

*The King Will Be With Us*

Isaiah 7:1-9:7

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I want to begin our time together this morning by reading Jesus' conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:17-27:

<sup>17</sup> *In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit.* <sup>18</sup> *A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit.* <sup>19</sup> *Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

<sup>20</sup> *So you'll recognize them by their fruit.*

<sup>21</sup> *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.* <sup>22</sup> *On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name,*

*and do many miracles in your name?'*

<sup>23</sup> *Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you.*

*Depart from me, you lawbreakers!'"*

<sup>24</sup> *"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.* <sup>25</sup> *The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock.* <sup>26</sup> *But everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.*

<sup>27</sup> *The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash."*

Jesus closed His sermon by challenging those who heard Him to examine their lives to see if they really were children of God. He called them to inspect the fruit of their lives and see if they had a real relationship with God. You see, what was going on was there were those in the crowd who said they loved God, but they didn't. They were religious, but they didn't have a relationship with God. They were counterfeit Christians who had built their lives on the sand. Lives built on the sand will not stand when crises hit their lives.

There are converted Christians, and there counterfeit Christians. The question is: Which one are you? Do you have genuine faith in Jesus, or are you just religious?

Here is how it works. Religion says: Do, but the Gospel says: Done. Religion says: *I do, and God accepts me based on my performance.* The gospel says: *Jesus has earned my right standing before God. I simply put my faith in Jesus. He has done everything for me. God accepts me based on what He has done. Because of my faith in what Jesus has done, I have been given a new heart and new desires, and so I wholeheartedly, from now on, want to live for Jesus.*

Bottom line: People who try to live religious lives are counterfeit Christians. They are not converted by the Spirit of God. Ray Ortlund says,

*Too often what passes for Christianity today is a life legislated by the good example of Jesus and frightened by the threat of divine punishment.<sup>1</sup>*

What Ortlund is saying is that many people believe Christianity is about morality (be good, be nice, be kind etc.), and if I am not, then God will punish me. This kind of Christianity is counterfeit Christianity, or as the Bible says, it has a form of godliness but denies its power. This is not Christianity. It is religion, and religion does not save. Only having a relationship with Jesus by faith will save you.

What Jesus says about the fruit and the flood at the end of the Sermon on the Mount is what we find in Isaiah 7-8. The crisis King Ahaz encounters revealed what was in his heart. He was religious, but he did not love God, nor did he have a relationship with Him. He was a counterfeit Christian.

The main point of the sermon is: *When crises hit our lives, it is genuine Christians who stand firm in their faith in Jesus, while counterfeit Christians do not stand at all.*

Last Sunday, we finished the Preface of Isaiah (Isaiah 1-6). Now we are moving into Book One of Isaiah: *The Book of the King.*

We are going to cover Isaiah 7:1-9:7. These chapters are actually covering only one event. They address the threat of a possible invasion by Israel, Aram and Assyria. In Isaiah 7, Yahweh addressed the threat of invasion to *Judah's King Ahaz*. Then in Isaiah 8 God addressed the threat of the invasion to *the people of Judah*. Finally, Isaiah 9:1-7 concludes the prophecy with a message of hope.

Let's walk through the narrative. We will consider some of the contours of the narrative as we walk through it, and then we will draw out our principles of application at the end.

As we work through this narrative, see if you can see yourself in the story. Often, we read the Old Testament and think, *"that was then, but this is now."* I'm not like them because I am a modern person, so it does not apply to me. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are just like they were. Faith for them is the same as faith for us. Here we go.

2 Kings 16 tells us that King Ahaz was the son of Jotham. He began to reign when he was 20 years old, but he was not a good king. He did not follow in the steps of his ancestor, King David. Instead, he acted like the pagan kings of Israel. He built high places for false gods and pagan worship. He even burned his children to the pagan gods. He was a wicked man.

Yet, Ahaz was a politician. He said he believed in God, but he didn't love God. He went to the Lord's temple for worship and did all the Jewish religious things, but when he was not at worship, he lived like an unbeliever. He lived like everyone else he was around. He did whatever he needed to do to help him rule as king.

You see, King Ahaz was a counterfeit Christian. He did not have genuine faith in God. He had a counterfeit faith, not a converted faith. He said *he believed in God*, but He did *not believe God*. He was *religious*, but he did not have a *relationship* with God. King Ahaz was a counterfeit Christian, and now he was in a crisis where his counterfeit faith was being put to the test.

It was 733 BC, and Assyria was the latest bully nation on the block. It was gobbling up everything in sight. Assyria had set its sights on Egypt, Israel, and Judah. They were coming for them, and nothing could stop the Assyrian steamroller.

Because Assyria was coming for them, Egypt and Israel (the northern kingdom) had formed an alliance, and they wanted Judah (the southern kingdom) to join them. However, King Ahaz would not do it. As a result, Israel and Egypt decided to go to war with Judah and depose Ahaz and put a puppet king in his place to do what they wanted. Ahaz was in trouble, and he knew it. He was going to be attacked by Egypt and Israel or by Assyria. He was literally between a rock and a hard place.

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Ortlund, *Preaching the Word: Isaiah*, 86.

So, in Isaiah 7:3, we see that God sent Isaiah to talk to King Ahaz as he inspected Jerusalem's water conduits. Ahaz needed to make sure that Judah had a water supply when the attack came.

Yahweh told Isaiah to take his son, *Shear-jashub*, with him. Yahweh wanted to assure Ahaz that He was going to protect Judah. Isaiah's son, *Shear-jashub*, would be the message of assurance. *Shear-jashub* means "a remnant will return" or "a remnant will repent."

Notice what is going on here. God had already decided to save a remnant of Judah even before Isaiah spoke with Ahaz. The promise was made in the name of the son. Although salvation had not happened yet, it was certain. God's people were going to be delivered even though Ahaz was a wicked king who was scared to death.

So, Isaiah goes to Ahaz, and he says to him in v. 4:

*Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering sticks, the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah*<sup>2</sup>.

Notice what happened here. The LORD didn't minimize Ahaz's emotional distress. He knew he was upset and anxious. The LORD didn't simply dismiss his struggle and say, "Just trust Me." He did call Ahaz to trust him, but Yahweh first met Ahaz, where he was in his anxiety and in his fear. The LORD acknowledged it and then told him not to worry about these two nations that were going to attack him because they were like a couple of puffs of smoke. They were about to be gone.

Then in vv. 10-12, Yahweh invites Ahaz to trust Him and offers him more assurance by asking him to request a sign. However, Ahaz refused God's offer and made a very foolish decision.

Instead of trusting the LORD, 2 Kings 16 tells us that he sent word to *Tiglath-pileser, the king of Assyria*, and asked him to come and save him from Israel and Egypt. Someone once said that Ahaz seeking help from Assyria was like a mouse who was being attacked by two rats going to the cat and asking for help. What's going to happen? The mouse and the rats are all going to be eaten.

So, as a result, in vv. 13-14, Yahweh told Isaiah that He was going to save him anyway. However, in this saving act, he would judge Judah and, at the same time, deliver Judah by re-establishing the Davidic dynasty through the promised son, *Immanuel (God with us)*.

Then in Isaiah 7:17-25 and 8:4-8, we see that Assyria will crush Israel and Aram. Remember, Ahaz had gone out to inspect the water conduits of the city. He wanted to make sure they had water, but it was not the physical water that they needed.

What they needed was the *sweet slow-flowing water of Shiloah*. But now it was too late. They had rejected the *sweet slow-flowing water of Yahweh*, so now the destructive flood water of Assyria was going to crash into the house of Judah. The flood was going to wash away Egypt and Israel and would almost completely wash away all of Judah. Only the remnant would remain, the "shear-jashub." Those whom *Immanuel* protected.

Then Yahweh gave His people another sign in the name of a son, but this name was one of judgment. Isaiah's son, *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz*, means "quick to plunder, swift to the spoil."

Then Isaiah went on to say in chapter 8 that it is not political plots and conspiracies that we should fear but that we should fear the LORD. Conspiracies come and go, but the LORD is a *Sanctuary* for those who trust in Him. However, for those who do not trust in Him, He is a *stumbling block*.

In other words, those not trusting in Yahweh and His word were consumed with conspiracies. Their final destination was gloom and darkness. You see, once you reject God's plan of salvation, there is nowhere else to go. Once we reject the light, all that is left is darkness. Isaiah 8:22 says that those who were consumed by conspiracies:

*Look toward the earth and see only distress, darkness, and the gloom of affliction, and they will be driven into thick darkness.*

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<sup>2</sup> Israel's king Pekah.

The imagery of v. 22 is that people were to be consumed with anxiety, distress, and fear. They will find no way to quiet the turmoil in their hearts. These people will grope around in utter hopelessness and confusion and be consumed by their fears.

Finally, in Isaiah 9:1, we see that God's judgment is full and complete when the world is in darkness, but all is not lost. Our narrative concludes in Isaiah 9:2-7 by telling us that God has not abandoned us. Light will dawn in the form of a child who is the coming King. This King is the ultimate King. He will reign in peace and justice. Luke 1:31-33 tells us that the promise of this Son is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Let's make some applications and see how crises and threats in our lives create fears that reveal whether we have genuine faith in Jesus or only counterfeit faith. It will reveal whether we have a relationship with Jesus or if we are only religious.

Remember our main point: *When threats of danger, crises, and conspiracies crash into our lives, it is converted Christians who stand firm in their faith in Jesus, while counterfeit Christians do not stand at all.*

1. Crises, threats, and conspiracies can create fears in our hearts and lives that wash over our lives like a flood (Isaiah 7:1-2<sup>3</sup>; 8:11-12<sup>4</sup>)

When we look at what is going on in Isaiah 7-8, King Ahaz and the people of Jerusalem and Judah were faced with the real threat of invasion from Assyria and from, Israel and Aram.

Ahaz had a big problem. Should he join with Israel and Aram and eventually be defeated by Assyria or ask Assyria for help and thus open the door for them to invade? He was in a Catch 22. It did not matter what he did because it seemed like whatever his choice, he was going to lose.

However, there was a third option. He could listen to Isaiah and trust Yahweh's promise to deliver him and the people of Judah.

Ahaz and the people were scared to death. Threats and rumors were swirling like storm clouds. Look in Isaiah 7:2. It says that:

*The hearts of his people trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind.*

Have you ever been that fearful? Have you ever been in a situation where your heart just fluttered in your chest? Perhaps it was your gut that churned, and it made you sick to your stomach.

The fact is, we are like them. There will be events that come into our lives that create such distress and anxiety that our heart rate increases to the point where our blood pressure is off the chart.

There was a report after the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, that a husband found out his wife had been killed. His heart was so out of control that he had a heart attack. Bad news can send us into a state of shock.

Here is my point. We will face real crises that will create real fear in our lives. It will cause our hearts to race, to get sick to our stomachs, to be weak in our knees and we will feel crushed in our spirit.

Have you ever been there? Perhaps you're looking at the balance of your bank account, and you realize that you're overdrawn, and there are no more funds left to provide for your family. Perhaps you thought you had that new job only to realize it just fell through. Perhaps you get that phone call that a loved one has just died. Perhaps you and your spouse have been wanting a baby only to realize that you just had a miscarriage. Perhaps that illness you thought you were over has come back. Friends, the list of crises goes on and on. They can wash over our lives like a flood and leave our hearts shaking like leaves on a tree caught in a whirlwind. What will you do when that day comes?

The LORD does not just blow off our emotional response to a crisis, sudden crushing news, or a threat to our lives. He knows we are weak, and so He meets us at that point. This leads us to our second principle.

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<sup>3</sup> Message for King Ahaz.

<sup>4</sup> Message for the people of Jerusalem and Judah.

## 2. Real faith rests in God alone (Isaiah 7:4-9; 8:13-15)

Look in Isaiah 7:4-9 because Isaiah comes to Ahaz at just this precise moment when he is having a crisis of faith. The LORD says to Ahaz through Isaiah:

*Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering sticks . . . [that have] plotted harm against you. They say, <sup>6</sup> 'Let's go up against Judah, terrorize it, and conquer it for ourselves . . . This is what the Lord God says: It will not happen; it will not occur . . . If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all.*

Then in Isaiah 8:13-15, Isaiah tells the people of Judah:

*Do not call everything a conspiracy that these people say is a conspiracy. Do not fear what they fear; do not be terrified. <sup>13</sup> You are to regard only the Lord of Armies as holy. Only he should be feared; only he should be held in awe. <sup>14</sup> He will be a sanctuary; but for the two houses of Israel [that will not trust Him], he will be a stone to stumble over and a rock to trip over, and a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> Many will stumble over these; they will fall and be broken; they will be snared and captured.*

So, what is happening in these texts? Ahaz and the people of Judah are having a crisis of faith. The rumor mill is turning out bad news and fake news.

Ahaz and his people said they believed in God, but the problem was they didn't believe God. They didn't have faith in Him or His word. They practiced religion, but they didn't practice resting in God.

You see, to rest in God is to believe God; it is to take Him at His word. It is, by faith, to have a living, vibrant relationship with Jesus.

God was using the crisis of Assyria to open the eyes of the people of Judah to their counterfeit faith. The crisis was an opportunity to get right with God. It was an opportunity to leave religion behind and step into a real relationship with Jesus.

Before we go any further, let's press pause and define what faith is. Quoting Ray Ortlund again. Ortlund says:

*[Faith] has three components: knowledge of God, persuading us to agree with God, [thus] motivating us to embrace God.<sup>5</sup>*

What does faith do? It awakens us to love Jesus with all of our hearts, soul, mind, and strength. Then we act on that love and faith by *believing* Jesus is for us, *resting* in Him in our crisis by joyfully *obeying* Jesus no matter the cost.

Faith calms and quiets our souls in our crisis. We may be shell-shocked in the beginning, but eventually, faith calms and quiets our souls so that we find our rest in Jesus. Faith reminds us to fear God more than we fear the crisis.

Yet, notice what the LORD said in Isaiah 7:9b:

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

Isn't this how anxiety and fears work in our hearts and lives when we do not have any faith in Jesus. *Fears that are not met with faith will leave us in utter and complete instability.*

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<sup>5</sup> Ortlund, 89.

So, how are you doing? How are you responding to some of the crises in our nation and world right now? Are conspiracies overwhelming you? Are you consumed by them? It seems like any time you listen to any news; it is one bad report after another. Inflation is at an all-time high; gas prices are through the roof, school shootings, mass shootings, targeted shootings by angry people, and war between Russia and Ukraine.

We are just scratching the surface. I have not even considered our personal crises like work problems, parenting problems, and marriage problems. It is in these moments of crisis that Jesus comes to us and says—trust Me. He says:

*“Calm and quiet your soul. Don’t be afraid of your crisis or the outcome of your crisis but fear Me only. If you do not stand firm you will not stand at all. Only regard the Me as holy. Do not fear your crises but only fear the Me. Do not listen to the conspiracies only listen to Me. Only be in awe Me, and you will stand firm. If you trust Me only, I will be your Sanctuary of rest and renewal.”*

However, if we do not have faith in Jesus, we are doomed to a life of instability, desperation, and doubt.

Bottom line: If we remain in our unbelief, then instability in a crisis is the least of our problems. Persistent unbelief in Jesus will eventually lead to your eternal destruction.

3. The Culmination of the Crisis of our Faith: *Immanuel* or *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*? Are we converted or counterfeit?

Converted Christians and counterfeit Christians both face similar crises in their lives, but each will handle them in vastly different ways.

Converted Christians will still experience hurt, pain, grief, and even struggle with their fears, but ultimately, they will rest in Jesus. *Converted Christians* turn to God’s word, seek God’s presence in corporate worship, ask God’s people to pray for him or her, and preach the gospel of grace to his or her heart for reassurance and rest.

While *Counterfeit Christians* say they believe in God, they do not open God’s word, pray, seek godly counsel, and seek to avoid worshipping with God’s people. They seem religious and earnest but stop short of trusting in Jesus.

Friends, a single crisis can elicit two very different responses. Do we have faith in Jesus, or do we live in unbelief? There can be one crisis that will result in two different responses to that crisis.

This was what happened in Isaiah 7 and 8. Same crisis, invasion, and the same sign, the birth of a son, but there were two different outcomes. The birth of this son was deliverance for some and destruction for others. It depended on how one responded to the crisis.

Theologian John Goldingay says that, most likely, there were not two sons born but only one son. *Immanuel* in Isaiah 7:14 is also the son *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* in Isaiah 8:1.<sup>6</sup> There was one son with two different outcomes depending on whether you had faith or not.

For the remnant that trusted God, the child that was born was *Immanuel*. He was “*God was with them*,” and they would be delivered.

Yet, for those who rejected God and remained in their unbelief, the child was *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*. Their unbelief led to their destruction or, as the name says, “*quick to plunder, swift to the spoil*.”

Friends, here is what we need to know about the birth of *Immanuel*. Isaiah 7:14 says, “*the virgin will conceive*.” In the Hebrew language, that can mean two things. First, the Hebrew word for “*virgin*” means “*young woman or young mother*.” Second, it can also mean a “*young girl who has never been sexually active*.”

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<sup>6</sup> John Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, 25-26.

In Isaiah's case, for its original fulfillment, it meant a young woman had a child. It was Isaiah's wife, the prophetess, who bore a son whose name was the sign of "Immanuel" for some because God was with them, but it was "*Maher-shalal-hash-baz*" for others because their unbelief would lead to their destruction.

Yet, the sign of the son of Isaiah 7:14 and Isaiah 8:3 finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

The virgin in Isaiah 7:14 is fulfilled in Matthew 1:23. In Matthew 1:23, the virgin Mary truly was a "*young woman who had never been sexually active and yet by the Holy Spirit she conceived a baby.*" She bore the ultimate fulfillment of "Immanuel," "*God with us,*" through the birth of Jesus Christ.

However, the birth of Jesus Christ was the deliverance for some and destruction for others. Do you remember what Simeon said about baby Jesus when he saw Him in the temple? In Luke 2:34, Simeon said:

*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel.*

Isaiah reminds us in chapter Isaiah 8:13-15 that, depending on how we respond to Him, Jesus is our Deliverer or our Destruction.

Isaiah says:

<sup>13</sup> *You are to regard only the Lord of Armies as holy.*

*Only he should be feared;*

*only he should be held in awe.*

<sup>14</sup> *He will be a sanctuary;*

*but for the two houses of Israel,  
he will be a stone to stumble over*

*and a rock to trip over,*

*and a trap and a snare*

*to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*

<sup>15</sup> *Many will stumble over these;*

*they will fall and be broken;*

*they will be snared and captured.*

Isaiah calls us to only trust Jesus when a crisis hits our lives. If we fear Him only then, He will be a Sanctuary for us. He will be with us, and He will never leave us or forsake us.

Why is this so? It is because Jesus is the Son of God who experienced the ultimate crisis. In the Garden, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus chose to drink the cup of God's wrath for our sin. Then He went to the cross and paid for our sin. On the cross, He was forsaken by God so that when our crisis comes, we will not be forsaken.

You see, God's answer for our crisis is a child. Look in Isaiah 9:6-7:

<sup>6</sup> *For a child will be born for us,*

*a son will be given to us,*

*and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*He will be named*

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,*

*Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*

<sup>7</sup> *The dominion will be vast,*

*and its prosperity will never end.*

*He will reign on the throne of David*

*and over his kingdom,*

*to establish and sustain it*

*with justice and righteousness from now on and forever.*

*The zeal of the Lord of Armies will accomplish this.*

This is the beautiful promise of what it means to live in the light of faith in Jesus. He is all of these things for us in our crisis.

Yet, for those who will not turn to Jesus, He is none of those things. He becomes a stone of stumble and a rock of offense. He will be the stone that falls on those who reject Him and crush them to their destruction.

Friends, Ahaz was a counterfeit Christian who lived in unbelief. His lack of faith was costly. It led to his destruction, and it led to the destruction of those around him. Will yours lead you to the same place? Will your unbelief be costly for others as well?

What's keeping you from trusting God right now? Is it your pride? Perhaps you feel that you are too smart to trust Jesus. Perhaps you feel like you are not smart enough. Perhaps you feel you are successful and happy without Jesus, so why do I need Him?

Bottom line: in our human existence, there are always crises. If you are not having one right now, one day you will. What will be for you? Will it be the sign of *Immanuel: God with you? Or will it be Maher-shalal-hash-baz: swift to the spoil?*

There are only two ways to live: trust Jesus, and He will be your Sanctuary, or reject Jesus, and He will be the stumbling stone that crushes you.

The question we should be asking ourselves is: Am I trusting Jesus right now, right where I am in life? If we look to Jesus in faith and rest in Him, we will not have any regrets.

Here is the good news if you are struggling to trust Jesus: *Jesus never lets faith go unmet without giving you His presence.*

However, if we decide to go at life all alone, God will eventually say to us: *Your will be done to you according to your lack of faith in Jesus.*