

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).

Ahaz the King of Judah was unfaithful. He rejected the message of the prophet Isaiah, which means he actually rejected the word of God. In the Bible things just don't work out well for people when they do not stand firm in faith. Israel had it good in the past with God as the sovereign ruler. God freed the people from slavery, led them into the conquest of Canaan, and continued to look after the people by raising Judges. But the nation of Israel, true to human nature, transgressed from the will of God and wanted an earthly king, instead of God as their king and divine sovereign ruler. This is when their problems really started. Like dominoes they experienced one problem right after another.

The kingdom divides and both Israel and Judah have bad and unfaithful kings. Both kingdoms weaken while Assyria grows strong and into a mighty empire. Assyria conquers its neighbors, gains resources, and its military might and wealth compounds. Israel and Syria align in defense against the threat of Assyria but king Ahaz of Judah decides to align with Assyria, instead of Israel. Ahaz thinks it is best to side with the strongest enemy for protection. I would like to point out that one of the key points of the Bible is that even though the people transgress from the will of God, the Lord continues maintain a relationship with humanity. The Lord uses the prophet Isaiah and instructs him to tell king Ahaz not to align with Assyria, but to put his trust only in God. If he obeys then God will destroy the enemies and save him. So, Ahaz is instructed and everybody should live happily ever after. King Ahaz is also warned. Isaiah 7:9 If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all (NRSV). This is a very important point, you have to stand firm in faith. The Bible lessons repeat. You have to stand firm in faith. This is good news, obey and you get to live happily ever after. But Ahaz is a bad guy and refuses to obey. God, being true to God's nature, does not give up on him. Isaiah does not say "Oh well, I tried, I did my job, man are you gonna get it!" God, through prophet Isaiah, offers a sign. God makes an honest effort to convince him. The sign is a confirmation, a validation of divine prophecy. You call it in advance, then you see it and you will know this is the real deal. But Ahaz is a bad king and refuses to believe.

This brings us to the Scripture. What is meant in the original text of Isaiah is a sign for king Ahaz. Matthew gives it a totally different meaning. Matthew and the early church used Isaiah to understand Jesus. Matthew's position is that Jesus is Immanuel which means God's presence with us. The picture that Matthew paints is that Jesus is God with us. It is a very beautiful picture, a promise of hope for the future. The Lord himself will give you a sign. Now when we hear the Immanuel prophecy we can't help but think of the beautiful picture of the birth of Jesus. Immanuel has a fantastic meaning - God is with us. It is not that Matthew was trying to contradict Isaiah. It is that Mathew knew Jesus as God is with us. It is beautiful picture.

The title of the message is *How do we find Jesus?* Matthew saw Jesus as God is with us. Matthew saw Jesus as a divine presence. I'm going to tell you a real life story. I saw Jesus a couple of weeks ago. Now, before you think I'm nuts, let me tell you the story. I pulled up to the

back of the church early one morning about 8:00 am. There was a homeless person sitting in the cold, behind the church, on the mulch. I caught this young woman by surprise. She apologized and appeared to be uncomfortable that I caught her there. She attempted to leave. I convinced her that it was OK to stay there and continue to charge up her cell phone. We talked for a while. She said that she knew I was the pastor. I asked "How did you know?" She said "Because, how much you care." I thought well, that is the standard that is set for all Christians. Matthew 25 is clear. If you don't feed the hungry, thirsty, welcome a stranger then you are not being a Christian. If you say you are but do not follow Christ, they you give lip service to faith instead of being proactive in faith as Christ requires. The Bible is clear you have to stand firm in faith. She is a victim of societal abuse neglect and indifference. She was evicted from her apartment with nowhere to go. After some coaxing she came inside to get warm. I offered her water she refused at first but then accepted. I offered her some Panara bread but she refused. I offered her money and she refused it. A meal bar she graciously accepted. She did not get any sleep that night so I offered her sanctuary, a safe place sleep, the couch in youth room for a nap, she refused.

Here is the lesson. She felt undeserving. I told her "You are a child of God." It did not register as well as I hoped it would. She did not take ownership of the concept of being a child of God. Most people don't identify the self as child of God. When you do you see yourself as a child of God then your self-concept is one with Jesus. I didn't think of it at the time. Maybe it would have been more effective if I told her "You are Jesus to me." You see, you are Jesus to me is from Matthew 25. As a Christian I carry with me daily the title of Christ. So, my responsibility is to be Jesus to you. Not as a pastor; but as a Christian. If Christians would actually be like Jesus in our society today there would be no war, poverty, abuse, or indifference. All churches would be packed.

I see today the same problem that Isaiah saw. The catalyst for the problems is a society that fails to live and worship as God calls them to do. They did not stand firm in faith. I see today the same problem that Jesus saw. The catalyst for the problems is a society that fails to live and worship as God calls us them to do. They did not stand firm in faith. We are to be Jesus to the world around us.

How do we find Jesus? Like Jesus said, in Matthew 25:40 "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (NRSV). What is needed from every child of God is the appropriate response to God's grace! How do we find Jesus? Don't go somewhere else to look for him. See Jesus in others around you.