

“God with Us!”—Isaiah 7:10-14

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “God with Us!”, is Isaiah 7:10-14 → *Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“Is the LORD among us or not?” (cf. Exodus 17:7) These are words which flowed from the lips God’s people grumbling about their circumstances in the wilderness. However, this is actually a common question in the minds and on the lips of many people experiencing unfavorable circumstances, tragedies, sicknesses and suffering of various kinds. “Where is Your presence in the midst of my life right now, Lord?” In verse 6 of the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” we just prayed: “O come, Thou Dayspring from on high, And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh; Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death’s dark shadows put to

flight.” There are times in our lives when life feels rather “gloomy” and sometimes even feels like we’re living under “death’s dark shadows.” What does it really mean when we sing “Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel,” confessing that God is with us?

When God spoke the prophecy in our text through Isaiah it appeared that Ahaz, King of Judah, was in the midst of “death’s dark shadows.” He was facing the threat of *the king of Syria and . . . the king of Israel* who had come *up to Jerusalem to wage war against it* (cf. Isaiah 7:1). Isaiah was supposed to reassure King Ahaz and the people of Judah that Yahweh would be with them in this fearful situation. Isaiah told him to *keep calm and not be afraid or lose heart because of these two king’s threats* (cf. Isaiah 7:4). After telling him these kings would eventually come to nought, he told Ahaz in Isaiah 7:9 → *If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.*

Being *firm in faith*, trusting that the LORD will make everything turn out favorably when it appears your world is falling apart is usually easier said than done for us sinners. When the “odds” look totally against you it truly challenges your faith even to the point of wondering, “Is the LORD among us or not?” Much like King Ahaz we find ourselves in the company of those to whom Jesus referred as *you of little faith!* (cf. Luke 12:28)

To reinforce His promise to take care of His people in their struggles, Isaiah commanded Ahaz in verses 10-11 of our text to *ask a sign of the*

LORD . . . deep as Sheol (i.e. the place of the dead) or high as heaven.

This *sign* would be a pledge of the divine certainty of God's promise. It appears that Ahaz hid his lack of faith behind a false facade of obedience to Yahweh's command in Deuteronomy 6:16 → *You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.* According to verse 12 of our text He refused to follow God's command through the prophet Isaiah: *I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.* Here God is willing to demonstrate His power to reassure King Ahaz of His deliverance but he refuses. Why? Many people would welcome such a request to have some concrete evidence upon which to trust such a promise!

Ahaz had other plans in the works. He did what many tend to do when faced with unfavorable dilemmas—look for a way to take control of the circumstances to manipulate them in our favor. He was getting ready to make an alliance with the King of Assyria to help fight off these kings. While God was offering him divine intervention he was choosing to trust in men rather than the LORD. Maybe his focus was on Isaiah's mention that *within sixty-five years* Israel would cease from being a nation (cf. Isaiah 7:8), thinking Yahweh would not deliver him presently.

Whatever his reasoning, once again God is wearied by His people's lack of faith (verse 13). However, God's love for His obstinate, rebellious people was so persistent that, even though His people didn't want to be with Him, **He still wanted to be with them.** Notice God didn't leave him

to his own devices saying, “O.K. Ahaz, go ahead. You figure it out. I’ll just watch what happens.” Instead, He continues to take the initiative to deliver His people as expressed in the promise of verse 14 of our text: *the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Immanuel is a Hebrew word meaning “God with us” (cf. Matthew 1:23). The Lord Himself was going to make this happen no matter what His people thought! You see, God is very perseverant when it comes to His salvation because He wants all people to repent of their sins, trust in His salvation **on His terms** and live in a right relationship with Him eternally. Isaiah 8:10 says: *Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for **God is with us***. No nations’ plans and decrees can surpass God’s power because *Immanuel—God is with us!**

So . . . while people continued to take control of their unfavorable circumstances, only to find themselves sabotage their souls by their sinful behaviors, Yahweh continues to be in control and with His people. He continued to deliver His people over and over again, keeping a remnant for the fulfillment of His promise that a *virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel*. We know the fulfillment of this prophecy came in a very real and concrete way about seven centuries after this interaction took place between Isaiah and King Ahaz. We confess this *sign* every time we speak about the Person & Work of

Jesus in the second article of the Apostle's Creed when we say He was "conceived by the Holy Spirit." This fulfillment came true in the birth of Jesus!

Jesus was truly God in the flesh. That's what we refer to when we talk about "the Incarnation." It means the divine (i.e. God) takes on human form. In Jesus God came to be with us sinners. Why? Many in Jesus' day thought it was for immediate deliverance from their "unfavorable circumstances" under Roman rule. When God revealed His power through the healing ministry of Jesus people went to great lengths to seek His help, rejoiced because of Him and even followed Him until . . . He confronted them about their sin. Facing your sin is always uncomfortable. You will defend your sin, ignore your conscience, even build a new system of belief to accept your sin in an effort to avoid surrendering that sin in repentance to the LORD. Why would God want to be with such sinful people like these?

God's love for people, sinners as they are, is so great that He needed to be present to do all that was necessary to make forgiveness and eternal life a reality in your life. It had to be His doing because we could not set ourselves free from the grip of sin in our lives. *In Christ **God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them*** (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19). Thus, the celebration of Christmas is not simply the recognition of a Baby born of a virgin according to God's promise. It

is the submission to God's coming amongst us in order to deal with our sins and our trust in His atoning sacrifice for our forgiveness.

When our lives feel like they're falling apart, when our circumstances are unfavorable, when struggling with temptations and sins continually, even when all is going well for us, by faith in the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus Christ we know the answer to the question: "Is the LORD among us or not?" (cf. Exodus 17:7). Yes, He is among us in His Word. Yes, He is among us in the midst of His people assembled in worship by His Holy Spirit. Remember Jesus' promise? *Where two or three are gathered in My name, **there am I among them*** (cf. Matthew 18:20). Yes, He is among us as we dispense and receive the forgiveness of sins in this place through the Absolution and Communion.

And guess what? He's still among sinners . . . who desire to be and live as forgiven sinners . . . who forgive others freely by faith in the Person & Work of Immanuel—God with us! Hard as it is to believe, this gathering is a foretaste of the presence of God yet to come for those who remain faithful to Christ, as described in the heavenly vision from Revelation 21:3 → *I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and **God Himself will be with them as their God.**"*
Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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