

# Who are you trusting this Christmas

*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 2017

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[ 0 : 00 ] Bibles there, turn to the book of Isaiah, which is almost dead center of your Bibles. Isaiah chapter 7.

So we're going to pick it up in verse 10. This is Isaiah 7 verse 10.

And then we're going to turn to Matthew chapter 1. So now hear God's word. Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz.

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

[ 1 : 21 ] Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel. If you'd like to turn to Matthew chapter 1.

And I'm just going to read two verses, verse 22 and verse 23.

And this is where Matthew very wisely takes the prophet Isaiah and understands promise made to King Ahaz of Emmanuel is a promise for all people.

And therefore it has deep meaning. So verse 22, again, hear God's word. This is Matthew 1 verse 22. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

That's Isaiah that we just read. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[ 2 : 35 ] Well, may God bless both the readings this morning and the message upon it. And we'll come back to the message after we sung once in Royal David's.

Well, Christmas, like all birthdays, is an act of remembrance. Christmas, when you have a birthday, you remember, well, I hope you should remember the day on which you were born and how old you are currently.

Christmas Day is an act of remembrance to remember the birth of Christ. I can't really figure out how old he is because he's eternal, right? So God's very, very old and has always been that way.

But Christmas is to focus our attention on remembering Advent. Remembering the birth of Christ.

But why? Well, here in this passage, it shows us that we can understand the promise of Emmanuel from two different points of view.

We can understand it from Matthew as in this is how it happened, this is where it happened, this is why it happened. But then if we understand it from Isaiah, we've got to understand it as a promise.

[ 3 : 53 ] And that changes everything. Promises change everything because promises do strange things to people. Promises involves a waiting period.

And not most people are good at waiting. The moment God makes a promise, it means that we have to wait for the promise to be fulfilled. And that little period, that little time period in between, can cause believers or non-believers alike quite a lot of trouble.

It's that middle ground where doubts can occur. Well, you made the promise, but I can't see it happening. Nothing seems to be changing. If I can put it in a slightly different way.

For Ahaz, it's a little bit different. And this is perhaps something that you can relate to with your children. They come home from school or wherever they are.

And you know that you have tea prepared for them. And you say to them, don't eat now or you'll spoil your appetite for later. Now, you know that there's no shadow of a doubt that in about 15 or 20 minutes time, they're going to have their meal.

[ 5 : 05 ] Okay? Their hunger is going to be satisfied. It's not a problem. But for children, they don't seem to be able to see it. They don't seem to be able to grasp the fact that just that little waiting period, then all of this, what I'm feeling now, will go away.

Right? And it's that period in between that just wait, it's coming, until it finally comes that you, I want it now.

I want something to get me through now. So what happens when the Christian lives in this middle ground? Or what happens when people live in this middle ground where we know that the promise has been made, we know that it's not yet been fulfilled, and what happens in this middle ground? Well, the temptation is, just like children, to snack. Okay? But it's not a case of snacking on food. It's a case of spiritually snacking elsewhere.

Okay? Okay? In other words, that Jesus Christ is everything, and you'll know you'll get Jesus Christ, even at his second advent. Okay? This is the first advent.

[ 6 : 12 ] Christ is coming again. But the temptation here is to be like Ahaz, of giving in to the middle ground. Giving in to the temptation and the pressure of what happens when you have to wait.

And this means that Christians, the moment you are called as a Christian by God, you have to get used to delayed gratification. You cannot have everything now.

Okay? Now, we know this, generally speaking, that this is a general principle. You can't have everything now. But the whole world, the whole world doesn't seem to agree with this.

In fact, I see Christmas after Christmas advert after Christmas advert, often for settees, telling me that I can have something now and buy it later. You know, he's like the double glail salesman that went to Jethro in Cornwall.

This is a joke, but it was true. You know, and he said to Jethro, you know, in 15 years, in 15 years, these windows will pay for themselves. So he said, well, I won't pay my bill then, and leave it 15 years and done and dusted.

[ 7 : 19 ] Well, we understand that that's not the case. But delayed gratification is something that the world's not used to. And the pressure of removing delayed gratification of, I can have it now and pay for it later.

In fact, all forms of debt in borrowing is simply borrowing from your future self. You assume that if you borrow this much amount today, that in the next couple of years, you will earn that amount to be able to pay it back.

Okay? That's how it works. But what happens when you don't? Well, then you get into debt, and there's the trouble. When it comes to the promises of God, it's the same principle.

God makes a promise. He wants you to wait, and he doesn't want you to snack, buy one, get it, and pay later. He wants you to wait. You have to get used to delayed gratification.

And this can cause much trouble in the Christian life, as it does in children's lives growing up. It's one thing to tell them that tea is coming.

[ 8 : 26 ] It's another thing to convince them that it is coming. And it's the same with us. When you tell a child to wait for their tea, you know that they will eventually get their tea.

But they are determined on thinking that they can have something now, and they'll still be all right later on down the road. In the same way children can spoil their appetite when it comes to the meal, believers can do exactly the same with God.

Instead of waiting on the promises of God, they can go elsewhere in the world and sort of shorten their delayed gratifications, shorten the time period of every type of pleasure they want.

And then suddenly when it actually gets to God, they don't want him. Okay, we filled ourself up on the things of the world, and now we don't have an appetite for the things of God.

King Ahaz here has an opportunity to hold on to the promises of God, and God wants him to hold on to the promises of God, but then he refuses to. He can't wait.

[ 9 : 37 ] God promises him a sign to encourage his faith, and faith is simply holding on to the promise. It is coming, I promise you it is coming, and faith is believing that what God said is actually true.

I believe God above everything else. I believe God above the doubt I feel in the waiting period. I will trust God even when it looks like I should be trusting in other things.

Okay, I'm going to trust God. Even when it looks like I can get what I want elsewhere a lot quicker, I'm still going to trust God. And that's faith. Ahaz, now he wants to eat between mealtimes.

He doesn't want to wait. He wants what he wants, and he wants it when he wants it. And this is particularly applicable for us who are Christians, especially for us who are Christians.

It is something hard to get used to, delayed gratification. Waiting for promises to be fulfilled. Waiting for God to make good on everything that he has said.

[10:44] Now when we look at this being said to Ahaz, it may not look as though it has anything to do with Christmas. Until you get to the promise made to Ahaz, or the sign, which is the first advent of Jesus.

It is Emmanuel. The promise that God gives here is God with us. And that's important. This is what it says. Verse 14 in Isaiah.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel. The promise is Jesus. For Ahaz, he has shifted all of his trust and belief in God to something else.

To someone else. To human powers. To human allegiances. To other humans. And in doing so, he's done so much more. By trusting someone else more than God, he's put his hope, his security, his salvation in people.

Rather than God. And for him to do this is to elevate the person higher than God himself. This may seem like an unusual thing to do.

[11:55] But let me ask you. How much do you trust God? I mean, you will know. Is your life marked by waiting on the promises of God?

Is your life marked by patience in respect to God's word? In other words, whatever happens, I'm going to hold to God's word and God's way of doing things.

And there are good reasons for doing that. There are good reasons. In the same way there are good reasons for not to snack before tea. There are good reasons to not try and fulfill yourself elsewhere other than God.

King Ahaz has his issue or his problem is that he has misplaced his trust. See, trust is very, very easy.

Trust is not difficult. What you put your trust in, well, that's the difficult part. What you choose to trust, well, then it becomes difficult. You know, 10 years to build a relationship, one conversation to break it.

[13:05] And trust goes with it. Trust takes a long time to build in a particular person. But to trust when the thing is trustworthy, well, that's not difficult at all.

So this is the time of year where God is promising you that he is going to be with you. And not just in the birth, in the stable. He is going to be with you, for you.

And he's asking you to trust that. Okay? God is with you and for you. And he's calling you to put all your trust in him. And what will you do?

Well, I don't know. I know what you should do. But I don't know what you will do on a daily basis. Now, I understand the struggle here because I struggle with it as much as you do.

The moment I think that I can get what I want with my own hands and that somehow God's not involved, not only do I get a big head, but things go wrong further down the line.

[14:03] Everything is dealing with God in this world. Everything is involving God. And so the issue for Ahaz here is will he turn from putting his trust in people to finally turn and put his trust in God as he should.

So we're going to look at this under two headings. The first is Ahaz. The second is Jesus. So here's Ahaz. The problem that Ahaz has is a simple one. Ahaz is simply putting his trust in things that are not trustworthy.

But why would you do that? Well, there's only one reason why you would put your trust in things that are not trustworthy. And that's because you're fed up of waiting on God. You see, when you wait on God, you can't claim that he's untrustworthy because you're still in the waiting period.

You're still waiting to see if he'll come through. And so he has shifted his trust from God and put it in something else. The difficulty of trust is what you have decided to put it in.

But trusting God should not be a problem that it is. And yet many of us find trusting God a huge problem. We can't wait.

[15:23] God promises all these things and a lot of them are delayed gratification. They will come to us. But some of us just want to snack between mealtime.

We just want to eat in this waiting period because none of us like waiting. Okay? The world dictates a world that says you don't have to wait anymore.

But in the Christian context, in a context where you're living and dealing with God, waiting's essential. It is often painful. It is definitely frustrating.

Waiting. But waiting is something that God would have us all do. So the moment you begin to, let's say, snack your faith. In other words, you begin to put your faith into other places, into other people,

into other ventures.

Simply because you don't like the fact that God can keep you waiting. It's never good further down the road. Because the thing that you put your faith in changes.

[16:28] It moves. It's not stable. Ahaz has decided to do this. He's decided to put his trust in human people.

He has shifted his trust from God to man. And the issue is you can't have both, right? Now we tend to think we can have both. We tend to think that we can get our salvation from God and get everything else from everywhere else.

And it's not going to be a problem. But God knows that that isn't true. Okay? In Christ is everything. Is all the blessings. Now I understand that some of us love to pick and choose what parts of the Bible we want to hold to.

We love to pick and choose which part of the Bible is that we want to live to. And I understand that sometimes we can claim confusion over the parts of the Bible which are absolutely clear as to reasons why we don't act upon them.

Okay? And there are many reasons. There are many reasons why we don't do this. And it normally comes down to the same issue that Ahaz has. Well, it's not what I want. I want something different.

[17:41] There's the misplaced trust. Misplaced trust happens out of a heart that wants something different for your life than what God wants for your life.

That's why misplaced trust happens. The reason you snack between tea time, the reason you go elsewhere, is because you want it. You have an appetite for it.

And in some cases, you don't care what it is. You don't care what the snack is as long as you get something because you can't wait. And that is super dangerous.

It's not so dangerous when it comes to food. Okay, if you have a Mars bar before tea or a Milky Way that's not supposed to spoil your appetite. Do you remember the advert? You know? The Milky Way, the one treat you can have before dinner without spoiling your appetite.

Well, that's just not true. Because my mum used to buy them and my brother Nathan would eat five of them. And tea time would come and he wouldn't eat his tea. So, these adverts are not true.

[18:44] They're true if it applies to one, maybe. But, you know, because they don't fill you up, what do you do? You eat another one, right? And that's the problem. That's the problem.

Because you just keep going until you've filled yourself up on junk that burns up very quickly. And there you have it. The issue that Ahaz needs to realize is that whatever he's dealing with in life, he's always dealing with God.

The issue that we have to realize as a Christian is that whatever we're going through in life, we're always having to deal with God. Now, we can ignore God, but even in our ignoring of God, we're still having to deal with him.

Whatever we're having to deal with in life, we're having to deal with God. So, the temptation to get, let's say, my salvation from Jesus and to get everything else from everywhere else just causes us problems down the line.

Just like it does for Ahaz here. It leads us into a false hope. And even believers today, even in the church, make this same mistake.

[19:56] That now that I'm saved, my salvation is taken care of. But all my other needs must be met by the world. Says who? On what grounds do you make that?

And why do you believe that to be true? There is no grounds for believing it to be true. If Christ has made you the person that you are in him, then Christ will give you so much more in him, but only in him.

It is a falsehood to think that my salvation is taken care of by Jesus, but I must take care of the rest of my life myself. That's not the promise that God makes in Emmanuel.

The promise that he makes is God is with you all the time for the whole of you. So as a believer, you are not meant to snack in between mealtimes.

You are not meant to snack in between the promises being made and the promises being fulfilled. You are to wait entirely on God because God is the source of all blessing in the promise being made, in the promise being fulfilled, and in the period in between.

[21:04] So what God does here is he seeks to encourage Ahaz's faith back to God away from human allegiances.

Trust me, God is effectively saying, don't trust other people. And Ahaz says, it seems very godly, he says, well I'm not going to put the Lord to the test.

This is what he says. Ask for a sign, but Ahaz said, verse 12, I will not ask and I will not put the Lord to the test. Well that seems like a very God-honoring thing to do.

The trouble is, it isn't. On closer inspection, you realize that Ahaz is only looking out for himself. Let me try and explain this in a slightly different way.

Have you ever met those people who are always looking for a way out? They love to live in the ambiguity, in the not-so-sure periods. It's like a person who says, do you know what, if only you said I would have done that.

[ 22 : 08 ] And then you say to them, oh there's still time. And then they go, oh well, yeah, but now I need to. You see the problem? Those people who say, who always preface what they would have done with, oh if only you said.

Or if only this happened or that. Those people who preface the condition beforehand. Well if this was the case then I would have done that. But then when you say to them, okay, well there's still time to do it.

They go, well actually now it's a little bit too late for me. Now I'm unable to do it. What you've done is you've put them on the spot. You've revealed their heart. They're probably never going to do it in the first place.

Right? The reason Ahaz will not ask the Lord for a sign is not because he's honoring the God. He has no intention of honoring God. He's simply looking out for himself.

He doesn't want to be put on the spot. He doesn't want God to say, okay, I'll give you a sign. Now wish your faith in me. He knows that if God gives him a sign, he's still going to have his faith in human people.

[ 23 : 09 ] And that's the problem. And that's the problem. If God raises the question, then it means that Ahaz has to come up with an answer. And Ahaz doesn't have an answer.

And people are just like that today. They preface what they, oh, if only you said, well, you know, I could have, I could have been there. Or, well, there's still time. Well, actually now it's a little bit too late for me.

There are people who love to live in this ambiguity. They love to live in this area of things not being clear.

They love to live in this period of, well, if it's not clear, then it's not clear either way. Well, if you had done that, I would have, well, if you had said, I would have.

There are some people who are revealed the moment you say to them, no, there's still time. And Ahaz is being put on the spot before God saying, well, there's still time.

[ 24 : 11 ] And Ahaz, I'm not going to seek a sign. I'm not going to put the Lord to the test. Looks very humble. Looks very God honoring. But he simply doesn't want his heart to be seen.

People love living in this area because they love things being unclear. Ahaz doesn't want to do anything different because he wants to live his life in ambiguity.

It's like people who say, well, if God had done this, then I'd believe. If God had done that, I'd believe. If God had done that, I'd believe. And the answer is, no, you wouldn't. You really wouldn't.

Trust me. You really wouldn't. God doesn't need to do any more to make you believe. And yet so many people say, well, if God only did this, if God did, then I'd believe.

No, you really wouldn't. You really wouldn't. You phrase it in that way because you know God never will. And that's the challenge. I'll give you an illustration.

[ 25 : 12 ] Which back in the day, believe it or not, I used to work. You know, I used to work, yeah. Yeah. Passes don't work now.

I don't know what we do. But back in the day, I used to work. You know, so I know what it's like to pay bills. I know what it's like to be overdrawn. And I know what it's like to have all of the problems of a working life, especially when contractors don't pay you on time.

And I used to work in the trade. And I can remember one day, I was sat down on a building site at dinner time between a plumber and a chippy. A chippy, by the way, is a carpenter, not a chippy chippy.

Although that would have been nice at dinner time, right, to be able to sit down next to a chippy.

And there were a few occasions when we did, you know, winter time when it was cold and wet and that. But there I was, sat down and beside this plumber and this chippy.

Well, I didn't know the plumber all that well. I didn't know either of them that well. But the chippy was more talking. He was from Liverpool. You know, and he always spoke like that. And he was, but he was like six foot four. So I thought, well, I can only take the mick out of him so far, you know.

[ 26 : 17 ] And on the site, you know, there's a little bit of banter. And roofers, which is what I was, are not looked upon as sort of, you know, the great trade of a building site.

But they ought to be because they keep everybody else dry. And I said to him, we're just having a conversation. He's like six foot four. I mean, he's not the type of guy you're going to mess around with.

And I said to him, the conversation got onto about God. And I said, oh, so you're interested in God, are you? He said, well, no, not really. I said, but you seem to be asking a lot of questions about you. I said, well, you know, I have my curiosities.

I said, I've got something for you to do then. Why don't you tonight go home. And when you get home, pray that God, if you're there, make yourself known to me.

I said, would you do that? He said, yeah, I'll do that. I said, no, you have to be honest with me. Will you do that? He said, yeah, I'll do it. Now, I knew I'd see him next day on site.

[ 27 : 19 ] He would see me because the job was a fairly big job. The next day he came back. At dinner time, we sat down. We had the same conversation. So I said to him, how did he get on? He said, well, I said, did you do it?

He said, no, I didn't do it. I said, why didn't you do it? He says, because I was afraid if I did, what would happen next? There you have it.

See, he was not afraid of God as such. He was afraid of God getting personal. He was afraid of God becoming real to him.

And that was the issue. And that's what Ahaz is trying to avoid. Okay? I want the life I want. I don't want God to be all that real to me. Yeah, I don't mind turning up at church.

I don't mind singing a few carols at Christmas time. But let's leave it at the door. But that is to shortchange yourself to such a huge degree. That God isn't about to change your personality.

[ 28 : 24 ] God is through your personality. Most people think that if they come to God, they have to give up their personality and their sense of humor. Not at all. Some people would have given up their sense of humor.

But generally speaking, that as you come to God, God makes you the person that you really ought to be. In him. Ahaz wants a snack between meals.

Okay? He doesn't want to wait. He wants what he wants. Whatever it is, doesn't matter. I just want. And that's the issue. And so as a conclusion, Jesus.

The promise that God makes here is Emmanuel. Emmanuel. The solution to Ahaz is issue. His problem. His life.

As it is. Why is Jesus the solution? Why is Emmanuel God with us and God for us? The answer to all of our needs.

[ 29 : 24 ] Well, when you think of Emmanuel, your mind might simply go to a baby in a stable, in a manger, and that's it. But that's not what Emmanuel means here.

Emmanuel here means that God is coming. Emmanuel means God with us. And when this promise is made here, yes, it's a virgin will conceive and bear a son.

He has to be born into the world somewhere through someone. But what it means is that God is with you. God has come.

And that if God is with us, then God is also for us. And that's the issue. That here Ahaz is wanting to do all his own thing on all his own way, and God is promising his very self for him.

I'm here for you. And we tend to miss that part of Christmas. We tend to think, you know, that the focus, which it ought to be, is all on Jesus.

[ 30 : 28 ] But let's not forget the reason Jesus came. God with us. God came for you. He came for all those who are waiting, who put their hope, who put their trust, who waited in all the periods of doubt, and then suddenly he came.

And all their hopes had increased, and all their fears had disappeared, and all their salvation had been fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

The issue for all of us here is that belonging to God is the only issue of life that you should concern yourself with. And to snack elsewhere is a terrible mistake. Focusing on Jesus as the perfecter of our faith, as the author of our faith, as the one who fulfills all the promises, should be the greatest

encouragement to you.

You see, the reason why Jesus lived is so that he could live this perfect life for us. I said this last week in touching on it, that the problems we have are not death, but life.

All the problems we have in life are in life. When we've passed from this life, the problems cease. Well, they don't, if you don't belong to God, but the problems that we have in this life belong to this life.

[ 31 : 55 ] So you have a God-given opportunity in God giving himself to you for you to put your trust in him. Okay? Jesus came to this world. Now, we're saved by a homeless man.

We're saved by a man who knew what it was like to be hurt, who knew what it was like to be betrayed, who knew what it was like to feel hunger, to feel tired.

Okay? He lived in his flesh and bones in this world and feeling everything that you felt. And he too also had weight on God.

So as you sit here this morning and as we conclude, we ought to realize that the only reason we are gathered here today, the only reason any of us have a hope, is because God fulfills his promise.

So the challenge to you all this morning is a very simple one. A very, very simple one. Who are you trusting? Who are you trusting?

[ 32 : 57 ] For everything. Not just Salve, for everything. Where is your trust? Where is your hope?

For everything. Where is your life? For everything. Where is it? So the promise is Emmanuel.

God with us. So come. Come to Jesus. Amen. Well may the Lord bless you and keep you and make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you and lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Amen.