

FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN

Isaiah 7:1-9:7

Key Verse: 9:6 “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Today’s message teaches us to overcome fear by turning to God and relying on him. When the people of Israel were overcome with fear, God gave them a sign of a child being born to them. By faith, they could understand that the Messiah would help them – then and forever. Let’s think carefully about how we can overcome fear and rely on God through Jesus.

I. His name is Immanuel (7:1-14; 8:5-20)

Look at verse 7:1. “In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it but could not yet mount an attack against it.” Ahaz was the 12th king of Judah and he ruled over the Southern Kingdom of Israel, after the nation divided.

Look at verse 2. “When the house of David was told, ‘Syria is in league with Ephraim,’ the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.” Judah heard that two other nations made a conspiracy to attack them, and King Ahaz and his people were terrified. Ahaz was a king, but he was shaking with fear. As king he should be a leader no matter what. But he was shaking like the leaves on the tree in the windy Chicago weather. We can relate to Ahaz, because often our fears overtake us. Sometimes we are afraid about financial problems or the economy, we are afraid of failing a class or not graduating, we are afraid of not having a job, not being promoted or getting fired, we are afraid when a terrible illness strikes or death occurs, we are afraid of getting married or not getting married, etc. We become overwhelmed with fear, even though our fears often are groundless. To help Ahaz, God sent the prophet Isaiah with a message to them. Look at verses 4, 7 and 9. “Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, ... it shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. ... If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.” From God’s perspective, there was nothing to fear. God was in control. God would protect his people. When our fears overcome us, fear destabilizes us. We need faith to hear God’s word, look at God, and overcome our fears.

God spoke to Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah. “Ask a sign of the Lord your God, let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” (11) But Ahaz refused it. He said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” (12) King Ahaz tried to sound super spiritual, but Ahaz had already made a secret plan to get help from the king of Assyria. God was becoming weary with Ahaz. He was also making the prophet Isaiah weary. Look at verses 13-14. “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.’” Let’s think about God’s sign of a virgin being with a child.

God's sign is so unusual. What's so unusual about it? At first, it seems pretty usual. Women get pregnant all the time. But in this case, it's a virgin who conceives and gives birth to a son. That never happens. Never. But one day, it would. It's a prophecy of Jesus. Jesus would be born of the virgin Mary, who had never been with a man.

The virgin would give her son the name "Immanuel." We've all heard this name before. But at that time, the name "Immanuel" was brand new. And it was very meaningful in the context of this story. "Immanuel" means "God with us." Ahaz and his people were being attacked by enemies. They were so vulnerable. But through this baby's name God wanted them to know that God himself was with them. It means God would fight for them. God would protect them. They didn't need the powerful Assyrian Empire. They just needed God himself. God was proving he was with them by giving this miraculous sign of a virgin giving birth to a son. Ultimately, she would conceive through the Holy Spirit, and God's Son would dwell among us. It is an amazing grace that the Holy God himself shared our flesh and became our brother. This sign of the Messiah's birth through the virgin is all we need to overcome being afraid of something or someone, whatever or whoever that may be.

In 8:11-15, God warned Isaiah not to be influenced by people's fears. It's easy to get sucked into their fears and conspiracy theories. When Immanuel God is with us, we never need to be afraid of anything in this world. We only need to fear God. Verse 16, says, "Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples." Isaiah decided to listen to the Word of God. He also helped his people to hear the word of God. This is the best way to overcome an atmosphere of darkness.

II. For to us a Child is born (8:21 ~ 9:7)

Look at verse 8:19. "And when they say to you, 'Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,' should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?" When the united army came up to Judah against them, Judah kept themselves from Immanuel and went to the king of Assyria for help. How about you? In times of danger or difficulties, do you go to God or to something else? Looking to something seems more practical than looking to God.

Yet, Immanuel God is with us, even in deep darkness. His steadfast love never fades away. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them a light has shone (9:2,3). Matthew quoted these verses when he saw Jesus' Galilean ministry. (Mt 4:13-16) We must have eyes to see how the Messiah's coming brings joy, freedom, and peace to us.

Look at verse 9:6, the key verse. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This child, this son will break the yoke of our burden, the staff for our shoulder, the rod of our oppressor as on the day of Midian because the government shall be upon his shoulder. His government and peace will have no end. This prophecy is an expansion of Isaiah 7:14, and shows how Immanuel God is with us – meaning all people – and how he helps us. In contrast to King Ahaz who relied on political alliances and could not save his people, Jesus is our real Messiah and King who saves us. In contrast to Ahaz who caused his people to tremble, Jesus gives his people real peace. King Jesus comes in the line of

King David, a shepherd after God's own heart. In this prophecy, Jesus is given 4 titles or names. Let's think about each one and what they mean.

First, the son is our Wonderful Counselor. After Adam's fall, the whole world became slaves of sin. Sin has ruled over us. None of us can break the chains of sin. Because sin requires payment – death. Someone who is not a slave of sin must pay the wage of sin – death. Until Jesus' death on the cross, we didn't know the solution. God's wonderful wisdom has been fulfilled by sacrificing his Son Jesus' life on the cross. When we are lost in the darkness of sin, Jesus our Wonderful Counselor shows us the way back to God through his death and resurrection. (Jn 5:24, 14:6)

Second, the son is Mighty God. Mighty means extremely strong or powerful. True mightiness requires proof. When Russia invaded Ukraine, Putin and his officials and even the whole world believed the mighty Russian army would destroy Ukraine in three days. Now, nobody says the Russian army is mighty, because they failed to prove it. But Jesus is Mighty God who proves he is mighty by changing people, families, communities, and nations. Whoever accepts him as Messiah and lives with real faith in him experiences Jesus as Mighty God. We must believe in Mighty God Jesus who rose from the dead and is changing us and those we serve and pray for. (Eph 1:9)

Third, the son is the Everlasting Father. When I think about the word father, I think of protection, provision, and compassion. Usually, fathers work hard to provide for their family. Fathers are aware of dangers to protect their family. Fathers show compassion on their children (Psalm 103:13). So, children know their father, their father's voice, their father's image, and their father's characteristics. The expression Everlasting Father means that his fatherhood will not end. Jesus was, is, and will be, since he is our Everlasting Father. Jesus is always with us and will protect us, provide for us, and love us. Jesus is our Everlasting Father who never abandons us. (Heb 13:8)

Fourth, the son is the Prince of Peace. The expression "Prince of Peace" tells us the characteristics of His kingdom. In Jesus' kingdom, there is peace. The law of the jungle is common sense in this world. But there is no war in His kingdom. The prophet Isaiah saw this kingdom in a vision. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox." (Isaiah 11:6-7) The pandemic turned people's lives upside down. People are anxious and fearful. Jesus the Prince of Peace can help us to live in peace in this very chaotic world of darkness. Jesus the Prince of Peace can help us to rebuild, restore, and revive our lives for his glory and with his peace. (Isa 26:3, Jn 14:27)

Praise Immanuel God. Praise Jesus whose name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace! Immanuel Jesus is with us, no matter what circumstance we stand in, no matter what we do. The problem is with my heart, and with your heart, not with God. Let's humble our hearts and come back to Immanuel God with us.

When my first daughter was born, I worried about making money. I left UBF, started my own business, and became a multi-millionaire. I became arrogant, and abandoned God altogether.

One day, I was arrested for bribing government officials, was thrown in jail for one day, and my bank accounts were frozen. Still, I did not repent nor return to God. At the same time, my wife was dying of cancer. In my fears, I visited a shaman and hired the most expensive doctors. She got better for a short while. Then one day, the doctors told me that my wife would die in a month. I cried myself to sleep, fearful and helpless. In my dream, Immanuel God appeared to me, and Wonderful Counselor Jesus was waving to me to come back to God. I returned to UBF immediately. After my wife died, I developed a new patent, but another company stole my patent. I could not pay back my loans to the bank, which amounted to \$35 million USD. I had nowhere to turn to and no one to help me. My life was spiraling out of control. I climbed up on a bridge over the Han River in the middle of Seoul. I looked down on the swirling water with one foot still on the bridge ready to jump. My Everlasting Father Jesus spoke to me from deep inside my soul saying, "I am your Good Shepherd. I gave my life for you. What more do you want?" I remembered Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is My Shepherd. I shall not be in want." I came down from the bridge, repented with tears, and returned back to God. The Prince of Peace Jesus came into my heart and strengthened me to remain in him though my problems were far from gone. Wonderful Counselor Jesus led me to my wife Yvonne in Chicago UBF. Though the situation looked impossible, we prayed and relied on Mighty God Jesus, and Mighty God Jesus removed all my debt, waived my criminal record, and gave me a visa to the US. In 2017, I came to Chicago UBF, I served HBF, and for the last 2 years, I have been serving as a youth pastor of Chicago HBF. May God bless HBF members to see the word of God, grow as disciples of Jesus, and be raised as spiritual leaders for their generation. Looking back on my own spiritual journey, my fears, beginning with providing for my family, were unfounded. I only needed to look to Immanuel God Jesus in my darkness, repent my sins and pride, and live by faith in him as my Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Recently my employer got involved in a lawsuit with another company and that gave me great stress. I also have many deadlines to meet. In the midst of these demands, Wonderful Counselor Jesus invited me to deliver this Christmas message so that I can listen to his word, repent of my fears, and rely on Jesus as my Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Thank you, Immanuel!

The pandemic has destabilized people's lives outwardly and inwardly. People feel isolated, depressed, and anxious. But in this darkness, we have God's sign of Jesus born in a manger. May we accept the child born to us as our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. May Immanuel Jesus' love overflow in our hearts, our community, and our nation in this Christmas time and the New Year. Amen!