

Immanuel

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[0 : 00] I just want to tell you about two other things.

We've got the men's meeting having a dinner. We've got the ladies meeting having a dinner. Someone the other week heard about the men's meeting, heard about a dinner, and asked, is it for men or men and women?

And I said, well, if you put a wee fake mustache on, you can come along. It's great that these things are happening, but what if we could smash them together and have just a dinner for all of us?

And so on Sunday the 29th, I failed to mention this last week, I think, last Sunday of the year, after the service, we're going to have a church lunch together.

And so if you're around on that day, and if you want to hang by for lunch, we're going to enjoy a time of eating together after the service on Sunday the 29th. And also, most of you know this anyway, but on Tuesday, Stephen and Ruth, it's their 30th anniversary, which is just wonderful.

[1 : 13] We love them so much. They do so much for us as a family. They do so much around this building and for these services and for each one of us.

And so we thank them, and we're glad that they're getting a way to celebrate that. And I know that their love story is probably like Ruth and Boaz.

And I know that like Stephen and Acts, Stephen's face is like the face of an angel. And so if you can find a way to be kind and encourage them, then please do so.

But we just, Stephen, we want to thank you for all that you do, and Ruth as well. We're so glad for you. And it's such a thing. You know, many of you have been in that situation. Many of you have outdone Stephen and Ruth.

But in our day and age, for a couple to be married so long is a good thing. It's a good thing. So this morning, we are going to be in the book of Isaiah, chapter 7.

[2 : 16] And you'll be glad to know that our reading isn't like a full chapter or three chapters. It's one verse, just one verse. So if you have a Bible, please turn to Isaiah chapter 7.

So our main focus will be in verse 14.

Isaiah 7.14 says this. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God is with us.

God, we thank you for your word. We thank you that it is a living word. And we pray that you would speak to us through your word. Just now we thank you in Jesus' name.

[3 : 52] Amen. Now this is one of the most widely known claims about the nativity, the virgin birth. Not only a claim maintained for centuries, but a claim known historically in Jesus' own day, because the Jews themselves knew about the scandal of Mary's pregnancy.

However, let's rewind. 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah, throughout his entire ministry, revealed many things about Jesus.

And so I'm going to look at this particular sign, and I'm going to look with four brief headings. Number one, the situation.

Number two, the sign. Number three, the situation. And number four, the Savior. And so let us consider the situation.

Long before Isaiah turned up in the scene in 2 Samuel chapter 7, God had promised King David this magnificent promise that after he died, one of his sons, from his own lineage, God would establish his kingdom and his throne forever.

[5 : 13] And so there's going to be someone coming from David's lineage that God will establish his kingdom and his throne forever. from David's lineage. And so from David, the Messiah will come.

And so from that point on, if you were against God and you wanted to discredit God, all you would have to do is destroy that lineage.

And in the situation that we're in with King Ahaz, King Ahaz is of that lineage, and there are threats coming from all over the place trying to destroy King Ahaz and the lineage of David.

If you destroy the lineage, you discredit God. Now, details of the Messiah's profile throughout the Bible are revealed bit by bit. Throughout the entire Bible, there are details about who the Messiah is, what he would be like, how to identify him, little bits of information throughout the Bible.

A bit revealed here, and then after a little bit of time, another bit revealed here, and another bit revealed here. And this is the same in the book of Isaiah. The book of Isaiah itself is like a microcosm of the entire Bible.

[6 : 24] The entire Bible has how many books? 66. How many in the Old Testament? 39. 27 in the New. The book of Isaiah is like a microcosm of the entire Bible.

And throughout the book of Isaiah, there's little bits of information about the Messiah, who he is, what he's going to be like, how God's going to come down and solve all of this. And in the book of Isaiah, it's into two parts, 39 chapters, and in chapter 49, there is one who's going to cry out in the wilderness.

Who's that? It's John the Baptist. And that is how the New Testament starts as well. And so there are many things about Isaiah that mirror the entire Bible. But one way it mirrors it is these details being revealed a little by little.

Every so often in the book of Isaiah, there'll be some kind of detail about who the Messiah is. And so Ahaz is of this line. We get to Ahaz and we think, is this the one?

Is this the one that God was speaking about? He is not. He is really not the one. There are many things that tell us he's not the one. Now his father and his grandfather were very godly people, godly kings.

[7 : 51] They did what was right in God's sight. Yet, Ahaz did not. Ahaz became king at twenty. He did what was evil in the sight of God.

And he even burned his own son as a sacrifice offering to idols that he worshipped. Now here's a little application for that. This happens in life no matter the upbringing that you have.

It doesn't guarantee that the next generation is going to turn out the same. someone might break that pattern. Certainly Ahaz broke that pattern of godly people. And he turned despite his upbringing, a godly upbringing, an upbringing of faith from his father and grandfather, yet he just turned from God.

And this happens in our lives. You probably know someone who has just turned for their entire family, for generations to come, they've just turned from God. The good news is all it takes is one person to break the pattern.

Just as someone can break the pattern in a negative way, someone can break the pattern in a positive way. Maybe that's you. Maybe you have broken the pattern.

[9 : 02] Maybe God has used your life to turn it around again. Or someone in your life, like your parent, your mum, your grandparent, someone like that, breaking the pattern.

And so Ahaz has turned from God, despite his father and grandfather. And the situation is that he's in Judah, he's the king of Judah, Judah is the tribe which the king would come from, and he's in the line of David.

And the kingdom's now split because of Solomon and because of his son. And so Israel have a king, and just above Israel there's Syria that has a king, and Israel and Syria are putting pressure on Judah because there is Assyria.

Assyria is the great superpower of the day, and they are going about conquering nations and taking control of the entire world. And the king of Assyria is a chap called Tiglath-Pileser III.

Now, to save me having a mouthful all the time, I'm just going to call him TP3. Okay, TP3 is the king of Assyria, and he is, I don't know, what maybe you would call like Putin just now, this great superpower, and he's just threatening everyone and wants to take over, invading places.

[10 : 27] And so, Syria and Israel have joined forces, and they're like, we're not going to let TP3 come in. We're not going to let it. We're going to join, get a coalition going.

But Ahaz doesn't want anything to do with this, because he's afraid of TP3. He's afraid of this great superpower. And so, they say, and we can see this in the text, if you look at chapter 7, Rezin, the king of Syria and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, come up to Jerusalem to wage war against it.

But couldn't yet mount an attack against it. Now, when Israel, when the house of David, sorry, when Judah, the house of David, was told that 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.

They are shaking in their boots. Ahaz and Judah are terrified. And it says, the Lord said, be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and at Pekah because Syria with Ephraim has devised evil against you, saying, let's go up against Judah and terrify it, let's conquer it for ourselves and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it.

So, God knows what's happening and Rezin and Pekah want a coalition with Judah but they know that Ahaz isn't going to do it so they want to kill Ahaz and set up their own puppet king to join a coalition against the king of Assyria, TP3.

[12 : 33] And so, Ahaz and Judah are terrified. I mean, what are they going to do? The nations to the north, including Israel, are wanting to attack them and Assyria, TP3, is wanting to attack every nation.

And so, Ahaz wants to side with the greater superpower in Tiglath-Pileser III. He disregards God.

He doesn't want to side with Israel and Syria and he wants to take the side of this maniac, Tiglath-Pileser III, just to be safe. And what he did to do that was he took silver and gold from the temple and paid off TP3 for protection.

Now, you can read on and later on it doesn't work out for him, but that's what he did. It's like he disregards the line that he is from. He considers the God of his father and grandfather as just some meaningless religion and he doesn't bother considering God in all of this.

It's like he looks at the faith of his father and grandfather with disdain, like Ahaz can figure this out for himself. He doesn't need prayers.

[13 : 50] He doesn't need religion. He doesn't need God. He's smart enough to figure out this situation with politics. The truth then and the truth now is that God is more in control of events than anyone on the ground thinks.

And so an application for this, especially for us today, in light of the recent vote or things that go on in our world, I want you to hear this point.

I want to hear this point. Ahaz should understand this point, that the politics of man are not going to outwit the promise of God.

And this is as true today as it was then. And so let's look at number two, the sign, the sign itself. God offered Ahaz, despite all his evil, God offered Ahaz a sign.

Ask a sign of the Lord your God. Let it be deep as Sheol or as high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask.

[15 : 00] I will not put the Lord to the test. What a pious man. He acts pious and refuses God's gracious offer.

And I think that he doesn't want to be bound by a sign. I think that's why he refuses. He wants plausible deniability for his lack of faith in God. And it was such a gracious offer, it was a blank check that God had wrote for King Ahaz, and yet King Ahaz ripped it up in God's face, as if to say, no God, I don't want your check.

I don't want your sign. There's nothing that you could offer me that would make me trust in you. I would rather take the silver and gold and trust in TP3.

Thank you very much. And he rips up this check in God's face. Thanks, but no thanks. And so, verse 13, Isaiah says, is it too much for you to weary man, to weary me, that now you have to go and weary my God?

And in verse 14, God gives him a sign anyway. Verse 14, therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.

[16 : 25] He will come from poverty and before he's even old enough to know the difference between good and bad. This is what verse 15 and 16 goes on to say.

He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. And before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

So, before this, before a child is old enough, in such a short time, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. And so, the sign is that while the king and the people abandon God, God has not abandoned his promise.

God's not abandoned Judah. God's not abandoned the line of David. The virgin will bear a son whose name will be God is with us. Now, we don't know if at the time there was a child with this name, perhaps one of Isaiah's sons.

Prophecy often comes in two parts. It comes firstly in a near and partial fulfillment, and then a far and complete fulfillment. And so, the other sons of Isaiah, in chapter 7 and 8, are examples of this.

[17 : 40] If you look at verse 2 of Isaiah 7, it mentions a name. not verse 2, verse 3, sorry.

In verse 3 of Isaiah 7, it mentions the name Sheer-Jashub, which means a remnant shall return. Now, obviously, there's some sort of future fulfillment of that still to happen.

And then in chapter 8, verse 1, if you have your Bible, chapter 8, verse 1, it has this other name.

It has Maher Shalal Hashbaz. There's a name to name your child, if you're ever thinking about having children. And what that means is, it means the prey is coming.

The prey is coming and spoil will be swift. Basically, judgment's coming and it'll be swift. Imagine naming your child that.

[18 : 53] And so, this child, it seems that Isaiah had this child with the prophetess, chapter 8, and I went to the prophetess and she conceived and bore a son.

And that is Maher Shalal Hashbaz. And look at the difference between that and chapter 8, verse 3, the prophetess shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be very different from the virgin who shall conceive and bear a son called Emmanuel.

One is about this terrible coming judgment and the other is about this confidence that God is with us. And so, we need to remember that there is a near and partial fulfillment but a far and complete fulfillment.

So, the point is, in a short time, whether you believe it or not, you will see that these threats cannot stop the promise of God. King Rezin and King Pecca will come to a demise and the land will be deserted in such a short time as if a child grew up and couldn't even get to the stage of knowing right from wrong.

But, God is with us and that is why these threats come to nothing. Therefore, when you see this happening, King Ahaz, when you see these threats from Pecca and from Rezin come to nothing, will you trust God?

[20 : 20] Will you trust God then? Will you believe? It's like we saw with the politics of man. The plans of man are not going to overthrow the promise of God.

The far fulfillment is who would be that promised king, the Messiah, who's going to actually rule like God is really with them? Because we know it's not Ahaz.

Now, his son, Ahaz had a son called Hezekiah, and he did much better. And it says in 2 Chronicles, Hezekiah was doing what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God, and everything that he undertook, in the service of God's temple, and in obedience to the law and the commandments, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly, and so he prospered.

Doing pretty good. A big improvement from King Ahaz. He's turned it around. And then it goes on to say this, after all that Hezekiah had done so faithfully, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came and invaded Judah.

He laid siege to the fortified cities, thinking to conquer them for himself. And you think, not again, not again. Why is this happening if Hezekiah has been so faithful?

[21 : 42] What's going wrong? But Hezekiah did not waver. Hezekiah encouraged the people, saying this, Be strong and courageous.

Do not be afraid or discouraged, because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him. For there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God.

good job, Hezekiah. He got the message of Emmanuel. God is with us. Now, because of this, Sennacherib started saying, No God of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my predecessors.

How much less will your God deliver you from my hand, Hezekiah, just as the gods of the people of other lands did not rescue them from my hand, so the God of Hezekiah will not rescue his people from my hand.

How arrogant is Sennacherib. And so, here we have Hezekiah not wavering. No, God is with us. Be courageous, people. Don't be afraid of this Sennacherib or Assyria.

[23 : 03] The power with us is greater. God is with us. Emmanuel. And then Sennacherib is like, nobody's been able to stop us. How is your God going to stop us?

And who do you think won? The Lord sent an angel who annihilated all the fighting men of Assyria and the commanders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king.

And so, he withdrew to his own land in disgrace. And when he went into the temple of his God, some of his sons, his own flesh and blood, cut him down with the sword.

Emmanuel, God is with us. So, Hezekiah understood. He got the memo. He understood the sign of Emmanuel. He had faith in the promise of God, and his response in crisis was, don't be afraid.

Have faith, for God is with us. And so, something you need to know, you've heard the name Emmanuel. You know that it's a Christmas, popular, we talk about this at Christmas.

[24 : 13] One of the things from this situation and this sign is that Emmanuel is a battle cry. Now, if that was true for Hezekiah, is it true for us?

You see, one of the things that we didn't look at in Exodus was that the tabernacle that God told Moses to build, was not unique in its design, but Pharaoh had a war tent that was strikingly similar in shape, dimension, and use.

Pharaoh used this tent when he was on his war campaigns, and all his army would go, and Pharaoh would have this great tent in the middle of them, and it would have a courtyard, it would have a big tent facing eastward, it would have a reception tent, and an inner court where he would be with winged creatures side by side, just like the tabernacle.

And so one of the things we didn't explore was the tabernacle is a war tent. So for the people of Israel, having the tabernacle wasn't just about having a fancy tent, it wasn't even just about being closer to God, God is with us, that's lovely, it's relational, but it was about the safety and security of having your warrior king in the midst of you, having the one true and almighty God in their midst.

Who's going to come against us? For Yahweh is with us. And so when God is with you, here's the point, you have nothing to fear, nothing to fear.

[25 : 55] Hezekiah understood that, Ahaz did not, and God told him, do not fear, Emmanuel. Now, we can say that's true for Hezekiah because God had a promise over the lineage of David, because he was the king of Judah.

That's okay for him, but what about us? How can we know if God is with us? Well, let's look at the third point, the Septuagint. There's a debate about this word Alma, which is translated virgin, whether it's actually about a virgin or simply a young woman of marriageable age.

But if you ever hear about these arguments, don't be swayed by them. It's not a problem because a young woman, a Hebrew woman, a young Hebrew woman of marriageable age who is not yet married, is a virgin.

the Hebrew word is never used of a young woman who is actually married, so it's assumed to be that she has never been with a man. And it's always used of a girl who's not yet married and has not known a man.

It's the equivalent of a white wedding dress. Do you remember that? In our days, a white wedding dress would be extremely rare. But in those days, it would be absolutely assumed a young woman of marriageable age who's not yet married is, by nature, not known a man.

[27 : 24] She's a virgin. And so, if you're ever asked about this verse, this is how a Hebrew would understand it. They would say, this is how the verse is understood.

Behold, the young Hebrew woman of marriageable age who is not yet married already is already pregnant and is about to give birth to a son, not a daughter, and she will call his name Emmanuel, which means God is with us.

And so, did it happen as God said? This is exactly what happened with Jesus and his mother Mary. Now, furthermore, long before Jesus was born, the Septuagint was written, which is a very careful translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek by 72 Jewish scholars, six from each of the tribes of Israel, got together, they were commissioned to translate the Hebrew into Greek because it was a diminishing language as the Greeks took over the world.

And so, this was a very careful translation by Jewish scholars themselves. And this verse, they translated with a Greek word that specifically means virgin, and they could have used other words.

So, if someone says, oh, the Hebrews didn't think that's what it meant, they did. Because the Septuagint, before Jesus was born, was translated that way, and that is what Matthew uses the verse from the Septuagint to translate, to quote Isaiah.

[29 : 00] The belief was that she was a virgin. And so, this Greek Bible was commonly used in Jesus' day, and Matthew quotes from the Septuagint, from this verse in Isaiah, and it's not just Matthew trying to shoehorn Jesus into the Old Testament, but it was already there, and he's trying to explain this miraculous birth of Jesus with all these prophecies that are going on.

Even in Luke, Luke talks about the historical event of the virgin birth without quoting Isaiah. So, it's not like the virgin birth rests on this one verse, but Matthew's doing something with this verse that's wonderful.

And so, if you remember what's right at the start of Matthew's Gospel, there's a long list of names. What is it? It's a genealogy. Matthew starts with a genealogy.

Think about this, right? He's going to, where it's leading is a virgin birth, but he starts with a genealogy. And in the genealogy, he's always talking about this person fathered this person, who fathered this person, who fathered this person, who fathered this person, and oh, by the way, we get to someone who doesn't have a father.

Because Isaiah said, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel. And so, we get all the way down to so-and-so fathered so-and-so until we get to Joseph, and then he changes and says, who was the husband of Mary.

[30 : 40] She's the virgin who conceived and bore a son called Jesus. And the angel said, Emmanuel, God is with us.

What an amazing thing. And so, not only is the Messiah singled out by this extraordinary birth, but he's also singled out to be no one less than divine, because his father is God.

And this is continually revealed in Isaiah, as it is throughout the Bible. And so, a very quick application for that is that we can trust Matthew's words.

We can trust what Matthew's doing with this quote from Isaiah. We can trust this testimony for a few reasons. Number one, because the Jews themselves accepted this meaning from the context of the Hebrew word and from the translation of the Septuagint.

Two, Matthew is being faithful with the text and is accounting for a historical event from the people who were there to see it. We know that the Jews in Jesus' day also knew that Joseph was not the real father, because they used this scandal against Jesus later in his life.

[32 : 03] Jesus also knew that Joseph was not his father. Even from the age of twelve years old, Jesus says, when he's apparently lost, but he's in the temple, and Mary and Joseph find him, and Jesus says, did you not know that I would be about my father's business?

And later on in life, he identifies God as his father. And then, this event with Mary makes sense of who Jesus is, that he's without sin, and that he is the Son of God, that he's fully human, and fully God.

And finally, the disciples who knew Jesus and saw all the other miracles that he did, they passed this on, and throughout the history of the church, the virgin birth of Jesus has been a central belief to who he is.

We believe. Now, if you have a hard time believing that, I understand, because it's not normal, but he is not a normal man. He's no ordinary person. He is fully man and fully God.

But people often approach this not realizing that they just have a presupposition. And so, a chap, J. Warner Wallace, was in this camp, and he became a Christian.

[33 : 21] He's an apologist. But he realized that he wasn't following the evidence. He had a presupposition that miracles couldn't happen. And so, he wrote off good evidence because he had a presupposition.

We need to watch out for our presuppositions, because the evidence of who Jesus is is overwhelming. Finally, my last point, the Savior. Matthew's very first selected fulfillment, Matthew's gospel, is all about fulfillment of prophecy, and his first selected prophecy that gets fulfilled is that Mary is this virgin spoken about in Isaiah.

And thus, Jesus alone is singled out as the divine Messiah child Emmanuel. Jesus is God with us. Not only just figuratively, but literally.

But I want you to look at what Matthew does with this. It's quite amazing. Matthew's gospel is about fulfillment. The first prophecy that he says is fulfilled is Mary is the virgin, and Jesus is Emmanuel, which means God with us.

And his last, words in his gospel are what? Jesus says, behold, I am with you.

[34 : 48] Always. Isn't that interesting? Matthew shapes his entire gospel to say Jesus is Emmanuel. From start to finish, he's the first and last.

Very first prophecy fulfilled, very last words, God is with you. And he's with you in Jesus. Matthew starts and ends with that.

Not only is Jesus the Messiah shown by the exclusive virgin birth, God, but the Messiah is God himself come in human form. And for those who trust him, this is how we can have confidence if God is with us, because those who trust Jesus, he is with them always.

So, Hezekiah can be confident that God is with him because he's of the line of David, but any one of us can be confident that God is with us because God came to be among us in Jesus, and he invites us to trust him that he may be with us forever.

And so, trust in him for what? Well, what do we have to fear? It all goes back to fear. This Emmanuel battle cry is about what you fear. And so, what do we have to fear?

[36 : 03] We have many things to fear. What does our sin do to us? It destroys us, brings judgment on us, brings destruction and death. What do we hope for when we have the spoil being swift?

What confidence do we have when death is approaching like the king of Assyria? We are completely helpless on our own. Death is approaching like the king of Assyria.

Are we going to make a coalition with some other people? Is this something that we can figure out politically? Have we ever been able to solve humanity's problems of sin and death with politics or with the plans of man?

No. And yet, they keep coming relentlessly. They keep coming. What are we going to do against this fear? Well, like Hezekiah, Jesus would say, Trust in me, for I am with you.

You have nothing to fear, for I have conquered death. You see, Jesus is the one who conquered death. He is the one who is God's own son. He is God with us, and he can save us for trusting him, for he is with us.

[37 : 13] And so, why do we sing about Jesus? We sing because he is our battle cry. Emmanuel, God with us. Yeshua means our God saves.

And it's like when Jesus is sleeping in the boat. I'm going to finish with this illustration from Mark that we'll look at in the new year. When Jesus is sleeping in the boat during the storm, can you remember the disciples' fear for their lives?

They fear that they're going to perish. And they wake Jesus up, and they say, Do you not care that we're going to perish? And he calms the storm, and he says, Why do you have such little faith?

Because this is what Emmanuel means. It's not that Jesus will calm every storm in life. The sign of Emmanuel is about who is in the boat with you.

That's what it's about. This is why the disciples had little faith. Because you cannot perish when Jesus is in the boat with you. When God is with you, you cannot perish.

[38 : 17] That's what Emmanuel means. And so the wonder of this promise is not an easy life. It is that God can even be in the same boat with us. It was unthinkable.

A wondrous thing that the divine and the dust should unite. that God should become man. And through Jesus, we have this hope. Like them back then, we have this hope against all odds.

And I think we're supposed to feel that. See, when we approach death, and we feel this fight against sin, we are against all odds. And we have this hope against all odds that when Jesus is with us, nothing is going to stop his promise.

We have nothing to fear, for God is with us. Let me pray. Lord, would you help us understand this, not just in our heads, but in our hearts?

Would you help us understand this when we have many fears? Would you help us understand this when many things come against us? that when you are with us, we have nothing to fear.

[39 : 29] And when your promise is over our lives, nothing on this earth will stop you from fulfilling your promises. Lord, we thank you that in Jesus you have given us this promise, that I shall not leave you nor forsake you.

For Jesus said, I will be with you always, even till the end of the age. We give you thanks in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.