

ISAIAH 7: 10-14a
(Reading: Isaiah 7:1-14a)

Without God's Voice There Is No Sound!

The text begins with the word, “again.” So we sense a pause before verse 10. A pause that some say could have meant that this conversation between the King and the Prophet was some time later. So it might have been a day later, even perhaps a month later. And it could have occurred in the palace, instead of on the outskirts of the city.

Such a view, though, would fail to see the strong connection there is between these passages. For what was it that verse 9 ended by so strongly emphasising? Wasn't it that call to believe? Verse 9 picked up on verse 4 where Ahaz is told to be careful, to keep calm, and not to be afraid. And aren't those qualities exactly what the Lord gives you through faith?

But we have also seen that Ahaz does not believe. Rather than depend on the God of the covenant – the One who had saved the Hebrews so many times before in miraculous ways – he will get out of this his way. He'll do the deal with Assyria.

What pause there is between verses 9 and 10 is simply the opportunity for reflection. And especially for Ahaz it is the time for repentance. Something he doesn't see the need for but he should!

So the Lord ups the ante. He takes his challenge to Ahaz to a new level. A level which will show Ahaz for who he truly is, for it will reveal the Lord God by what He does. So when verse 10 begins “Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz,” it is what's been said through Isaiah the prophet. And this time it is even more gracious to Ahaz. It's almost as if the new level the Lord takes with Ahaz is a lot closer to his level. “Ask the LORD your God for a sign,” says Isaiah. A warm invitation. The prophet encourages him to see for himself that the Lord can do anything. In fact this “anything” covers everything! “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, **whether in the deepest depths or the highest heights.**”

You Couldn't Get It Much Clearer Than This

YOU COULDN'T GET IT MUCH CLEARER THAN THIS! And that's exactly what our first aspect to the sermon is about this morning. But let's be clear on what a “sign” is here. When you think of a sign it might be that object on the side of the road telling you the way to go to a particular place. Or perhaps it's warning you to slow your speed.

How you regard that sign will depend upon whoever has placed the sign there. A sign advertising a café in the next town should be regarded differently than the sign telling you the speed limit is changing.

For the Old Testament people of God, the word for “sign” here has a direct connection with their covenant God. Their word for “sign” either signified an unusual event itself or in some way points to that unusual event. It may be also something that points back to an historical event or looks forward to what will be in paradise. Whichever way, when it was drawn in with the name of Yahweh, it meant an acknowledgement of Him. **YOU COULDN'T GET IT MUCH CLEARER THAN THIS!**

This is not about something that Ahaz can't handle. He can state his own proof for seeing that God can do all He has promised He will do. All that Ahaz needs to do is to ask God for it – the God who here is specified as “the LORD your God.” So the God he is connected to in a special way.

Remember, Ahaz hasn't yet openly denied the God of his father David. There's been no clear action he's taken against the Lord.

The other aspect is the magnitude of what he can ask for. In effect he's told, "Go as low as you want or go as high as you want."

What is low could go as far as what comes out of the underworld. There is the example of Saul who had the sign of Samuel appearing from the realm of the dead in 1st Samuel 28. And what is as high as he could go could involve something like the sign of when God kept the sun in the sky. That was the time He gave extra time for the Israelites to complete defeating the five kings of the Amorites in Joshua 10.

Signs of such wonder had also been granted on other occasions. Who could forget the bush which didn't burn in Exodus 3 verse 2? That was a sign to Moses when he faltered in his faith. And then it was Ahaz's own son, Hezekiah, to whom Isaiah later gave a sign. We read about that in Isaiah 38 and 2nd Kings 20. When Hezekiah was so ill that he was on the point of death and the Lord healed him through Isaiah he asked for a sign that he would indeed live longer. That sign was the sundial going back ten steps. And, interestingly, the ten steps it went back on were down the stairway named after Ahaz!

Such a sign would convince Ahaz! YOU COULDN'T GET IT MUCH CLEARER THAN THIS!

You Couldn't Get It Much Worse Than This

But, then, the text goes on to tell us that YOU COULDN'T GET MUCH WORSE THAN THIS. This is our second aspect.

You might be wondering here, though. This point is so different from the first! And the text doesn't seem that way. Isn't it Ahaz who in verse 12 is actually being quite godly in his response to the Lord? By saying, "I will not ask; I will not put God to the test," doesn't he endorse Deuteronomy 6 verse 16? For that verse says God's people should not test Him as they did at Masseh. They must simply obey His commands.

Ah, Ahaz has a little knowledge. But as the saying goes, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." And it's dangerous exactly because it is so little! How many people brought up in the Christian faith don't prove that? They end up using God's Word against Him. They take it right out of context and twist it right around to suit their own selfish way!

Which is exactly what Ahaz does here. Because who is it actually inviting Ahaz to ask for a sign? It's the LORD God Himself! So how can you be going against Him if He's the One telling you to do it?

This is not a good sign for the future is it? Because what Ahaz is showing here is a deviousness that tries to give him a good image while at the same time he's going to do what he wants to do all along! He'd make a great politician! Oops – he is one!

But he's far from being some everyday type of politician here, though. He is the king of Judah. He is the One in the line of David. He is the man who should be leading His people in the way of the God of the Hebrews. For it was the Hebrews Yahweh had chosen from among all the people of the earth to witness to His grace. He was the One who had performed such miraculous signs amongst them before proving that to be so.

As we move into the verse 12 and 13 we see that this involves a lot more than Ahaz. The word "you" in verses 13 and 14, for example, is in the plural. This is also about the people represented by the king. Isaiah tells that king he is wearying God. God's patience does have a limit.

The tone changes completely. A sign which would have been a promise is going to turn into threat. Instead of salvation there will come judgement.

You can notice that in the change of personal pronoun tied in with God. In verse 11 Isaiah spoke to Ahaz about "the LORD **your** God." Now in verse 13 the prophet says "**my** God."

This is because Ahaz refuses to believe. And in his unbelief there is only one thing that can be done. The thing so many churches and Christians don't want to hear about. And certainly they don't want you to preach or teach about it!

You see, if you don't come to a living faith in the Saviour God of Israel – the Redeemer – you will go to hell. It's not a matter of if but when. And everything around you and in you will confirm that.

No wonder Ahaz doesn't want to have the sign. Because that would mean he would be confronted with the consequence of what he's doing. Just like people today don't like to think of death. And if they do they want to sanitise it right away as going into some nothingness or loveliness for all.

Don't say people are going to hell! Don't talk about sin and repentance and consequences. This post-modern world and the post-modern church just wants you to feel comfortable. They respect all differences. Every person's journey is uniquely their own. And so they do leave us all alone, don't they?

But here is a God who acts. Here is the divine being who won't leave us to ourselves. In fact, we will hear how the sign pointed to He Himself coming among us – and definitely upsetting us!

YOU COULDN'T GET IT MUCH WORSE THAN THIS. God's people are without God. They reject Him. And so God will leave them alone, just as he does today to those who choose not to believe the gospel. And that's judgment!

It is a terribly sad time in Judah's history, a time when they could have witnessed so powerfully to the nations of the world as to how great and gracious God is, but instead they only showed how much like everyone else they were. Isn't that the same in any generation when the Lord's people turn to their own devices and resources? Then they do the gospel the most terrible disservice. And it's the Lord who is brought down in the eyes of mankind.

You Won't Get God Any Closer Than This!

You see, **YOU WON'T GET GOD ANY CLOSER THAN THIS!** This is our third aspect. For the opportunity Ahaz has here is the most saving one of all.

I need to be careful here not to move into the description of the sign itself in verse 14. That's another sermon! But what we can note is that when verse 14 begins by saying, "Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign," this is more than another of God's signs. For marvellous and miraculous as those signs were and still are – who can forget the sign of the rainbow? – this is the sign to outdo them all. Isaiah is indeed full of the Messiah!

This is a clear word that it is going to be taken out of Israel's hands altogether. While God's people have not yet reached the point of no return it's obvious that it won't be through this way that the Lord's Day will come. When God says they have tried His patience it is more than frustrating this one particular prophet. It's not only about a few things that haven't gone the way He would have liked. It's a whole history of the royal family of David again and again refusing to be disciplined by the Lord! They would not believe without seeing. And when signs were offered to them to see, so that they might believe, they wouldn't even look!

Already we picked that up in the thought of a remnant remain earlier in chapter 7. Remember the name of Isaiah's son, Shear-Jashub – 'a remnant will remain'? The remnant that will remain when the physical nation has long gone, as Isaiah 6:13 tells us.

It's that remnant which is the Church of Christ today. We are those who have seen the sign. The very sign that we must point others to.

David McCasland relates when he made a December visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. He paused to admire the magnificent Christmas tree. It was covered with angels and surrounded at its base by an elaborate 18th century nativity scene. Nearly two

hundred figures, including shepherds, the Magi, and a crowd of townsmen, were in that scene. They looked in anticipation towards the manger or gazed up in awe at the angels.

But one figure appeared different from the rest. He was a barefoot man, a man who carried a heavy load on his back and looked at the ground. It struck him that this man, like so many today, was so weighed down he couldn't see the Messiah.

That's what sin does. It keeps us from looking up. Because once we do look up our whole outlook is completely different. When you repent and are forgiven you are really freed up! Ahaz wouldn't look up. He was stuck in a real hole. And he couldn't be dug out of it.

But there are many today whose focus might just be shifted. You have to remember that Christ came into this world to lift up those bowed down. Jesus used words from later in Isaiah to announce His God-given mission on earth. As He said in Luke 4, verse 18, "he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed."

Dear friend, there is a reason for the season. Let them hear it – and let them see it! **YOU WON'T GET GOD ANY CLOSER THAN THIS!**