

Immanuel

Call to Worship: Micah 5:2-5

1st Scripture: Isaiah 7:1-17

2nd Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Hymn #159- *Good Christian Men, Rejoice*

Hymn #160- *God Rest You Merry Gentlemen*

Hymn #152- *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

Introduction

In our introduction to the Gospel of Matthew, I had stated and sought to show, how Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, has steeped his Gospel in Old Testament prophesy and teachings that would have affirmed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. This morning, we move on, to consider Matthew's first use of a direct Old Testament quote/prophesy, taken from Isaiah, Chapter 7, which avows that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah, prophesied about from the beginning. Now, it is important to realize that the reason why there is a lengthy Gospel of Matthew, is because it is the whole package of which Matthew provides, that proves that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, worthy of being called, *Jesus Christ*. And so, while each individual prophesy attests to the Messianic office of Christ, the whole of the prophetic witness, combining all of the texts, is what provides the greatest and surest testimony of all that Matthew seeks to bear witness to, concerning this Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, of the Seed and lineage of David and Abraham.

Last time, we considered the miraculous, virgin birth of Jesus, who was conceived in the womb of Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And Joseph, who was to be everything that a father ought to be, to Jesus (less contributing to His actual conception), before moving forward to divorce Mary, was encouraged to remain married to Mary, recognizing that this child was of the Holy Spirit, and He was to name the child, "Jesus," because He would save His people from their sins.

This morning then, we will see how this historical miracle and reality, ties into the prophecy of Isaiah, found in Chapter 7, along with the additional implications that are found in the prophecy itself, especially within the context, within which, Isaiah proclaims it. All in all, we will find Christ to be the greater redemptive fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14.

I. Isaiah 7

And so, Matthew here states that, at His birth, Jesus has fulfilled Isaiah 7:14, which states, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His Name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”

Moving back then to Isaiah 7, let’s consider this prophecy, first in its immediate context, before coming to the full weight of its greater redemptive fulfillment in Christ. For those of you, who were at the last luncheon that we had, I sought to explain how “double fulfillment” texts work, using Psalm 8 as a primary example. Well, we will see such a “double fulfillment” unfold here again, from Isaiah 7, through Matthew’s Apostolic lens.

Isaiah 7 takes us to the time when King Ahaz was ruling over Judah, during the time of the divided kingdom, not too long before the Assyrians would come and conquer (and exile) the northern kingdom of Israel/Samaria, for their perpetual, gross idolatry and wicked rebellion against God (vs. 7:1). And it wasn’t a time of faithfulness for the kingdom of Judah for that matter, for we read in the Book of 2 Kings 16:2-4,

“Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.”

And so, while Judah did have a handful of faithful kings, one of which, was Jotham, who was Ahaz’s father (and who preceded Ahaz), Ahaz was not a faithful king at all (not even in part, nor is there any evidence that he ever repented). It was a time of severe moral degradation and rebellion for Judah, where the wickedness done under Ahaz was so great, that you could not distinguish his reign from the rebellious kings of the northern kingdom, which was soon to be ripe for fierce judgment.

Now, what happens during the time that Isaiah had spoken this prophecy to King Ahaz, is absolutely profound, and so relevant, to how this all points us to the time of Christ’s birth. Follow me, closely here.

Because of the terrible sins of King Ahaz, and the great moral degradation, into which, he had brought Judah, the Lord sent opposition from all sides, to continually batter and defeat Judah, literally to the point that the kingdom itself was on the verge of total and final collapse. The Philistines and the Edomites came from below, and the Syrians and the northern kingdom of Israel came from above, and they basically sacked Judah left and right, until it was held together by a fraying thread. And the only reason that that thread never completely snapped, was because God remembered His promise to David, to perpetuate a kingdom under His Name. Read through the account given in 2 Chronicles 28, and you will see how the Lord used a prophet even to keep Israel from virtually destroying Judah beyond repair.

A summation statement of what had happened to Judah, is found in 2 Chronicles 28:19, which states, “For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the LORD.” And even in all of this, King Ahaz never sought help from the Lord. He sought help from the Assyrians, which wound up backfiring on him as well, but right to his death, he just aggravated the sins of Judah more and more. In verses 22-27, of 2 Chronicles, we are told,

“Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the LORD. This is that King Ahaz. For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, saying, “Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.” But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel. So Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers. Now the rest of his acts and all his ways, from first to last, indeed they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. So Ahaz rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem; but they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel. Then Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.”

And so, it is in the midst of this most disastrous of a time in Judah, with a king, who had never gotten it right and only progressively got worse and defiled the kingdom to no end, that we locate Isaiah’s prophecy, given to Ahaz, which carries our Messianic text in it.

It was when Judah was already hanging on by a thread, and in a context of utter corruption (with no self-preserving motivation in Judah that should motivate God to preserve her; indeed, He had every motive to crush her all the more because of her perpetual wickedness and unrepentance)...it is during this time that a huge, major death blow was about to strike Judah, which would have wiped her out altogether. For, the King of Israel, Pekah, and the King of Syria, Rezin, had formed an alliance, and they were both forming a battle line, preparing to come in, to sweep away the remaining dust of Judah. Now, one of those kings, on their own, could have probably wiped out what remained of Judah. But, both of them! Forget it! Judah was as good as toast! And that's what makes Isaiah's prophecy so powerful, and to the natural man, simply unbelievable. King Ahaz was well aware of what was going on. In fact, he and the people, we are told, were shaking like tree branches in the wind.

And so, Isaiah is sent to the unrepentant, hardened King Ahaz, to actually encourage him, to let him know that God was not going to allow Samaria/Israel and Syria to accomplish their mission of destroying Judah. God was going to step in and do something marvelous for Judah, in spite of her wicked and rebellious ways. God was not only going to prevent the Syrians and the Israelites from destroying Judah, but furthermore, He was going to utterly destroy both of those much stronger and powerful nations, doing to them, exactly what they had planned to do to Judah. And He was going to do it soon, by the hand of the Assyrians. And, of course, we know, as we read on, that this is exactly what happens, when Israel and Syria are conquered and exiled by the Assyrians, and the land of Israel is resettled with foreigners.

This is what Isaiah speaks about in chapters 7 and 8, which for the sake of time, we cannot read now (however, we did read the first 17 verses of Chapter 7 earlier), but you can certainly do that on your own. And so, Isaiah speaks of this seemingly impossible feat, in the presence of King Ahaz, and then, he even commands the king to ask for any sign, whatsoever, which God would do, to confirm that this would indeed happen. And of course, King Ahaz, being the virtuous man that he is; well actually, in his foolish pride and attempting to show himself noble before God, refuses to ask for a sign, not wanting to put YHWH to the test. He'll commit every heinous, offensive act under the sun, against the Lord, but not test Him with a sign, when the Lord even commands him to do so.

Nevertheless, putting up with further foolishness from the king, the Lord provides him with His own sign. And hear it is:

“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. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. The LORD will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father’s house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah” (Isaiah 7:13-17).

And so, what is the sign? A woman, currently not pregnant, will conceive and be with child and he will be called Immanuel, which means “God with us.” And before that child would be old enough to know right from wrong, both, the lands of Syria and Israel, would be forsaken by their kings. In other words, there would be no more Syria and Israel, because God would remove them both from their lands by the rod of the Assyrians. Now, this was a big deal, especially, because God was not simply pronouncing some type of temporal judgment on the two nations, but rather, he was going to remove them altogether, something that had never been done before!

Now, before we move on, to bring this all together in its New Covenant context, in Matthew’s Gospel, it’s important to understand a few essential points here:

1) It’s important to recognize that this prophecy had an immediate, relevant fulfillment, within the time frame that it was proclaimed. The Assyrians came in, and wiped out Syria and Israel at the appointed time frame, well before the Lord Jesus Christ was born, during the reign of Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz.

2) In the immediate context, the woman being spoken of was a young woman, who had given birth to her child, through the normal means of procreation. The sign, in this sense, is not a virgin birth, but rather, it is a time frame sign. It speaks of the fact that the presently non-pregnant woman, would conceive and have a son, and before he knew right and wrong, these two great nations would be exiled. That is a big deal. And so, the emphasis is on *the short time*

period, within which, something so profoundly great and unthinkable would take place. God was going to reverse the intentions of Syria and Israel against Judah, turning the judgment upon their own heads, and that, in but a very short time.

Now, who was the woman, here spoken of? More than likely, it was Isaiah's wife. I say this for two reasons. First, interestingly enough, Isaiah was to have his son, Shear-Jashub (whose name means, interestingly enough, "a remnant shall return") go with him to meet Ahaz, when this prophecy was given (Isaiah 7:3). And then, in Isaiah 8, which continues along with the same theme of this prophecy, Isaiah states in verse 18, "Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! (Another Messianic prophecy, by the way, concerning Christ and His church) We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion." And so, Isaiah and his children, were uniquely presented as signs to Israel, more than likely, indicating that this child to come was to be his, as well.

3) Finally, consider the profound revelation of God's mercy here, perhaps, the greatest revelation found in this sign, which will set the tone for its New Covenant fulfillment in Matthew's Gospel. Remember the specific time that this sign was given. This sign was not given to David or Solomon or Jehoshaphat or Hezekiah or Josiah or to any other king, who had even a remote period of faithful obedience, and who was, in some way dealing with ungodly opposition. We could expect that. And we see God meeting his faithful, and yet, oppressed or troubled people, in those kinds of ways throughout history. This is not even a sign, given to Manasseh, who, at least, toward the end of his reign, when God had greatly humbled him, exhibited genuine fruits of repentance. No, this sign was given to a man, who had never, not even once, exhibited faithfulness to God, and who in fact, continued to grow worse when God sought to chastise him, and who couldn't even obey the simple command to ask for a sign! This sign was given to King Ahaz, and to Judah, at the most undeserving time imaginable, in the midst of their unfaithfulness and unto the continuation of their unfaithfulness! God would utterly destroy two of Judah's key enemies, out of His sheer grace, although presently, they were no worse than Judah.

Now, here's the real kicker. Recall the name of the child, which although not a proper name, was meant to indicate God's design toward His people in Judah. The child's name would

be called, “Immanuel” (God with us)! God with His people; God sparing His people, God delivering His people, God among His people, in spite of their ongoing rebellion, unwillingness to repent, and perpetual worship of idols! That’s what makes this sign so profound! And the fact that Hezekiah, one of the most faithful kings in the history of Judah, comes to reign next, turning away from the paths of his wicked, unrepentant father, only further testifies to the profound grace of God toward Judah! God remained with and continued to deliver and bless such a wicked, rebellious, unrepentant people, calling Mount Zion, His holy mountain!

Now, this is where we fast forward to our text in Matthew, toward which, the lesser, shadowy fulfillment of this prophecy from Isaiah’s time, finds its greatest, objective fulfillment!

II. Matthew 1

Remember, Matthew tells us that the virgin birth of Jesus, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, has fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy. How is this the case?

1) During such a dark and corrupt period in the history of Israel, when it was subject to Roman rule, and when God’s Law had been transformed and added to, in such a way that had banished the very purpose of the Law, in driving sinners to find grace in the promise of God’s coming Messiah; when the Pharisees had corrupted every aspect of the Law, creating an ungodly, self-righteous system of meritorious works, taking advantage of the people, emphasizing legalistic outward show, while failing to lay hold of the critical virtue of mercy, which alone, could leave hope for sinners; when the Saducees, the very priests of the time were all about trying to seek political advantage and wealth, while denying the realities of the spiritual life and the glory of a heavenly kingdom; when temple worship had been utterly corrupted and turned into a market place for the wealthy...on this deplorable scene, God sent His Son, Immanuel, on a search and rescue mission, to save sinners, by His own life, death and resurrection. “Immanuel,” God with us; God has not forgotten His promise; God has not abandoned us; God has not given up on us, in spite of our utter rebellion and ungodliness, God has come down to us, and not simply *as an accompaniment* to the ministry of this Jesus, but in the Person of Jesus Christ, Himself!

If you think God's mercy and grace were unfathomable when He delivered undeserving Judah during the time of King Ahaz, with the accompanying sign of Isaiah's son, then what do you think of the mercy and grace of God, when He Himself, actually steps into human flesh, born through the womb of a woman, and who lays down His own life, not simply for Judah, not simply for Israel, but for a wicked, naturally God-hating, idol worshipping people, from every single nation in the whole world! Immanuel! God is with us! God has not forgotten; God has not abandoned; God has not utterly rejected fallen mankind! He came to us! He lived for us! He died for us! He was raised for us! He ascended to heaven to intercede for us! And He will dwell, *delightfully* dwell, forever, with His redeemed people in glory, forever! And that's the glory of this sign! [You see, even ethnic Judah was a sign (which, in its limited, earthly sense, was destroyed in AD 70), pointing to the redemption of the true Israel of God; the church, a people from all nations, beginning with those who have come to Christ from Jerusalem and Judah, and spreading out to the whole world; one people of God; the wall of separation now broken down, in Christ! Remember Isaiah's son, who came with him to meet King Ahaz? His name was "Shear-Jashub," which means, "A remnant shall return!"]

Now, what of the virgin birth? Well, I spoke of the importance of Christ being born of a virgin, both to fulfill the OT Scriptures (the NT sign), and to embrace humanity without inheriting Adam's fallen nature, so that, He could be a legitimate and worthy sacrifice. But, if during the time of Isaiah, the sign did not involve a literal virgin birth, what right have we to see it that way now? After all, in the Hebrew language, the word that our Bibles interprets as "virgin" ("almah"), can, and often was, translated as "a young maiden/woman." And that would have suited Isaiah's context. [*There is also another Hebrew word for strictly "virgin"]

But, here's the kicker, brethren. The word "almah" could also be interpreted "virgin," and the translators of the Greek Septuagint, which was undeniably completed, well over one hundred years before the birth of Christ, translated the Hebrew term into the Greek word, "Parthénos," which beyond the shadow of any doubt, means "virgin," in the full sense of the word. And so, well over a century before Jesus was even born, when the Septuagint (and this is undeniable) was finished in total, that word was translated as "virgin." And the Septuagint was the prominent Bible used during the time of Christ. [*"Almah" meets the double fulfillment!]

And so, that which was fulfilled in a lesser, more shadowy capacity, during the time of Isaiah, met its greater and complete, redemptive, miraculous fulfillment in the birth of Christ. And that is why Matthew brings that out here, as an important, critical proof of Jesus's Messianic office.

And so, Matthew ends this narrative, showing that Joseph did exactly what the angel had commanded him in the dream. "Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus" (vs. 24-25).

Conclusion

1) Consider the amazing display and hope of God's grace, for us, brethren, even as we continue to strive toward glory. This is not a license to sin, but it does give us great hope as we still struggle with sin, living a life of ongoing repentance and growth, in Christ.

2) Consider the hope that is yet available for those who are still unsaved! What a wonderful hope of forgiveness, reconciliation with God and eternal life, that is here presented before you! But, if you remain on your rebellious path, consider how much greater your judgment will be, having walked away from the free grace and hope that God now offers through the shed blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, Immanuel!

Amen!

Benediction: Romans 16:25-27