

**Isaiah 7: 1-14; “Immanuel, God with Us”, A Sermon for the Christmas Season,
delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 20th, 2020,
in the Morning Worship service.**

In just a few days, we will celebrate Christmas, the remembrance of our Lord’s Incarnation and His birth. At this hour I would like to set forth to you the greatness of God’s gift to the world of fallen sinful mankind. This name of Immanuel, which we find in our text, is a very beautiful name. It was actually given here, to wicked king Ahaz, a sign. And that sign became one of the greatest prophecies of Christ’s birth, in the whole of Scripture. It was a sign which Ahaz was supposed to ask for. It was a sign which he was supposed to believe when he heard it. The sign was of a virgin who would conceive and bear a Son. But here we find that His name is called Immanuel. And we do not find our Savior being called by this name, anywhere else in the Bible, except here in this book of Isaiah and over in Matthew chapter 1.

We are told there in Matthew that the angel told Mary to call His name Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins. And so I think that we need to take the name Immanuel to be a spiritual name, and to understand that it has significance to all those who would believe in God’s Son, in terms of their salvation and the strengthening of their faith. And so I think that we should ask ourselves – In what ways is the name Immanuel a sign to be believed? Let me give a couple of ways which I pray will speak to your hearts of your need to understand better how God is with you when you exercise your faith in this wonderful name of Immanuel.

1st of all – The name Immanuel is a sign of the depths of our need of Christ.

“Ask 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.’” Now it should be evident to us here, that God, when He gave His Son this sign-name of Immanuel, He knew the depths of the stubborn unbelief of the human heart. He knew how stubborn Ahaz was, how unbelieving he was, and how he would refuse this wonderful sign. But I want you to see that He gave this sign to Ahaz, not only to convict him of his sins, and show him the depth of his sinfulness and unbelief, but also he gave it to him to show him the heights of His great faithfulness. In verse 11, God directs him to – “Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord God; ask it in the depth or in the height above.”

A sign, when it is given by God, is a miracle performed by a man; a prophet usually, to verify the truth of what he, the prophet, is saying. The sign was given to convince the people that the prophet had been sent by God to them; to give them a message from God. Here in these verses we find the Lord presenting Ahaz with the greatest opportunity that he would ever have. It was a very unusual opportunity that was given to Ahaz. Why should as wicked a man as Ahaz receive such a wondrous and important sign? It is because God would show him that he would be merciful to him if he would only believe in Him and receive His word.

I cannot think of any other time in the Scripture in where any other man was given an opportunity like this. It was a gift, really. It was because of God’s sheer mercy to him personally, and to the people of God, that He would offer this sign. You see, God’s desire, because He is good and merciful in His character, was to see Ahaz and all Israel delivered from all of their fears by pointing them to the future Incarnation of His Son. God was going to give the king and all the people with him, this golden opportunity to hear about the greatest of gifts that God would ever give to any man in any time; this wondrous gift of Christ. When Christ would come into the world, it would be Immanuel; God with us. The sign would lead to the reality of the riches of blessings on undeserving sinners. Blessings were being offered, and they are being offered to you today, which would be most certainly given to all men, and women, and children who would believe.

I am speaking of the free gift of salvation. This free gift which if it is received, brings the greatest of blessings. At this Christmas season, when we remember Christ’s birth, we are

remembering that God gave this gift; the gift which keeps on giving forever and ever. It is the gift of eternal life, the gift, first, of being able to hear the gospel; that salvation is found only in Christ; not from yourself, not from your justifying yourself, or declaring yourself righteous. But from Christ who being God, came to us in the form of Man, and being fully God and fully man, He could deal with your sins. He would satisfy God's justice and remove the righteous wrath that God has against you, because of your many sins, and give you this free gift because of His perfect work of obedience to fulfill God's law, and His sufferings, to satisfy God justice; His punishing Him on the cross, so that you will not be condemned, and not punished forever.

This free gift, Ahaz really needed. The context of this sign-gift being offered was that Ahaz would have the opportunity to ask that he would be delivered from all of His fears, and the fears of all the people with him, too. Politically, they were living in the time of the divided kingdom when Israel was divided into the Northern and Southern kingdoms, after the time of Solomon. Ephraim was the ten northern tribes and they were called Israel. Judah was composed of the two southern tribes. Each kingdom had their own king. King Ahaz, the king of Judah, was a particularly evil man who should have known that He needed to repent and believe the gospel. After all, he was the son of a very godly man whose name was Jotham. It is said of him in 2nd Chronicles 27: 6 – “So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” How good a thing this was for Jotham to do. Because it led to his salvation.

But you and I should understand that sometimes the children of godly men do not always turn out to be godly themselves. Sometimes even when godly mothers and fathers teach their children the words of the Lord; even when they teach them the ways of the Lord, and even though they set before them a good example, that sometimes their child will not receive the witness of their words, or the testimony of their lives. They do not believe when they see the signs of grace at work in their parent's lives. Oh, what a shame it was for Ahaz, that he did not humble himself or prepare his ways before God. Let me ask you now whether you have godly parents? Have you had parents who have given you good instruction in the word of God?

Let me ask this question: Do you think that your parents are godly people because they have always been that way? No, it is not so. They are godly because God gave them grace to humble themselves, like Jotham, so that they would prepare their ways before God. Sometimes children and young people ride the profession of faith which their parents have, for years. They assume they are saved because they have godly parents, and because they are a part of a godly family. Having godly parents is one of the greatest of blessings. I acknowledge this. But you must ask yourself these questions: Is God's grace something that I have? Have I responded to the gospel invitation to believe in Christ? Have I seen my own sinfulness, how I have fallen short of what God has expected me to do in keeping His 10 commandments and all of His holy and good moral commandments? Have I seen the unbelief of my own heart? For it is there that this sign given to Ahaz, needs to be found by you.

For you see, there are depths there that you do not understand; that depths of sin there that lurk in the thoughts of your mind and heart. But God would shine His light there, and make you joyful in receiving His all of His words to you in the Bible. King David once prayed to God and He said – “Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice!” “If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” “But there is forgiveness with You that You may be feared.” Have you sought God and found Him through believing in the name Immanuel, which means God with us? Do you realize the principle that God is with me when you are with Him? Has God brought you out of the depths of discouragement and despair over your sins and the most frustrating things in your life; things that you know that you have to deal with? Do you know Immanuel; God with you?

2nd – The name Immanuel is a sign of heights of the faithfulness of God.

“Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.” The sign given to Ahaz of the name Immanuel was intended to show him that God would be with him, if he would be with God. If he would believe, then God would be with him causing him to know His presence with him, guiding him in relation to His word, directing him into the truth of His word; causing him to rejoice continually that He was giving him the grace and strength to do His will and to live a righteous and holy life, if only he would believe. But, it says in verse 9 – “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.” Often times, it appears, there are many people who will not personally ask God to help them, and thus their faith is weak, and they are not established in knowing God’s help to them at many points. This is not only true of unbelievers, but it’s even true of people who believe themselves to be true Christians.

You will notice that Ahaz very self-righteously says to the prophet – “I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!” He did know something about the Lord. He knew that it was wrong to test the Lord. It says so in Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 16. It says there – “You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tested Him at Massah. What was the sin at Massah? It was their not believing that the Lord was among them. It was their murmuring and complaining that God had brought them out of Egypt to kill them; mistrusting His providential leading and guiding them. Now how foolish then, it was for Ahaz to pretend to religious and yet mistrust God. And yet God tells Him to ask. But Ahaz is just foolish enough to believe that it would be testing God to ask.

This is a form of unbelief, when God tells you to do something in his word, He goes further yet, and He tells you that you will find favor with Him and be blessed by Him, when you ask that He would do great things in prayer, and yet you think that it is the right thing to do to remain silent and not ask, and not pray. You will not seek God for the greatest thing – to know Him better, to love Him with all of their heart, and to seek for the wisdom which He alone can give, because you think that you know better than He does, what you should ask for? This is sinful unbelief. No, when God says that you should ask, that your joy will be full, you had better not argue with Him or think that you need to dispute with Him.

If you are truly a Christian, you will come to realize the importance of believing the promise, even when you do not know how it can be fulfilled concerning you. You should be pursuing God with all of your heart. But how easy it is for a many a Christian person to gradually fall into the sin of unbelief; to not expect great things of God, or attempt great things for God; to go many days without their thinking of the strength of their own faith, or well-being of their own soul. They will think that good things will continue to come without seeking to read the sign, or without much seeking of God at all? Psalm 105, verse 4 says – “Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore!” “Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth.” And so let’s think about this for a few minutes. There may be a reason for this unbelief, this not looking at this sign. Are you this person?

Let’s think about this together, both the young people and those who are older. Sometimes, whether you are young or old, you may not be consciously seeking God for His blessing upon your life. Am I right? You will occasionally think of how thankful you are for all of the earthly blessings which God has bestowed on you. You tell Him how thankful you are for your parents, or how thankful you are for the children or relatives that He has given to you. You think about the people that He has given you in your life, and the many blessings that you have received in relation to those people. Yes, you think to yourself, as you evaluate yourself – It is not as though you are shunning or spurning His spiritual blessings. But let me ask you this: Are you forgetting them, or taking them for granted; not believing in this sign of Immanuel; that God is with you?

Perhaps are not thinking upon the sign of God’s faithfulness to you in the way that you should be, and of how He might want you to respond to His great faithfulness. You have become very selfish about what you want out of life, and you do not think about what He might want out

of your life; to live more for Him, and more for His glory, and to learn to keep His commandments is a better sense than you have. You see, God wants you to think about the heights of His kindness, His goodness, and His faithfulness in your life. You have let many days go by, perhaps you have let many years go by, and now you are not really seeking to know the meaning of this sign; that God could be with you in a greater sense; that God could be working in your heart in a greater sense, or that He could be dwelling more richly in your heart, showing you more about Himself, and revealing to you how you could better serve Him? God takes notice of this.

If this is true of you, you may forget altogether what your greatest need is. Your greatest is to pray, it is your need to keep seeking God to give you more of Christ; to let you know more of the love of God in Christ Jesus, and then go on to find, more and more, the power of His resurrection. Ask yourself whether you think the way that the apostle Paul did in Philippians chapter 3: 7 and following? He had known the Lord for many years. But he said this: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith: that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." Do you think this way?

Sometimes young people forget to seek God to know the meaning of life. Have you ever come to God and told Him that you do not know; that you want to be shown the meaning of your life; that you want to understand the truth and be set free from your own misconceptions? People actually forget to do this. Ahaz had forgotten to do this, all through the time of his growing up, and all the time that he was king. And here he was, now; even though he was receiving the greatest sign that any man would ever receive in any time before Christ Himself appeared upon the earth, yet he still would not believe, and so he could not be established. Oh, how I pray that that you will carefully consider the natural blindness which is in your own soul if you do not know Christ or have Christ.

But you should also know also that there is a form of spiritual blindness that can come to those who believe that they are Christians, or even know that they are Christians when they fall into unbelief. When you do not engage your faith in God and in Christ, when God has told you to believe in the promises of His word; that no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly; how blessed is the man who trusts in Him. And yet you still do not believe; this is a very bad thing. This sign that was given to Ahaz was actually a prophecy, a promise of what God would do in the sending of His Son. He was to believe in this sign that was given to him. I pray that you see that the sign which was given to Him has already come to you. And will you not begin to take up the Scriptures for yourself, to read them? Will you not take up the habit of prayer, calling upon the name of the Lord, so that you might know God better, and His blessed Son, in greater depth?

We should also understand that it was not only Ahaz, the leader of the people who did not do what was right, in this regard, but it was the majority of the people of Judah as well. Most of the people of the nation had this same problem. It says in 2nd Chronicles 27, verse 2, "And Jotham did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah had done (although he did not enter the temple of the Lord)." "But still the people acted corruptly." How awful a thing it is, when God gives the good gift of a good leader, and yet the people still act corruptly. We need to take notice of this in our country. Even if the Lord was to give us a good and righteous man to be our President; and even if the Lord were to give us a majority in both houses of Congress, of righteous men; still, if the people act corruptly and do not follow the Lord

and serve Him in accordance with the truth of the Bible, His judgments will still come upon our nation for our many sins if we do not repent.

And often it is the case that God will give a country leaders in accordance with the desires of the people, especially if they have had good leaders in the past, if they still continue to love their sin and to act corruptly by breaking His commandments. I believe that it was because Judah did not respond in faith and repentance toward God, having been shown God's mercy in the gift of a good leader in Jotham, that then God gave them over to a leader who was in accordance with their own sinful desires; even Ahaz. Even though King Jotham had been a godly man, it did not insure that his son Ahaz would be a godly man. Let us understand that it was because Ahaz was a great sinner against the Lord that the Lord allowed Rezin the king of Syria and Pekin, the son of Remaliah, to come up and besiege Jerusalem. It is sinful wickedness in leaders that paves the way for a further downhill slide in a nation, morally, so that God must indeed bring his greater judgments.

In 2nd Chronicles 28 it says that Ahaz made molded images for the Baals, he burned incense in the valley of Ben-Hinnom and burned his children in the fire. He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree. Therefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria. They defeated him, and carried away, a great multitude of the people, as captives. Then Ahaz was also delivered into the hand of Pekah, the king of Israel who killed 120,000 in Judah in one day, all valiant men, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. A few verses later, in verse 19, we find this comment: "The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Judah, for he had encouraged moral decline in Israel and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord." Sin is not only a reproach to any people, but sin is something that will bring them low. Let us understand that not all depression or feeling low is as a result of sin; but you must ask yourself, if you are low, if this depression of spirits is due to your not being faithful to God, in some way or another; if you're not seeking Him, you're not believing in Him, or you're not doing what He commands? This Ahaz did not do, and so he suffered for it.

Sometimes unbelieving people, when they see someone who they admire, falling into depression, they will try to assign some other reason for their being brought low, than unbelief. It is the fault of some other person; it is the unfortunate circumstances that have come to them. It is anything else other than what it may truly be; which is, because of their sin of unbelief, in relation to God Himself, and what He says in His word that they should be doing, He has brought them into discouraging circumstances. Why does God providentially order these things? It is because they are trusting in something that they should not be trusting in; themselves, or their money, or their own supposed wisdom or strength. They have learned to reason like the world. The worldly person's reasoning to think and draw conclusions apart from the truth of God's word, and often in direct contradiction to it.

The Christian's mind should always be focused on the heights. The heights of God Himself, and His Word. This is heights of knowing the meaning of this sign we are studying. In the heights above, Christ reigns at the right hand of the Father. He is continually making intercession for you. If your mind is focused on your God and His word to you, day by day, then you will find that you will be lifted up in your heart; you will be learning to rejoice in in all things that the Lord ordains for you, because you are trusting in His leading and in His lovingkindness in the way that He orders things for you. You know that He is working all things together for your good and for your growth and for His glory. And so, you will be praying and asking for the grace that you need, from Your Lord, on a daily basis; grace and peace which you will need to face all of your difficulties, and to know God's provision for you in all of your needs.

3rd – The name Immanuel is a sign that nothing will be impossible with God.

Verse 13 – “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.’” I want you to take notice of a truth that is very important for us to remember; that unbelief is not a small thing in God’s sight. Unbelief is perhaps the greatest of all sins. It is called wearying God and men, here in verse 13. It tires out God’s patience for you, to treat God in this unholy, unloving way. In verse 22 of 2nd Chronicles 28 it says: “Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the Lord.” I hope that you can see the connection here between sin, unrepented of, and fear. Ahaz became distressed over what God was bringing into his life because of his sins; but he would not believe in God, and he would not seek Him. Therefore he became afraid, and he became increasingly unfaithful.

This is the way that sin progresses in an unrepentant person’s life. An unrepentant person will never have peace if they are going to tolerate sin in their heart and actions. Here in Isaiah 7, in the life of Ahaz, we find that all this unfaithfulness brought about fear. In verse 2 it says, “And it was told to the house of David saying, ‘Syria’s forces are deployed in Ephraim.’” “So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.” We need to see the principle given to us here, that unbelief and fear go hand in hand. Unfaithfulness to God, when it is found in ourselves or our leaders, will bring us to the place where God’s judgments will cause us to be moved as the “trees of the woods are moved with the wind.”

But look at the surprising and wonderful mercy which God shows wicked Ahaz. The Lord gives Ahaz the Old testament gospel through Isaiah the prophet. He would freely give him that which would be the solution to all of his problems and change his life for the better forever. The Lord would have him to “Take heed and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted”, He says to him in verse 4. God would do something very wonderful if only he would believe. Be careful and be calm, Ahaz, the Lord says. All this plotting against you will not stand and it will not come to pass. You do not need to fear men, Ahaz; you need to fear Me, God says. Trust in Me, and in My strength, and all will be well. God was commanding him to ask for this sign, to believe in His promise, and to look for God to act in miraculous ways on his behalf.

Ask yourself this question: Do I understand the place of faith in relation to all the trials that I am going through? Will I really let skepticism and unbelief rule in my heart and thus attempt to road block the goodness of God to me? May you not fall into this. Please remember, dear Christian, that God will be faithful to deal with you according to your faith, to reward you according to your faith. Will you not believe that all things are possible with God? Surely, that is the sign of Immanuel! The sign is, that the infinite and eternal God would become a man; would join human flesh and a human nature to Himself, and that He would become in every way like ourselves, and yet without sin. Is this not a sign to us today? If God could do this, then can He not also strengthen your faith, strengthen your love for Him, and strengthen your obedience to His blessed word? Yes, He certainly can, and He will, if you will believe this sign.