

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and she shall call his name Immanuel.
~Isaiah 7:1-25; Matthew 1:18-25

Pastor Tom
December 15, 2019

Sometimes life imposes a trust choice upon us. We hear a knocking in our engine and need to take it to a mechanic to find out the source. He explains the problem and estimate it will cost 1200\$ to repair. Do you trust him and go ahead? We don't feel well and book an appointment with a doctor. A few tests later, she reveals you've got an illness that requires immediate treatment. She wants to schedule you for treatment in 2 days. Do you trust her and go ahead? A friend, coworker or family member gives you the cold shoulder and acts a little weird toward you. You ask "what's wrong?" They answer, "Nothing." Do you trust their answers?

Who can you trust when making big decisions? Some have to make tough decisions at work that affect other people. Some of you face a challenging relational situation and you don't know what to do. Some face a decision that may bring great change to your life. You wonder whether or not to go ahead. Some here have had gone through a major life change this past year – death of a loved one; change in job; change in your family dynamics; startup or breakup of a relationship; legal situation – and you wonder who or what you can cling to for stability through this change.

Who do you trust? We have two primary options. Option 1 – We trust in humanity. So we can trust ourselves; our ideas and thoughts. We trust in human resources and discoveries. We trust other people's words, writings, actions or example. Option 2 – We gather up the wisdom, thoughts, ideas and suggestions of other humans and ourselves. But we put all of this under our greater trust in the Lord.

With those two options in mind who are you trusting with whatever concerns you today? A young king named Ahaz faced a serious situation. He had a trust choice to make. We will follow this story to see the outcome of his decision. We will see his story connect to the Christmas story. Once we hear his story and trust choice, we will examine our own trust choices with whatever we face right now. I pray you will see the wisdom of trusting in the Lord with whatever you face.

I will read 2 passages of Scripture today to tell this story. So you can try to follow along or just listen – Isaiah 7 and then Matthew 1.

Isaiah 7 English Standard Version (ESV)

7 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. ²When 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.

³And 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. ⁴And 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. ⁵Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, ⁶“Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it^[d] for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,” ⁷ thus says the Lord GOD:

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

⁸For the head of Syria is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.

And within sixty-five years
Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.

⁹And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

If you are not firm in faith,
you will not be firm at all.”

¹⁰Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: ¹¹“Ask a sign of the LORD you God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. ¹⁷The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!”

¹⁸In that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. ¹⁹And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures.

²⁰In that day the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired beyond the River^[i]—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also.

²¹In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep, ²²and because of the abundance of milk that they give, he will eat curds, for everyone who is left in the land will eat curds and honey.

²³In that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briers and thorns. ²⁴With bow and arrows a man will come there, for all the land will be briers and

thorns. ²⁵ And as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not come there for fear of briars and thorns, but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread.

Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ¹ 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.

King Ahaz started reigning over the southern kingdom of Judah when he was 20. His dad, King Jotham died at the age of 41. So life suddenly forces Ahaz into some trust choices. He must make decisions not just for himself but for a nation. In Second Kings 16 we get a fuller story about Ahaz. It tells us he immediately made a trust choice to not follow the Lord. He lived like the kings of the northern kingdom, Israel. They famously abandoned the Lord. The author of Second Kings tells us Ahaz even burned his son as an offering. That means he fully embraced a form of paganism where child sacrifice served to appease the gods.

But then he faces a problem. The northern kingdom of Israel joins the nation of Syria in an alliance. They wage war against Ahaz’s kingdom of Judah. They even besiege the capital city of Jerusalem but they can’t take it. Yet they remain a threat. So Ahaz sends messengers to the king of the super power of Assyria. Ahaz appeals for rescue. To ensure Assyria’s support Ahaz sends silver and gold from the temple of God to accompany his plea. He also promises loyalty as a servant of Assyria.

Assyria’s king receives the message and the gift. He agrees to Ahaz’s request. He sends his army to take on the Syrians and Israelites. The Assyrians will soundly defeat the coalition. They will kill the Syrian king and take its capital Damascus. So Ahaz’s trust in the king of Assyria seems to work. But as we will soon see, Ahaz’s trust choice results in disastrous consequences for his people. Isaiah 7 gives us much more insight into Ahaz’s choice.

In verse 1, we discover that Ahaz still faces the coalition's threat. Syria and Israel have come up to Jerusalem to capture it but they couldn't. So they apparently withdraw and plan to make another attempt. In Isaiah 7:2, news comes that the Syrians and Israelites have not given up. Notice what happens to Ahaz and the royal court. "When the house of David was told, "Syria is in league with Ephraim (another name for Israel) the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind." So they survived the initial attack from this alliance. But terror grips them with news of potentially another attack.

Now remember Ahaz did not walk in the ways of the Lord. But look who shows up in verse 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.'" So the Lord intervenes. He will send his prophet Isaiah to speak to King Ahaz. The Lord instructs Isaiah to bring along his son whose name means "A Remnant will Return." This name brings warning and hope. A remnant implies those left over from a greater number. Only a remnant will return. That means many people will relocate somewhere. But the hope comes in the return. At least a remnant will return. Perhaps the Lord intended to give a message to Ahaz when Isaiah introduced his son to him. But notice also the location of their meeting. Ahaz inspects the water supply at one end of the city. A major piece of siege strategy included cutting off a city's water supply. At that time, Jerusalem's water flowed completely above ground. So Ahaz prepares for another siege.

But Isaiah shows up with his son and brings a message of hope. Verse 4 – "Be careful. Be quiet and do not fear and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrand." The Lord's message diminishes these invading kings. He commands Ahaz to not fear despite their threat. He declares why in verse 7. "It shall not stand and it shall not come to pass." "It" refers to the fall of Jerusalem and the overthrow of Ahaz. It will not happen. Why? Because the weakness of Rezin the Syrian King. The Lord calls Ahaz to consider this Syrian king and realize his overall lack of strength.

Then in middle part of verse 8 Isaiah says – "And within 65 years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people." The Assyrians will defeat this coalition army and completely shatter the Syrians. Israel will survive but only for a short time in the great scheme of things. Then in verse 9, the Lord again diminishes the king of Israel. He declares this king also lacks strength. Though he looks threatening he will not succeed. After all, they have already failed once to take Jerusalem.

Then comes the end of verse 9 which is a tremendous verse about faith. “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.” There’s the trust choice. Will Ahaz and his court choose to firmly trust in the Lord? No. They will choose to trust Assyria. They might think to themselves “we will not trust the Lord but we will still be firm because we trust the strongest nation in the region.” But Isaiah corrects that myth with the second half of the statement. “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.” Firm faith in the Lord leads to firm life. No firm faith in the Lord leads to no firmness in life. The Lord’s first message to Ahaz comes to an end.

In verse 10, the Lord speaks to Ahaz again. He sends Isaiah to deliver another message that appeals for Ahaz to trust in the Lord. The Lord will go to great lengths to assure Ahaz of His trustworthiness. He commands Ahaz to ask for a sign. Verse 11 – Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” Whoa! Does the Lord invite Ahaz to ask for any sign to prove the Lord’s trustworthiness; even something dramatic or supernatural? Yes, the Lord wants to bolster Ahaz’s faith.

But Ahaz responds, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” At first glance, this looks like a Godly response. Doesn’t Deuteronomy say “Don’t put the Lord to the test?” Yes it does. Jesus even quoted that verse when he resisted the devil’s temptations. But it’s quite different when God invites someone to put him to the test because He knows of their weak faith. Ahaz refuses not out of honest concern to not test the Lord. He does not believe in the Lord. He may have already sent messengers to Assyria pleading for deliverance.

We discover Ahaz’s heart in verse 13. “And he (Isaiah) said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also?” From this encounter comes a verse you might have heard before. Verse 14 – “Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” You don’t want a sign from God Ahaz? God will give you a sign anyway. The virgin will give birth to a son and name him Immanuel – God with us.” So Ahaz, though you don’t trust that the Lord is with you, this child will serve to remind everyone that He is. This sign will prove the Lord’s word and trustworthiness.

How? Verse 15. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. Curds are clumps of dried out curdled milk. The poor depend on curds for food. Honey also can be found in the wild. People depend on wild honey when there’s no regular crops to provide food. This child will be born into poverty. He will eat this when he’s old enough to choose between right and wrong. What age does that

happen? Most 2 year olds know a little about right and wrong. They understand what their parent wants and throw tantrums when they don't want to obey.

So verse 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.” So before the boy turns 2, these kings will suffer defeat. Scholars date the start of Ahaz's reign about 735 BC. Assyria defeated the coalition in 732. 732 BC. The Lord kept His Word. I wonder what Ahaz and his court thought after verse 16? “Oh. So even if we don't trust the Lord these two kings will be defeated. Cool! We can trust Assyria or we can trust the Lord. It doesn't matter.

But look at verse 17 – “The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah!” So the Lord will bring days that resemble another day – the day Ephraim or Israel departed Judah. Israel used to be a united kingdom of 12 tribes under King David and his son Solomon. But under Solomon's son, the kingdom split apart into 10 northern tribes and 2 southern tribes. This fractured the people and led most away from God. Days like that day are coming.

But through whom will they come? Look at the end of verse 17 – “the King of Assyria!” Wait a minute? Isn't that the guy that Ahaz and his court paid to come and deliver them? Isn't that the king they swore allegiance to and promised to serve? They made their trust choice. He would certainly defeat the armies that threatened them.

But this trust choice would cost Judah everything. Verses 18-19 - In that day, competing armies from Egypt and Assyria would ravage the land. Assyria and Egypt would fight several battles over the next few year in Judah. So many soldiers will march through the land that they will camp in the most undesirable places because there's no room left.

Verse 20 – In that day, the Lord will use the King of Assyria as a razor to shave Judah. Assyria will completely strip the land of its crops, people and wealth. Verse 21 – In that day, if a farmer has one cow and two sheep he will be considered rich. The cow will produce an abundance of milk for everyone. But one cow can't feed a lot of people. So most people must have left the land. One cow's daily milk will seem like an abundance to those remaining.

In that day, verses 23-25 all the vineyards will fall into disrepair and get overgrown. The only people who will come to those overgrown vineyards will be hunters because wild animals will take over the lands. The hills

that used to be cultivated with crops will become grazing land for the remaining cattle and sheep. It is a picture of total devastation and loss.

This awaits King Ahaz and his court for trusting surely in their own wisdom and diplomacy. They trusted a king who would ultimately destroy them. The same is true for anyone who solely trust in the world. **Trusting in the world alone ultimately leads to calamity.** It would lead to personal calamity for Ahaz. He would continue down the path of idol worship and even build idols to the Assyrian gods. He died at the young age of 36. It would lead to national calamity for Judah. Assyria reduced her to a poor vassal state. Eventually she would be completely destroyed.

But all was not lost. I agree with commentators who argue for a double fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. I believe a young woman gave birth to a son during Ahaz's time. She named the child Immanuel. Maybe Ahaz knows the mother or meets her a year later. He asks the boy's name. She says "Immanuel." Suddenly, the sign of God strikes Ahaz. But he doesn't turn back. Yet those who trusted the Lord even through that terrible time for the nation could still hope. God was with them and they had the promise that a remnant would return.

Fast forward about 700 years. A poor man named Joseph is betrothed to a young girl called Mary. She comes to tell him that she's pregnant but it's not by another man. "The Holy Spirit has come upon her." Joseph concludes what anyone would conclude who depended solely on human wisdom. She's lying. But being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, he resolves to divorce her quietly. But that night he has a dream. An angel appears to confirm Mary's account – this child is conceived by the Holy Spirit. Matthew, the author of the gospel that contains this account reaches back into Isaiah 7:14. There he finds when God provided a sign to assure a king of His presence with the people. Matthew sees history repeat itself but in a much deeper way.

So he writes "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call him Immanuel' which means God with us." Then Joseph wakes up. He has a trust choice to make. Will he trust the Lord? Will he continue to trust only what he and others would naturally conclude or will he trust in the Lord? Matthew tells us "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."

So trusting in the world leads to calamity. Trusting in the Lord leads to security. What might this look like in our lives today? Say your life goes along normally. You're positive about its direction. You have

friends and family. You enjoy life and have lots to look forward to. You spend your money mostly on yourself or your family.

And you hardly pray. You go through whole days without even thinking about God. Sometimes it's a whole week. You think a little about God during the Sunday worship service. But you think more about after the service. Your Bible collects dust on the shelf. You may have at one time done some Bible reading. But you find that pretty time consuming. You occasionally read a little on your phone but the moment a text comes in or some other notification, you quickly jump to that and forget about the Bible.

You don't really notice it, but you begin to accept what people generally think and believe around you. You see it in movies or on some TV show. You experience it on campus or at work or in a chat group. When you do pay attention a little at church and hear about God, you get more annoyed with Him. You begin to think Christians are weird and out of touch with life. You find church a chore. You begin to think that maybe you don't need to do that. Christmas and Easter. That'll do.

A few years later, someone in your family gets struck down by an aggressive cancer. Your comfortable life shatters. You shake like a tree in the wind. You don't know where to turn or how to make sense of it all. You cry out to God to make a bargain. If He will spare your loved one, you will go back to church. But your loved one dies. You are so angry with God. You conclude you want nothing to do with Him anymore. You stop praying. You don't go to church even during the special seasons. You raise your children without any focus on God or knowledge of Him. So you teach the next generation to build their life on themselves and whatever humans can come up with for solutions.

The slow drift that began with hardly praying and easy distraction from God and His Word ends up in unbelief and rebellion against God – and eternal life apart from Him. Trusting in the world leads to calamity.

But say you live a similar life to the one just described. But you regularly pray. You regularly read your Bible and reflect on it. You gather with other Christians to go through the Bible and talk about it. You hear it preached and explained. You hear about the call “to love your neighbor as yourself.” Or “whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

You discover God calls you to not just live for yourself. He's gifted you in many different ways. You discover that He calls you to use those gifts for His glory. So you begin serving others. You see others blessed or

encouraged. You rejoice regularly in your salvation and all God has done for you. You live generally with joy and want to share it with others.

And then someone in your family gets struck by an aggressive cancer. Your ordinary life suffers a great disturbance. You fervently pray to the Lord and ask Him to spare their life and bring healing. But then the latest tests come back and there is not more they can do. So you spend those remaining days with them. You pray together and share. You still ask the Lord to remove this cup yet not your will but His be done. If the cup won't be removed, you ask for strength to drink that cup. Your loved one dies.

You grieve. But you are not like those who grieve without hope for they knew Christ. You thank God for the resurrection and the fact that He sent Jesus to pave the way for us to come to the Lord and be saved. So you can look forward to the day when you see your loved one again. But until that day you will continue to trust the Lord for His strength and life each day. You will teach the next generation to live the same way with hope and trust in Christ who provides a sure and certain foundation. You experience peace and security even though you go through a deep valley because the Lord is with you. "God is close to those who humble themselves. And He comes into the hearts and lives of those who are humble enough to know they need a saviour." **Trusting in the world leads to calamity. Trusting in the Lord leads to security. So, who will you trust?**