

Isaiah 7:10-14

10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. 13 Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel (NRSV).

Introduction

I love Sunday morning worship. I love how we get to share this sense of togetherness. I love the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I love the peace, the spiritual revival, and the divine nurturing that we get through worship and how it helps us through our daily lives. I love the Advent season, all the decorations, festivities, and the sharing of love. I love the way we focus on Jesus during this time of year. I love how Advent leads us to the beautiful story of the baby Jesus. Today is the 3rd Sunday of Advent which is the Sunday of Joy. Jesus brings Joy into a world that needs it and Jesus brings Joy to us.

One thing that I have gone into detail this year is the exile. The Bible is all about the divine relationship with humanity and prophecy is all about God, the covenant, the will of God, and God's interaction with humanity. The covenant connects the Old Testament to the New Testament to us here today. It is all connected because we are in a relationship with God. It is God's desire to be in a covenant relationship with the people from the very beginning. It starts with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Stay true to God and you get to keep living in the garden where you have an easy life of purity and innocence. If you disobey God there is a consequence. You get kicked out of the garden, have to toil the land, and suffer death. Then the covenant with Abraham is passed through the generations to Moses. When they get to the Promised Land, the deal is set. The land is promised due to the covenant. I cannot tell you how many times the covenant is re-certified in the Bible. The Scriptures repeat the deal over and over. The one true God will be their God and they will be God's people. They get the land that is flowing with milk and honey and all of its abundant resources. They don't have to worry when they conquer the land because God is with them. In order to keep the land, all they have to do is keep the covenant. If they break the covenant then they don't get to keep the land. The exile is all about what happened to the people for breaking covenant.

It is easy for us to look back in the Bible and wonder, why on earth would people break covenant when they have it so good? The answer is the same as today. People prefer their own thing to God's thing, even though God has provided us with everything. The exile is a very important event in Old Testament history because it shows a great lesson in great detail; the devastation that occurs from rejecting God. When the prophets deliver the word of God there are four key components to the message. There is a reminder of the covenant. There is a warning against breaking covenant. There is a word about the consequences of breaking covenant. And there is hope, a promise to return to the Promised Land and the promise of a redeemer.

Isaiah is considered one of greatest prophets. He confronted evil and called for a return to the ways of God. That word was unpopular because people prefer to do their own thing instead of God's thing. Isaiah delivered the word of God to stubborn and obstinate kings. Ahaz, the King of Judah was one of them. He was a bad king, unfaithful, practiced witchcraft, and pagan idolatry. God instructs Isaiah to meet King Ahaz with a message of hope, a word of comfort and

assurance. All you have to do is renew your faith and God promises to destroy your enemies and save you. The word of prophecy is really good news. The kingdom of Judah will not fall. However, prophecy has a condition and it is a very important condition - if you stand firm in faith. It seems so simple and easy. It is a biblical lesson that is repeated maybe a hundred times. God will protect you if you stand firm in faith; deliverance will come through divine intervention not military might.

After announcing God's sure protection of Judah against hostile forces the prophet offers a concrete sign of God's intention as evidence. This is like saying "since you don't believe my word, let me offer to you some evidence, you name it, God will make it happen as proof." This would confirm the divine promise. The prophet offers a confirming sign as a sign of reassurance. However, this offer is met with a failure of faith. Ahaz is unwilling to accept the prophetic word. He rejects the message of the prophet Isaiah. This means that he rejects the word of God. When you reject the word of God, you reject God. In the Bible things don't work out well for people when they fail to stand firm in faith. So, God through the prophet Isaiah offers a sign, the prophecy of Immanuel, God is with us.

The presence of God is a great source of comfort. Here in the sanctuary the presence of God is a great source of comfort. In our daily lives the presence of God is a great source of comfort. When times are difficult, the presence of God is a great source of comfort. The presence of God is a great source of comfort for God's people. Now whenever we hear the Immanuel prophecy, we can't help but think of the beautiful picture of the baby Jesus. Oh how we love the baby Jesus! Immanuel has the fantastic meaning of God is with us. Mathew knew Jesus as God is with us. Jesus is the divine presence. The name Immanuel embodies the promise of God's saving presence. As Christians, we carry Christ with us in our daily lives. Now it is our responsibility to represent Jesus to the world. If Christians would be like Jesus, in our society today, there would be no war, poverty, abuse, or indifference. All of the churches would be packed with worshippers. What is needed from every child of God is the appropriate response to God's grace! Embrace the sign of Immanuel for God is with us.