
Proof that God is With Us (Isaiah 7:1-17)
12/18/2016 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



Names have been on my mind a lot lately. As many of you know, my wife is pregnant and the due date is closing fast. So we have been thinking a lot about what to name our child. Personally, I've always liked the idea of giving a name that has some meaning to it.

For example, my first son's name, Zachary comes from the Hebrew for, "The Lord remembered me." My wife and I thought it was a fitting name because Zach's birth came at a fairly hard time in our lives but even then God's blessings showed us that he clearly remembered us.

In most of the Jewish culture which we read about in the Bible, parents almost always named their children with a meaning that had significance for some recent event. The patriarch Isaac's name means "he laughs," and was named so because Sarah, his mother, said everyone will laugh at hearing that a woman her age could miraculously have a child. Isaac's son Jacob, if you remember was a twin and after his brother Esau was born, Jacob came out holding his brother's heel, so Jacob's name means, "heel-grabber."

Today, we hear a prophecy about a woman who would name her child Immanuel, which means "God with us." This woman of the prophecy, who many believe would have lived in a dangerous and war-torn land, would be so convinced that God himself was with his people that she would name her child, Immanuel.

Today, as we continue our Christmas with Isaiah and examine the events of Isaiah chapter 7, we will see that just as people in Isaiah's day would know clearly that God was with them, we today can also see Proof that God is with Us.

Isaiah chapter 7 begins with Judah in a tight spot. Aram and Ephraim, two powerful nations, were allied against Judah. Some background is helpful here. Judah had previously lost battles against both Aram and Ephraim separately. So they had already lost soldiers and civilians to both nations.

We have more details of Judah's defeat by Ephraim. 2 Chronicles 28 tells us that in a single day Pekah, king of Ephraim killed 120,000 soldiers, including the prince,

the officer of the palace and the second-in-command of the kingdom! The best numbers I found say that we lost about 4,500 in the Iraq war and that was bad enough. Judah lost 120,000 soldiers! That's more than the whole population of Green Bay! And the officers who were killed, that would be like if we were attacked today and we lost some of our military's highest leaders, or even the secretary of defense or the president!

2 Chronicles 28 tells that the defeat didn't stop there. Pekah also captured 200,000 civilians; wives, sons and daughters. That would be like us getting attacked and the enemy capturing about double the population of Green Bay! The news makes a pretty big deal even when a few people have been taken captive. Can you imagine 200,000?

But those comparisons hardly hit home because we are trying to compare our whole country of the USA to Judah which would have been smaller than even half the size of Michigan's upper peninsula. Those losses would have been a much bigger percentage of their population. Pretty much all the people of Judah would have felt the losses or even have known people who had died or been capture.

So by the time we get to Isaiah chapter 7, Judah has been severely weakened. They have been weakened militarily. They have lost a significant portion of their military force. They have lost significant leaders and strategic minds. And they have lost their morale, their will to fight. These people had beaten them before, what chance did they have now? And many of them were thinking about their loved ones that they had just lost from those previous battles! And in addition to all of this, their two bitter enemies are now working together against them! What chance did they have?

Honestly, what chance did they deserve? This was at the time of king Ahaz. The Scriptures record that he was a vile man, with no concern for what was right or even what was decent. And many in Judah followed his example. Very rightly, they deserved the coming destruction.

But God would not let any of these things get in the way of him saving his people. Not their previous failures. Not their enemies' power. Not even the people's own wickedness.

So God sent his prophet Isaiah to speak to Ahaz about this threat and to tell him, *“It will not take place, it will not happen.”* The great defeat that Judah feared would never happen. Because as strong as their enemies were, they were only human and they stood against God.

God didn't even ask Ahaz to believe this promise on blind faith. He told Ahaz, *“Ask the LORD your God for a sign.”* God told Ahaz to pick the sign that would prove that God's word would come true. What an incredible opportunity!

But instead of accepting this gracious offer from God, Ahaz plays at piety and quotes Scripture back to God, as if to call God wrong. He quotes Scripture, not because he cares what God says but just to stroke his own ego! But again, God would not let even this king's wickedness get in the way of saving his people.

God gave Ahaz the sign we now see today. Isaiah prophesies a woman who would give birth to a son and would call him Immanuel, again which means *“God with us.”* As terrified as Judah was at that moment in history, God promised that just within the time it takes for a woman to conceive and give birth to a child, just around nine months, within that short amount of time, Judah's fears would be gone. In fact, it would be so evident that God had saved his people that this woman of the prophecy would name her child something relevant to that time: *“God with us.”*

God even says that before the time that son, Immanuel, was old enough to know right from wrong, maybe between 5 or 15 years, in that short amount of time the two nations that now terrified Judah would be decimated, nothing to fear at all. In that short amount of time, God would give his people proof that he was truly with them. And that's what history showed: it was less than 5 years before this prophecy came true and Judah's enemies were decimated.

My fellow people of God, we too are in a battle. Not a battle against enemy nations, not a battle with swords and spears, but a battle for our very souls. And we, like the Judahites in our text, have reason to fear.

We face terrifyingly powerful enemies. We face Satan and his demons who every day are fighting to lead us astray so that we might be eternally destroyed in hell. We face a sinful world that is not only unashamed of sin but applauds people who commit the vilest atrocities against God's holy law. And we face our own sinful

selves.

We face terrifyingly powerful enemies and we have lost to them in the past. Every time we catch ourselves in the wrong but make excuses for our sin rather than repenting, Satan raises his arm for a battle won. Every time we quote Scripture, not to grow in God's Word but to stroke our own egos, the world leads us captive. Every time we play at piety by coming to church or studying the Bible without repenting and without doing what God demands, we lose another battle to our sinful flesh. We face terrifyingly powerful enemies and it seems clear that they will defeat us eternally.

But today, our God tells us, "It will not take place, it will not happen." Isaiah's prophecy came true in the day of Ahaz king of Judah when God's people saw undeniable proof that God was with them, but as we read in Matthew 1:22-23 Isaiah's prophecy fully came true at the birth of our Savior Jesus!

He is the proof that God is with us. As God himself took on flesh, born of the virgin Mary, Jesus destroyed the power of all our enemies forever. Jesus, by his perfect life, has shattered all of Satan's demonic weaponry. Jesus, by his innocent death, has overcome this sinful world. Jesus, by his resurrection, has removed even the power of our own sinfulness.

Therefore, let us not fear to stand against our enemies, terrifying and powerful though they are. Because strong as our enemies may be, they are only the spiritual powers of darkness and they stand against God. We can be sure because God has fulfilled his promise to save his people by giving us Jesus, our Immanuel, our Proof that God is With Us. Amen.