

“Nothing Can Save Us That Is Possible” | Rev. Jordan Griesbeck | December 22, 2019

Isaiah 7:1-4, 10-16 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... 7 thus says the Lord GOD:

“‘It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. “

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... 16 For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

Romans 1:1-7 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be the Son

From W.H.Auden “For the Time Being; A Christmas Oratorio”
“Nothing can save us that is possible.”

Excerpts: <http://www.cs.utsa.edu/~wagner/church/auden/>

Auden, trying to make sense of World War II and of his reawakened faith in Christ, pondered the desperate situation the world and he personally faced. But in our world, most daily problems can be fixed, repaired, or ignored.

1. An Impossible Situation

Isaiah 7: Ahaz, young, inexperienced, and out-matched, faces an impossible situation. His enemies, the king of Syria and the tribe of Ephraim, legendary fighters, represent an unbeatable combination which turned Ahaz’s knees weak. We are outmatched in our times by our two enemies, sin and death, yet unlike Ahaz, many of us are not too concerned about our desperate situation.

Sin has become a matter of casual acquaintance. A 1980s survey found that most people said they sinned on an average of 4.64 times a month, hardly what might be considered a pressing problem. Yet G.K.Chesterton said, “Original sin is the only part of Christianity that can be proven.”

Death, too, may be a remote problem in the future if scientists who say that the day is coming when people could live forever prove right.

Ahaz, when told by God to ask for a miracle, refused, and rather than looking up for the solution to his situation, looked around, i.e. to the Assyrians, who offered an alliance that eventually would cost Judah its independence. God, in defiance of Ahaz’s lack of faith, supplied a prophecy that predicted a virgin birth, a savior, and God coming to dwell with men, a truly impossible sign.

2. An Impossible Salvation

The first chapter of Matthew talks of angels, scandal, a 700-year-old prophecy fulfilled, and a child born without 2 human parents--truly impossible events—yet so many church-goers have become dismissive of the virgin birth as either so familiar that they tune out on the miraculous news or they deem it too fantastic to be true. Author and photographer Chris Arnade speaks of atheism as an intellectual belief

of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, 6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

7 To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 1:18-25 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

mostly accessible only to those who have done well. Arnade found true faith in the drug addicts of the South Bronx when he went there to photograph their lives for his book *Dignity*. He expected to find cynicism but found people of faith, like Takeisha, a "child of God." Arnade found that middle and upper-class America really didn't feel it needed the gospel, but the citizens of the South Bronx knew they did.

Conclusion

The two names of the Messiah tell us almost all we need to know about Jesus.

Jesus: to save his people from their sins (Mt.1:21)

Immanuel: God with us (Isaiah 7:14)

That is, Salvation and Presence

The bad news: Humanity cannot save itself from sin and death.

Good news: It isn't about us climbing up to reach God; it's about God with us, God coming down to save us.

Tim Keller reference that other religions offer good advice, but Jesus offers good news: God did it for us.

Mt. 1:24-25 Our part is to be like Joseph—wake up, obey, and call.

Discussion

Wake Up

Consider seriously the problem of sin in your own life, both specific sin and general attitudes of sin. What has hardened you to sin around you? What would make you more aware of your own condition before God? Reread Romans 1:1-7 and consider what it means to be "called to belong to Jesus Christ."

Obey

What would it take to obey the specific commands of Jesus you are avoiding? Pray to see where you may be discounting or avoiding obedience. What did you find?

Call

Spend some time calling on Jesus in prayer to give you a more vivid notion of what it means to know in depth both the salvation and the presence of God.