

Isaiah 7:1-17

“God with Us: Promise and Warning”

Imago Dei Church | 12/1/2019 | 2 Services | Sunday AM

INTRODUCTION

Turn to Isa. 7.

I want to invite you to think with me about the idea of “presence.” Presence...*with*-ness. Being there. It has a kind of awesome power.

The presence of parent has the ability to calm a child after a bad dream.

The presence of a long-time friend can have a comforting and life-giving effect on us.

When someone we’re close to is dying, we make every effort to get their before they pass.

In our day, the power of presence is underappreciated, and we’re worse off for it.

Technology can make us feel like we’re everywhere while in reality we’re never really with anyone—truly knowing them and being known by them. (APP growth groups, hospitality, the church)

Of course, sometimes presence can be a scary thing, right?

Students, if the teacher walks by when you're taking a test, you tense up.

Or if we're driving and we see a police car by the side of the road, we quickly check our speed. They didn't have to do anything...they were just there!

In Isa. 7, we are introduced to the great Christmas theme of Immanuel, “God with us.” God ... present ... with us.

And just like the presence of another person can have enormous power, so in Isaiah 7 the presence of God is meant to be a powerful force in the life of the king of Judah—a man named Ahaz.

Main Idea: The promise of “God with us” is an invitation to trust him in and above all things.

Unfortunately, as we'll see in Isaiah 7, Ahaz fails to trust in the God who promised his presence.

In order to understand this passage and its message for us, we'll need to understand a little of its historical setting (cf. 2 Kings 15:27-16:20).

As we can see from Isa. 7:1, this all unfolds in the middle of some political and military turmoil.

- A) Assyria is the world power at this time (2 Kings 15:29), and [1] Syria/Rezin and [2] the northern kingdom of Israel/Pekah have teamed up to oppose them.
- B) [3] Judah (southern kingdom; Ahaz), as part of her slow moral and spiritual decline, take the pro-Assyria posture in hopes of appeasing the military powerhouse.
- C) Syria and Israel come against Judah, probably to install a new ruler (Isa. 7:6) that would lead Judah to help them against Assyria (2 Kings 16:5).
- D) While Ahaz prevents the Israel/Syria attack from working, Syria is still able to gain some small victories to weaken Judah (2 Kings 16:6).
- E) It's at this point that the events of Isa. 7 seem to take place. Ahaz is under siege, and the temptation is to turn to Assyria for help, rather than trusting in the Lord.

F) That's exactly what Ahaz ends up doing in the course of our text. He rejects the presence of God in order to trust in himself and in other human powers, namely Assyria.

(APP) So you can from this overview what really is the main application point for us in this text: **Will we trust in the God who is with us? On this side of Christ's coming, that particularly means (as we'll see), will we trust in Christ, who IS Immanuel?**

But even though Ahaz fails to receive the grace that God's presence meant for him, I want to tease out 4 implications that trusting in "God with us" might have for our own lives.

"God with us" means ...

1. PEACE FOR THE FEARFUL

(2-4)

[2] When the house of David was told, "Syria is in league with Ephraim," the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

So Ahaz and his people are confronted with the news that Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel are in cahoots, and everyone starts to tremble.

What are we gonna do? Who's gonna save us.
They're scared and fearful.

So the Lord sends the prophet Isaiah to the king to bring a message of peace. And he does so by reminding Ahaz of 2 things: (1) God's faithfulness and (2) God's superiority.

God's Faithfulness – v.3, where Isaiah brings along his son named "Shear-jashub," which means "a remnant shall return"

Isaiah reminds him that God's promises have not expired.

No matter what happened to Judah, a remnant would return because God is always faithful to his promises.

God's Superiority – v.4, where the two enemies of Judah are called smoldering stumps. Their fire has gone out. Their worst has passed. The Lord still stands.

In light of these promises, 4 commands:

Be careful (pay attention); Be quiet (keep calm); Don't fear (an invitation to trust God); and Don't let

your heart faint (don't waiver; persevere in that trust)

(APP) I think it's instructive to us see *how* God addresses the fear in Ahaz and the people's hearts. **He does so by redirecting their gaze away from their enemies, away from themselves, and to God himself, who is with them.**

It's disingenuous to say that there aren't real dangers and fearful things in our lives. There are. And the Bible knows that.

That's why Scripture doesn't tell us to deal with our fear like the kid who's scared there are monsters in the closet ("It's not real. It's not real. Its's not real.").

Instead, the Bible gives us Psalm 23:4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Friends, I don't know what brings fear and anxiety to your heart today. I'd love to tell you those things aren't real (and for some of you, that might be the case). But I do know that God is faithful and God is bigger.

The promises that “God is with us,” then, means peace for the fearful. It also means...

2. SECURITY FOR THE WEAK

(5-9)

[5] Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, ... [7] thus says the Lord GOD:

“It shall not stand,
and it shall not come to pass.
[8] For the head of Syria is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.
And within sixty-five years
Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.
[9] And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.
If you are not firm in faith,
you will not be firm at all.”

The contrast that is drawn for us in these verses is primarily between weakness and strength. Between stability and something that is fleeting. ([7] “It shall not stand”)

God responds to the aggression from Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel with this prophecy that says, **“Those who rely on their own power will fail and fall. Those who rely on me will stand firm.”**

Twice in these verses you see this little limerick: “the head of [country] is [city], and the head of [city] is king.” (8a, 9a).

He’s basically saying, “He’s only a man.”

And in v.8 he highlights the outcome of these men:
“within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.”

So Ahaz is presented with a challenge, of sorts. Will he fear these weak and fleeting men, or will he stand firm?

But notice what his means for standing firm is:

[9b] If you are not firm in faith,
you will not be firm at all.”

The Lord tells him, your stability, longevity, strength, and survival will not come by trusting in yourself or in Assyria—you also are just a man, and so is Assyria.

Your security will come from trusting in the Lord.

Like a father that helps a child stay upright as it’s trying to ride a bike, the presence of God provides stability that we cannot provide ourselves. Why? Because we are only human. We weren’t meant to uphold the

foundations of the world, we weren't meant to ensure the sun's rising and it's setting, and we weren't meant to save ourselves from sin, death, and Satan. God alone can do this.

God DOES NOT say, 'Don't be weak and fleeting like these mere men. Be strong and firm.'

INSTEAD, he says, 'Your only hope for security and stability and salvation is to firmly trust in my presence with you.'

(APP) This corresponds with the gospel message, which is for the weak (cf. Rom 5, Matt. 9)

God with us means peace for the fearful, security for the weak, and thirdly...

3. WARNING FOR THE UNBELIEVING (10-13, 17)

This is the subtext that has been running throughout this whole text, and here it becomes explicit. Much of this text isn't so much **promise** as it is **warning**.

Not only are we **invited** to trust in God's presence, we are **warned** that to do anything else is sinful, destructive, and futile.

That's why verse 9 ends the way it does. If you aren't firm in your trust of the Lord, you won't be firm at all.

It's not like you would have been kinda firm. ZERO firmness.

(APP) That's the way saving faith works. We don't kinda trust God and kinda trust in our status, success, knowledge, money, or other people, or other gods. To say that we trust God for salvation but we've got a backup is to say we don't really trust him.

So in order to show Ahaz that he is trustworthy, God offers to give him a sign, no matter how big (v.11). But Ahaz refuses and he uses pious language: "I will not put the Lord to the test."

But God is not inviting Ahaz to *test* God's trustworthiness. He's inviting Ahaz to *behold* it.

Ahaz refuses not because he reveres the Lord but because he rejects the Lord.

And so we see from Isaiah's reaction that Ahaz's hardness of heart has finally broken through. So much so that Isaiah separates Ahaz from the Lord altogether.

In v.11, Ahaz is invited to ask a sign of “the Lord your God”. But in v.13, Ahaz is wearing “my God.”

The consequences of his lack of trust are spelled out in v.17:

[17] The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!”

As Ahaz runs to the king of Assyria for deliverance, Assyria becomes the agent of God’s judgment on Ahaz.

4. HOPE FOR THE BELIEVING

(14-16)

As Ahaz rejects the Lord’s offer for a sign, God insists on giving him one anyway.

This too, is in large part a message of judgment. But mixed in is also a message of promise.

[14] Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. [15] He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. [16] For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

Isaiah predicts that there will soon be born a boy that will be called Immanuel, God with us.

The naming of this child is a rebuke of Ahaz. God is with them, yet Ahaz has rejected God’s presence.

The word “**virgin**” is not indicating that this is a virgin conception, but rather that the woman who is giving birth is at the time of the prophecy an unmarried woman of childbearing age. This is happening soon, it seems.

v.15 tells us that when the boy grows up, he will enjoy a time of relative peace, at least when contrasted with being overthrown by the foreign invaders.

And **v.16** tells us that *before* the boy is grown up, the two nations that are coming against Ahaz will fall.

Not only are there glimmers of hope in his name and in the prophecy. But if you continue reading into ch. 8 you see that this message, “Immanuel: God with us” as a recurring theme.

And we’re left wondering and anticipating, is there more to “God with us” than a simple boy who marks the end of Syria and the Northern Kingdom’s attacks?

It's precisely because of this anticipation that the NT picks up this prophecy and says it was all pointing to the true Immanuel, Jesus.

In Matthew 1, the Gospel writer tells us that the virgin Mary had conceived a child. And then Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7 to interpret for us what's going on:

[22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: [23] "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

In the birth of Christ, then, we have the supreme fulfillment of Immanuel, God with us.

God became man, took on human flesh, and dwelt among us. And just as it was for Ahaz, we are invited to trust in God's presence in Christ.

We are invited to see and believe that he has overcome all of our weakness in his perfect life, paid for all our unbelief through his sacrificial death, and conquered all our fears in his victorious resurrection.

For us, the question was the same as it was for Ahaz and the nation of Judah: "Will you trust in the God who is with you?"