the Son of God because God is His Father, not Joseph. And Jesus is the Son of Man because Mary is His mother. He has her human nature without our sin nature. He is God and man. He is the perfect, sinless Lamb who is able to take away our sins and save us. This is God’s perfect solution to our Situation Room crisis.

Conclusion and application.

The point of this text and this prophecy, is faith. In whom would Ahaz trust? In Assyria or in Yahweh’s covenant promise concerning the house of David?

Can you imagine the conversation in that Situation Room? Ahaz’ advisers saying, “Look, Ahaz, Isaiah is a great prophet, a great preacher, a great theologian, and that’s all well and good in its place. But this is war, this is foreign policy, this is international crisis management. We need to play hardball here, we need diplomacy. We need to bribe the king of Assyria into helping us. We can listen to Isaiah’s sermons on Sunday, but they are no help to us here.”

This was a defining crisis in Israel’s day, just as crises define us as a nation and as Christians.

We are easily seduced and tempted by visible, tangible, temporal solutions and fixes to our problems. What are you trusting in, what are you depending on, what is your source of confidence?

Your athletic ability, your grades, your parents, your job, your spouse, your children, your government, your smart phone, your guns, your investments or retirement plan, your self.

Every single moment of our lives we are trusting in something or someone and when a crisis comes along, what we are trusting in is exposed. This is precisely why God brings trials and

situations into our lives, to test us, try us, reveal what is real, get us out of our comfort zones, out of our security blankets.

Floods, fires, financial trials, health problems, relationship issues, besetting sins, secret sins, uncertainty, doubt, whatever it is in your life that stirs up anxiety, fear, causes you to shake like a tree in the wind

God uses crises to teach spiritual lessons. God uses our history to get our attention. Are we just getting more angry and frustrated or are we hearing what God is saying and teaching?

What defines us? What fills our hearts? Are we taken in by the stunning glory and majesty of God's great promise? Are we convinced to the core of our being that God is with us?

God has gone out of His way to give us visible, tangible proof that He can be trusted implicitly. God is willing to do anything to get us to trust Him and believe in Him, even a virgin birth.

“If you are not firm in your faith, you will not be firm at all.”
Without faith you cannot stand, without faith you will not stand.

God is faithful, God keeps His Word, He does what He says He will do. God is truthful and trustworthy. Are we confident we can trust God to keep His promises, that He can and will save us, that the truth of His Gospel applies to each of us?

If we want to do battle with the hostile powers assaulting our souls today, sin, death, Satan, make an alliance with Jesus Christ and no one else. Turn your situation room into a room of prayer and faith.

Proverbs 3:5-8 Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.

6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

8 It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.