



Incarnation: God's Long Faithfulness

Isa. 7:1-25 / Jn. 1:4-14

(Expanded Sermon Notes)

Two hundred years before he ever had the thought about taking the throne, a once-great nation would be divided and would never be united again. In fact, not only would it never be reunited, it would eventually lose its sovereign independence altogether. Why? Well, selfishness and greed are two large factors. Pride will also play a significant role. And pride was his greatest weakness. As a child, he demonstrated a profound capacity for problem-solving and creative thinking. He was born to be a leader, and everyone around him could see that. So, when King Jotham died, it was clear that his son Ahaz would take over. And Ahaz would quickly demonstrate his ability to lead and rule. He was king over Judah, the southern half of what was a once-united Israel. But that was two hundred years ago. He had only heard stories of Saul, David, and Solomon, who ruled at that time. Now, his small nation was surrounded by enemies, and he had successfully defended against one attack, but he knew there were more to come. And he knew that his army was not strong enough to hold on for much longer. In his heart, he felt that the situation was hopeless... it was just a matter of time till they fell and he lost power. But his mind was as sharp as ever, and he was resolved to do all he could. And, if he was good at anything, he had political savvy in spades, and he started hatching a plan... an alliance.

Step one was to begin negotiations with a more powerful force that could protect his people. For this, he turned to the king of Assyria. Sure, the Assyrians might not have been an ideal ally, but the enemy of his enemy was now his friend. And no one was stronger than Assyria. With them on his side, his people could live in peace... as long as Assyria permitted it. The second step was to make sure that his people and capital city, Jerusalem, had a clean and reliable water supply. This was crucial if he could not secure an ally and needed to defend himself in war. It was while he was out securing clean water that God sent the prophet Isaiah to offer hope and salvation. However, Ahaz's greatest strength, his political acumen, was also his greatest downfall. Through Isaiah, God offered to save Ahaz and his people, but just like so many of the kings over the last two hundred years, Ahaz's pride got in the way, and he trusted his own plan over the Lord's. And, yes, Judah had peace for a while under Assyria's protection, but Ahaz's decision would eventually lead to their downfall and exile. Yet, God would remain faithful and, in the face of rejection, promised salvation. And so what we see in Ahaz's story is that **God is not indifferent to our suffering.**

1. What is Advent?

- a. A season of intentional remembrance and looking forward... a paradox of postures.
 - i. Literally meaning “coming” or “arrival,” this term refers to the coming of Jesus Christ to earth to provide salvation by his life, death, resurrection, and ascension.
 - 1. We remember when God fulfilled his promise to send his son.
 - ii. Christians now anticipate a second advent when Christ will return to earth in bodily form to receive the church and to judge the nations.
 - 1. We look forward in hope and expectancy for Jesus’ promised second coming.
 - iii. The term *Advent* also refers to a season of the church year during which the church prepares to commemorate Christ’s first coming to earth (Christmas).
 - 1. The Advent season encompasses the four Sundays prior to Christmas Day.¹
 - 2. By the Middle Ages four Sundays had become the standard length of the Advent season. Since then, Advent has been considered to be the beginning of the church year.²
- b. It is a season of increasing light.
 - i. The Advent wreath has five candles. The candles represent:
 - ii. Each week, a new candle is lit, and with it, the light increases until, on Christmas Eve, we light the final candle, the Messiah’s candle.
 - 1. As the light increases, we remember the moment the light of the world came into the world.

2. Some decisions have long-term negative consequences. (Isa. 7:17)

- a. Ahaz is faced with a significant trial and a legitimate threat to his kingdom.
 - i. **The abiding truth of this passage is that faith in the Lord and in his promises is a practical approach to life, however great the crisis.**
 - ii. **This message was rejected:** Practical people, they would say, have to live in the real world where political astuteness and military muscle are what counts. But to Isaiah, this was not a choice between viable alternatives. It was a life-and-death decision.³
- b. **The threat at hand:** King Pekah and King Rezin march upon Jerusalem to no avail.
 - i. Threatened by the expansionist/imperialist policies of the Mesopotamian power, Assyria, the two major states of northern Palestine, *Aram*, and *Israel*, had entered into a defensive alliance and, considering that an all-Palestine alliance would give greater collective security, **pressed Judah to join.**⁴
 - ii. King Ahaz and his people were shaken. (v.2)
 - 1. Another invasion is impending, **causing king and people to ‘flap’ as the trees of the forest are shaken!** Contrast 28:16, ‘the one who trusts will not panic’ (lit.).⁵

¹ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, [*Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 7–8.

² Fred A. Grissom and Steve Bond, [“Advent,”](#) ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 31.

³ J. Alec Motyer, [Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 85.

⁴ J. Alec Motyer, [Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 85–86.

⁵ J. Alec Motyer, [Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 86.

2. **God's supreme kingship exalts him as sovereign, not only over Judah in the days of its earthly king's demise, but over Rezin, Pekah, and the great Assyrian monarch himself.**
 - a. Chapter 6 predicts unbelief; chapter 7 records its historical manifestation.⁶
- c. **Who will I trust in hardship?** → This is the question that Ahaz has to face.
 - i. If only Ahaz could be persuaded to disengage himself from politics, Assyria would in any case squash the northern kingdoms and the Lord would preserve Judah—as indeed he ultimately did (37:36–37).
 1. But if Ahaz links himself to Assyria he will indeed have taken a tiger by the tail!
 2. **In all this the issue is clear-cut: is salvation by faith or by works? Will Ahaz be saved by trust or by astute political gambles?**⁷
 - ii. This is a question that each of us has to face at some point.
 1. **Do we believe that God is present and able to see us through?**
 2. Do we pray for wisdom? Do we lean into the wisdom of others?
 - a. Remember, we are not called to walk alone.
 3. Do we lean into God's strength in our weakness? Or, do we put on our boots and lean on our own strength?
 - a. **Leaning into God's strength doesn't mean that we don't have to try. It means that we acknowledge what we can't control and work to honor God in all that we can while trusting him for the rest.**
 4. Are we hiding God's Word and truth in our hearts?
 - a. We cannot access what is not there.
- d. **The generational reality of our sin.**
 - i. Ahaz's unfaithfulness and sin will bring generations of destruction to his people.
 1. **Consider the contrast between the promise of salvation in vv. 8-9 and then, the destruction of vv. 18-25.**
 - a. **We should pause here and not just focus on the messianic promise, but the realities of the generational impact of sin.**
 2. They will live for a period of peace with Assyria as a vassal state.
 - a. However, the reality is that Assyria is in charge.
 - b. **Those who hate wisdom love death (Prov. 8:36). With open eyes, Ahaz rejected the way of faith.**
 3. **The very things he trusted guaranteed calamity.** Assyria dominates this section (7:18, 20; 8:4, 7). This is what Ahaz trusted and it will be his ruin.⁸
 - a. We get a picture of how bad life is under the Assyrians with Jonah.
 - i. Jonah hates everything about the Assyrians.
 - ii. He would rather be separated from the very presence of God than go to them. (Jonah 1:3)
 - ii. **Do we consider the long-term impacts of our sinfulness?**
 1. Ahaz could not see down the road to the implications of his decision. → We are like him in that way.

⁶ Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 60.

⁷ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 86–87.

⁸ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 91.

- a. How many of us are trusting “savvy” more than God’s truth and promises to make our decisions?
- 2. Ahaz dismissed the significance of his decision.
 - a. He was given two options... trust God or not.
 - b. We are given the same two options.
 - i. What decisions lead to sin and perpetual sin because we aren’t taking God seriously?
 - ii. What makes us undervalue or dismiss sin as “not that big of a deal?”
- 3. **We cannot lead others where we have not gone.**
 - a. **Jesus is in my heart... Grandpa is in my bones.**⁹
 - b. A generational impact can come from the trauma of sin, it can also come from a lack of depth and experience.
 - i. **Prayer:** Is the Spirit flowing through me?
 - ii. **Word:** Do I enjoy God’s presence?
 - iii. **Generosity:** Am I investing in the kingdom?
 - iv. **Community:** Am I sharing my tough stuff?
 - c. Blessings come from obedience.
 - i. We miss those blessings when we walk in disobedience.
 - ii. Exod. 20:12
 - 1. **“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”**
 - iii. A commandment with a promise. → This promise is both spiritual (God is giving them a home) and practical (we learn from other’s mistakes).
 - iii. **In a passage otherwise dark with judgment**, this picture incorporates some element of hope for the future. The judgment will devastate the land, but the survivors will find that small resources will yield adequate provisions (cf. 2 Kings 4:1–7). **In this way (cf. 6:13) the purpose of God for his people will continue—if only in a remnant.**¹⁰

3. God sees your suffering. (Isa. 7:4; Jn. 1:9)

- a. **Some of us need to just hear and receive this truth this morning.**
- b. **God communicates his knowledge of Ahaz’s predicament. (v. 4)**
 - i. How emphatic is Isaiah’s exhortation! **A verb commanding attention—“be careful”**—is followed by three others counseling trust instead of fear. This is further reinforced by the description of the two kings. Their anger may have been fierce, but there was little real fire left in them—they were virtually impotent.¹¹
 - 1. God sees the situation more clearly than Ahaz and attempts to help Ahaz see what he is blind to.
- c. God sends Isaiah to Ahaz... Ahaz rejects God's offer for a sign. (v.10-12)
 - i. **Remember the setting:** v. 2 – Ahaz and his people were terrified.

⁹ I first heard this phrase from a pastor named, Rich Villodas.

¹⁰ Geoffrey W. Grogan, [“Isaiah,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 65.

¹¹ Geoffrey W. Grogan, [“Isaiah,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 60.

1. They had successfully defended themselves once (v.1), but knew that defeat was only a matter of time.
2. Ahaz is a savvy political leader... He can read the room and understands this geopolitical situation.
3. v.3 - He was attempting to secure a clean water source for his people.
 - a. An adequate water supply is imperative for a city under siege. The king was probably satisfying himself as to this or making arrangements for its improvement.¹²
- ii. **But God reaches out... In this way, Ahaz could not claim that God had abandoned, forgotten, or just plain didn't care about Ahaz and his people.**
 1. God does care... And, he made an offer so large that we get the picture of a desperate father filled with an overflowing amount of love that he is willing to do something irrational to save his children. (Isa. 7:10)
 2. If there was even a spark of faith in Ahaz, God was willing to give it an opportunity of expression.¹³
- iii. **Demonstrates Ahaz's hard-heartedness.**
 1. He was probably silent, because he carried a secret in his heart which afforded him more consolation than the words of the prophet.
 2. The invisible help of Jehovah, and the remote prospect of the fall of Ephraim, were not enough for him. His trust was in Asshur, with whose help he would have far greater superiority over the kingdom of Israel than Israel had over the kingdom of Judah through the help of Damascene Syria.
 3. The pious, theocratic policy of the prophet did not come in time.¹⁴
 - a. Ahaz tries to hide his pride behind Deut. 6:16
 - i. **"You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah."**
- d. **A sign was confirmation of God's promises. → "Pledge of Divine certainty"**¹⁵
 - i. **In the face of Ahaz's hard heartedness, God pledges to remain faithful.**
 - ii. Ahaz is more comforted in the visible hope of Asshur. (Alliance with Assyria)
 - iii. Eventually it would be Asshur who would demand the surrender of Jerusalem. Ahaz's hard heartedness sealed the fate of Jerusalem for over 2000 years.
 1. This city and the Jewish people will never be independent again. (The Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans will all take turns ruling.)
- e. **The long-promised sign arrives.** (Jn. 1:4-5,9)
 - i. Jesus is the Word (logos). (v.1)
 1. Though the idea of the Word/Logos sounds strange in modern ears, it would have resonated with ancient readers of the Gospel, whether Jew or Gentile.
 2. **Parallels can be found (1) in the OT ideas of God's creative and sustaining word, the word of God spoken through the prophets, later Jewish personification of wisdom as the agent of God in creation.**¹⁶

¹² Geoffrey W. Grogan, ["Isaiah,"](#) in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 60.

¹³ Geoffrey W. Grogan, ["Isaiah,"](#) in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 62.

¹⁴ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [Commentary on the Old Testament](#), vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 138.

¹⁵ Keil and Delitzsch p. 174.

¹⁶ Colin G. Kruse, [John: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 62–63.

- ii. The sign that was verbally promised by Isaiah is now coming to fulfillment, and as John's usage of *logos* indicates, this is directly by God's hand.
 - 1. Ahaz's fateful decision plummeted God's people into 700+ years of darkness... now a light is coming that the darkness cannot overcome.
 - 2. Why? → Because God cared for humanity in their suffering.
 - a. He always had.
 - b. He always will.
 - c. He goes to irrational lengths to rescue humanity. (Jn. 3:16-17)
 - 3. **1:9** - As this Gospel unfolds we find that the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ is 'the light of the world', and that through his person and teaching he brought the light to bear upon all those with whom he came into contact.¹⁷

4. God cares for you in your suffering. (Isa. 7:10; Jn. 1:4-5,14)

- a. God doesn't remove his presence from us in hardship or suffering.
 - i. Ahaz and Judah (the southern kingdom didn't get here by accident).
 - ii. Yet, God still:
 - 1. Sends a prophet. (v. 3)
 - 2. Offers to rescue Ahaz and his people. (v. 4)
 - 3. Allows Ahaz to ask God to prove himself. (v. 10)
 - a. **A sign was confirmation of God's promises. → "Pledge of Divine certainty"**¹⁸
 - i. **In the face of Ahaz's hard heartedness God pledges to remain faithful.**
 - iii. Again, God went to extraordinary lengths to make his presence known to us.
 - 1. **The beginning:** God created a good world for man... Man rejected him.
 - 2. **The OT:** Man causes evil, death, and destruction... God rescues him.
 - 3. **The NT:** Man is without any other options, God sends his Son, and even then some men will reject the presence of God.
 - iv. **We are not all that different than Ahaz:** We are facing a great and overwhelming enemy. → **Sin, death, suffering, and trauma.**
 - 1. God has given a great sign... His Son, Jesus. (Jn. 1:14)
 - 2. God has demonstrated the steadfastness of the sign in our healing and new life. (Jn. 1:12)
 - a. We experience healing in part now, which is to build confidence in our complete healing in the life to come. (Rev. 21:1-4)
 - 3. Because God has demonstrated his faithfulness and rescue now, we are able to confidently hope and trust for what is promised but not yet fully seen. (1 Cor. 13:12)
- b. **God cares so much that he sent his Son to dwell with us (Immanuel), and to conquer the darkness.**
 - i. Our new life is a sign we can hope in and have a foundational confidence.

¹⁷ Colin G. Kruse, [*John: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 67.

¹⁸ Keil and Delitzsch p. 174.

1. 1:12-13 – “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,¹⁹ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”
 2. To ‘receive’ him means, as this verse indicates, to believe in his name. To believe in a person’s name is to believe in the person, because the name stands for the person.¹⁹
- c. **We do not endure as people without hope.** → We look back and look forward at Advent.
- i. Ultimate hope came in the person of Jesus. → He dwelled with us.
 1. The first of these was that he *made his dwelling among us*. The expression ‘made his dwelling’ translates one word (*eskēnōsen*), which, rendered literally, means ‘pitched a tent’ or ‘tabernacled’.
 2. The allusion is to the time when God’s presence was localized in the tabernacle in the midst of the camp of Israel (Exod. 40:34–38).
 3. The evangelist is saying that the Word becoming flesh and living among us is like God tabernacling among the tribes of Israel, or, put in other words, **the presence of God was localized in Jesus the incarnate Word.**²⁰
 - ii. **How has God dwelled with you recently? How have you enjoyed his presence? How has he made your day?**
 1. Can you put your finger on a way... even a small way that he is working in your life?
 - iii. We have seen his glory (now in part), and we hope for the fullness to come.
 1. The ‘love and faithfulness’ that constituted the glory of God proclaimed to Moses is now found in the Word incarnate. What was *proclaimed* to Moses by the Lord as he passed by has now been *seen*, embodied in the incarnate Word, by the eye-witnesses.²¹
 2. In our new-life and healing we have experienced the kindness and faithfulness of God.
 - a. Yes, not all brokenness is healed completely here and now.
 - i. A product of living in a sinful world.
 - b. We are prompted to hope for a future without any brokenness. Not because of what we can do, but because of what God has already done.
 3. **Jesus is our “Pledge of divine certainty.”**
 - a. **The road for Ahaz wouldn’t have been easy...** He was outnumbered, outgunned, and lacked tactical advantages.
 - i. Yet, God was faithful.
 - ii. **The abiding truth of this passage is that faith in the Lord and in his promises is a practical approach to life, however great the crisis.**
 - b. **The road for us is not easy...** We slip into repeated patterns of sin, our spirits are willing, but our flesh is weak, and have experienced trauma that was not our fault but bears bad fruit in our lives.

¹⁹ Colin G. Kruse, [*John: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 68.

²⁰ Colin G. Kruse, [*John: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 69.

²¹ Colin G. Kruse, [*John: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 70.

- i. Yet, God is faithful in the midst of that, and we are able to trust him for what is ahead.
- ii. God cares for you in your suffering.
- iii. **We never lack for hope with God.**