

The Promise of a Savior

Isaiah 7 – 9

There are clues and hints of God's grace woven throughout our lives that are designed to point us to his power and his mercy. You may have seen in the news this past week one of those pointers from a tornado in Tennessee. The twister blew apart a trailer and sucked up a one-year-old baby in the funnel while the father was trying to hold him. The father was lifted up and thrown in one direction and the baby was simply gone, lost in the chaos of storm. As soon as the tornado passed the terrified parents began searching for what they were sure would be the lifeless body of their baby. An hour into the search the baby was found nestled in the shock-absorbing branches of a tree that had been knocked over by the tornado. The child was unharmed.

It's a remarkable picture of grace. A tornado spins up from a broken world groaning under the curse of sin. (Nothing has worked right since the fall in Genesis 3.) The creation itself spins out the death that is consequent to the rebellion of our federal father, Adam. But in the midst of the destruction of that curse, God reaches in to save a baby. That's stunning. But the grace of God displayed in his reaching into the middle of that curse-laden catastrophe pales in comparison to the grace he promised and displays when he reaches into the catastrophe of the domain of darkness and snatches rebel souls out of eternal death through his Savior Son.

Isaiah 7:1–14 — 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. 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.

³ And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. ⁴ And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, ⁶ "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," ⁷ thus says the LORD God:

"It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. ⁸ For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. And within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.

⁹ And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all."

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¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³ And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

PRAY

V 14 — The Lord himself will give you a sign.

God promises the Savior. The Lord himself promises salvation. It's not a man-made promise; it is divine, from the throne of eternity. The Lord himself will choose the sign, and the Lord himself will save sinners. He alone is the Savior: **Isaiah 45:21 & 22** — ...there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. No man is capable of saving even himself, much less Adam's entire race. We are all marked by sin, and salvation must come through one who is sinless.

This is why the doctrine of the incarnation is non-negotiable. God must accomplish our salvation because he is the only one who can. One of the early heresies waged against biblical orthodoxy is that Jesus was either not fully God or not God at all. But it is God who saves sinners through his atoning sacrifice on the cross. If we do not have God wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger,¹ we do not have God on a cross reconciling us to himself.² If we do not have God on a cross paying for our sin we continue under our own sin debt and will pay with our eternal soul — we will perish.

The promised Savior is from God himself who keeps the promise himself. He's the only one who can.

Vv 10–13 — This promise comes in the middle of sinful rebellion.

We saw and felt the great weight of sin last week in the first six chapters. Chapter 7 opens with the ongoing unbelief and rebellion of Judah's wicked King Ahaz. *That*, along with the enemy kings of the nations is the backdrop for God's promise. When God tells Ahaz not to worry about the threats of the Gentile kings, he tells him to ask for a sign so that he can be certain of God's promise. But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” (v 12)

¹ Luke 2:12

² Ephesians 2:16

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That statement may sound humble if you don't know anything about Ahaz. But Ahaz has never done anything **but** put the Lord to the test. There are two ways to interpret his statement. One is that he's just faking piety, pretending that it wouldn't enter his mind to defy God. "Oh my! How could you **ever** think I would test God? I would never, ever, ever question God!" That's one way. The other is that the statement is a forthright admission that he doesn't believe God: "I won't test God because I don't believe there is a God to test. I choose my unbelief over whatever you say." Whichever way you interpret it, it underscores (1) the king's wicked unbelieving heart, (2) the nation's wicked departure from God under Ahaz's leadership, and (3) the hostile wickedness of the surrounding nations. Wicked, wicked, wicked. It is into this context that God promises the Savior.

The recalcitrance, the hardness of sinners did not, and does thwart the Savior's promised coming. Chapter 8 even details God's people consulting mediums and fortune tellers and necromancers to gain some insight into their world. Into this kind of rebellion and unbelief, God's Promise: **Immanuel, God with us.** God with us! That is what Immanuel means. God dwelling in the midst of us.

We saw last week that our need for a Savior flows from our sinfulness which separates from holy God. So God said in Isaiah 1:4 that we are utterly estranged from him. To be separated from him, to be driven out as our first father and mother were in Genesis 3, is to be cut off from life. That means death because God is both Creator and sustainer, the source of life. We will not live apart from him.

God who created us both for his glory and for communion with himself — (The chief end of man is to glorify God and *enjoy him forever*) — He initiates the process of salvation **not** because we are realizing the error of our ways, and making some reforms as we go, and learning to be better. No, salvation is promised in light of the fact that none of that is true and we remain blind and deaf to the good and kind rule and reign of God apart from his grace. Stiff-necked rebels don't repent to the glory of God on their own. But Christ Jesus comes to save sinners.³

Let this grip your heart. If God was hindered by rebellion and sin, none of us would be saved — there would be no salvation. Have you imagined you are too far from God to turn and be saved? You are not. God reaches into the curse and chaos of sin and rescues from death by his grace. See here in the Promise the light of salvation piercing the clouds of sin. Are you walking in darkness? The people

³ 1 Timothy 1:15

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who walked in darkness have seen the great light of God's salvation! God shines in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.⁴

Have you imagined those whom you love who are outside of Christ are consumed by such dark sin that Christ himself cannot penetrate it? No. Let this stir you to greater, more sustained prayer! This is the promise of a Savior: God overcomes separation, who comes in the middle of estrangement, draws near to the sinners who are cut off and cast out, and he comes bearing this name: Immanuel, God with us.

We all remain under the obligation to turn from our sin to Christ in faith, but let's put to the lie the notion that sinfulness — yours or anyone else's mounts up so high that it trumps the reconciling power of the cross. Look to Jesus, gaze on the Savior, whose face *radiant beams with the dawn of redeeming grace*. The promise of the Savior is not premised on your goodness but on the reconciling, redeeming love of God.

v 14b — ... the virgin shall conceive and bear a son. The Savior will be one like you.

God elected Adam as our representative. In Adam we all sinned, and the whole race fell. To redeem the human race a second Adam is required. This is the promise: God will send forth his Son to be born of woman — he will be a human — born under the law to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.⁵ As we said earlier, if God is not in the manger, God is not on the cross. In the same way, if a man is not living in holy perfection under God's law, man has no new representative. We remain under the law, and therefore under its penalty. God comes as Savior in human form, born of a virgin that God chooses.

The baby conceived in that virgin is by the Holy Spirit, not a sinful man. The Savior is free from the nature of sin. The rebellious likeness of Adam is at last replaced by the obedience of Christ.

Adam's likeness now efface, stamp thine image in its place!

Second Adam from above reinstate us in Thy love.

So the promised Savior is fully God — holy and righteous — and fully man. He does not subtract his deity to become a man. There is no division in him that he is partially one and partially the other.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:6

⁵ Galatians 4:4–5

His humanity is added to his deity, and becomes the only acceptable substitute for our salvation. He is God incarnate.

9:1b–2 — The Promise is to all people.

Isaiah 9:1b–2 — In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

The promised Savior will come to and through Israel — the Messiah is Jewish. But the promise of salvation is to all nations. Zebulun, the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations... That's us. He will come to his own, to the Jews, but as a people they will not receive him. But to everyone who does receive him — those from every tribe, language, people, and nation⁶ — to everyone who believes in his name,⁷ the light of salvation will dawn. Believers are the beneficiaries of this promise. We are also the proclaimers of this promise: To all who dwell in the darkness of sin and death, the Sun of Righteous rises with healing in his wings.

Wherever you are, whoever you are, whatever you have done, the Savior inaugurates the day of salvation. With joy you may draw water from the wells of salvation.⁸

The Promised One will overcome hostility and usher in peace.

Isaiah 9:5–7 — For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult

and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

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.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

⁶ Revelation 5:9

⁷ John 1:12

⁸ Isaiah 12:3

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We live in a time of wars. This is the normal course of things. There's war in eastern Europe. There is war in the Middle East. There are threats of war in the far east, threats of war in South America, potential for war at home. The promise of the Messiah's reign is that all of these human wars will be put down, and there will be peace when the world ultimately comes under his rule and reign. This is huge. But as big as that is, wars between nations and peoples are not **primary**. Those wars are **secondary** — secondary to human hearts in the grip of sin, raging against God and each other. The greatest war that the promised Savior will win is when he conquers those who are alienated from God and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, and ends the hostility, brokering peace between children of wrath and God. The promised Prince of Peace makes peace by the blood of his cross. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this. This is the promise.

Last week, "The need of a Savior." This week, "The promise of a Savior." Next week, "The coming of the Savior," where we see him accomplish all that is promised. The grace of God reaches in to the domain of darkness and saves sinners through Christ. But as Calvin said, all that Christ has done for me remains of no benefit to me as long as I remain outside of Christ. Today is the day of salvation. Receive the promised One through faith, and know what it is to be at peace with God; know what it is to enjoy the life of God for the glory of God forever.

PRAY