Christmas Message from Isaiah

Isaiah 7:1-17

Key Verse: 7:14 “Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

Generally, we hear Christmas messages from the book of gospel such as from the book of Matthew or of Luke. Today we will hear a Christmas message from Isaiah the prophet of the Old Testament. It is amazing that God had promised to send Jesus as the Messiah long ago, BC 700 through the prophet Isaiah. I ask you to remember two verses for Christmas: one is 7:14 and the other, 9:6. Today we will be studying verse 7:14.

First, it will not take place, it will not happen. (1-9) Prophet Isaiah lived around BC 700 while king Ahaz ruled the land of Judah. King David established his kingdom around BC 1000. But after King Solomon the kingdom was divided into two parts as Northern Israel and Southern Judah. It was like North Korea and South Korea today. In the days of Isaiah, Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah king of Israel gathered and marched up to fight against Jerusalem. (1) It was like North Korea and Russia or China getting together to invade Seoul, South Korea. The situation of King Ahaz and Judah was like a smoldering wick before a perfect storm. Verse 2 says that when King Ahaz and the people of Judah heard the news, they were like the trees of the forest shaken by the wind. (2) They knew that they could not resist the allied enemy because they were too strong to fight against them.

We often face these kinds of enemies while living in this world. Our enemies could devour us at any moment. They look too strong and powerful to deal with them by ourselves. We just want to give up and surrender to our enemies. Do you have such a strong and powerful enemy which threatens you and tries to destroy you and your family? How did God answer them? Look at verses 3-5. God asked Isaiah to meet King Ahaz with his son and tell him not to be afraid of the two allied enemies. Look at verse 4. “***Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah***.” God said to King Ahaz, “*Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid*.” He also called the two allied powerful kings ‘two smoldering firewood.’ To the eyes of God, the two powerful kings were like two stubs of firewood. Sometimes to our eyes, our problem looks too big and too strong to handle. But to the eyes of God, they are like a smoldering firewood or a piece of delicious cake. So, it is important for us to see all things with the eyes of faith, not with the eyes of fate. When we don’t pray, our problems look big, God small. When we pray by faith, God looks big and our problem small.

God’s message continues. Look at verse 7. “***Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “‘It will not take place, it will not happen.***..” God said that it will not take place and it will not happen. In verse 6 the two allied enemies threatened King Ahaz and the people of Judah saying, “***Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.***” (6) Their enemy threatened them to invade Judah and tear it apart and divide it. But God said that it would not take place and it would not happen. Kim Jung Un and North Korea have often threatened South Korea with the same words. They said that they would make Seoul ‘a sea of fire’ with a nuclear bomb. So, many people in South Korea wanted to compromise with him. But it will not take place, it will not happen. Before they use a nuclear bomb, God will punish them. They just want to plant fear in the hearts of people so that they want to control the South. We are also afraid of the threat of our enemies. All things seem to come against me and destroy me and my family. There seems at first to be no hope, no exit to come out from that situation. But, remember that it will not take place, it will not happen. God is with you and will take care of you. God will open the way for his people. Jesus is the way as well as the way-maker. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “*And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it*.” Amen! Therefore, don’t be afraid and do not lose your heart. It will not take place; it will not happen. All things will go well with you because in all things God works for the good of those who love him and those who have been called according to his purpose. (Ro 8:28) Amen!

Second, Immanuel, God’s sign (10-17) We cannot say that all tragedy and disaster come from the sin of human beings, but the crisis of King Ahaz and Judah was caused by their sin. In Isaiah 1 God called them a sinful nation. “*Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great...they have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel...”* (Is 1:4) His people abandoned God and worshiped idols. They had a godly form, but their hearts were far away from their God. God said, “*stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me...I cannot bear your worthless assemblies*.” (1:13) In the history of Israel God often used his enemy to discipline his people to repent. God disciplined King David through his son Absalom and the Philistines when he had sinned against God. Our God is not only gracious, but also righteous. God does not want his people to live as sinners. In the same way God disciplined King Ahaz and Judah to repent of their sins and turn to him. In the same way God also disciplines us to repent of our sins and turn to him. When unfavorable things happen, we must give careful thought to our ways, whether we are doing to please God or to displease God. The Holy Spirit always speaks to our conscience to repent or to repeat.

Look at verses 10-12. The LORD God spoke to Ahaz, “***Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights***.” (10) Seeking a sign means to seek God for help. God did not mean to make King Ahaz a mere miracle-seeking man. God asked him to humbly seek God a sign for his help. Seeking signs are familiar with the people of Israel. God has been with them with numerous signs in their history: rainbow-the sign of God’s covenant with Noah, circumcision, the sign of covenant with Abraham, the blood of the lamb, the sign of salvation, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, the sign of God’s presence and guidance, and so on. God asked Ahaz to seek God’s sign as an expression of his faith and submission. How did Ahaz respond to God’s word? Look at verse 12. “***But Ahaz said***, “***I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test***.” When I studied this with one of my Bible students, he said, “Pastor Paul, Ahaz seemed to have a great faith.” But he was deceived by Ahaz’s deceiving words. Ahaz did not obey God’s word. He did not want to seek God’s help. He was proud. Many people failed to seek God’s help because they had the same mindset of King Ahaz. They think that they don’t need God’s help because they can solve their problems by themselves. They don’t pray, but worry. They worry because they don’t pray. They think that they can solve the problem without seeking God. They are not humble, but proud. When someone is sick, he should go to see a doctor for help. If he says, “I am okay, I will take care of myself, don’t worry!” Is he a humble man or proud man? King Ahaz was proud and stupid.

God does not withdraw his love even though we reject his offer. This is because God knows that our choice and our ways are not right. God continues to show his care and love through his sign. In verse 13 God rebukes King Ahaz’s stubbornness and pride. And he promises him to give a sign whether he understands or not. Look at verse 14. ***“Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.***” God did not give the king signs such as rainbow or pillars of cloud or fire, but a baby, a baby born of a virgin. A newborn baby should be a good sign for pregnant women or newly married couples, but not for the fearful king. What does the baby from the virgin mean to King Ahaz and his people? What does this baby mean to us and how is he related to Jesus? Above all, the fact that a virgin can conceive and give birth to a son without having a relationship with a man is a miracle. It is impossible for a virgin to deliver a baby from a genetic and biological viewpoint. My wife works at a hospital as a newborn baby nurse and my daughter studies at a medical school. If they teach students that a virgin can conceive a baby and give birth to a son, my wife will be fired and my daughter will be kicked out. It is a miracle for a virgin to have a baby. It is only the work of God who works beyond our common sense and science. How could the Israelites cross the Red Sea as on dry land? How could Jesus feed five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish? How could Jesus walk on the water and calm the storm? They are all miracles which only God can do. They are miracles which only are understood by faith.

God wanted King Ahaz to seek a miracle from God. Defeating the two strong allied armies of the North and defending Jerusalem is possible only with a miracle. This is possible only through the power of God. Nothing is impossible with the LORD. Let’s go to the book of Luke. The angel Gabriel visited Virgin Mary and said that she would have found favor with God and that she would have a baby. The angel added that the baby is the Holy Son of God who inherits the throne of King David and that his kingdom will never end. (Lk 1:31) Then, Mary asked the angel. “*How will this be since I am a virgin*?” (Lk 1:34) Mary said that it was impossible for her to have a baby because she was a virgin. How did the angel answer her? Luke 1:35-37 says, “*The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with the LORD*.” Nothing is impossible with the LORD means that God would create a miracle. Our God is the Almighty God who created all things in this universe out of nothing. To this powerful and almighty God, letting a virgin have a child is nothing. To King Ahaz and the people of Judah God would create a miracle to protect them as he gives a child to the virgin.

The baby born from the virgin will be a sign of God, the sign of God’s presence and his protection. So, God asked them to call the baby Immanuel. The word Immanuel means ‘God with us.’ The word ‘*Im*’ means in Hebrew ‘with’, ‘*nu*’ means ‘us’, and ‘*el*’ means God. God gave us a baby from the virgin as his sign that he is with us. Jesus is called Immanuel God. Matthew quoted this verse 7:14 in the first page of his book, in Matthew 1:23. “*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”)* Immanuel God Jesus was special to Matthew personally and nationally. Matthew was a former tax collector Levi before he was called from Jesus. Matthew was lonely because his people despised tax collectors and treated them as traitors. No one liked to be with Matthew. But Jesus called him to be with him. Jesus was with him when he was lonely and when he needed someone who would listen to him and talk with him. Jesus was with Matthew for three years and left. But Jesus did not leave Matthew forever. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be with him forever. (Jn 14:16) He also promised to be with him to the very end of the age. (Mt 28:20)

In the days of Matthew people of Israel thought that the Lord would not be with them. They thought that God had forsaken them because of their sins. In fact, there had been no prophet for 430 years since Malachi, who was the last prophet in the OT. They thought that God had forgotten them in the time of suffering. But this was not the case. God was with them, is with them, and will be with them. God sent Jesus Christ as the sign of Immanuel. Jesus came to the land of Israel as the descendant of King David as the prophets had prophesied. Jesus was born in the town of David to be our shepherd and to be our Savior.

Today how has the word Immanuel come to you? Have you ever been lonely and troubled? Believe that the Lord is with you no matter how your situation may be. He is with you and will be with you whatever you do and wherever you go. Jesus promised to be with us to the very end of the age. In this Christmas season may Immanuel God Jesus be born in your heart so that you can experience miracles of God. May you feel his presence, his unfailing love, tender mercy when you have Jesus in your heart and in your family. Amen! Merry Christmas!