

**Isaiah 7: 1-14; “Immanuel, A Sign to be believed”, A Sermon for the Christmas Season, delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014, in the Morning Worship service.**

In a little less than a month, we as a culture and society will celebrate the birth of our Jesus our Savior. We have no commandment in the Bible for the Church to celebrate it on December the 25<sup>th</sup>; neither do we know with any certainty the particular day on which He was born. The puritan commentator John Trapp says, “For the time of His birth, Christ living just 32 years and a half, and dying at Easter, it must needs follow that he was born about the middle of the month Tisri, which answers to part of our September, at the Feast of Tabernacles, to which Feast the word *ἑσπεριος* in the Greek in John 1: 14 probably alludes to. “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.” The thing which is to be celebrated by every person on any day, not just December the 25<sup>th</sup>, is this blessed fact, that God has sent His only-begotten Son into the World, that we might live through Him. In this is love. (1 John 4: 9) Indeed it is a good thing that all the World know that our Immanuel was sent into this World by our loving heavenly Father; and that this One is the Savior of the World, especially for those who believe.

So this morning I would like to set forth to you the greatness of God’s gift to a world of fallen sinners. We will do this by looking at the beautiful Name of our Savior which is given to us in this text; the name Immanuel. The Lord Himself gave Ahaz a sign which has become one of the greatest prophecies of Christ’s birth, in the whole of Scripture. It was a sign to be asked for, and a sign to be believed. The sign itself was of a virgin who would conceive and bear a Son. And His name would be called Immanuel. We know that just before the Christ child was to be born, that the angel told Joseph to call His name Jesus; for he would save His people from their sins. But here in Isaiah it says that the virgin shall call his name Immanuel. And we do not find the name of our Savior spoken of in this way, anywhere in the Bible, except here in the book of Isaiah and in Matthew chapter 1. And so I think that we need to take Immanuel to be a spiritual name; part of the sign that was given. You and I must seek to understand the meaning of this sign-name for ourselves. In what ways is the name Immanuel a sign to be believed? Let me tell you how it is so.

**1st- The name Immanuel is a sign of depths and heights.**

In giving this sign, God knew the depths of the stubborn unbelief of the human heart. But He gave it not only to convict Ahaz of his sins, but also with the intent of many other sinful people coming to know the heights of His great faithfulness. In verse 11, God says through the prophet, “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 is given to convince the people that the prophet has 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 of opportunities. “Ask a sign for yourself; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.” This was a very unusual opportunity; it was really a gift given to Ahaz. I cannot think of another time in the Scripture in which God came to a man and told him to ask for a sign. The reason that God did this for Ahaz was because of His sheer mercy to him, and to the people of God. God would deliver them from all of their fears. God was going to give to the king and all the people with him, this golden opportunity to hear about the greatest gift that God would ever give to any man in any time; a gift which would be for all men, women, and children who would believe.

The context of this passage focuses upon the fears of this sinful king, and all the people with him. 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 called Israel. Judah was composed of the 2 southern tribes. Each had their own

kings and kingdom. King Ahaz, the king of Judah, was a particularly evil man. He was the son of a very godly man, Jotham; of whom it is said in 2 Chronicles 27: 6 – “So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” How good this was for Jotham. It led to his salvation. But you and I should understand that the children of godly men do not always turn out to be godly. Sometimes even when godly men teach their children the words of the Lord; even when they teach them the ways of the Lord, and set a good example before them, 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 whether you have godly parents? Have you had parents who have given you good instruction in the word of God? 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 so that they would prepare their ways before God. And so, you must ask yourself this question then: Is God’s grace is something that I have? Have I responded to the gospel invitation to believe in Christ? Have I begun to pursue Him with all of my heart? How easy it is for a many a young person, and sometimes many an older person, to go many days without thinking of their soul; without ever once seeking God. Sometimes such a person will seek God occasionally for His blessing upon them. They will occasionally think of how thankful they are for earthly blessings; how thankful they are for their parents, and their parent’s care over them. And if you were to have the ability to examine their heart, as God does, you would find that it is not as though they are shunning or spurning spiritual blessings. They are simply not thinking upon the signs of grace, or acting upon them to find Christ for themselves. And so they grow up, and they go away to college, and they may forget altogether their greatest need; their need to pray, and to keep seeking God to give them Christ. They may forget to ask God to reveal to them the meaning of life, so that they might know Him and serve Him and love Him. I pray that each person here today will carefully consider their own soul. I pray that you will begin to take up the Scriptures for yourself, to read them; that you would take up the habit of prayer, calling upon the name of the Lord, so that you might know God and His blessed Son for yourself. This Ahaz did not do; even though he received the greatest sign that any man ever received in any time before Christ Himself appeared upon the earth.

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. It says in 2 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 though the Lord gives 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 judgment will still come upon our nation for our many sins. 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, and they still have continued 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 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 judgments. In 2 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; your not seeking Him, your not believing in Him, or your 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, 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 God Himself, and His Word. 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 learn to rejoice 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 will be praying and asking for grace from Christ on a daily basis, to face all of your difficulties and to know God’s provision for you in all of your needs.

In verse 22 of 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 in these words; 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”. 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 is well Ahaz. "But if you will not believe," He says to him in verse 9, "surely you shall not be established." The Lord even goes so far as to tell Ahaz to ask a sign for himself; he can ask it either in the depth or the height above. Make it ever so great, Ahaz, it shall not be beyond my infinite power, the Lord is telling him.

But, I want you to note the stubborn unbelief of the human heart apart from grace. Ahaz does not respond positively at all to the Lord's overtures to him. He says, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!" Oh, Ahaz, this sounds so spiritual of you, but you are so wrong! The Lord Himself is giving you a sign. He is showing his great faithfulness to you and to all the house of David. He is going to preserve the line of the godly seed, and you would have no reason to fear if you would only believe. This should wake us up and speak volumes to us this morning. It is faith in the promises of God that establishes all the good blessings of God to ourselves, whether we are a believer or an unbeliever. And if we will not believe, then surely we shall not be established. Unbelief is perhaps the greatest of sins. It is called wearying God and men in verse 13. It tires out God's patience for you to treat God in this way. He was commanding Ahaz to ask for a sign, to believe in the promise, to look for and to expect God to act in miraculous ways on his behalf, and on behalf of the kingdom; and yet Ahaz in this mockingly pious way says, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!" I am sure that the Almighty does eventually get tired of our unbelief if we stubbornly continue in it. Ask yourself this morning; do I understand the place of faith in relation to all the trials that I am going through? Do I let skepticism and unbelief rule in my heart and thus attempt to road block the goodness of God to me? Let it be understood that God will be faithful to you if you will be faithful to Him. God will be faithful to deal with you according to your faith, to reward that faith; and He will be faithful to bring you to judgment if you will not believe. But He will be exalted in His faithfulness either way! Which will you have?

*"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm. Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill, He treasures up His bright designs, and works His sovereign will. Ye fearful saints fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for his grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work in vain; God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain." - William Cowper Hymn # 21 in the Trinity hymnal.*

**2ndly - The name Immanuel is an encouraging sign of our solemn responsibility to believe in the Son who was born.**

Ahaz was a man of blind unbelief, stubborn unbelief, with a steadfast refusal to consider God's great work and words. Let us ask ourselves this morning: What am I like in this regard? Over and over God comes to us and He says, "Be not afraid, only believe." He comes to us and He says: "Have faith in God." "For assuredly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.'" (Mark 11: 22, 23) He says, "Your faith has made you well." "Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction." (Mark 5:34) This is why you and I need to see the significance of the name Immanuel this morning. It is not as though you are never going to suffer in this life, or that eventually that you will not die from some bodily affliction. The real issue is whether or not you will suffer to the glory of God, and die gloriously in the Faith of Jesus Christ. That is what makes all the difference. It makes all the difference

when you behold the truth of Immanuel, which means “God with us”. In the giving of that Name, we behold the faithfulness of God.

It was the faithfulness of God that preserved the line of David until the Messiah was brought forth. The sinfulness of Ahaz warranted the judgment of God that He would eventually bring on the Nation of Judah. Ahaz was entirely unworthy of such a sign as this. We all are unworthy of it. The depths of our sin deserves God’s judgment and not His mercy. However, the sign of the name Immanuel should show me that God is willing to dwell with me, by my exercising faith in Jesus Christ. When I believe in the truth of the gospel, then I begin to see why my sinful independent way of thinking about things in my unbelief must go. God is the only One who can change my heart. God is the only One who can give me grace. My being unbelieving will not glorify God in any way. God speaks to me gently in the gospel, and when He does so, it is good news of great joy; it is for all people. But if it is refused, then God will still fulfill all his purpose, which is to judge all who will reject Christ. To those who would have God to show them mercy, Christ says: “Only believe.” Sadly, You will see the proof of Ahaz’ unbelief over in Matthew 1 in the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 9 it says that, “Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Ahaz is mentioned here as standing in the line of the men and Kings whom God preserved. He preserved their physical lives, long enough in each and every case, for them to have the children that would establish the Royal line of David down to the birth of Christ. Ahaz was a man who made the list of the forefathers of Christ, but he was evidently not a man that went to heaven. For there is no mention anywhere in the Scripture of his having faith in God so that he could be called a good man. It is Ahaz’s fault that he did not believe the sign. And it will be yours as well if you will not believe it for yourself.

Look over at Isaiah chapter 8, and look at verses 5-10 with me. Here we see what unbelief brings. “The Lord also spoke to me (Isaiah) again saying: ‘Inasmuch as these people refused the water of Shiloah that flow softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah’s son; now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them the waters of the River, strong and mighty – the king of Assyria and all his glory; He will go up over all his channels and go over all his banks.’” “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.” “Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces! Give ear, all you from far countries.” “Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces; Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces.” “Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak the word, but it will not stand, for God is with us.” (Immanuel) This prophecy is telling us that the reason that Israel as a nation would not be destroyed, could not be destroyed, was because it was Immanuel’s land. But it could be judged by God, and they eventually would be judged, and brought into captivity because of their sins. The whole purpose of the nation of Israel finds its fulfillment, and its reason for existence, in bringing forth the Christ child. “For unto us a child is born, and unto us a Son is given.” But many of them did not understand the purposes of God. They did not believe and trust in God to protect them and to provide for them, either for this life or for the next. Many only saw the conspiracies of men like Pekin and Rezin against them. They saw only the armies of the Assyrians poised to come at them. But those persons who were people of faith, in Judah, said what is recorded in verse 10 – “Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak the word, but it will not stand, for God is with us.” (Immanuel) To apply this to ourselves: You and I need to take care that we exercise faith in God, and in all of His promises. We must truly believe in the sign which the name Immanuel represents. God is with us, as we trust in Him, not as we doubt Him. We should not allow ourselves through unbelief to become this same kind of people that many of these people were; people who fell into unbelieving thinking.

If you find yourself trying to assign the reason for all the bad and difficult things which are coming upon our society as being the conspiracies of evil men; think again. It is God who gives

us peace. It is God who brings blessings to men and to societies. It is not men, ultimately that you have to deal with; it is God. Verses 11-18 of chapter 8 of Isaiah, however, will give you the answer to your unbelief if you have it. "For the Lord spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying: 'Do not say, "A conspiracy," concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.'" "The Lord of hosts, Him shall you hallow; Let Him be your dread." "He shall be as a sanctuary....." Let me ask you, now, if the Lord Jesus is a sanctuary to you? "Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee." "Let the water and the blood, from Thy riven side which flowed, be of sin the double cure; save from wrath, and make me pure." Verse 14 of Isaiah 8 goes on to say: "But Christ is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." "And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken, be snared and be taken." This is what happens to all of those people who think that all that is happening to them is a result of some conspiracy theory.

Let us understand what we are thinking about here today. In order to be saved and in order to grow in your faith, you need to be delivered from all of your fears. To be delivered from your fears you must see the Lord Jesus Christ as the Child born for you, as the Son given to you. You must see Him as God with you, in the presence of His Holy Spirit. You see this by faith. In order to be saved, in order to be filled with faith and hope and love, you cannot walk in the way of unbelief. You must trust in God's word. Listen to verse 16, "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples." "And I will wait on the Lord, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; and I will hope in Him." "Here am I," says the Lord Jesus Christ, "and the children whom the Lord has given Me!" "We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion." God is with us in the person of Jesus Christ. The name Immanuel is a sign; of the depths of our need of Christ, and the heights of the faithfulness of God to His promise. And when we believe in our Immanuel, our Lord Jesus, we ourselves become a sign to people around us. We become a sign and a wonder to others who see the reality of our faith. God is with us, to save us from our sins, to save us from our enemies, and to save us from ourselves, so that we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life. The Lord has given us a great sign in the name of His Son; our Immanuel. Let us believe it, and live according to the truth of it.