

Immanuel
Isaiah 7-11

Turn to Isaiah 7 please. This is a sermon from Isaiah about Jesus. Next week will be another sermon from Isaiah about Jesus. The beginning of Isaiah describes Jesus the king. The end of Isaiah describes Jesus the servant. This week, the beginning of Isaiah, about Jesus the king.

The beginning of Isaiah gives the promised one the name “Immanuel.” Immanuel is Hebrew for “God with us.” We first read that name in a story we’ve talked about a couple times already in these sermons.

Ahaz, king of Judah, descendant of David, was scared of two neighbouring kings who were planning to attack him. To protect Judah, Ahaz was planning to make a treaty with the powerful king of Assyria. While he was planning this treaty, before he put that plan into action, Isaiah brought him a message from God.

Isaiah told king Ahaz, “Don’t do anything, stay calm, God will take care of those two neighbouring kings, do not make a treaty with Assyria, those two neighbouring kings will never attack you. It is important that you trust God in this.”

Now, let’s pick up the story in 7:11 *“Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”* [God offered proof that he deal with the two kings.]¹² *But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”*¹³ *Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?”*¹⁴ *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*¹⁵ *He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right,*¹⁶ *for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.*

God offered Ahaz a sign, any sign he wanted, a miracle of Ahaz’s own choosing, to prove to Ahaz that God meant this, God would certainly protect Judah from those kings. God rarely does this, but he did for Ahaz. But Ahaz did not want a sign, was not interested, he had already made up his mind to trust the Assyrians. But God gave a sign anyway, the baby boy Immanuel.

This is a confusing paragraph. All commentators grope here. In Hebrew, “virgin” means young single marriageable woman. This could mean a miraculous birth, but does not have to.

It could mean a young woman will get married and get pregnant. The rest of the paragraph sounds like someone born at that time, who will be 3 or 4 when the two kings are destroyed. And yet Isaiah does not tell us that this boy was born. Matthew uses this verse of Mary and Jesus. It’s not clear how anyone back there could have seen that coming from this paragraph.

But this is clear: a baby will be born, a son, and his name will be Immanuel, God with us, and this boy is God’s sign to his people that God will protect his people from their enemies, and take care of them.

Now let’s turn to Isa 8:8. Isaiah is describing what the powerful Assyrians will do when they come. They will overwhelm Judah. Isa 8:8 *[Assyrians like a flood will] sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it, and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, Immanuel!*” Get that ending? *The breadth of your land, Immanuel.*

This son named Immanuel is not an ordinary boy. Judah belongs to him. What does that mean? We are not sure yet. Who can call Judah “his land”? That doesn’t really work for anyone less than a king. The land of Judah belongs to this son named Immanuel.

Keep reading - 8:9 *Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered!* ¹⁰ *Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for Immanuel.*

At the end of v10, your Bible will read “for God is with us.” And then they have a footnote which says the Hebrew reads “for Immanuel.” If we were reading in Hebrew, the sentence would end in awkwardly, and let’s leave it like that. “your purpose will not stand, for Immanuel.”

Let’s go back to the virgin’s son in Isaiah 7. In Isaiah 7, the boy was a sign to God’s people that they did not need to worry about those two neighbouring kings because God would protect them.

But now Immanuel is a sign of God’s protection from all the nations, “all you distant lands.” Raise the war cry, and be shattered, prepare for battle, be shattered, and again, prepare for battle, and be shattered, devise strategy, be thwarted, propose your plan, it won’t work. For: Immanuel! Immanuel himself is the reason your plans will not stand. Immanuel will shatter you.

The boy called Immanuel, whom we know to be Jesus, is certainly a sign that God is with us and will protect us. But in vv9-10, which we just read, he seems more than just a sign. Immanuel himself conquers the nations and shatters the enemies of God’s people.

Revelation speaks of one great final battle in which the enemies of God’s people all gather together to put an end to God’s people. Rev 16, 19, and 20 all describe “the battle,” in which Christ conquers (Rev 16:14; 19:19; 20:8). That’s what Isa 8:9-10 feel like to me. Immanuel himself is the protector of God’s people.

So, when Jesus is called Immanuel, it means God is with us, but with a particular purpose: God is with us to protect. God is not passively present, he is guarding and shielding. The birth of Jesus, Immanuel, is God’s sign that God takes care of his people, and fights for them. We often don’t feel very protected. That’s fine. From God’s side, though, he’s doing a lot of protection.

The call to Faith: 8:11-13 *This is what the Lord says to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people:*¹² *“Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it.”*¹³ *The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.*

The problem is not that we feel afraid of dangers around us. I can be scared, my heart pounds and my legs shake and my stomach hurts and I can't sleep properly. We can't tell from that if I trust God or not. Will I then make a treaty with something dark, to protect myself? = Unbelief.

Or: Will I serve God rather than protect myself? = Faith. Faith and obedience are interchangeable at this point. When we are afraid, obeying God means faith in God, and faith in God means obeying God.

Isaiah's response in 8:17 – *I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face; I will put my trust in him.* "Isaiah sounds afraid too, but he heard the warning.

The sign of Immanuel, and the protection of Immanuel, comes with a call. "Don't fear what they fear, don't dread what they dread; regard the Lord Almighty as holy, he is your fear and your dread." The right response to this call: *I will wait for the LORD, I will put my trust in him.*"

In different ways, you people in this church show this kind of faith again and again. You already know this, and you live it. Trusting God is not easy. But you do keep trusting in him and serving him. So did Isaiah, but God still thought it was a good idea to warn Isaiah. God today warns all of us together about this: Be careful. Don't let fear take us from making him our first concern.

Let's review: what is the sign of the virgin's baby? a baby will be born, a son, and his name will be Immanuel, God with us, and this boy is God's sign to his people that God will protect his people from their enemies, and take care of them, don't worry, stay calm.

Let's keep reading. 9:6-7 *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.* This can hardly not be the virgin's son, Immanuel. In Isa 7, the boy was a sign to Ahaz. But now, *to us a child is born, to us a son is given.* We'd already sort of seen this by 8:10, but here it's clear. This child is a sign of God's care to all who trust him.

God gives us what he gave Ahaz, a sign of his care and protection for those who trust him, and the sign is a baby boy named Immanuel. In Jesus, God gives you and me what he gave Ahaz.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ *Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

This tells us much more about Immanuel “He will be called Mighty God, Everlasting Father.” I think this is the only messianic prophecy in the OT that makes the deity of Jesus clear. “Mighty God, Everlasting Father.” So now we go back to the name “Immanuel.” The boy is not just a *sign* that God is with us; no, Immanuel *himself* is Divine, Immanuel *himself* is God with us.

And he will reign on David’s throne. He’s in the same line of kings as Ahaz. Wow. And there is emphasis here on government and peace, on justice and righteousness, and this king and government will never end. Everlasting. There will be no end. From that time on and forever.

To us a child is born (not just to Ahaz, or to the virgin), to us a son is given, and his name will be Immanuel, God with us. This boy is God’s sign to his people that God will be with his people to protect them from their enemies, and take care of them.

We’ll read one more text here, from Isaiah 11. 11:1-10 *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—³ and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

The stump of Jesse. Jesse was David’s father. The stump of Jesse means that David’s line of kings will be cut off, chopped down. That’s what the exile to Babylon did. But a shoot will spring up, a new branch. That is the virgin’s child, the child born to us, the son given to us.

My favorite line in here is v3: *and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.* When God says, “*don’t fear what they fear, or dread what they dread, I will be your fear and your dread,*” Immanuel says, “Yes! That’s for me, that’s how I want to live!” He will delight in the fear of the Lord.

One other line, in 11:4: *he will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.* In Revelation 19:21 *The rest (of the gathered armies) were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse.* The rod of his mouth, the breath of his lips, the sword coming out of his mouth.

And where does Immanuel’s Spirit-led government take us? Back to Eden, right back to the garden of Eden, just like the book of Revelation. Isa 11:6 *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.⁸ The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest.⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

That is where Immanuel, the virgin's boy, will take us. Matthew tells us how this actually got started:

Matthew 1:20-23 An angel of the Lord appeared to [Joseph] in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. " ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

And now we must notice how Matthew ends. Matthew ends with Jesus speaking to his disciples after his resurrection: *And surely I am with you every day, right to the end of the age.* After all, he's Immanuel. How else could he speak?

So, let's picture ourselves as Ahaz, getting a personal sign from God that he will take care of us, a sign from God that the things we fear and dread will not destroy us. God says, here's a sign for you that I'm on this to make sure it does not destroy you.

The sign is a baby, a son, named Immanuel. To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and his name is Immanuel, God with us. This boy, this Immanuel, is God's sign to us that God is with us to protect us who trust him, protect us from our enemies, and take care of us. Amen.