

A virgin shall conceive

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[0:00] We get to this passage and we see that the king is under threat.! Who's he going to trust?

There's enemies surrounding him and his house.! Who is he going to trust? The king feels shaken by the threat of war.

Who is he going to trust? His enemies say, let's invade this king and his nation. Let's set up our own puppet king in his place.

Who's he going to trust? This is the king of Judah. This is King Ahaz.

And God is on his side. And if King Ahaz doesn't know it, the Lord's prophet Isaiah certainly does know who is truly in charge.

[1:07] For Isaiah in chapter 6 saw the king of all kings. The Lord Almighty seated on his throne in heaven. So who's the king going to trust?

That's the question we need to be thinking about as we look at this passage. Is the king going to trust in himself?

Or in the nations around him? Or is he going to stand defiantly and trust in the Lord Almighty? And that's the question we're going to ask ourselves this morning.

Who are we trusting? Are we trusting in the Lord Almighty? Or is our trust in something or someone else?

We're in... We're in... We began a series last week looking at prophecies that lead us towards Christmas time.

[2:18] That point us to the Lord Jesus. And we're in this passage this morning. And it's really helpful that we're thinking about this.

Who are we trusting? As Christmas approaches, as we said earlier, there's 34 sleeps till Christmas. Who are we trusting? For some of us, the thought that Christmas is approaching fills us with great joy.

We're excited about Christmas. We can't wait for it and we have all our plans in place. But maybe we're at risk of trusting ourselves and our plans.

For others of us, this thought on the screen fills us with great dreads. Christmas is stressful. There's lots of things we need to sort out.

Presents to buy. Family to keep happy. Christmas is hard. So who are you going to trust? And for others of us, Christmas is a painful time of year.

[3:25] It actually fills us with a lot of sorrow. And in that, who are we going to trust? And so we're going to learn from Ahaz's experience that the only place we can put our trust in is in the Lord Almighty.

The only reliable place. So we see two things in this passage. We're going to see two things. Firstly, the king's choice.

The king's choice. Verse 1 sets this passage nicely in context for us. It says this. When Ahaz, son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah.

Another king, King Rezin of Aran and Pekah, son of Ramalia, king of Israel, marched up to fight against Jerusalem. But they could not overpower it.

Ahaz, he is king of Judah, the southern kingdom of God's people. And he has these other two kings who are wanting to wage war against Judah.

[4:44] That's the situation that the king finds himself in. And understandably, he is feeling shaken by this.

Verse 2 says, Now the house of David was told, Aram has allied itself with Ahaz, Ephraim. So the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken as trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

Think of a tree. It stands nicely and tall and unshaken. But then the wind comes in and it's shaken about. It's moved and tossed about.

And this time of year we're seeing leaves flying everywhere as the wind blows through the trees.

That image of a tree shaking, that's how Ahaz is feeling.

He is shaken up by this threat of war. And so in that prospect of being shaken by the threat of war, he feels fearful.

[6:01] And so who's he going to trust in this situation? It's understandable that he would feel shaken by the threat of war.

Maybe we ourselves have felt that more than ever this last year as war has been closer to us than it may have ever been before in our lives.

So we can understand that Ahaz and the people of Israel feel shaken by the threat of war. And so who is the king going to trust?

Well, we see in verse 3 that the Lord, the Lord Almighty, the king of all kings, speaks to this situation.

So he sends his prophet Isaiah and he says to him, Isaiah and his son, and we'll think about the significance of his son a bit later, they're sent to go and meet Ahaz.

[7:27] And Ahaz, we've read where he is at the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool on the road to the laundress field. Why on earth is he there?

Why on earth is this mentioned? It's because King Ahaz needs to check the country's water supply.

Because if these armies which are threatening invasion come in and manage to cut off the water supply, they kind of cut off the country and they have the upper hands.

And so Ahaz, in his fear and shaking and trembling, goes and nervously checks that the water supply is secure and strong. But in all of this, the Lord comes to speak to him through his prophet Isaiah.

And Isaiah says this to him in verse 4, Say to him, be careful, keep calm, and don't be afraid.

Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood, because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Ramalia.

[8:45] God comes to him and says, you don't need to fear. Fear. Fear is a natural human emotion.

It's not wrong for us to fear. Fear at times, it can keep us safe from things that can cause us danger. But we don't need to let fear overwhelm and control us.

And the Lord comes and says to Ahaz that you don't need to fear. And he doesn't need to fear because the Lord is the almighty king who reigns.

And so he calls Ahaz to stand in a defiant trust in him. That's who Ahaz should be trusting.

In the Lord. And that's who we're called to trust too. The Lord almighty is the unchanging Lord almighty who is still ruling on his throne in heaven.

[9:53] And so in whatever circumstances we are facing today, as we begin thinking about Christmas, as we've heard 34 sleeps, whatever emotions and things come with that for you, we're called to not fear but to trust in the Lord almighty.

To stand in defiant trust of him. And many times over the last few years, I've found myself gathered with people around fire pits.

They're great fun enjoying the warmth of a fire, toasting marshmallows, just enjoying chatting with people in that kind of atmosphere. But inevitably, the fire, it goes out.

And you see the last bits of wood kind of burning away, but the fire's gone out. And that's how the Lord describes these nations that are wanting to attack King Ahaz and his people.

See that towards the end of verse 4. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewoods. That's how God describes these nations which are threatening war against them.

[11:26] God says they're not even on blazing fire. They're not dangerous. They're smoldering out. They're not going to be around forever. They're not as threatening as you might think they are.

Because kingdoms rise, kingdoms fall, but God's kingdom, it stands forever. King Ahaz is God's king, part of the house of David's.

And God made promises to David that his throne would be established forever. And so because of God and his word, Ahaz can trust, can stand in defiant trust of the Lord Almighty.

But, Ahaz, if you don't trust God's word, this is what he says in verse 7 to 9. Have a look.

This is what the sovereign Lord says. It will not take place. It will not happen. For the head of Aram is Damascus. And the head of Damascus is only resin. Within 65 years, Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.

[12:51] The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Ramalia's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.

Ephraim or Israel, they will be shattered. They won't be a people anymore. Too shattered to be a people. Within 65 years.

That's what God says. Because they trust in their own strength and not in the Lord. But this is a warning to Ahaz.

A warning that says, if you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all. If Ahaz doesn't take God at his word and trust in him, then he will not stand.

And we need to hear this warning too. Here at Calvary Church, the teaching of the Bible is central to what we do.

[13:59] Because in God's word, we hear God speaking to us, and we need to stand by it and trust what the Lord says in his words.

For if we do not, we may fall. If we aren't a church that stands by what the Bible teaches, then maybe we won't stand at all.

We need to trust in God's word, even if people call us not to, to change our thinking on certain subjects.

No, we need to look and see what the Bible says, and we need to keep looking and seeing what the Bible says and keep hearing it taught and keep taking God at his words.

And for us, more individually, if our faith feels like it's being shaken and we think, who should we trust? We must trust the Lord Almighty.

[15:09] Take him at his word. He says, don't fear. Trust me. Stand in defiant trust of me and my words.

And so Ahaz has an important decision to make. Is he going to trust God or is he not? And this decision, it's going to affect him and the life of his nation.

There was key decisions made in our country on Wednesday by our chancellor that's going to affect life here. This is a key decision for Ahaz and the life of Judah as a country that's going to affect life there.

Have a look at verse 10. Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.

God is offering Ahaz a sign. From the deepest depths or the highest heights, nothing's too big to ask of God.

[16:23] God is prepared to do something completely miraculous for Ahaz if Ahaz chooses to trust in him. No limits, nothing too big for this is the Lord Almighty.

You might be wondering why a sign? It's not like God asks me if I want a sign now, does he? Often in the Bible, God does accompany his word with signs.

The last few weeks, I've seen rainbows in the sky quite a lot and we remember that that's a sign God gave to Noah to confirm his promises and we still see it today and we're reminded how God is faithful to his promises.

So how does Ahaz respond to God asking him to ask him for a sign? Have a look at verse 12.

But Ahaz said, I will not ask. I will not put the Lord to the test. And you may think that sounds rather acceptable.

[17:39] Hasn't he done a good thing not putting the Lord to the test? Doesn't Deuteronomy say, do not put the Lord to the test? But it's the Lord Almighty himself who's asking Ahaz to ask him for a sign.

God is testing Ahaz's heart to see, are you going to trust me in this situation? And the choice Ahaz makes is not to ask him for a sign.

Ahaz's heart to ask him and all this makes a lot more sense if we have a look at another passage in the Bible, at 2 Kings chapter 16.

2 Kings 16. Ahaz's heart is not to Ahaz's heart to ask him Ahaz's heart does instead of asking God for a sign.

We're going to read just two or three verses from this chapter. 2 Kings 16. Do you have a read of the whole chapter later on today?

[18:52] 2 Kings 16 verse 7. Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath Pelesa who's king of Assyria.

And Ahaz says, I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and the king of Israel who are attacking me.

And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it.

He deported its inhabitants to Kerr and put Rezin to death. Instead of trusting in the Lord Almighty King Ahaz chooses to trust in another king.

The king of Assyria. And he goes off to the king of Assyria who's got all this power, wealth and might and says can you come and help us?

[19:57] Ahaz rejects the Lord Almighty the king of all kings for compared to God this little king the king of Assyria.

And some part of me has a lot of sympathy for King Ahaz here. He can't see the Lord in front of him. And so he sees the might of the king of Assyria, sees the great army that he has and thinks, yes, that's the way to go.

And yet it's sad that he doesn't trust in the Lord Almighty who's spoken to him through the prophet Isaiah. And we ourselves, maybe we look at the circumstances around us and we trust things other than the Lord.

Thinking about Christmas coming, maybe Christmas is quite hard, maybe we feel like we're one of the only Christians in our family.

And so we get to Christmas day and we have this choice, do we go to church in the morning and celebrate with Christian brothers and sisters or do we stay with our family and get some brownie points with them on that day?

[21:28] Who are we going to trust in that sort of situation? Or maybe we're tempted to think that throwing lots of money at Christmas this year is the way to go and it's hard because the cost of living has gone up and we think maybe we're tempted to think maybe I just won't give anything to church this month and trust in this money to make Christmas as great as it can be.

We have a choice. Who are we going to trust? Are we going to trust in the Lord or something that we see around us? Someone, something. And the king had that choice.

He had the choice to trust in the Lord, to not fear but to trust in the Lord Almighty who can move heaven and earth to bring about a great sign. Or to reject the Lord and his words and trust in another king instead.

Who are we going to trust? That's the choice that king Ahaz has. Secondly, we see the Lord's sign. The Lord's sign. Have a look at verse 13. Then Isaiah said, Here now you house of David, is it not enough to try the patience of humans?

[23:00] Will you try the patience of my God also? It seems the Lord's patience has run out with King Ahaz. I wonder what it takes for you, for your patience to run out.

For me, I've definitely discovered over the last few years how talking to someone who doesn't seem to listen to what I say until I've said something two, three, or four times makes my patience run out. Particularly if they're sitting on their mobile phones and tapping away and we're trying to have a conversation but they're clearly not interested. And I'm guilty of doing that too. I'm sorry if I've done that to you.

Or I go back home and I visit my younger brother who it seems to for some reason it seems to take five, six, seven, eight times before he listens to me and he's not even on his phone.

I don't understand it. But that tests my patience. The Lord's patience has run out with King Ahaz.

[24:05] He's not listened to him. He's not taken him at his words. In verse 11 as the Lord spoke to him it says ask the Lord your God for a sign.

Ahaz still is Isaiah still addresses Ahaz and says the Lord is your God. God but in verse 13 it seems that the Lord's rejected him.

Will you try the patience of my God just my God not your God now. You've rejected you've made your choice not to trust me but to trust the king of Assyria.

God is going to be faithful to his people. He's going to be faithful to his promises and we've seen that already in this chapter maybe without realizing because in verse 3 the Lord said to Isaiah go out you and your son Sheer Jasheb.

Sheer Jasheb his name this child Sheer Jasheb means a remnant will return. It means that God would bring judgment but a remnant will return of God's people.

[25:30] God was going to be faithful he is faithfully committed to his people. And we see that even more as we see the sign that he promises in verse 14.

Have a look. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel.

The Lord still gives a sign. Even though Ahaz rejects the Lord asking him for a sign the Lord still gives him and his people a sign.

Another child will come. Born of a virgin born in impossible circumstances. A child is going to come. A child seemingly weak and helpless.

How can a child help? And yet this child is a special child for he will be Emmanuel God with us.

[26:42] This will be a sign from the highest heights. A miraculous sign. A miraculous child. God with us. So how was this sign fulfilled?

Well we see it kind of partially fulfilled in chapter 8 in the words that we read there. Because another child is born to Isaiah.

Verse 3. Then I made love to the prophetess and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the Lord said to me name him Meher Shalal Hashbaz.

If somebody before the service today came up to tell me that they wanted me to announce the birth of their new grandchild or child and I say okay yeah that's fine what's their name and you tell me they're called Meher Shalal Hashbaz.

I would say what on earth did you just say and I'll ask you how you spell it and then I'll ask you why on earth is that name chosen?

[27:54] Well the name means quick to the plunder swift to the spoil. It essentially means that judgment was going to come.

That the nations around Judah were going to be judged. The nations threatening Judah. Have a look at verse 4 before the boy knows how to speak to say my father or my mother the wealth of Damascus and plunder of Samaria is going to be carried off by the king of Assyria.

Judgment was going to come to those nations threatening Judah, threatening king Ahaz and his people. But not only were the nations around threatening war going to be judged, so was Judah itself.

Verse 5, the Lord spoke to me again because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloh, rejoices over Rezin and the son of Romalia.

They rejoice over everything but the Lord. They've rejected the Lord. Therefore the Lord himself is about to bring against them the mighty flood waters of the Euphrates.

[29:17] The king of Assyria who Ahaz made a deal with. The king of Assyria with all his pomp will overflow its channels, run over all its banks and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck.

judgment was going to come on king Ahaz and his people. And there's a picture that it's going to be like mighty flood waters.

Imagine you've got water rising up but it's going to stop at the neck and then it's going to go down. The judgment doesn't go all the way up above our heads because God says a remnant's going to return.

That's what Sheer Jashub, Isaiah's other son, means. A remnant will return. God was still going to be gracious in judgment.

And it's through the sign of these children that Isaiah has. And so the cry is O Emmanuel at the end of verse 8.

[30:35] God is with us. And then we move into verse 9 and 10 and the tone kind of changes here in chapter 8 verse 9 and 10.

And raise the war cry you nations and be shattered. Listen all you distant lands prepare for battle and be shattered. Prepare for battle and be shattered.

devise your strategy but it will be thwarted. Propose your plan but it will not stand. For God is with us.

The nations around can plan all they like against God's people. But God's people can confidently say God is with us because of the sign of Emmanuel that child that is promised.

But if we stop here at the end of chapter 8 and hear about this sign we don't get the full picture. It's like following the signs to Stanmer Park and seeing one of them and getting out there and not actually enjoying Stanmer Park itself.

[31:54] So we need to go on to the destination. We need to go on to those words which we read earlier when the children were in with us. in Matthew chapter 1 as 21 to 23.

Matthew chapter 1 21 to 23. In light of all that we've looked at in Isaiah all that we've seen from King Ahaz we read these words.

she will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel which means God with us.

Emmanuel is like the title for this child. This is the child God with us and his name is Jesus.

[33:09] Jesus who will save his people from their sins. This is a sign from the Lord Almighty who reigns on his throne over all things but he does not just leave us all to our own devices rather he comes down as God with us because we could not bring ourselves up to God.

We see that in King Ahaz. King Ahaz is like a picture of us in our sin when we choose not to trust in the Lord when we choose not to take him at his word and instead turn away from him.

But here is Jesus and he's born and he is God with us and he's come to rescue us from our sins.

And we see that in the greatest sign of his love as Jesus hung on the cross to die for our sins.

sins. And so we ourselves we can look back to the sign of the cross where God was with us so much that he hung forsaken.

He took our sins upon himself. All that wrong we have, all that rebellion we have, all those times when we join with Ahaz and say I don't need you, I don't need to take you at my word, I'm trusting my own way in this.

[34:55] Jesus is God with us and comes to take away our sins. And so as we approach Christmas time, as we hear these familiar words again in Isaiah 7 and in Matthew 1, let's remember they are said at a time and to a king, and a nation that failed to choose to trust in the Lord Almighty.

But let's see too the faithfulness that God has in his word, the Lord Almighty who moved heaven and earth to give us his miraculous son, miraculous birth of his son, the Lord Jesus Emmanuel.

Emmanuel, and so in all that needs to happen in the next 34 sleeps, maybe we're, we've got things planned out and we're tempted to trust our plans, our ways, let's trust in the Lord Almighty.

Almighty if we're making difficult choices with money and this cost of living, it makes things around Christmas rather tricky.

But let's not be trusting in money, let's trust in the Lord Almighty. Maybe we're trusting in our family to make Christmas a good one, maybe children you're trusting in your parents to make Christmas amazing and parents you're trusting in your children to make Christmas amazing.

[36:40] No, let's trust in the Lord Almighty. The Lord Almighty, let's stand defiantly and trust in him.

And we can. We can because Jesus is God with us. He knows our weakness, he knows our sin, but yet he is God with us.

And so we can trust him because he's with us. Let's pray. Let's pray.