

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

December 22, 2013

Isaiah 7:10-14

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

What would you have asked for if Isaiah had asked you, instead of King Ahaz, for a sign from the Lord? This wouldn't be just any sign. It would be a miracle. It would be something which couldn't happen without God doing it. Would you have asked for your stack of bills to disappear? Would you have asked for the weather to be sunny and 75? Would you have asked for your illness or the illness of a friend to be immediately cured?

Isaiah gave Ahaz a wonderful opportunity to ask the Lord for a miraculous sign. How did Ahaz respond? **"Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.' But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.'"** Ahaz refuses to ask God for a sign. Why does Ahaz refuse to ask God for a sign? Is it because he is noble and really doesn't want to test God? No. It is because he doesn't believe God has the power to work miracles.

This unbelief is sad since Ahaz was in a bad spot. He was at war with the kingdoms of Israel and Aram. He was afraid these two kingdoms were going to come and destroy his kingdom. He didn't want to turn to the Lord and ask for help so instead he turned to the kingdom of Assyria to help him. Ahaz wanted the kingdom of Assyria to come and attack the kingdoms of Israel and Aram. He thought once Assyria attacked these two kingdoms that he would be left alone and all danger to his kingdom would be gone.

This was Ahaz's thinking at the time of our reading today. However, God had different plans for Judah. He was going to provide rescue for Judah. It wouldn't come from Assyria. It would come from him. He sent Isaiah to tell Ahaz this message. **"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."**

"Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, 'Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.' Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'It will not take place, it will not happen, for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.'"

"The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all." God sends Isaiah to tell Ahaz that he will rescue Judah from her enemies. What does Ahaz think of this promise? Ahaz refuses to believe God's promise to him. This unbelief leads to God sending Isaiah back to Ahaz in our lesson today. God sees and disapproves of Ahaz's refusal to trust in his promise of rescue.

This disapproval of Ahaz's unbelief leads to our lesson today where God gives Ahaz another opportunity to trust his promise. **"Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.'"** God gives Ahaz the opportunity to ask him for anything in the world to happen to prove he would rescue Judah from the enemies who are threatening her. It could be a sign from the depths of the earth. It could be a sign from the highest of heights.

What does Ahaz do with this wonderful promise? **"But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.'"** Ahaz tries to make his response sound good. He tries to make it sound noble. He could

claim he had the words of Deuteronomy 6 in mind which says, **“Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah. Be sure to keep the commands of the LORD your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you.”**

Ahaz’s words sound noble and good, but in reality his words are wicked since they indicate he doesn’t trust God can work miracles. Isaiah exposes this unbelief when he says to Ahaz, **“Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?”** Isaiah reveals the hardness of Ahaz’s heart because the Lord offers Ahaz a wonderful opportunity to experience God’s love for him and he rejects this opportunity.

How does Isaiah illustrate this to Ahaz? Isaiah tells Ahaz that he is trying God’s patience. The word picture given by the original Hebrew is even stronger than the words trying God’s patience. The Hebrew says Ahaz is wearying God with his refusal to trust his promises. God has become sick and tired of Ahaz rejecting his love. He is growing tired of offering Ahaz a promise of rescue and a wonderful opportunity to ask for a miraculous sign from the Lord only to have it rejected by unbelief.

What does God do in response? He offers Ahaz another promise. This promise is greater than any promise Ahaz could have asked for. God promises Ahaz that he will not only rescue his kingdom, but he will also preserve Ahaz’s line long after him. This line will be preserved until one of his descendant’s has a baby. But, this pregnancy would be unique in human history. The baby’s mother would be a virgin and he will be called the son of God.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” Did you ever stop and think about how incredible of a promise the virgin birth really is? Every single one of us is here today because we each have a father and mother. None of us could have been born without them. Yet, here God is promising to do something impossible. He promising a woman will become pregnant without the aid of a man.

Why is this promise so important? Why did Jesus need to be born of a virgin? Why did he need to be conceived by the Holy Spirit? Jesus needed to be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin so he could be sinless. All of us have two human parents who are sinners. One of the things which they pass on to us is our sinful nature. This teaching of the church, which all people born of natural means are born in sin, is called the teaching of original sin.

Our Lutheran forefathers wrote about this teaching in the Augsburg Confession in Article II of this confession. They wrote, **“Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God.”**

“Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God’s eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit.” Simply put, this means we are sinners because we have an earthly father and a mother who pass their sinful nature on to us. This sinful

nature means we are God's enemies who deserve to be sent to hell because we are born in sin. The teaching of original sin goes directly against the way we often like to think and feel about ourselves.

How do we often like to think and feel about ourselves? We often like to think, "I'm a good person. People like me. I don't murder anyone. I don't steal from anyone. I help others out when I can and don't ask for anything in return. I try my best. I ask for his forgiveness every night. I don't judge people on what they say. I don't judge people on how they act. I accept them for who they are and what they believe. He has to love me because other people love me because I am fair to them."

The teaching of original sin doesn't agree with these self-righteous thoughts. It points out these thoughts come from a sinful mind which is hostile to God. They come from a mind which refuses to trust God. They come from a heart which trusts its own ability to gain heaven rather than trusting God and his promise. The teaching of original sins exposes that these thoughts are unbelief and no different than Ahaz's words when he says, **"I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."**

How does God deal with and respond to this teaching of original sin? **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."** He sends us a Savior who is conceived by the Holy Spirit and born without sin because he sends us himself. Jesus' virgin birth is one of the greatest miracles which could ever happen in this world. Why did this miracle need to happen? Why did Jesus need to be sinless?

Jesus needed to be sinless so he could offer up his perfect life for us. God demanded a perfect sacrifice for sin. The only way for this to happen was by the sinless son of God being born into this world. The only way Jesus could be truly sinless is if he did not have a human father. This is why he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The miraculous sign of Jesus' virgin birth assures us Jesus is our perfect savior. It assures us our sins are forgiven. It assures us he is God's sign for us. Amen.