

The Promise of Immanuel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 December 2023

Preacher: Dr. Wes Feltner

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Say it with me. God with us. See, everybody usually knows what it means, but the extent in which we know about it is usually God became a man and we can have a relationship with God and we can be with him in relationship.

And that is true. That's the good news of the gospel, but I want to show you this evening the context of Emmanuel and I trust that it is going to encourage you this Christmas Eve.

[2 : 27] So Isaiah chapter seven, if you're able to stand, please do so as we honor the reading of God's word. Isaiah chapter seven. And I want us to focus our attention here on verse 10.

Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ask a sign of the Lord your God and let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.

But Ahaz said, I will not ask. I will not put the Lord to the test. And he said, hear then, O house of David. Is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also?

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name.

Everyone say it. Emmanuel. Let's pray together. God, thank you for this time together now. And I pray that you would come and talk to us and speak to us. I have no doubt that there are people here tonight that this message you have ordained specifically for them tonight to be encouraged, to be built up, to be edified in the good news of the gospel and the truth that is Christmas.

[3 : 42] So Holy Spirit, guide us. Teach us. I pray in Christ's name. And God's people said, amen. You can be seated. Amen. Christmas time is here.

Happiness and cheer. And for all that children call their favorite time of year.

Sunflakes in the air. Carols everywhere. Olden times and ancient rhymes.

Of love and dreams to share. I think there must be something wrong with me, Linus.

Christmas is coming, but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel. I just don't understand Christmas, I guess.

[4 : 46] I like getting presents and sending Christmas cards and decorating trees and all that, but I'm still not happy. I always end up feeling depressed. Charlie Brown. You're the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem.

Maybe Lucy's right. Of all the Charlie Browns in the world, you're the Charlie Browniest. Christmas is coming. But I'm not happy.

That's the confession that Charlie Brown makes to his friend Linus, and it's a problem. It's a problem because at Christmas time, everybody's supposed to be happy.

That's why that scene starts, and you've got children skating on the ice, and everybody's having a wonderful time. There's music playing in the background.

The very lyrics of the song is, Christmas time is here. Happiness and cheer. Fun for all the children call their favorite time of year.

[5 : 50] And that's true for just about everybody in the story, except Charlie Brown. Christmas is coming, and I'm not happy.

Now, don't give Charlie Brown too much grief, because he's really not trying to be the Grinch and ruin Christmas for everybody. He's not trying to be the Scrooge and make everyone around him feel really, really bad.

Actually, on the contrary, by his own admission, he says, he loves Christmas. He enjoys the presents. He likes sending cards and decorating trees and all the Christmas activities like

everybody else.

He doesn't hate Christmas. He's just trying to make sense of it all. Christmas is coming, and he's not happy.

And let's be honest, he's not the first one to feel that way at Christmas. Amen? Some of you here this evening, if you were honest, you'd say, listen, I'm in the Christmas spirit.

[6 : 51] I'm trying to really enjoy this moment. But if I were honest with you, Pastor, I'm struggling with why he or she is no longer with me. I want to feel holly and jolly.

That's my true desire. But if I'm honest with you, this has been the hardest year financially I have ever gone through. Yeah, Pastor, I love the season.

I love everything the season is about. But if I were honest, my stress level right now is as high as it's ever been. Does anybody just want to say amen? Amen.

I thought this pastoring faith family of just real, I'm not going to obviously mention names, but of real stories in our faith family. Like right now, there are people that are going through divorce.

There are people who are battling cancer. There are people who literally just a few days ago lost a loved one. There are families that are tense and fighting with one another. There are economic struggles and financial problems that people are facing.

[7 : 55] And there are some of you, your worry and anxiety and stress is about to make you pop like a balloon. You're not the Grinch.

You're not a Scrooge. You're just like Charlie Brown. You're just trying to make sense of it all. And listen, that's why I want to introduce you to a man that we don't talk about at Christmas.

He almost never gets mentioned at Christmas time. We know about Joseph and Mary and wise men and shepherds, but I want to introduce you to Ahaz. Really?

Ahaz? Like that's who we're going to talk about at Christmas? Yeah, because you have more in common with him than you realize. The year is 732 BC. Ahaz is 20 years old.

And he's become the king of Judah. And I want you to know that he begins to understand what Christmas is about 700 years before the first Christmas.

[8 : 57] Let me show you. Verse 2. Isaiah chapter 7 verse 2 says this. In other words, here in Isaiah chapter 7, King Ahaz is facing a crisis.

He's facing a personal crisis. He's facing a national crisis. And all of his people, the people of Judah, are afraid with him. In fact, Isaiah tells us, so much so, he describes it this way, their hearts is like a tree that's in a storm.

That's what their life looks like. They are scared. They're afraid. They're afraid. They're alone. They have absolutely no idea what the future will hold.

And here's why. Some of you know this. In the Old Testament, when King Solomon died, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom Israel made up of ten tribes.

The southern kingdom Judah made up of two tribes. And in the northern kingdom, the greatest of those ten tribes was a tribe by the name of Ephraim. That's older brother.

[10 : 18] Judah is little brother. And this is happening at a time, you'll notice on this map, that a nation is on the rise by the name of Assyria. In fact, notice here, that dark green is the land in which Assyria had conquered by the mid-800s B.C.

The light green is all the land it will conquer by the 600s B.C. Everybody listen to me. Isaiah chapter 7 is written in between the dark green and the light green.

Ahaz doesn't know what's going to happen. This nation of Assyria is on the rise. And here's what happened. His older brother, Ephraim, or Israel, decides to make a coalition in case they have to stand up against Assyria.

And so they go into a relationship or coalition with a nation by the name of Syria. Not Assyria, but Syria. And older brother reaches out to younger brother and asks them if they would like to join this coalition.

Now, show of hands, how many of you have siblings? How many of you have brothers or sisters? How many of you have ever been in a fight with them? Hopefully it wasn't that bad, all right?

[11 : 54] But I bet you some of you have seen something like that happen. In my family, I've got an older brother. He's six and a half years older than me. Let's see, one time he hit me on the back of the legs with a pool stick as I was running up the stairs.

Another time he shot me in the back of the head with a BB gun. Explains a lot, doesn't it? Some of you are like, that makes everything a lot more clear, all right? In other words, you know what sibling

fighters are about. You've been through that. You've experienced that. Here's my point. Older brother asked younger brother to join the coalition. Younger brother said no. So older brother with Syria joined together and they attack Judah. And just as was the case in my family, younger brother beat up older brother. If you believe that, all right? And so they're victorious over Ephraim. But listen, look at verse six. Look at verse six. It says, let us go up against Judah and terrify it and let us conquer it for ourselves and we'll put a new king in the midst of it. And so they come and they try to take over Judah, but Judah wins. However, even though they win, they're alone. Now they have no friends. They have no allies. They're weak.

They've lost 120,000 men. The city is now ruined and they are scared. They don't have a clue what's coming tomorrow. What if they come back after them? What if Assyria comes next? Ahaz and Judah, their hearts are shaking like trees in the midst of a storm. They are absolutely in crisis and chaos and fear. Have you ever been there? You don't have to raise your hand for this one. Have you ever been in a crisis? Have you ever felt alone? Have you ever been scared about what the future might hold?

It's Christmas time, but I'm not happy. And Ahaz knows exactly how you feel. So God sends a messenger. The messenger is a prophet. His name is Isaiah. And God has an encouraging word for Ahaz and for his people through the prophet Isaiah. It goes like this, verse 7.

[14 : 24] Thus says the Lord God, it shall not stand. That is, the things that they want to do to you will not happen. It will not come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus. The head of Damascus is Razin.

Within 65 years, Ephraim will be shattered from being a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria. The head of Samaria is the son of Ramallah. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all. In other words, here's what God says to his people through his messenger. Are you listening? I mean, I'm serious. Are you listening? Those of you that would be willing to admit tonight that it's Christmas and you love it and you're holly and jolly, but you're trying to make sense of life right now. Here is what God says to his people through his messenger. It is going to be okay. You're afraid. You're alone. You're scared. But I want you to know you will not be defeated.

I want you to know that it's all going to work out. And the thing that you're afraid about, like Ephraim coming back, is not going to happen. But here's the thing you're going to have to do.

[15 : 31] I hope you're still listening. You're going to have to trust me. If you're not firm in your faith, you will not be firm at all. Ahaz, what I want you to know in the moment of crisis is that you're going to have to trust God.

You're going to have to know that I'm going to take care of my people. C.S. Lewis said this, quote, you never know how much you really believe anything until it's truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death. It's easy to say you believe a rope is strong enough if you're using it to court a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then discover how much you really trusted it? Ahaz, you're going to have to trust me here. It is going to be okay. And then he tells Ahaz, in fact, if you want to know that it's going to be okay, how many of you tonight really want to know that it's going to be okay? If you want to know that it's going to be okay, ask for a sign. And Ahaz says, I'm not going to ask for a sign.

And Isaiah, on behalf of the Lord says, you weary men. Do you weary God also? God said, amen, absolutely. The prophet Isaiah right there in our midst. I mean, come on people.

I said, ask for a sign. You're not going to ask for a sign, but guess what? I'm going to give you a sign anyways. And here's the sign. Verse 14. Verse 14 of chapter 7. Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name. Say it. Emmanuel. Emmanuel. We know the name. It's on our Christmas cards. It's in our Christmas songs that we sing even earlier. And then there's the big theological debate we have every single year. Is it Emmanuel with an E or Emmanuel with an I, right? Does anybody really know? But we know this word and you've already proven you know what it means. It means God with us. And as I said earlier, the way we usually interpret that is God has become a man. That's true. That's what Christmas is all about.

And so now a mankind can have a relationship with God. God with us. That is absolutely true. It's beautiful. It's the gospel. But there's more to that. There's more to Emmanuel. And now that we've understood a little bit about that first sign of Emmanuel in the context of King Ahaz, we can understand it even more as we come to that first Christmas. Look at Matthew chapter 1 and verse 18.

[18 : 21] Matthew chapter 1 and verse 18. The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband, Joseph, being a just man, unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. Understanding the context of Ahaz prepares us to understand the context of that first Christmas, specifically as it related to Joseph. First of all, notice that like Ahaz, Joseph is in a crisis. He is shaking like a tree in a storm. When Mary tells Joseph, I'm pregnant, Joseph's response is, Clark, that's the gift that keeps on giving the whole year. That is not Joseph's response at all. His life immediately goes into crisis. He is immediately in a situation where he is panicked, stressed, and afraid. His life is flashing before his eyes. Immediately he's thinking, this is not the future that I had planned for. This is not the marriage I had planned for.

This is not the reputation I spent my life building. He's in crisis. In other words, let me say it a different way. It's Christmas time. And Joseph's not happy. In fact, so much so, he's considering walking away from it all. And do you know what God does? He does the same thing to Joseph he did to Ahaz. Notice next that like Ahaz, God sends a messenger to Joseph, only this time it's not a prophet.

This time it's an angel of the Lord. And what does the angel of the Lord tell Joseph? Verse 20. But as he considered these things, behold, a messenger, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. In other words, he tells Joseph the same thing he told Ahaz in Isaiah chapter seven. Listen to me. You're going to have to trust me on this one.

Joseph, I know you're afraid. I know you're scared. And I know you don't have a clue what the future holds. But don't be afraid to do what I told you to do. Trust me on this. It's going to be okay. I am the God of Ahaz. I am also Joseph, your God. Cheer up, Charlie Brown. God's got a promise for you.

[21 : 06] And then guess what God does to Joseph? He gives him a sign. Look at what is quoted in Matthew chapter one. In Matthew chapter one in verse 21, it says this, she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins. And all this took place to fulfill what?

What the Lord had said by Isaiah. Verse 23. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name. Everyone say it. Emmanuel. In other words, Joseph, I know that you feel alone.

And I know that you're scared. And I know that the odds seem impossible of all of this working out, but I'm giving you a sign. It's a sign I gave 700 years before. The sign of a child. Emmanuel, God with us. Everybody right here notice this on the screen. In other words, Joseph, listen, you may not have all the answers, but you have Emmanuel. You may not know how all this is going to work out, but here's what you do have. God with you. In other words, faith family, listen to me.

Lean in, lean in for just a moment. The promise of Emmanuel is more than you can have a relationship with God because God became a man. That is true and awesome and great. The promise of Emmanuel, though, is the promise he gave like when Ahaz or Joseph was in a situation that was hopeless.

When like Charlie Brown, everybody else is around you is happy, but you can't make sense out of life. The birth of Jesus Christ is a sign to every Christian that God never forgets and God never forsakes his people. He is with them. Listen to me. Listen, if you're in the raging storm and war of Isaiah 7, you're in the life crisis of everything you planned just fell apart. Whatever it is, what Emmanuel means is not just you have a relationship with God. It's that if God is for you, who can be against you? I don't care the nation. I don't care the family. I don't care the financial hill. I don't care whatever it is. If you have God for you, nothing can stand against you.

[23 : 44] And listen, faith family, whether you believe this or not, you need God more than you need answers. You need God more than you need answers. And that's because of this. Notice it on the screen.

Is God's presence is actually what gives you peace in times of panic. Listen, Joseph doesn't get peace by getting all the answers. He gets peace by having God.

Ahaz doesn't get peace by figuring everything out with Assyria and what about bigger brother and all that. No, no, no, no. You don't need those answers. You have God. And God is what gave them peace in their time of panic. So as I close this evening, listen to me, be honest with me. You don't have to raise your hand or shout out loud. Some of you are in a personal crisis right now. I know

some of you are because I'm your pastor. I know what's going on. I get it. You're scared. You feel alone.

The future feels uncertain. And all I want to do this Christmas Eve is remind you of this. Emmanuel. God is with you. You may feel alone, but you're not alone. And the one on your side is the creator of all things. And I pray that in your personal crisis, you'll find peace.

The peace of Emmanuel. Secondly, everybody was born in a spiritual crisis. You think Joseph is facing impossible odds. You think Ahaz is facing impossible odds. Try being right with God on your own.

[25 : 28] It's impossible because we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And the one thing we certainly cannot do is make ourselves right before a holy God. That's a crisis. Think of it this way. Notice it on the screen. It's one thing to be uncertain about the next few months. It's another thing to be uncertain about your eternity. I get not understanding what all is going to happen in 2024. But do you really want to be the type of person that doesn't know what your eternity is going to be? And I remind you in the crisis spiritually of being unable to save yourself, what Jesus came to do.

Look again at Matthew chapter 1, 21. Listen, all of us this Christmas need to rest in the promise of Emmanuel that God promised through the birth of Jesus and all that Jesus would do to make us right with him. Jesus came, praise God, to save us from our sins. So the confidence I have, the confidence I have to stand before God has nothing to do with me.

It's that I know on that day God is with me. That Jesus did the work I couldn't do. And the promise of Emmanuel is not a Christmas promise. It's an eternal one.

That God is with us forever. And we are his forever. Christmas is coming.

And I'm not happy. That's how Charlie Brown felt that first Christmas. And he's not the first. He wasn't the last.

[27 : 38] The very first announcement of Emmanuel, Ahaz was shaking like a tree in a storm. The final announcement of Emmanuel, Joseph's not celebrating.

He's considering, how do I get out of this? How do I walk away from it all? How do I quit on what God has called me to do? And you know what?

Ahaz and Joseph found hope in their crisis in the very same place Charlie Brown did. The promise of a child.

And there were in the same country shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them. And the glory of the Lord shone round about them.

And they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not. For behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

[28 : 41] And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in the manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.

And saying, Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace, goodwill toward men. Charlie Brown found his peace. Have you?

Because Faith Family, listen to me. This is not a cartoon. This is real life. Emmanuel. Emmanuel.

No matter what you face. Now or through eternity. You will never be alone. You know why?

Your God is with you. And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray. Let's pray. It's the best news in the world.

[29 : 43] Absolute best news in the entire world. God, thank you for giving us the hope of Christmas. The hope of Emmanuel. That whether we're Ahaz or Joseph.

That whether we're Ahaz or Joseph. Or a whole bunch of real stories in between. Of life and crisis and chaos. Scared, alone, having no idea what the future holds.

There is one thing that does hold. There is one promise that is true. Emmanuel. Well, God is always with his people.

So if we came in here tonight knowing it's Christmas time, but I'm not happy. I'm struggling right now to make sense of it all.

Oh, that tonight we would find the hope of a Savior born. A King who came to set us free and be with us now and forever.

[30 : 46] We love you, Lord. Thank you in Jesus' name. And God's people said, Amen. Amen.
Amen.