

Isaiah 7:1-17. When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. ² Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. ³ Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. ⁴ Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶ "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it." ⁷ Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "It will not take place, it will not happen, ⁸ for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. ⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all." ¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." 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 men? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. ¹⁶ But 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. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria."

Jesus is Immanuel

- 1. He rescues us from a hopeless situation***
- 2. The almighty God is with us.***

The odds are stacked against them. Their backs are pressed against the wall, but then the impossible happens. It might sound like it came from some Hollywood movie script or some "had to see it to believe it" fourth quarter comeback. The hero steps up and the people are saved, the star athlete throws the team on his back and they snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. A situation which is hopeless is suddenly filled with immeasurable hope and joy. But our lesson for today is filled with such high drama. The people of Judah had their backs against the wall and seemed to be in a hopeless situation. Under King Ahaz, Judah had already lost in battle to the kingdom of Aram—with many prisoners carried away. In 2 Chronicles 28 we hear that they also lost to the Northern Kingdom (Israel at this

time had been divided into the Southern Kingdom called Judah and the Northern Kingdom which was also called Ephraim). In a single day King Pekah of Ephraim attack the kingdom of Judah and killed 120,000 soldiers—including the prince, the officer of the palace and the second-in-command of the kingdom. He also took 200,000 into captivity and that number included women and children, all in one day. And now, Judah’s enemies were conspiring against them. Aram led by King Rezin and the Northern Kingdom led by Pekah had joined forces and were planning an attack on Judah. It was bad enough when Judah faced the threat of one enemy at a time, but now two enemies would rise up together against the house of David.

It certainly seemed like Judah had no chance whatsoever! King Ahaz was overcome by fear and all his kingdom with him. They were so terrified that we are told that they shook like the trees of the forest shake in the wind. And so in walks Isaiah into this hopeless situation and he delivers a message of unlikely hope from the very lips of God. God sent out Isaiah and his son to meet with Ahaz to speak these words, ***‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah.***

God was in control. These kings were mere men. They were but fire brands, or smoldering sticks, that God had used to stir the fire around his people, but Rezin and Pekah, Aram and Ephraim, they had no real power of their own, for God was in control. Aram and Ephraim had plotted to conquer Judah, but God sent his servant Isaiah to utter these simple words of hope, **“It will not take place, it will not happen,”**

Yet despite these tremendous words of promise sent from God himself, Ahaz was nothing but a scared mess of a man. He looked at the forces pressing on his doors and he could not see the power of God. He lacked trust in God so much, that he sent tribute to the brutal king of Assyria. Instead of looking to God he looked to another enemy, another pagan king, for deliverance. God rebuked Ahaz for his lack of faith saying, **“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”** And yet this warning fell on a stony heart as Ahaz failed to trust in the Lord. What is worse is that in a show of empty piety he refused God’s request to ask for a sign. God told him to ask for a miracle. Anything in heaven on earth and God would make it happen. God wanted his king and his people to call on him, but Ahaz wouldn’t have it. He refused to ask. Even though he made it seem like he was trying to be polite, Ahaz simply didn’t see the point. Why ask for a sign? Why ask for a miracle? This was all impossible.

This meeting between Ahaz and God’s prophet would not be a pep talk so that the king could step to the challenge and deliver his people. No, this was God taking charge and bringing about his promised deliverance and his promised salvation. God threw his people on his back and the he made it clear that he alone had the power to save them. And so, although their king, in his unbelief, wouldn’t ask for a sign God, in his faithfulness, would give them a wondrous sign anyway. God would use this decisive moment in Judah’s history to reveal another key and specific piece of the Messiah puzzle. The promised Savior who would bring ultimate deliverance would be born of a virgin. God would make the impossible happen; not only would God rescue his people from a hopeless situation, he would provide deliverance for all people.

God would provide immediate deliverance to Judah, the nation would not be destroyed, but God also made it clear that his purpose for doing this was very much set in the future. Isaiah and *his son* (whose name meant a remnant will return) brought God's words of promise. This sign of a virgin birth would not be seen until much later. But nonetheless, the promise would be given and it would be fulfilled. God would preserve this house of David, this nation of Judah, because God had made a promise to this house and through this house. Notice how God refers to Ahaz and Judah almost exclusively as the house of David. God would be faithful to his promises despite the unfaithfulness of his people. God would preserve this nation of Judah so that a child would be born from the house and line of David. And that child would be born outside the ordinary rules of nature. God would do the impossible. A virgin would be with child and would give birth to a son.

The God whose wisdom created all of nature and whose wisdom brilliantly established the rules of nature would work outside of them to bring our salvation. Deliverance would not come through some mighty king from the proud royal line of David, but through the humbled house of David a child would be born in poverty to a woman who was a virgin. And that child would be both God and man. God would make it clear that He alone delivers his people; for God himself would become one of us. God would do "the impossible" in order to save us from the hopeless situation that faced all humankind.

When faced with the powers that threaten us we are prone to doubt and fear as well. When faced with temptation, when threatened by the evil influences that daily swell and surround us, when Satan amasses his forces against us and tries to persuade our own flesh to betray us who could stand? We have lost enough skirmishes with these enemies that we are well aware that we cannot stand on our own. Daily we lose the fight against the devil's temptations. Daily we surrender to the urges of a sinful flesh. Daily it seems that the world is dealing another vicious blow to faith in Christ as they strike down our beliefs, insult our faith, and leave us feeling exhausted and battered and defeated. On our own we would be trapped in a hopeless situation forever.

But we are not on our own. Immanuel has come. God would become one of us; sin and death, Satan and hell would not swallow us up without a fight, but rather in his grace God would take it upon himself to come to this earth. God came to live as one of us, in order to achieve the impossible goal of perfection for us, die the death that we deserved, and then do only what God could do - raise himself from the grave. God came to be with us and to win the victory. And this one who came to be with us - Jesus our Immanuel - also promised to be with us even after he ascended. He promised to be near when we call. He promised to be our refuge and strength, to guide us and protect us through this life until we are with him body and soul in heaven. God is faithful even when we are unfaithful. God makes and keeps all of his promises.

Dear friends, our God is with us. He came from heaven above to this earth below. He dwells within our hearts through faith. He came in love to rescue us from the hopeless situation that we were in because of our sin, and now he helps us to stand firm in our faith.

That's not always that easy is it. Even during this time of the year our faith is pushed and prodded and tested. While this might be the most wonderful time of the year it can also be the most difficult. A number of issues can make us feel hard pressed. And instead of peace and joy during this Christmastide we feel anxiety and even fear. When might not

tremble with fear or shake like the leaves of a tree, but when we look at how big and bad this world can be we worry that surely the evil of this world will win and somehow someday they will find a way to squeeze Christ out of Christmas. Remember that God says, ***“It will not take place, it will not happen.”*** God has promised that his word will remain, the good news of Jesus will be proclaimed until he comes again.

When we look at sins and shortcomings, the things we have done wrong the good that we have failed to do, Satan threatens to grab you by the nape of the neck and plunge you into despair, but God stands with us and says, ***“It will not take place, it will not happen.”*** He watches over us and makes sure that we will not face more than our faith can handle. His protection covers over us. He will deliver us.

When sorrow and grief, the pain of loss, and the power of painful memories seek to overwhelm us God rescues us from this “impossible” situation and he gives us peace and serenity. He gives us the healing message of forgiveness. He gives us the joy of life lived in his love. He gives us the sure hope of heaven and the welcome assurance of a blessed reunion in heaven and eternal life forever in his presence.

In these times of trouble and distress, when the problems of this world, when the schemes of Satan, when the weakness of our own sinful flesh, when the added anxieties of a holiday season all team up against you remember that God is with us. When the forces of sin and Satan, when the problems and pressures of life conspire against you, when temptation and anxiety and fear seek to carve up your faith and drag you into captivity remember that God is with you. God is with us.

Don't take that for granted. Don't overlook that sublime assurance. Don't forget to call out to him. Trust in his love and care and power for God is with you. Jesus is Immanuel. He is God with us. He is our refuge and strength an ever present help in trouble. He loves you and he promises to be with you.

God is with us, and if you want proof, if you want a sign, look to that manger. Look and see how in love God does the impossible for you. A virgin with child and gives birth to a son, and that baby boy is the very Son of God. God is wrapped in human flesh. The king of glory comes to save and is placed in a manger. It sounds impossible, but it isn't. It sounds like a story ripped from the pages of a fairy tale or some movie script but it is real. God made it happen. This happened so that you and I might have the gifts of grace and peace. *In the town of David a Savior has been born to you, He is Christ the Lord.* God had come down to earth to save sinners. He came to save you and me and give us the victory that he would win. Impossible... it sounds like it, but this victory is truly yours through faith in Christ. Lift up your heads and see this great thing that God has done. Believe and stand firm.

God is with us. If we consider who our God is, the power to do the impossible is not the most amazing part, but it is his great love for us. He saved us undeserving sinners. He left his throne of glory and was laid in a bed of hay for sinners who are so prone to doubt and sin and unfaithfulness. What amazing grace that he would be called Immanuel! What immeasurable love that God came to be with us. And the same God who kept his promise to come and live with us is the same God who promises to be with us through faith each and every day. And so dear friends, be careful, be at ease, keep calm and carry on, don't be afraid. Do not lose heart. Immanuel is coming, prepare to meet him. Amen.