

Trust in God

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[0 : 0 0] You may be seated. Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today.

A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, and so that's why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're taking a break over the next few weeks from the Gospel of Mark because this Sunday is actually the first Sunday in the season of Advent. Advent comes from a Latin word that means to come or to arrive, and so during the season of Advent, we focus on Jesus arriving or His coming to earth, and as we do that, we do a couple things. First of all, we celebrate the past, so that's why we sing songs like Joy to the World.

The Lord has come. That's what's already happened. We also look forward to the future, so we just sang O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, which speaks in the future tense. Hey, we're looking forward to what is going to happen, so we're looking back to the past. We're looking forward to the future, and that's really not just the season of Advent. It's actually the whole Christian life. As Christians, what we're doing is we're celebrating what God's done in the past. We're looking forward to what He's done in the future, and then we're using both of those to be able to live faithfully in the present right now.

As we do that, we're going to return to the prophet Isaiah, and I say return because if you're an old timer, you'll remember we were in Isaiah for Advent 2017, but fear not. We're going to look at completely different passages than we looked at five years ago. The book of Isaiah is the prophecies of a prophet named Isaiah, and Isaiah was in the 8th century BC, and his job was to go to the southern kingdom. We'll talk a little bit more later about what that means, but the southern kingdom of Israel to call them back to God, to warn them about the consequences of their sin. I mentioned Isaiah, by the way, last week when we were talking about the occupational hazards of being a prophet. You may remember that Isaiah was the one who was sawed in half by Manasseh, the king of Judah. So his message was not well received, but it has lasted until now, and we're going to be looking at Isaiah chapter 7, which is the chapter that gives us this phrase we've already seen twice. First of all, in our New Testament reading from Matthew chapter 1, Isaiah 7 was quoted. We were told that Jesus is Emmanuel, which means God with us, and Matthew there is referring back to this passage from Isaiah chapter 7.

We've also just sung the song, O come, O come, Emmanuel, which is citing both of those passages, Matthew 1 and Isaiah 7. And so as we dig into this, we're going to be asking this question of what does it actually mean for God to be with us? What does it actually mean for God to be with us? And even more sobering than that, why would we resist that or run away from it? Because that's exactly what King Ahaz done, it does in this passage. He's not interested in God's presence, even though it's offered. And so with that, I invite you to turn with me now to Isaiah chapter 7, starting at verse 10.

[3 : 26] You can turn in your Bible, you can turn in your worship guide, you can turn on your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. In Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5 tells us that every word of God proves true. He's a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so that's why we read Isaiah chapter 7, starting at verse 10. Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ask a sign of the Lord your God.

Let it be deep as shale 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? Verse 14. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah, the king of Assyria. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we praise you that you are Emmanuel, God with us, that Jesus came as a man into this world, that you didn't stand far off from us, but you pursued us in your grace. And we ask for your presence this morning by your Holy Spirit, that you would give us the ability to hear and understand your word, that it would be clear, that it would make sense to us, and that we would be able to believe it and apply it to our lives. Most of all, we ask that you would show us Jesus in his holiness and his beauty and his glory and his love, that we would grow in our love and our affection for him, in our reverence, in our all for him, that we would follow him and that we would obey him. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we come to Isaiah chapter 7, we are jumping into the middle of a story that's been happening for hundreds of years with God's people in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel. And so for us to be able to make any sense of what we're entering into right now, we have to understand a little bit of what has come before. Now, if you're familiar at all with the Old Testament, you know that Israel is God's people, his chosen people, who are meant to be, this phrase that Isaiah uses over and over again, a light to the nations. The people of Israel are meant to show the world what it looks like when God's people live in God's ways. But things have turned bad very quickly after King David and then Solomon and then his son Jeroboam, the nation of Israel splits in half. Okay, there's a rebellion against God, the legitimate king that follows from the line of David. And so in 930 BC, by the way, I know this is going to be a little bit for you to follow, so I've given you some notes on page 7 of your worship guide. 930 BC, the kingdom of Israel splits in half. The northern kingdom is the illegitimate kingdom, but it's referred to as Israel. It's illegitimate because they're the ones who broke off, and they're illegitimate because they do not have a king from the line of David. Only the king from the line of David is the one who is legitimate. The southern kingdom we refer to as Judah, and Judah continues this Davidic line, and so they're in a sense the faithful kingdom, although not so much because they also struggle to obey and worship God. Okay, so with all of that background, what you need to know is there's Israel in the south, Israel in the north, Judah in the south. Now, there's the power of Assyria, which is growing. They're a military threat to both Israel in the north and Judah in the south, and so Israel in the north decides, look, we know Assyria is great, and they are coming for us, so here's what we're going to do. We're going to team up with Syria, and we're hoping that with this alliance, we are going to be able to stand. But we don't want to just rely on that. We also need

Judah in the south to join us, because then we'll have three different groups in alliance against Assyria. That's where King Ahaz comes into the picture. We meet him at the very beginning here in verse 10. God's speaking to Ahaz, because Israel in the north comes to Ahaz, and they say, look, you've got two options. You can join us by choice, or you can join us by force.

If you choose not to join us, we're going to attack you, and we're going to replace you with a puppet ruler who will do what we want. We are going to get you to fight Assyria with us no matter what. So you can receive our invitation, or you can receive our command. And so Judah in the south is just filled with great fear. We didn't read all of chapter 7, but we're told at the beginning that the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind. Assyria is the great threat. Israel in the north, the lesser threat. Ahaz, the king of Judah, the one who's from the legitimate line of David, is left trying to figure out what he's supposed to do in response to this threat from the north that they are going to replace him with another king.

[9 : 15] And that's where Isaiah the prophet rolls in to remind Ahaz of God's faithfulness. Judah is the kingdom with the legitimate king. Judah is the one that is still descending from David.

And so Judah still can claim the promises that God has made for generations. They can still claim the fact that God will remain faithful to them and fight for them. And yet Ahaz has forgotten all that.

He is filled with fear and he's tempted to make a deal. He prefers not to trust God and instead to trust himself. And so that's where we pick up in this story. Isaiah is coming to Ahaz and he says here, verse 10, ask a sign of the Lord your God. Let it be as deep as shale or as high as the heavens.

In other words, Isaiah is saying this, look, I know that you're struggling to believe. I know it's hard for you to trust that God is going to show up for you and fight for you.

I know that if you judge just based on what your eyes can see, none of this makes sense. Trusting God doesn't add up. And so I'm going to do you a favor here. Ask me for a sign. Ask me to do something miraculous. I'll do it so that there's something you can see. I'll do it to build and grow your faith.

[10 : 36] I'm coming here to help you. Ask me for anything and I'll do it so that you know you can believe. And it's here where Ahaz makes his critical mistake. Verse 12, he says, I will not ask and I will not put the Lord to the test. And so Ahaz refuses the sign and he cloaks it in spiritual language.

But really he's using this spiritual language that he's going to refuse to test God as a way of hiding what is really going on. Ahaz doesn't want to rely on anyone but himself.

Ahaz doesn't want to receive a sign from God because he wants to do it himself. Ahaz believes it is riskier and scarier to have to wait and trust than to be able to act quickly and decisively. Ahaz would rather believe in what he can see than what he can't see. And this is Ahaz's great downfall, by the way, that he refuses to trust God and believe in him. And that's the background that helps us understand what's going to come next, this promise of Emmanuel. God is saying here, okay, I've offered to give you a sign and you've turned me down. So you know what we're going to do?

This is how this game is going to play out. I'll come up with my own sign. It's like you go to someone and you say, what do you want for Christmas? Ask me anything you want and I'll give it to you. And they say, oh no, no, no, I wouldn't do that. And so you say, okay, I'll pick my own gift for Christmas.

I'll give you whatever I want. And that's what God is saying here. Okay, you won't name a sign. I will give you a sign. Verse 14, therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The two kings he's referring to here, the king of Syria, the king of Israel in the north, they're coming to replace you with a puppet ruler. At least that's what you think. But here's what's actually going to happen.

[13 : 06] There's going to be a child that's born. And before that child is very old, those nations are not going to be anything you need to fear anymore. Would you just believe me and trust me?

And there's some disagreement over who Emmanuel is in this section. Some people believe it ends up being Isaiah's son in chapter eight. Isaiah's son has this beautiful name that you can write down.

If you're considering one for your child, he's named Maher Shalal Hashbaz. And so Maher Shalal Hashbaz is born in chapter eight as this fulfillment of the sign. Some people believe it's actually the son of Ahaz, Hezekiah. Either way, God fulfills his promise. There's this child that's born in a quick amount of time. Assyria, excuse me, Syria and Israel in the north are no longer a threat. God honors his promise. He protects Judah in the south from this threat. Now this raises a question that we have to talk about for a second, which is you might be thinking, okay, we just read Matthew chapter one. I thought that Isaiah here was talking about Jesus. I thought Jesus was the one who was going to be Emmanuel, God with us. And now you're telling me it's Maher Shalal Hashbaz.

What am I supposed to do with this? Everything I know is false. In fact, if you're unfamiliar with this passage, this is one of the areas folks will go when they're trying to deconstruct the Bible and prove to you it's something you shouldn't trust. They'll say, look, isn't it obvious that it's Maher Shalal Hashbaz and not Jesus? So clearly Matthew's just making stuff up.

And the answer is this. It's a little bit complicated. The way that prophecy works in the Old Testament is it also often has a double fulfillment. Prophecy often has a near fulfillment and a far fulfillment. Prophecy is not limited by one thing. And so what's happening here is that it is not that we have to choose between Maher Shalal Hashbaz and Jesus. It's that both are ways of this prophecy being fulfilled. First of all, we need for there to be a son to be born quickly because otherwise God's promise to Ahaz makes no sense. He's not saying trust me because in hundreds, hundreds, thousands of years, hundreds of years, Syria and Israel in the north will no longer be a threat. He's saying, trust me because they're not going to be a threat very soon. And so that's sort of a sidebar, but I just want you to know when we talk about prophecy, that's often the way things work. You don't need to look at it now, but I've given you a quote on the back of your worship guide that kind of unpacks some of this, that when we think about these things, it's not an either or, it's a both and. And so we don't need to be threatened when people raise these questions about the

[15 : 48] Bible. We can say, yeah, Matthew, the author of the gospel, he knew about Maher Shalal Hashbaz. He read Isaiah chapter eight. Okay. He's not ignorant of that. The audience of the gospel of Matthew, they're not ignorant of Isaiah chapter eight. They know about that. What Matthew is saying is, look, there was a small fulfillment in Isaiah chapter eight. There's a much greater, fuller, more final fulfillment in Jesus. Emmanuel, God with us means that God is going to be with you, Ahaz, even in the midst of your doubts, as you fear this army coming in.

And Jesus, God with us is going to be with you in a greater and more powerful way. I've gone over a lot of Old Testament history with you. We've talked about a lot of things. If you are confused or lost, here's the point. Ahaz trusted men when he should have trusted God.

Ahaz feared men when he should have feared God. Ahaz refused to accept God's help, but instead he wanted to do it himself. Ahaz thought that Israel in the north and Syria were more powerful, powerful than Yahweh. And so he reaps the consequences. What he ends up doing in a backward sort of way is he makes an alliance with Assyria, the major threat to begin with. And he says, look, Assyria, I want you to protect me from Israel and Syria. And so he does. And what happens? He loses his independence and he becomes a battle. And so it's the beginning of the end for Judah.

Ahaz refused to believe that God would be Emmanuel, God with us. He refused to believe that God would show up and fight for him.

Now I told you a few weeks ago, maybe it was last week, that when we come up against a negative example in the Bible, and it doesn't necessarily describe us, or maybe even if it does, we want to look and push towards the positive. And so why is it that we've unpacked all of this Old Testament history, talking about the split between the north and the south in 930, and the attack from Israel in the north and Judah in the south? It is all for this to say, Ahaz did not trust God's deliverance and his presence.

[18 : 32] Emmanuel, God with us, means that we do. Ahaz refused to trust God's deliverance and his presence. Emmanuel, God with us, means that we do.

It means that we go through this process of both grief and relief. On the one hand, we grieve giving up total control. We know, we recognize that we're actually not as powerful as we think, and that God is someone we can trust. There's a grief that comes, a loss that comes with finally letting go of this illusion, this delusion that we can arrange and control enough things to make ourselves safe.

And there's a relief from not having to bear that weight anymore. There's a relief that comes from not having to play God.

It seems counterintuitive that Ahaz would see God being with him as a bad thing, that he would refuse to name a sign, that he would not want to grow in his faith and his dependence. But on the other hand, it makes complete sense. Ahaz is protecting himself from being in the scary position of trusting God. Ahaz is protecting himself from the pain of waiting. He's protecting himself from the possibility of feeling helpless.

Instead, he would rather feel powerful and in control. And so the core point of this passage is this, that we must believe and trust that God will provide for us and protect us. We must give up what Ahaz clung on to, which is this illusion that we're in control. We must give up our desire to constantly be able to be powerful enough to do anything and everything. And so that means we no longer judge what we're going to do simply by the circumstances around us, what's right in front of us. Even when the odds are against us like they are against Ahaz, we trust and we believe in God. It means when we're in the midst of a battle and we are tempted to believe that we're all alone and it's up to us, that instead we remind ourselves that it is God's power at work in our greatest battles and our feeblest efforts.

[21 : 01] It means that we let go of believing that it's up to us to change the hearts and minds and behaviors of others that leads us to anxiety and badgering them to get them to do what we think they need to do rather than trusting God and loving them.

And so we end up controlling and manipulating our friends and our family and our partners. Ironically, driving them farther away rather than bringing them close.

It's believing that we're all alone to protect ourselves and provide for ourselves. And so the only logical choice, since God isn't going to show up, is that we have to hoard more and more and generosity is to be avoided at all costs. And we forget that we have a heavenly father who numbers the hairs on our head and cares even for the sparrows and the lilies of the valley.

We believe it's up to ourselves to protect ourselves. And so we punch back when we're hurt with gossip and slander and cutting remarks that damage the hearts and minds of others.

But we have a God who says that he's with us. And he says, vengeance is mine, says the Lord. It means we're concerned about God's opinion rather than public opinion.

[22 : 34] It means we can accept, help, and admit weakness because we don't have to convince ourselves anymore that we're strong enough or great enough or powerful enough.

We can give up working constantly and finally trust that God is true when he says he can do as much in six days, more in six days than we can do in seven.

And really the positive is this, Psalm 118, verse 6, the Lord is on my side. I will not fear what can man do to me.

And the negative is from Matthew chapter 10, verse 28. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Ahaz feared men and trusted men. If we believe God is with us, we fear God and we trust God. That's what it means for God to be with us.

[23 : 47] Not some sentimental story about Jesus reading you a story and serving you hot cocoa, but instead Jesus being the one who's a warrior who fights on your behalf and defends you against greater, more powerful enemies.

Defending you against those you cannot fight on your own. Now we read in Matthew chapter 1, talked about Jesus being Emmanuel, God with us.

And I've told you over and over that when it comes to the Bible's bookends matter a lot. Matthew chapter 1, Emmanuel, God with us. The very last chapter in Matthew, Matthew chapter 28, what are the very last words of the whole gospel?

The gospel of Matthew is meant to tell us at the beginning and at the end that God is with us.

He doesn't just give us himself and his sacrifice. He doesn't just give us the death where he takes the punishment that we deserve. And he doesn't just give us his life where he lives the life that we should have.

[25 : 07] Jesus also gives us his presence. Jesus gives us his power. Jesus comes and fights on our behalf. He is much greater than Mahershalal Hashbaz.

He is present with his people in a greater way than he was present with Ahaz. He fights against a greater enemy than Israel in the north and Syria.

Jesus fights and defeats Satan himself and sin along with it. When we think about the gospel then in relationship to this, we think about Romans chapter 8, verses 31 and 32, which I've told you about many times before, which reminds us of this promise that says, look, if God gave you his son, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

He's given you Jesus Christ. What will he hold back from you? He was powerful enough to defeat death. What else would he refuse to conquer?

And so when we face the battles of this world, when we're tempted to believe that it's all up to us, when we're tempted to manipulate and change circumstances around us, when we're tempted to make compromises with evil because we're afraid, we're reminded of the words of Isaiah chapter 7 and Matthew chapter 1, that he is Emmanuel, God with us.

[26 : 43] And so we trust his protection and his provision more than anything else. And we refuse to make treaties with Assyria because we know that God will fight for us.

In Peter Jackson's second movie in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, The Two Towers, there's this great focus on the battle for Helm's Deep. And you'll remember this sort of begins when King Theoden has his exorcism, Gandalf casts out the spirit from him.

And so he decides after this, now that he's in his right mind, he needs to rescue his people from the threat of Saruman and his army. And so he decides the way that he's going to do that is to go to Helm's Deep.

There he has his fortress of the Hornburg, which belongs to the people of Rohan. And if he can make it there, then he's able to stand against Saruman. Gandalf is convinced that this is a terrible idea.

And so you may remember he has this sidebar conversation with Aragorn where he vents his frustration and says, this is the wrong move. They're going to get trapped in this valley. And so there's only one choice for me.

[27 : 56] I, Gandalf, am going to have to ride off and find help. And his last words to Aragorn are this, look to my coming at the first light on the fifth day.

At dawn, look to the east. While Gandalf heads off to get help, we see the people of Rohan make their way to Helm's Deep. They hunker down and then this battle begins.

If you've seen it, this is the portion where Aragorn and Gimli are having this competition over who can kill enough orcs. And so they're adding up the numbers because they want to be, each of them, the one who comes out on top.

I think Gimli maybe adds some numbers in there. It's all fun and games though, until the orcs finally blow a hole in the wall that's protecting the people of Rohan. And that's the beginning of the end.

They keep moving further and further back into their fortress until they realize they're facing a death sentence. Wanting to die like men rather than cowards, Théoden and Aragorn decide they're going to make one last charge out in this blaze of glory.

[28 : 57] They're going to go on this suicide mission, rushing out on their horses into this uncountable number of orcs because they want to die defending rather than retreating.

And as they make this decision, remember, Aragorn looks up and he sees that the sun is beginning to rise. It's shining through the window where he's standing there with Théoden.

And he hears the words of Gandalf in his ears. Look to my coming at first light on the fifth day. At dawn, look to the east. And so they ride out and we see them taking over this ridiculous number of orcs knowing eventually they're going to die because they cannot kill enough of them.

Except you see at the very top of the hill of the valley, because Helm's deep as a valley, Gandalf rides up on this white horse that bucks up. And the sun is rising right behind him.

And then you see the king of Rohan come beside him. And he says, look at all these people fighting alone. And the king says, not anymore. And then they charge down the valley straight into the orcs and they clean house.

[30 : 11] And the battle of Helm's deep ends up being a victory for Rohan, not a defeat because Gandalf and the riders of Rohan are with them.

They are with them in a military sense. They're with them in a power sense. They're with them in a fighting sense that they're not going to leave them to fight their battles alone.

Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us. God is with us too. And he has come and defeated sin and death forever.

He has made what would be certain defeat into a great victory. And so we believe him and trust him and follow him no matter what.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you for this great promise that you are with us. You're with us in your strength and your might and your power.

[31 : 19] You're with us to fight for us and stand against the enemies that would otherwise destroy us and obliterate us. We ask that you would help us to know and believe that more and more, that you would direct our eyes to Jesus Christ and we would remember his sacrifice and take confidence in the fact that if you gave us your son, will you not also with him give us all things?

We ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. I invite you to...