

Immanuel

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[0 : 0 0] church. Turn with me and your Bibles to Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 7. In the Pew Bibles, it is page 535. This morning is the first Sunday of Advent. That is the season where we anticipate celebrating the coming of Christ leading up to Christmas, and we're beginning a new sermon series on Messianic prophecies from the book of Isaiah. So this month in December, we'll be looking at how the prophecy of Isaiah points forward to the person of Christ. Isaiah lived and prophesied in the 8th century BC, about 700 years before the coming of Jesus into the world, and yet the New Testament quotes from the book of Isaiah over 75 times. And what we want to do this month is look at just five of those texts from Isaiah that are quoted or alluded to in the New Testament in reference to Jesus. So we'll consider how Isaiah's words shed light on the significance of

Jesus' birth, Jesus' ministry, Jesus' character, Jesus' suffering, and Jesus' mission. The chapters we'll be focusing on are listed on the blue sermon cards in the pews, so if you want to take one of those home with you, feel free to do that if that helps you to prepare for Sundays. This morning, we're focusing on the prophecy that is in Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14, but I want to read chapter 7 beginning at verse 1 so that we can see some of the bigger context of the verse that we'll be looking at today. So join me, read with me from Isaiah chapter 7, beginning at verse 1.

In the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. When the house of David was told, 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. And the Lord said to Isaiah, go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear Jashub, your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the washer's field, and say to him, 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 the son of Remaliah.

Because Syria with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah has devised evil against you saying, let us go up against Judah and terrify it and let us conquer it for ourselves and set up the son of Tabeal as king in the midst of it. Thus says the Lord God, it shall not stand and it shall not come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin. And within 65 years, Ephraim will be shattered from being a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.

Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ask a sign of the Lord, your God, let it be deep as Sheol, as the grave or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask and I will not put the Lord to the test.

[3 : 4 4] And he, that is Isaiah 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 Emmanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. And the Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria.

What is it that strikes fear into your heart? Maybe it's something personal. Could be a medical diagnosis or a relational conflict or financial stresses or looming deadlines.

Perhaps those final exams and papers that are due next week or the project that your boss wanted done yesterday. Maybe you're afraid because you have enemies.

You have people who seem to be out to get you. And you don't feel like you have a way to defend yourself against them. Or maybe it's not just a personal crisis.

Maybe it's a family crisis. Maybe you're worried about your kids. They're having problems and you can't seem to make any progress in dealing with them.

[5 : 24] Maybe you're worried about their school. The town of Hamden, where we now live, just approved a plan to redistrict their elementary schools and close two of them. It's a big change and affects a lot of people.

The Board of Education meetings this fall have been filled with concerned parents. Or maybe it's something even bigger. Maybe you're worried about the direction of national politics. Or the effects of global warming. Or the worldwide refugee crisis. The passage we just read from Isaiah begins with the hearts of King Ahaz and his people shaking as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

King Ahaz was facing a national crisis. Two neighboring countries had banded together against him. They had invaded his land. They had caused some damage.

They were headed toward Jerusalem. And Ahaz was shaking in his boots. Now the passage we read earlier in the service from the Gospel of Matthew also begins with someone facing a crisis.

[6 : 30] Joseph wasn't facing a national crisis, but he was facing a personal crisis because Joseph was betrothed. That is, he was legally pledged to be married.

To marry. And he finds out she's pregnant with a child that's not his. What does he do now?

Now, this morning as we look at both of these passages, I want us to see that God speaks to us in the midst of our fears. In the midst of our problems and crises, he speaks to us.

And he speaks to us through a child called Emmanuel. I want us to look at this theme in three parts. First, I want to begin by looking at God's word to faithless Ahaz in the book of Isaiah.

Then I want to look at God's word to faithful Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew. And third, I want us to consider God's word for us in our own problems and crises and fears today.

[7 : 38] So first, God's word for faithless Ahaz. As we said, Ahaz was facing a national crisis. It's described here in Isaiah chapter 7. It's described with some more details in 1 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28.

So here's a bit more of the situation. Two neighboring countries. So one of them is called Syria. Not to be confused with Assyria. Those are two different countries.

Both appear. So Syria, in some translations, if you have the NIV, it's called Aram. So Syria is one country. And then Israel, which is also called Ephraim, which was the northern ten tribes that had broke away from Judah.

So Syria and Israel had allied themselves against Ahaz, who was down in Judah. And they had invaded his land. They had killed some of his people.

They had taken many captives. And they were heading toward his capital city of Jerusalem. And Ahaz was shaking in his boots. Where we meet Ahaz in verse 3 is he's apparently gone out of the city to inspect the water supply.

[8 : 47] A practical thing to do. That's probably why he was at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the washer's field. It was one of the water sources for the city of Jerusalem. He's sort of thinking, if we're besieged, what do we have on hand?

How are we going to deal with this? And there, verse 4, Isaiah delivered God's word to Ahaz.

What's God's word? Be careful. Be quiet.

Don't fear. Fear. And don't let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands. In other words, what Isaiah is saying is that these two countries who are attacking you and who you're shaking in your boots about, they're like the remnants of a bonfire.

They're still creating a bunch of smoke, but they're on their way down and they're on their way out. They are not the ones that you need to fear. So, verse 7 says, it, that is their plan to conquer Judah, shall not stand and it shall not come to pass.

God says, they're trying to conquer you, they will not succeed. And then in verse 9, Isaiah challenges Ahaz and says, if you won't stand firm, if you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.

[10 : 07] Now, that word has, that sentence, there's a word play in that verse that's hard to capture precisely in English because the same verb appears twice, first in an active form and then in a passive form.

So, basically what Isaiah is saying is, if you won't actively trust and rely and believe in God, you won't be established, confirmed, reinforced by God.

If you won't stand firm in faith, you won't be confirmed and established. Now, Ahaz doesn't seem to respond to Isaiah's first word, or at least his response is not recorded here in the text.

So, Isaiah goes to, God sends another word to Ahaz. Verse 10, again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz a second time. Ask a sign of the Lord your God.

Let it be as deep as the grave or as high as heaven. In other words, God was saying to Ahaz, let me show you how trustworthy I am. Let me demonstrate my love for you.

[11 : 22] I am your God. Let me show you my power to save. And Isaiah says, I mean, sorry, Ahaz says, verse 12, no.

Now, he says this in a way that sounds rather polite and even sort of religious. I won't ask. I will not put the Lord to the test.

All right, now, back in Deuteronomy, the Israelites were in the wilderness. And they were testing God, even though they had seen his faithfulness over and over and over again. And God says to them, do not put the Lord your God to the test.

You've seen enough evidence. He brought you out of Egypt from slavery. He brought you through the Red Sea. You've seen enough. You don't need another sign. But here, God is offering Ahaz. It's a rather unusual offer. God doesn't make this offer to everyone in the scriptures. Ask me for a sign. Whatever you want. But Ahaz says no.

[12 : 28] Because really what Ahaz was saying was something like this. God, I don't even want to consider the possibility that you might be right. I don't even want to give you a chance to show me that you're worth trusting.

I'm not asking you for a sign because I don't want a sign. Because my mind is already made up. I know who I trust, and it's not you. Now, you might say, well, how do we know that?

How do we know that's what was going on in Ahaz's mind? Well, verse 13 indicates, here then, O house of David, is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also? In other words, Ahaz is test-trying the patience of God first by ignoring Isaiah's first word and then refusing the second word.

But if you look at 2 Kings, verse 16, again, one of the other passages that speaks about the same situation, it makes it very clear who Ahaz was really trusting. So 2 Kings 16, verse 5, just summarizes the situation.

Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Ramaliah, king of Israel, came up to wage war in Jerusalem, and they besieged Ahaz. So they finally reached Jerusalem, but they couldn't conquer him. And then verse 7, here's Ahaz's response.

[13 : 54] So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglas Pileser, king of Assyria, again, not Syria, but Assyria, saying, I am your servant and your son.

Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel who are attacking me. Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house and sent a present to the king of Assyria.

Who was Ahaz trusting to save him from this national crisis? He wasn't trusting the Lord, but he was trusting the king of Assyria.

He was even willing to clean out the treasures of the Lord's house and send them off to the king of Assyria to try to buy his favor. Now you might say, who were the Assyrians?

Well, they were the rapidly expanding superpower of the day. They were the largest empire that had yet existed in world history. They were also incredibly cruel and ruthless.

[15 : 04] They routinely deported and brutally tortured peoples whom they had conquered. But Ahaz thought the king of Assyria is strong.

Ahaz's pro-Assyrian stance might have been partly what provoked Syria and Israel to unite and come against him in the first place because they realized that if he allied with Assyria, they were in trouble so they were going to strike first.

So Ahaz might have just even brought this trouble on himself. By trusting in Assyria and looking to Assyria. So Ahaz was facing a national crisis and he refused to trust and obey the word of God. Instead, he trusted the king of Assyria. And that brings us to verse 14. God says to Ahaz, Okay. You won't ask me for a sign. I'll give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.

[16 : 21] This child Emmanuel will be a sign. In other words, this child Emmanuel will be a living demonstration that God's word is trustworthy and true even though you have rejected it.

Ahaz. Now many people have wondered who in the world was Isaiah talking about? Here in verse 14. Now look down at verse 16.

For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. Isaiah was speaking to Ahaz in the year 735 BC.

That was the year that Syria and Israel invaded Judah. Three years later, the king of Assyria conquered Damascus. That was the capital of Syria. Killed the king of Syria and deposed the king of Israel.

And ten years after that, the Assyrians conquered Samaria, the capital of Israel, and the nation of Israel fell apart. The northern kingdom. So at one level, verse 14 has to be talking about a child who was born in the time of King Ahaz.

[17:33] Otherwise, the child is not assigned to King Ahaz and verse 16 doesn't make any sense. So at one level, in the immediate context, there has to be a child that Isaiah is speaking about who was born back then in the 8th century BC.

Now you might say, well, what about this word virgin? The virgin shall conceive and bear a son. Well, that word translated virgin can also mean more generally a young woman of marriageable age.

So this is not necessarily speaking about a miraculous conception or a miraculous birth in Isaiah's time. So, okay, if there's a child that was born back then, who was it?

Well, I think the beginning of chapter 8 shows us who this child was. Chapter 8, verse 3. And I, this is Isaiah speaking, and I went to the prophetess, that is, Isaiah's wife, and she conceived and bore a son.

Do you notice the parallel wording? 7, 14. The virgin shall conceive and bear a son. Chapter 8, verse 3. I went to the prophetess and she conceived and bore a son.

[18:54] Sign, fulfillment. And you might say, okay, so if Emmanuel is at least in part talking about Isaiah's son, then how is Isaiah's son assigned to King Ahaz and to his people?

Well, primarily Isaiah's son would be a sign of God's coming judgment because Ahaz had refused to trust and obey the word of God.

And God says, this child will show you and be a living demonstration that my words will come to pass regardless of whether you believe them or not. And because you have chosen not to believe them, you will experience judgment.

Now, if you look at the verses following, 7:14 and 8:3, Isaiah first reaffirms that the two nations who are attacking Ahaz will be defeated.

So, 7:16, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. 8:4, the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.

[19:58] But Isaiah's main emphasis is in the verses that follow. In 7:17-25 and 8:5-8. What do these verses say?

Verse 17, chapter 7, verse 17, the Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria.

So, basically, Isaiah's saying, you know what? These two nations that are attacking you now that you're worried about, yeah, they'll be dealt with, but guess what? Something worse is going to happen to you.

Chapter 7, verse 18-25 basically talks about how terrible things will be when the Assyrians invade Judah and how the land will be depopulated and how it will become briars and thorns.

It'll become a wilderness again. Chapter 8, verse 5-8 is even more clear. The Lord spoke to me again because this people, that is the people of Judah, has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently.

[21:03] So, Shiloah was a little stream outside Jerusalem that is just a small, gentle brook. And Isaiah's basically saying, because you're not willing to just be content being who you are and who God has made you to be and you rejoice over Rezin and the son of Ramaliah.

That is, you're rejoicing that Assyria is conquering these Syria and Israel because you're so happy about that. Therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them that is against you the waters of the river mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory.

It will rise over all its channels. It will go over all its banks. It will sweep on into Judah. In other words, the king of Assyria is going to come in like a flood and nearly drown you.

You have something much bigger that you should be worried about. You're worried about the wrong thing. You're worried about these two little nations that God is going to deal with soon.

And guess what? You have something even worse. If you want to think about this with a simple analogy, somebody else came up with this. Ahaz has been compared to a mouse who is being attacked by two rats and the mouse calls out for help to the neighborhood cat.

[22 : 28] You get it? Isaiah says, the cat is not your friend. He might attack the rats first, but once you're on his radar screen, he's coming for you.

Isaiah says, Assyria is the wrong one to trust. And one commentator, John Oswalt, said, whatever we trust in place of God will eventually turn on us and destroy us.

Isn't that so true? And that's part of God's judgment when God gives us over to the fickle and selfish masters that we have chosen for ourselves.

That's what the child Emmanuel would be a warning to Ahaz of. He would see this child growing up and he would see the word of God being fulfilled at each stage of this child's life and he would see that God's words were trustworthy and true and he would see that because he didn't listen and didn't obey that these judgments were coming on him.

So Ahaz faced the national crisis. He refused to trust and obey the word of God so God gave him the sign of the child Emmanuel as a sign of his coming judgment. But now, that's Act 1.

[23 : 56] Now we go to Act 2, the Gospel of Matthew, God's word to faithful Joseph. Turn ahead to Matthew 1. We read this earlier in the service. The page number's in your bulletin if you need that.

Matthew 1, 18 to 25. Now here we have somebody who's not facing a national crisis but he's facing a personal crisis.

Back then, being betrothed was, it was even more binding than engagement. Okay, being betrothed meant you're legally pledged to be married.

The only way you could break off a betrothal agreement was through a legal divorce. So it was even more serious and even more difficult than breaking off an engagement today as devastating as that can be.

So Joseph has already signed on the dotted line. They have a wedding, they've, you know, they've probably got a wedding date but they've made a legal and binding agreement. They will be married, they're not yet married, they're not yet living together but they haven't yet slept together but then he learns Mary's pregnant.

[25 : 10] And so what does he do? Verse 19, it says Joseph resolved to divorce her quietly. Now notice, verse 19 says Joseph was a just man, that is a righteous man and he was also a compassionate man because it says he was unwilling to put her to shame.

In other words, Joseph was saying, I'm committed not to dishonor you even though I can no longer trust you. I can't marry you but I won't do anything to harm you.

I won't make a big scene. I won't gossip about this. I won't seek to undermine your reputation. We will go our separate ways peaceably.

Now on a side note, Joseph in verse 19 is an example of how to go through a divorce in a godly and righteous way when you have clear biblical grounds for divorce, in this case apparent sexual unfaithfulness.

Joseph resolved not to be vindictive even when it seemed that trust had been irreparably broken.

[26 : 34] However, that's a side note, what seemed to be the case was not actually the case. God sent his word to Joseph, verse 20, not through a prophet as with Isaiah but through an angel in a dream.

Joseph, son of David, do not fear. Again, notice the theme of fear. Do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Okay, that's the one and only time that this is going to happen, just so you know. She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.

And unlike King Ahaz who twice rejected God's word, we see that Joseph obeyed immediately.

Verse 24, when Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took his wife but knew her not till she had given birth to a son and he called his name Jesus. So Joseph was facing a personal crisis. God sent his word to him and Joseph trusted and obeyed.

[27 : 41] And what we also see is that God gave him a sign. the child Emmanuel as a sign not of his coming judgment but of his coming salvation.

Jesus who will save his people from their sins. Verse 22 and 23, Matthew tells us that all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet Isaiah.

Now, I'm sure that some of you are asking this question. You're saying, wait a minute, you just told me that Isaiah was talking about his own son Emmanuel back in the 8th century BC.

How can then Matthew say that Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus? Let me say three things out to that very reasonable question.

First, many biblical prophecies have both an immediate fulfillment that is a specific relevance to the time and place where they were first spoken and a longer range fulfillment that becomes evident later on in the unfolding story of God's salvation.

[28 : 59] So, it's a bit like if you're watching, it's not a perfect analogy, but if you're watching a movie and the movie begins with a close-up of a particular individual individual. And for a while, the movie is just focused on you see that person as a child, you see them growing up, you see their life develop, and you think this movie is all about that one person.

For example, take Thomas Edison. I'm not sure there's a movie about him, but he's the one who invented electricity and all other kinds of things. So, the movie focuses on his childhood and then finally on his adventures, but then as the movie comes to an end, the story broadens.

Because it's not just about Thomas Edison, it's about how electricity changed the world. It's about his followers and their legacy and his legacy and his impact, and it's about the people who come after him who even far surpassed them.

The people who make even other inventions that even perhaps have a greater impact that grow out of that. You realize that this one person is only the beginning of a much bigger story.

Second, so that's a general point about biblical prophecy. They often have both an immediate fulfillment and a longer range fulfillment. In the case of this particular prophecy, second point, the book of Isaiah itself points to both an immediate fulfillment and a longer range fulfillment.

[30 : 28] You might say, how? Well, turn back to Isaiah, but keep your finger in Matthew. Turn back to Isaiah. Isaiah, the child Emmanuel is first named in Isaiah 7, 14.

And as I've pointed out, the rest of chapter 7 and the beginning of chapter 8 clearly indicate that Isaiah's son was in mind. I think that's the best way to understand them.

But that's not all that Isaiah says about Emmanuel. Look at chapter 8, verse 8. It's talking about the king of Assyria invading Judah and sweeping on into Judah, overflowing and passing on, reaching even to the neck.

It's as if Judah is nearly drowning in this flood and its outspread wings that is the extent of the king of Assyria, his power will fill the breadth of your land, O Emmanuel.

And you think, what? your land, O Emmanuel. Wait a minute. I thought Emmanuel's just Isaiah's son.

[31 : 36] Isaiah's son doesn't even become a king. How does the whole land belong to Emmanuel? And then, verses 9 and 10, the tone abruptly shifts from a prophecy of judgment that almost overwhelms and destroys Judah to an announcement of judgment on the other nations that are attacking Judah.

And a word of hope for God's people. Verse 10, take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. Speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us.

Emmanuel. There's that word again. It's a word play. The word Emmanuel means God with us. For God is with us. So, Emmanuel seems to give renewed strength and hope to God's people, even after God has judged them for their faithlessness.

And then, Isaiah chapter 9, which we'll look at more next week, also talks about this child who will be born. Chapter 9, verse 6, for to us a child is born.

To us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And the end of verse 7 says, he will reign with justice and righteousness from this time forth and forever more.

[32 : 59] You see, the horizon has broadened. We've started by just looking at Emmanuel as Isaiah's son, and then the camera angle has zoomed out, and now we see that someone called Emmanuel will reign forever.

So it can't just be talking about Isaiah's son, even though it is talking about Isaiah's son at the first. Third point, Matthew sees this familiar pattern first described by Isaiah, and he sees that it has now come to a greater fulfillment in the birth of Jesus.

He sees that Jesus is this child who will one day reign forever. You know, if you look at Old Testament prophecies, there are a few Old Testament prophecies that are about the Messiah that are fairly straightforward predictions.

Prophecies that were recognized even before the coming of Christ, by faithful Jews, they were expecting these words to refer to the Messiah. A good example of one of these is Micah 5.2, which basically says that a ruler of Israel will come from Bethlehem.

And you can look at the Dead Sea Scrolls, you can look at pre-Christian Jewish documents that clearly interpret that verse as referring to a coming Messiah.

[34 : 32] Messiah. But you know, many or perhaps even most Old Testament prophecies, it's not quite that clear in advance what they're referring to.

Their significance only becomes clearer in hindsight after Christ has come. One scholar, Craig Blomberg, put it this way.

He said, the key patterns of activity ascribed to God recur, that is, they happen over and over, in striking discernible patterns such that the believer can only affirm the same hand of God at work in both events.

It's sort of like if you turn on the radio and you hear a song that you have never heard before, but immediately you recognize the singer's voice.

You recognize the band's style and you know immediately who it is even though you've never heard that song in your life. Or you see a piece of art that you've never seen before and immediately you know that's a Van Gogh, that's a Monet, because you see the fingerprints of the artist.

[35 : 50] I think Matthew looks at the story of the birth of Christ and he says, that's the God who speaks to us in our fears. That's the God whose word is always trustworthy.

That's the God who gives his people a sign, the sign of Emmanuel, so they can see that he will always be true to his word. And so they can be encouraged and challenged to trust him and not trust anything else that is not worthy of their trust.

You see, here's the basic comparison. Back in the day, Isaiah's son Emmanuel was assigned to unfaithful Ahaz of God's coming judgment, but now Matthew is saying, Emmanuel, born of the Virgin Mary, is assigned to faithful Joseph and to all God's people of his God's coming salvation.

As Joseph watched the child Jesus grow up, as he watched him be born, as he watched him grow up, he would see God's promises are coming to pass in him.

He is a sign that God is faithful to his word, and he is a sign that God has come to save us. That's what the name Jesus means.

[37 : 07] The Lord saves. There's salvation for everyone who will put their trust in Jesus. Emmanuel, God with us.

So we've seen God's word to unfaithful Ahaz, and we've seen God's word to faithful Joseph, and finally, I want us to consider God's word to us. What are the crises and problems that you're facing? What are the things that can make your heart shake like a tree in the wind? Whether they're personal problems or family crises or national or global concerns?

Let me speak to you for a moment if you're not a Christian, if you're not currently trusting Jesus as your Lord and Savior. God spoke to Ahaz, and God said, ask me for a sign.

Now, as I said, God does not tell everyone to ask him for signs anytime they want. God does not say, ask me for whatever you want, and if I don't give it to you, then don't worry, you don't have to trust me.

[38 : 24] The Pharisees came to Jesus, they demanded a sign, and Jesus said no, because their motives weren't right. But here's the question. Are you giving God a chance to show himself to you as trustworthy and true?

Maybe you have questions, maybe you have doubts thoughts or fears or issues, barriers to faith in the Christian God. Talk about them with a Christian.

You'll almost certainly find that other people have wrestled with the very same things. There are good books by Christians that address all kinds of issues and fears and doubts and concerns and questions.

Have you read a thoughtful book by a Christian that explains a Christian perspective on whatever your top doubt or issue is with Christianity?

Also, let me challenge you, are you willing to question your default assumptions? Ahaz's default assumption was, I need to trust the biggest guy on the block.

[39 : 45] Everybody trusts something, even if it's only themselves. Who are you trusting if it's not God? Finally, have you ever prayed and asked God, God, if you're real, would you please show yourself to me?

In the bulletin, there's a prayer for those searching for truth. It's on the page titled Prayers for Communion.

When we serve communion in a few minutes, let me encourage you to consider that prayer. Second, for those of us who are Christians, will we let God's word speak to our fears and our problems and our crises?

You know, the right kind of fear can be clarifying. It can jolt us out of apathy and complacency. It can give us a laser-like focus and clarity to face the challenges before us or to flee the temptations that ensnare us.

Sometimes we need a little bit of that right kind of fear, which begins with the fear of God. All the right kinds of fear are ultimately derived from the fear of God.

[41 : 14] Because the fear of God gives us a respect for the order that God has established in this world. And therefore, we learn to live wisely in the world that God has made when we recognize that there's a maker of this world who ordered it.

And so, we ought to respect His design for things. There's a right kind of fear, but there's a wrong kind of fear. And the wrong kind of fear, the kind of fear that Ahaz had, God just further confuses us. It further creates clouds of dust. Sometimes fear can paralyze us. Sometimes fear can drive us into a frenzy of chaotic activity.

But to be honest, you can't even quite explain why you're doing what you're doing. You just know that you're afraid and you're running. And you're spinning your wheels.

Sometimes we can get so worried about our concerns, that is, things that we cannot control. And therefore, ultimately, we need to trust God with those things, that we neglect our responsibilities, the things that God has actually assigned us to do.

[42 : 31] One person said, we are always in danger of paying too much attention to the passing and paying too little attention to the significant.

So will we let God's words speak to our fears and reshape our concerns? You see, on the one hand, the sign of Emmanuel is a warning, as it was to King Ahaz.

Whatever we trust in place of God will eventually turn on us and destroy us. But on the other hand, the sign of Emmanuel is a comfort.

Because we can look at Jesus and see, God has come to be with us.

That's how Matthew begins his gospel, by introducing Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us. And what's the last word of the gospel of Matthew? Jesus says to his disciples, go and make disciples of all nations, and I am with you always.

[43 : 42] to the very end of the age. Emmanuel has come to be with us, and he's promised to stay with us, and never leave us, and never forsake us.

And so he's with us in our problems, in our crises, in our fears. Don't live as if he's not. He's not absent. Brothers and sisters, do not fear the wrong things.

For God is with us. Let us pray. Father God, we thank you for speaking to us in the midst of our fears.

We thank you that you do not only speak to us from afar, but we thank you that in Jesus Christ you have come to dwell with us, that we would know that we are never alone in all the battles we face, in all the uncertainties of life in this unpredictable and fallen world.

Lord, we thank you that you are the rock upon which we can stand. We thank you that you are the one who can give us courage and confidence, who can give us humility and peace.

[45 : 21] We pray that we would take heed, that we would listen and obey your word. We pray that in this Advent season that we would know your presence with us.

We pray that we would forsake our loyalties that are misguided, that we would not trust other people or other things that we should not be trusting in.

That we would trust in you alone above all things. And that you would give us wisdom to live wisely in this world.

We pray that as we come to the Lord's Supper, that you would nourish us and strengthen us to live by faith in the one who died for us and rose again from the dead.

We pray in his name, Jesus our Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.