

## “Behold the Virgin, Pregnant and Bearing a Son”

Isaiah 7:1-14,

Advent Evening III December 17, 2014

Beloved of the Lord.....While there are always many useful and beneficial lessons in any particular Bible reading, tonight’s reading is rather comforting because Ahaz was a very wicked king, even bent and intent upon doing evil, yet God still gave him a wonderful Gospel promise to believe in which contained forgiveness. God spoke to Ahaz of the Christ who would come, even our Immanuel, God with us. When we see the Lord thus being merciful to Ahaz, we should see just how gracious and forgiving God is, that He is even able to forgive someone like Ahaz. Let us therefore work hard tonight, mentally, to do two things: **FIRST** let us see how we are the same as Ahaz in many ways, and **SECOND** let us apply the Gospel promise of Christ to ourselves and firmly. God has pardon also for all our sins, but let us receive such pardon by faith alone.

We begin now with the background. Ahaz was the king of Judah, ruler of Jerusalem, and Pekah was the king of Israel to the north. Pekah had made a pact with Syria to make war together against Ahaz, and overthrow him. Hence at this time when Isaiah visited Ahaz, the city was under siege, surrounded by armies. This is when the heart of Ahaz “was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.” God at this time sent Isaiah to Ahaz saying, “Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shearjashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.” Knowing all things, the Lord knew where Isaiah could meet Ahaz. He was checking out the water supply for the city under siege.

God’s message to Ahaz by way of Isaiah, was that in spite of the league between Israel and Syria, God was not going to allow these enemies to win. “It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.” In order to strengthen Ahaz God even offered to give him a sign to confirm or prove God’s Words were true. This was exceptionally gracious of the Lord, for we ought to believe His Word always without signs and wonders. Yet the Lord said, “Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.” Now why did he say this? On the surface it seems Ahaz is very godly and pious. But the truth of the matter was Ahaz had already come up with his own plan. Rather than going to the Lord in prayer, repenting of his sins, and gaining strength from God’s Word, Ahaz trusted in the strength of men, armies and soldiers. Ahaz made a league of his own with Tilgathpilneser, king of Assyria. Ahaz even took gold from Solomon’s temple, the wealth of God’s house, to buy the help of Tilgathpilneser. But the Bible says in Second Chronicles 28, that “Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the LORD, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not.” The armies didn’t come to help! The Bible continues “And in the time of [Ahaz] distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the

gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel.”

Isn't this astounding? Ahaz first believes money can save him from the situation, just as we trust in our money or savings to help us. Ahaz also steals from God's house in order to buy the armies of Assyria, just as we hold back our firstfruits because we doubt God will provide enough for us. Ahaz likewise puts his trust in a man, Tilgathpilneser, who then betrays him, and so we often trust in men who fail us. After all that, since the Syrian armies seem like they are always winning, Ahaz bows down to the gods of his own enemies, but that doesn't help either. We're guilty here too. Trusting in our own reason or strength, we devise solutions to our problems without God's Word and prayer, and we make and create our own path which never pans out. We may not bow down to the gods of Damascus, but we seek after and follow this world's counsellors and psychologists. We might even listen to Oprah, Dr. Phil, or Ellen. We forget Jesus is our best friend, even a Friend of Sinners, our Immanuel. We are much like Ahaz in our sins, yet our Lord still holds out His pardoning hand saying, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: Return Unto Me; for I have redeemed thee."

Continuing on, Isaiah now says to rebellious Ahaz, "Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" In other words, "How long Ahaz are you going to test God's patience with you? There is an end you know to God's patience! He doesn't hold out His pardoning hand of grace and forgiveness forever. Repent now of your idolatry and despising of God's Word, before it is too late for you Ahaz. Confess your sins before God's wrath falls upon you. God would rather forgive you and receive you than punish you and cast you away. "O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help!"

This is why you and I, dear Christian, must likewise never put off repentance until tomorrow. If we sin against our conscience, and then we put off repentance until later, we may very well harden our heart against God by getting stubborn in our sin. Continuing in the sin allows our flesh to grow stronger and stronger and our desire to fight sin grows weaker and weaker. We are overthrown when we stubbornly refuse to repent and confess the sin of which we know we are guilty. While it is always true that it is never too late to repent as long as we live, our flesh can use that truth for evil. We then become smug or coy in our sin, comfortable, and then our repentance later is false because we have no real intention to forsake the evil and amend our ways. Let us not weary God by our sins, but seek His mercy for Christ's sake, before the doors to heaven are shut and no longer open.

It is rather incredible then, knowing how evil Ahaz was, that God still offers Ahaz a sign that Jerusalem will not be destroyed. "Therefore, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign, Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." Given the context this might seem strange, for that sign would not be fulfilled until some 700 years later, and Ahaz would not be alive when Christ was born. Nevertheless that was God's sign, and Ahaz understood it. This is because the believers in the Old Testament already knew the Messiah would come from a woman and not a man. They

knew the Seed of the woman is not the seed of a man, hence a virgin would give birth. “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” This is like saying, “I promise you that your enemies will not overthrow you, for a virgin will bear a son as God promised, and His name will be Immanuel – God with us.” By such words, God is then directing Ahaz to Jesus and the forgiveness of his sins, a promise Ahaz had often heard but never believed. He should repent of his trusting in armies and leagues, money and men, and he should put his trust in Immanuel, God with us.

Whatever our troubles may be in life, God’s counsel for us is no different, for Jesus really is the solution to all our problems. He delivers us from our own sins and death, and the power of the devil. His forgiveness saves and lifts up to heaven, those who were lost and bound for hell. Nor do we need to see any special sign from God, nor any wonder, Jesus is the sign and wonder Himself. He came down from the height, from heaven above, to the depth, this earth below, and God clothed Himself with human flesh and blood, received by His own mother, the Virgin Mary.

Hence the exact words of Isaiah’s prophesy, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son”. This English translation could be better. The Hebrew words chosen by God are stronger. Literally the Hebrew words say, “Behold, the virgin, pregnant and bearing a son!” That literal translation closes the door to the idea that a virgin will have sex and then conceive. God’s Word says a virgin is giving birth even now! The Hebrew word for virgin is *almah*. *Almah* is used only seven times in the Old Testament, and in each case it always means virgin. Besides that we have the words of Mary herself who said, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man.” She was a virgin, how could she conceive a child without a man? Even she didn’t understand how this was possible, but the angel explained, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.”

How then is Jesus our Immanuel?...God with us? FIRST Jesus is God and Man in one person – for our sake. His divine nature from heaven above was joined to a human nature, and never shall they part! “God was manifest in the flesh.” “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” You then, as man or woman, ought to be forever comforted knowing Jesus is your own brother, a True Man to save all men from sin. Even now in heaven above Jesus is still flesh and blood like you, for by His flesh and blood He redeemed your flesh and blood from all sin. You were born dead in trespasses and sins, but through Jesus’ flesh and blood you now have an eternal life no man can take that away. Jesus even said, “Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

The SECOND way God is with us, is by coming to us to help us. This He did in His own person, of flesh and blood, for “He hath visited and redeemed His people.” His holy birth becomes our holy birth by grace through faith. All our guilt because His guilt on the cross. He bore our sins to redeem us. And still today we are never alone, for He lives within each believing heart, yet He sends us also His Spirit for our comfort, the Comforter who says, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”..... “Be still,

and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.” Take refuge this Christmas in your best Friend named Jesus, the Rock who cannot fail you, your Immanuel. Your battle with sin has already been fought, since Jesus won, and we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. He is not distant but close, as close as the Word you read with your eyes, or His truth which you ponder in the heart. Amen.