

ISAIAH 7:14b-17

(Readings: Isaiah 8:1-10; Luke 2:8-20)

Without God Himself There's Nothing Else!

Wasn't that some sign for those shepherds? For not only was there the Christ-child in the manger but there was the whole way they got to hear about it! And not just one angel either – they got the complete choir! What a sound that would have been? Not a missed note there! Just the most perfect harmony!

Now, while the shepherds were socially the lowest of the low, it wouldn't have taken them long to put the pieces of this picture together. They would have known about Israel's great coming hope of the Messiah. There would have been instruction from Isaiah's prophecy about Him when they were young.

I mean, how many pretenders hadn't there been throughout history? Even in their own lifetime they would have heard of them - even perhaps met a few! And they would've known that they weren't the real thing – much as many Jews may have put their trust in them!

This is the Sign from the Lord Above

This was a sign alright. In the words of the first aspect to the text this morning, **THIS IS THE SIGN FROM THE LORD ABOVE.**

You can be sure that they would have heard the facts behind the miracle of the virgin birth then and there as well. What was recorded in Matthew 1 verse 23 as fulfilling Isaiah 7 verse 14, would have been talked about here.

But that does make us wonder about this text, though, doesn't it? Because in Isaiah 7 you get the idea it was a sign already fulfilled in Ahaz's lifetime. Otherwise it wouldn't have made sense, would it?

I mean, didn't that reading from Isaiah 8 raise the possibility that the virgin was Isaiah's wife? So in verse 3 there Isaiah takes what is thought to be another wife and gives birth to a son called Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. We already met his oldest son early in chapter 7 – Shear Jashub. But this other child's name is not Immanuel, as the prophecy declared.

Still others thought it was referring to the birth of a son to Ahaz, namely Hezekiah. Yet Hezekiah also was not called Immanuel. Besides, he was already born by this time.

There are three views as to who is the virgin in the text. There are those who think it was referring to someone born at the time of the scene in the text. They are known as having the non-Messianic view. They believe everything the Lord means Isaiah to say was brought to pass soon after. So it was a clear sign to Ahaz at that time – and to the people of that time. On the opposite side of interpreting this text are those who say that it is only Messianic. They point to what is said in Isaiah 9 verses 6 and 7 as a clear allusion to the coming Messiah. And as this chapter is very much tied up with the same theme of Immanuel, they say that the quoting of this verse in Matthew 1 makes it clear it can only be Messianic.

And then there is the dual-fulfilment view. This says that it would have been a sign to Ahaz. A woman of his time who was then a virgin later became married and gave birth to a child called Immanuel. A child whom Ahaz would know as well as he knew Isaiah's two sons and what their names meant. But that, they say, is the first hill-top that you see in the range of hills. For the next and ultimate hill-top would be 700 years later through a woman who would give birth to something truly miraculous. This view does justice to verses 15 and 16 in our text and to what Matthew later quoted from this passage.

You soon see that it can only be one of the last two views which could be correct. Isaiah is all about the Messiah. To say that this couldn't be now takes it out of its most immediate context, which is exactly what those who claim it couldn't be Messianic say they're trying to do! It's helpful that another prophet Micah says the same. In chapter 5 verse 3 of his prophecy he says, "Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is labour gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites." And he goes on, in verses 4 and 5, "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace."

This is the Proof God comes down Below

It is this we will see about the Messiah in the next part this morning. For now we see, **THIS IS THE PROOF GOD COMES DOWN BELOW**. This is our second aspect to the text.

We have looked at who this "virgin" could have been. That she was a virgin is clear from the word used by Isaiah and how it has been used before then in Scripture and since, especially in Matthew 1. Now we come to the child himself. This is the child who will be called "Immanuel." "Immanuel" when translated means "God with us." In a similar way to what Isaiah has named his two sons, there is a clear word spoken just in the name itself.

Now, Israel had a God with them. Unlike any of the other nations, they had a personal God. They had a deity who was not cruel but merciful. And yet He was the God who was not controlled by any of man's whims.

It was quite a name to confront Ahaz with. He wanted gods he controlled. That's why he chased after the foreign gods hoping that by his manipulation of them they might bring him the success he thought they had brought to their countries. Just think about the fact that he's recorded as worshipping Syrian gods! Fat lot of good that did the Syrians when the Assyrians came calling! But then I'm sure there would have been some Assyrian gods he would turn to. Oh, Ahaz! Ahaz! Even though Isaiah prophesies again about Immanuel in chapter 8 verse 8, he's not going to change. And then verse 10 of chapter 8 is quite frank about the fate of all those who go their own way. God is not with them.

But He is with His own! Verse 15 in our text is clear about this. This special one won't be brought up in the most luxurious circumstance. But already when He is young He will know and show what God's way is.

So what we have in the next few chapters of Isaiah is a very special child. Not only does his name highlight something but his qualities confirm the same. For while it is very possible that an ordinary child be given this name, what we see following on from our text points to someone quite unique. Isaiah 11 begins in verse 1, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. And verses 2 and 3 there continue, "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD – and he will delight in the fear of the LORD."

Here it is helpful to remember the old quote about the two testament in Scripture: "The new (testament) is in the old (testament) concealed, while the old (testament) is in the new (testament) revealed." For while the saints of old knew this was tied up with the Messiah, the son of David, they weren't to know exactly what this would mean.

What is perhaps saddest of all is that even today Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Some years ago they thought it might be when a certain rabbi from New York was going to visit Israel. And all the while Immanuel had already come – two thousand years ago! God's Son has won, and they still look to a man with a limited political persuasion. Not that much different than Ahaz, is it? You have to pray that they'll look up! So let's do pray such

words now. Let's pray for physical Israel that she might join spiritual Israel, and so truly come home!

This is the Judgment on Those going their own way

But now we have come to the third aspect in connection with the text this morning. Now we come to see that **THIS IS THE JUDGMENT ON THOSE GOING THEIR OWN WAY.**

Dear believer, don't you wonder at which point Isaiah knows that Ahaz is beyond hearing him.

You know how it is. It's like you've suddenly lost someone's attention. Someone you are talking to who was actively listening but then, all of a sudden, you notice he's not listening.

That person is just not interested any more. He's away in some dream world of his own.

But, then, Isaiah knew this was something that needed saying. It wasn't a matter of a social chit-chat. This was deadly serious – and while Ahaz might not be interested anymore it was something that had to be said because it was nothing less than God's Word itself!

Ministers and elders in the church experience this with discipline cases. While those they're pleading with to change seem deaf to it all yet it has to be said. Especially it must be said because of the consequences of what's coming to them and those around them.

Now, it may have been something that has been said to them before. They may even nod away and say, "Heard it all before," but it cannot stop them being told again.

In the same way, it will not stop Isaiah stating the facts to Ahaz again. Verses 16 and 17 are about this. Isaiah tells the king he has no idea of what he's leading himself and his people into. You can't make a deal with the devil! And yet he has! Just like all those who defiantly continue on when they're under church discipline. They may even tell you that they've never been happier in their lives!

Well, they're telling you a lie. They know they're wrong – very wrong. Just like Ahaz knows he's going against the LORD God. But both will keep on going. And the less they hear from the Lord's spokesmen about it the better!

Because of the fall into sin, salvation now cannot come without judgment. For just as some are graciously elected to eternal life so also there are those left to go their own godless way. They have been told. But like Pharaoh their hearts only hardened against it.

And remember, Pharaoh became even more hardened after nine of those ten plagues! Those signs couldn't shift him! Even the tenth one didn't do it in the end, either, because he came chasing after those Hebrews with his army! And neither would this sign change Ahaz now.

So Ahaz is told he's going to get judgment. He will suffer God's discipline through the Assyrians. The very ones he's put so much hope in will devastate him and his kingdom.

Dear friend, the lesson is very simple. Don't put your trust in men. They will always come to a sad end. But put your faith in God and not only will you come to the most joyful end, you'll meet and live with God Himself! Then your life itself will be the judgment on those who don't believe. Because now God with us is God in us.