

Sermon – Isaiah 7:1-17; Matthew 2:13-23?

III – Last Thursday I was delivering our Christmas flyers around the back of King Road. As I was walking past one particular house, I looked and 6 feet in front of me I saw something I wish I didn't see – a red belly black snake! I don't like snakes. And this one was about a kilometre too close. On Friday, I was cleaning out some pot plants. And as I emptied out one pot, out crawled a little spider – a black spider, with a big red mark on its back – a red-back! I don't like spiders. Let me just say, as someone who isn't fond of these Australian natives, I was, in the words of Isaiah 7:2: "shaken as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind"! I felt a little out of control.

Do you ever feel like life is out of control? Are there times when life sends you into a bit of a panic, or makes you a bit scared, or leaves you feeling helpless?

If you were living in Judah at the time of Isaiah 7, you would most likely be shaking as well because lots of people were wanting to attack Judah.

Let's have a look at the characters in this passage.

Ahaz was the King of Southern Israel at this time. These were God's faithful people and were usually referred to as **Judah or Jerusalem** – the main city. Then we have Rezin, the king of Aram (the place we know more as **Syria**) and then there's Remaliah, the king of Northern Israel, (which we often know as **Ephraim**).

Syria and Ephraim were ganging up to attack Judah. Why? Because they were under pressure from Assyria. Assyria was HUGE and was taking over all the surrounding nations. So Syria and Ephraim were trying to force Judah to join their alliance. But, Isaiah 7:1 says – *"they marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it."*

Now, it seems that things are going well. God was protecting Judah from these attacks. But unfortunately, King Ahaz was still afraid. And 2 Kings 16 tells us why – because Ahaz wasn't actually a King who listened to God:

2 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God"

So even though God had protected them from previous attacks, they were still scared of these other nations. Verse 2: *"so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind."*

So God sends Isaiah to give Ahaz a message. And when Isaiah finds him, what does he say? In verse 4 he starts with an **encouragement**:

*"Be careful, keep calm and **don't** be afraid."* The guys that are trying to attack you are two smouldering stumps of firewood! They're nothing! It's only Rezin and Pekah! These guys are nothing! Don't worry! You have **GOD** on your side. These are only **men** who are attacking you. And then Isaiah goes on with a **warning** from God in verse 9:

*"If you do **not** stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."*

Then God says to Ahaz: *"Ask for a sign". Ask me to give you a sign to show you that I'm with you.* And Ahaz replies with what seems like a good response. He says: *"I will not ask. I will not put the Lord to the test."*

But in fact, God has TOLD him to ask for a sign. Ahaz says **"No"** because he doesn't want to HEAR from God, because he wants to go his **own** way. He wants to do his own thing. He wants to form an alliance with Syria and Ephraim because he's afraid! He doesn't trust God. In fact, he even turns to the gods of these other nations hoping that *they* will protect him.

And so God says to him through Isaiah: “I’m going to give you a sign anyway!” What’s the sign? It’s probably well known to us all – Verse 14:

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” But before that day comes, he goes on to say, the King of Assyria will take them over.

And that’s exactly what happened before Ahaz died.

King Ahaz was succeeded by his son, Hezekiah – who was one of the most **godly** Kings over Judah. 2 Chronicles 29:2 says – *“Hezekiah did what was **right** in the eyes of the Lord, just as his Father David had done.”*

Hezekiah was a **glimpse** of the sign that God had promised. Not born of a virgin, not named Immanuel, but a King who brought God’s people back to him, even if it was only for a short time.

It’s not until we get to the New Testament that we see the complete fulfilment of God’s promise. In Matthew 1 a man named Joseph is told that the woman he is about to marry, Mary, will have a child and he will be called Immanuel.

In Matthew 1: 22-23 we read *“All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23”The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” – which means, “God with us.”* ”

Finally, in Jesus, there is a real faithful ruler over God’s people. In Jesus we have God himself coming down to earth. God with us. Finally, a King who is completely under God’s rule and direction.

In Jesus **WE** have a King like Israel **NEVER** had – we don’t just have God’s King, we have God AS King in person on earth.

III – Every time I visit an aquarium, it’s hard for me not to tap the glass and try and get the fish inside to react. Especially with the sharks. It’s even harder when there’s a sign that says not to! I just want to tap the glass! We may sometimes think that we’re like fish in an aquarium and God is tapping on the outside trying to get our attention. That he stands over the top of the tank and throws in food, and rain and all the things we need to survive. But he’s not like that at all. God is WITH us. God came to earth. He got IN the aquarium we live in. And when Jesus went into heaven after his resurrection, God STILL STAYED WITH US through his Holy Spirit. God is with us.

Listen to those words again that Ahaz was told.

First: *“Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid.”*

When we struggle in this world, it’s easy to think of God as a controlling arm over the top of the aquarium. A Creator who is distant. Outside. Above us. Most religions have this sort of view of the Creator. A God who is “out there”. That he is in some way distant from us. That he makes the universe and sets it spinning and then controls it like a puppet. But OUR God, the real God, did not stay at a distance. He came among us.

III – When I was a little 10 year old runt at school, and 4 foot nothing, if I ever got picked on (which happened quite a lot being of my short stature) I had a great line of defense. I’d say something like “My brother’s 17 and he’s really big and he’ll beat you up!” That usually worked. I had nothing to fear because I knew there was someone there who would fight on my side, no matter what. And he was big enough to deal with anyone. Unless they had a brother who was even bigger! Now there’s only one thing that would have been better than saying that. To have my brother standing there. Right in front of them. All 6 foot 2 of him.

God came down. He became one of us. He lived among us. He went through all we go through as humans, and more. He suffered death, and rose again. God is not at a distance. Ahaz never understood

that! Even though Jerusalem had been protected again and again against their enemies, Ahaz still didn't understand that God was there for his people. God is not *there* for us. He is *here* for us.

Conclusion

III – Does life ever leave you shaking like a tree in the wind? Do you ever feel threatened or afraid or out of control? Do you ever feel like things are falling apart? Do you ever feel, like Ahaz, that perhaps God is too distant to be able to help? Perhaps you see your family going through struggles – your son, or daughter, brother, sister, mother, father. Or maybe yourself. Or your friends. Or someone at work. Real struggles. Financial struggles. Marriage struggles. Health struggles. Children struggles. Sleepless nights, overbearing workload, difficult family relationships. I'm sure we can ALL think of something along those lines that's either happening right now or at least recently in our lives.

Remember this: ***God is not distant.***

“Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid.”

In other words, be sensible about things, but don't be afraid of the things in this world. Because your God is with you and he made everything and is in control of everything. When there are those times when we feel tempted, like Ahaz, to give up on God and put our trust in the things of this world, this is the warning we're to remember:

“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”

Without our faith in God, we stand like Ahaz did – on his own.

III – If I'm at the shops on my own with the two boys, I usually get Flynn out of the car first. And if we're in a busy car-park, I need him to stay still while I get Jonah out. I stand him right next to the car, right next to me, and I say to him “STAND THERE. Do not move.” He says “Otherwise what?” I say “Otherwise you'll get hurt by the cars.” He stays there. He knows it's the safest thing to do.”

When we stand as God's people in this world, God places us on solid ground and he says to us “stay there”. And the solid ground he stands us on is Jesus. Stand firm in Him, follow him, do not MOVE from him, and you will be safe. If you do not stand firm, you will not stand at all.

We will stand if our faith remains in the Lord Jesus. Through him we are in a covenant that God cannot break with us! Despite our sinfulness, God **will not break** the eternal covenant that he has made with us through Jesus. If we stand firm in him – if we continue to hold to our faith in God, if we continue to trust in Him over all the things and people of this world, we will not be let down.

Christmas celebrates God coming to earth. The sign of Immanuel is our assurance that God is with us. In those times when we are threatened or afraid or shaking like a tree in the wind, God is not “up there”. He is with us. First in the sign of Immanuel. And today by his Holy Spirit. He is right here with you. Today, tomorrow and forever. Amen.