

Faithful

Isaiah 7:10-14 ¹⁰ Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" ¹³ Then he said, "Hear now, O house of David! *Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?* ¹⁴ "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

In each of our advent signs this year we saw God fulfill not one but two promises, a near promise and a far promise. God provided a ram as a replacement for Isaac. God also would provide Jesus as the replacement for us all. The near was a token to prove God's faithfulness so that the believers could be confident of the one which was far away. God's faithfulness in saving the Israelites through the bronze serpent was evidence that he would be faithful in saving all through Jesus lifted up.

This is very common to find prophecies which may seem like one prophecy but actually has two fulfillments, The near bearing witness to God's faithfulness so that those who heard could be confident in the one which was far away. When God appears to David and promises him a savior who would sit on his throne, that prophecy spoke about both Solomon and Jesus.

Our text this morning is the same thing. We have a sign which does point far into the future to Jesus, but in order that God might prove his faithfulness to Ahaz, it is also points to a closer more immediate fulfillment.

There are two things going on in this text

1. Ahaz the king of Judah is worried, Syria and Israel have formed an alliance and are attacking Judah. Ahaz wants to make an alliance with Assyria against Israel and Syria. Isaiah has continually warned Ahaz to trust the Lord and not to trust Assyria. But Ahaz refuses, thus you have the first verse, **the Lord spoke again to Ahaz** – in his mercy the Lord speaks again to Ahaz, if you won't listen to my word, what sign do you want? What proof can I give you?
2. The lord speaks to us. I will give you a sign that I am the Lord who keeps his promises more than that I will give you my only Son

On the one hand God was telling Ahaz, I am with you, and before nine months are over it will be so obvious that I am with you that women will start naming their children "Immanuel." This sign is a rebuke on Ahaz. Isaiah is saying that the women of Judah will know within nine months what Ahaz refuses to believe. The God is with his people. That God is faithful.

On the other hand he is telling us. I the Lord your God will be born as a child and be with you in person, and remain with you forever. This is a passage that many of you know very well, that is because it is such a wonderful promise that it is a passage well worth holding on to, and keeping with you at all time. That the Lord our God is with us.

Ahaz was outwardly a very religious person. He built temples and altars, he worshiped often and regularly. He sacrificed to every god he could. He even sacrificed his own child. From a worldly perspective, many would have said yes here is a very spiritual person. But in the eyes of the Lord he was an abomination.

He indeed had a "form of godliness but denied its power." For all his prayers, for all his sacrifices, for all his worship he didn't actually believe when God came and spoke to him personally. He didn't consider the Word of the Lord something worth holding on to. He did not believe God to be faithful.

Isn't that so much an apt description for so many people today. Even for ourselves.

So many talk about loving one another, so many will tell you merry Christmas, so many will talk about truth and doing what is right. They clutter their lives with the outward signs of religion and Christianity.

But the Word of God is nothing to them. They have a form of godliness but deny the power of God's word. They deny the power even of the Angels message. We often don't let the Word of God rule our life. We often think we know a better way. We often assume that we can't trust God's promise. Yes he promised to take care of me, but I have to make sure that I have enough money in the bank. I have to make sure that I get a good enough job. I have to watch out for myself.

Again we don't grasp the promise that is in that name Immanuel. We don't cling tightly to that promise that God is with us and hold it close to our hearts.

Despite man's faithlessness, God remains faithful. His promises are delivered even when we fail to believe. Even if we doubt God and treat his word as worthless, nevertheless God has delivered his son to us, and through him forgive our sins.

Ask a Sign

In His mercy God tries again with Ahaz. You don't believe me ask any sign, any sign at all. And Ahaz responds "I will not test the Lord." He responds with scripture. Again "a form of godliness but denying its power."

To put the Lord to the test when he has not given you a promise, is indeed a sin. To say to God, I want a BMW for Christmas and if I don't get it, I'm not going to believe in you, is a sin. Not only is it very arrogant but it makes God into nothing more than a cosmic genie.

On the other hand, we have Ahaz, to whom the Lord does give a promise, but he doesn't consider the word of the Lord something worth anything. He doesn't believe this word. To refuse to believe when God has given a promise is just as sinful as demanding where God has given no promise.

God has given many promises to us which he has faithfully delivered. We don't need another sign from God. We need to learn better to appreciate the ones he has given to us. To hold them in our heart as Mary ponder all these things in her heart.

Especially the sign above all others that we receive at Christmas. God is faithful who has delivered his son to us.

The virgin shall conceive

The Hebrew here is the word Alemah. This is not the normal word for virgin, the normal word is betulah. Betulah is used over 50 times and Alemah is used only 8. And so you have the modern "scholars" who act as if they know so much more than God and his word. "It doesn't mean virgin, it isn't a reference to Mary," they claim.

There is no doubt that the word Alemah means virgin. Every time it is used it is clearly a reference to a virgin. The Hebrews who translated the OT into Greek used the Greek word for virgin. The context of the passage demands it. But above all this the Lord tells us through the inspired NT writers that indeed this word is a reference to the virgin Mary and the promise of the Messiah

These so called "scholars" fail to learn the lesson that Ahaz also failed to learn. The power of God's word, that it can be trusted. That when the evangelists by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us here is the full fulfillment of this passage, then we know that this is what God meant when he spoke through Isaiah

The Lord fulfilled his word to Ahaz. Syria and Israel were not able to prevail against him. The Lord fulfilled His word to us. The virgin did conceive and the Son of God was born for us. The Lord will be faithful to you as well. He will do as he has promised, even when you are not faithful to him. That is one of the precious things about Ahaz. Ahaz wasn't a David. He wasn't a saint, far from it. Yet God still fulfilled his word to Ahaz. God will fulfill his word to you as well.

His name shall be called Immanuel

The women of Ahaz's day named their children Immanuel because they saw that the Lord was faithful. Mary's child we also call Immanuel because he is the faithful Lord who is with us.

Since God has fulfilled his promise, this name is one that we want to hold dear and close to our heart. In this name we are reminded that through this child God did truly walk and live among us. That he is still with us now. That He saved us from sin and darkness. That He will take us to be with him in heaven. God is faithful.

Immanuel, is it a promise that is nice to have around at Christmas time, or is it a promise to grasp and hold on to, to keep with us in our hearts?

By the power of His word, a virgin conceived, by the power of His word God became flesh, by the power of His word our sins were forgiven when He hung on the tree. Do not think lightly of this promise as Ahaz did, rejoice in it and hold it in your heart as Mary did.

Amen