

CCH Sermon 9th Dec 2018 Advent#2 Isaiah 7:14

Why Christmas is bad news and good news!

- **V14.** Continue Advent series of one-off verses.
 - Great Christmas text, but
 - Not going to stable in Bethlehem 1st C AD straight away!
 - Going to city of Jerusalem 8th C BC
 - To point when the prophecy originally given.
 - To a man facing challenge
 - Going to help us understand Christmas more
 - How it is bad news as well as good news!
 - And help us if we face challenges.
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- First can I introduce you to 4 people also facing challenge & choice. Made up people. ABCD:
 1. **Adam.** Facing **challenge**: business IT sales serious financial difficulty. Pretty worried. **Choice**: trust God who clothes lilies or try a little bit of back of a lorry.
 2. **Beth.** Teenager.
facing **challenge**: friends say J only way.
Choice. Follow Crowd or Christ.
 3. **Colin.** **Challenge**> Worried about getting older. **Choice**> Trust God's promises- Ro 10:13. Or Start give a little more charity as gets older just to bolster his success at the pearly gates.
 4. **Dominika.** Would have loved to have been married.
But "not be yoked with unbelievers", and no Christian man.
challenge: guy in her pilates class not Xn showing interest.
Choice. Take an interest in guy who is going to lead her away from Jesus (though she might kid herself she can convert him) or trust God to help her even if that means singleness.

If you can relate to any of those, or if you have any other challenges in your life at the moment, story of Ahaz in Isaiah 7 for you.

3 headings. The challenge. The Choice. The Child.

1) THE CHALLENGE

- V1. Overview of the situation.
- v2. Zoom into how it all began.

You can imagine the phone call as the chief of security phones into the Royal Palace where Ahaz is on the Throne.

"Boss it's Mick down at the security desk. You better look at the CCTV".

And sure enough there was a sight to make any king reach for the panic button.

There beginning to point their weapons at Jerusalem was not just one army but two.

King Ahaz called his chief of staff and top officials to the COBRA conference room for an emergency committee and full briefing.

The head of intelligence says that two neighbouring states have entered into a pact together against us

Google maps flashes up on the monitor. Here's geography...

- **Judah**- S Kingdom (capital Jerusalem) split from rest of Israel 200 years earlier.
- **Israel** – N Kingdom (also called Ephraim)- 10 tribes (capital Samaria, now Nablus) has been so divided from Judah that they want to invade.
- **Aram** (or Syria) capital Damascus- (same place that gave its name to Paul's Damascus road experience hundreds of years later).

The scholars say that they probably were cross with Judah for not teaming up with their alliance against **Assyria**- the big superpower of the day (capital Nineveh).

Well what is to be done with this challenge. V2 describes how King Ahaz' is having a bit of a crisis deep down in his stomach.

It's likened to the trees in a gale force wind. Totally shaken to the core.

As he goes to the medicine cupboard to find something to settle his tummy, he thinks about **2) THE CHOICE**

What's he going to do about it?

Well wonderfully, into the crisis, God speaks. His Word comes. ➡ What a joy that in challenges, we have God's promises.

And it comes to the prophet of the day. Isaiah. Who we met last week promising light for those walking in darkness.

And it comes in 4 small parts... **i) visual aid.**

V3 No problem that it's the weekend so that Isaiah is at the swings with his son, he's to come too.

And the son's name is very significant. Shear- Jashub: A remnant will return.

This little lad tagging along is a kind of visual aid to the meeting between Isaiah and Ahaz.

We had a guy at our last church called "Parousia"- that means second coming. Not a bad message to be reminded of whenever you see him!

But Isaiah's son would have reminded the King of good news and bad news. Bad news- a remnant- the people would face great difficulties and get thrown out of the land and not everyone make it (glass half empty). But a remnant will return. There would be a faithful core of true disciples who were going to come through these challenges stronger (half full!).

Next comes **ii) the directions** Sat nav is no problem to God. They are to find King Ahaz out at the aqueduct, which brought the clean water supply into the city. No doubt, he's now talking to his chief of defence about how they are going to get a steady supply of water if the city is under siege. God can direct his message just where he wants it. So that we hear what we need to hear!

And third **iii) the message**

V4.

Those two nations, they may be burning with anger, but they're just kindling wood.

They may want to bump you off, and put some unknown puppet king on your throne v5,6 (whoever Tabeel was).

But v7. I love the clarity

"This is what the sovereign Lord says: It will not take place, it will not happen"!

I seem to remember Trump saying that with great confidence a few times. It's not going to happen!

But with God, if he says it's not going to happen it's not.

Don't worry over your neighbours gathering at the gate to invade.

It's not going to happen.

You see It goes back to 2 Samuel 7.

Some of you might remember that God made a promise to David that a descendent of his would be on the throne forever.

So Ahaz has a choice. Does he trust the promises of God. God never lies. And if he promises a King from the line of David, then it's not going to be from the line of Tabeel whoever that is!

The start and the end of the message comes with a **iv) lesson.**

V4. And v9.

You could sum it up like this. **KEEP CALM AND TRUST GOD**

!All this OT history sounds complicated (1ST TIME IN CHURCH!)- but it's very simple and actually very contemporary. Ahaz has a **challenge.**

And he has a **choice.**

Will he keep calm and trust the Promises of God.

(easier said than done, when tanks are on the lawn)

Or will he trust something or someone else.

He chooses to wear a different T Shirt. **KEEP CALM AND TRUST ASSYRIA**

Tragically we know from the account of his life in another book of the Bible, 2 Kings, that he does a foolish thing.

He makes a truce with the superpower Assyria.

In fact he makes a bribe. Gives them masses of silver and gold and enters into an agreement that looks good (keeps other nations off their back) but makes them slaves for decades.

Bad mistake. What a tragedy.

There's a simple choice between trusting politics and trusting promises.

But the story's not finished....Let's move to the 3rd part of the Story.

And after all this waiting, this is where we get to the virgin with child.

3) THE CHILD

V10-11.

Well God is incredibly kind and offers him a sign to help his faith.

▲ Woody Allen apparently once said, "I wish God would give me a sign, like a big deposit in a swiss bank account in my name".

Well amazingly God offers Ahaz a sign. A big sign.

You see something of how gracious and patient and kind God is, and how he wants us to go his way....

So he offers a sign.

But Ahaz refuses (v12)

Now this sounds really spiritual, because Deuteronomy 6:16 says "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test".

But God himself is offering it.

God is offering help to Ahaz's flickering faith.

But Ahaz is already wearing the other T shirt. He's already made up his mind to go down the politics route rather than the promises route.

What is the sign.

Well it's an amazing thing.

[You'll meet some so-called scholars who deny the virgin birth by saying that this word doesn't mean a virgin, it means young woman. It can mean that (so the footnote is correct), but each time it's used in the Old Testament it seems to imply a woman who has never slept with a man.

And when they came to translate the Bible into Greek, over 100 years before Jesus was born, they chose to use the Greek word for a virgin- which definitely means virgin- someone who

I can point you to more on this if you need help].

But the point is this. It would hardly be a big sign like in the deepest depths or the highest heights v10 if "a **young woman** conceived and gave birth to a son".

God is giving fuel to our faith here.

He's saying I'm giving you a guarantee that I keep my promises. I will have my King, my son of David on the throne. (Not some son of Tabeel), and I'll give you a sign to guarantee it.

The virgin will be with child.

But as we read on we see that it's a double edged sign.

- On the one hand **it marks rescue. V16.** That sounds good. Those two neighbouring kings defeated. A rescue.
- But on the other hand **it's a sign of Judgement. V17.** (Assyria will be oppressive to them rather than allies. In the words of chapter 8 there's the image of the people rejecting a local Jerusalem stream in favour of the river of Assyria, just like they had rejected God for Assyria, only to discover Assyria brings floodwaters not blessings. (8:7,8).

Now I know there's a lot going on in this passage.

But do you see that this child which should have helped Ahaz Has actually been a stumbling block to him.

Because he chose

- human help
- trusted in a visible superpower
 - **it was a sign of judgement** chastisement, discipline.

when if he had chosen

- to trust God's help
- which is hard because you can't see him, you can only hear his word in the Bible.
- It would have meant rescue not judgement.

God wants to help us trust him.
He has guaranteed it

The guarantee comes in the form of a promise.

And while for Ahaz that was in the future, for us it's in the past.

**God has come to us. Immanuel.
In his son Jesus Christ.**

This promise was fulfilled when a young woman who had never slept with a man became pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

I know it doesn't normally happen, I've done my GCSE biology.
But that's the point! It's sign. A huge sign from the highest depths or in the highest heights.

We are meant to look at baby Jesus- a virgin birth and say- wow look God keeps his promises, even if it takes a miracle.
God really is with us!

God really has come to earth.

And if he can keep his promise with the coming of a child born of a virgin, he can keep his promises to me.
And to Adam, Beth, Colin, Dominika*.

When we face a challenge, there's always a choice.
To trust politics or promises.

Or to trust God. Even though we can't see him.

It doesn't mean he'll always give us what we want.
But he will give us what we need.

Will we trust him?

If you have challenges, you have a choice.
Will you trust God's promises?

Do you know there was another son of David in the same family as Ahaz.
His name was Joseph.

He had a **challenge**. He found his girlfriend was pregnant and it wasn't his child. And so he had a **choice**. Would he leave her quietly?

But he chose to trust God's promise.
God came to him by an Angel and promised him what was happening.
Matt 1:20. And he chose to believe. He chose to wear that T Shirt!

Do you see Christmas could be bad news as well as good news?
We need to make sure the sign- Immanuel God with us is a sign of blessing and not judgement.

How? Whoever we are (*ABCD) and whatever challenges we face.

Keep Calm and Trust God who keeps his promises.
That's the message of Is 7:14