

Isaiah 7

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[0:00] Turn back to Isaiah chapter 7. We'll be looking at verses 1-14 and in particular verse 14. Have a think, do you know what the most common, the most mentioned command in the Bible is? Have a think, don't say out loud. Have a guess. This is one of the classic Bible trivia questions.

So the most mentioned command in the Bible, it isn't believe, it isn't praise the Lord, that would be a good guess. No, the most common command in the Bible is do not fear.

Do not fear. You can have that for your Christmas quiz later in the year. And if we think about it, the reality of this, if you think about just the reality of this world, the fact that do not fear is the most common command, that shouldn't be a surprise to us.

Because we are constantly scared about where the world is heading. You look at these wars going on now, all this conflict, these negotiations, and it just feels like we're on the brink of World War 3.

And we can be scared of where the world is heading.

Is this all just going to end in a nuclear apocalypse? We can look at our country and it feels like everything is falling apart, economically, morally, like everything is going downhill.

[1:19] And we can fear, where is all this going to end? And we can feel that about the church. We see the decline of the church in the UK, the constant opposition we get at work, at school, just the godlessness around us.

And we can fear about the future. Where is the church heading? If you're not a believer here tonight, and you might look at the church and think, is this all just a fad?

Just a passing religion of this world? And when humanity just kind of comes to its senses, then the church will just fizzle out. The Bible tells us that this world is a spiritual war zone.

That's what Paul says in Ephesians. We wrestle against the cosmic powers over this present darkness. Against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. We may not realise it, but if you pull back the curtain of reality, we are in a spiritual war.

Satan wants your soul. Sin lurks in our hearts. Guilt hangs over a cursed humanity. And death is the final enemy that goes after all of us.

[2:36] God is bringing in his kingdom, but a kingdom of darkness fights against it. And as we see the spiritual forces at work, as we see the state of this world, it can be scary.

We can be filled with fear and we can wonder, what is the outcome of this war? Where is all of this heading? Well, today, God is saying to us, I can guarantee you where all of this is heading.

I am going to win this war. History ends with the victory of the church. Because that's also what's going on in this passage in Isaiah.

God's people are in the midst of war. God's very kingdom is on the line. And things just seem impossible. And it seems like the church is actually about to come to an end.

And the question is, where is all this heading? Is God going to lose this world? And in fact, this passage even has that most common command of the Bible.

[3:45] Look at verse 4. Be careful, be quiet, do not fear. This passage is all about God addressing our fears in the war zone.

But this passage also contains a very familiar Christmas verse. Did you spot it? Verse 14. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.

This verse is directly quoted in Matthew 1, when Joseph is told Mary will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. In fact, turn there with me now, page 807.

Keep a finger in Isaiah 7. But turn to page 807. Matthew chapter 1.

And just look at verse 22. Matthew, all this took place. All this, Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary. Matthew says all this took place to fulfill this verse here in Isaiah 7.

[4:52] And today, I want us to see why. I want us to see how exactly Jesus' birth and the command not to fear in this war zone, I want to see how they're linked.

When Matthew quotes Isaiah here, it's kind of like a hyperlink on a website, you know? So you know when you get an email, let's say, and it says, click here to find out more, and it's kind of blue and bold and underlined, right?

And you can click on those words, and then it pops up a new window, and it opens kind of like a whole new page of information. Well, that's like Matthew 1. Today, I want us to click on the hyperlink of verse 23, and it opens up the page of Isaiah 7.

And I want us to see how exactly Jesus fulfills this verse. Because if we do, we will see Jesus doesn't only fulfill this only because of the Virgin Mary, and not only because he is God with us, but also because his birth is God saying to a world at war, to us scared about where all this is heading, this is God saying, do not fear.

And so this evening is the first of our Advent sermons, but it's really kind of the Advent to Advent, the build-up to the build-up, the story behind the prophecy. And so let's click on that hyperlink now.

[6:21] And the first thing to see is this. The world is at war. So turn back to Isaiah 7. Isaiah 7. This Christmas prophecy, it comes in a time of war.

So look at verse 1. Ahaz is king in Jerusalem. That's in Judah in the south. That's where God's king rules from. But Jerusalem is under threat.

So the northern kingdom of Israel have teamed up with Syria, and they want to wage war with Judah. So look at verse 2. Syria is in league with Ephraim.

That's Israel, the northern kingdom. This is kind of like your worst enemy and your own brother teaming up against you. And what are they trying to do, verse 6?

They've been saying, let us go up against Judah and terrify it. And let us conquer it for ourselves and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it.

[7:20] They want to invade, take over, destroy, get rid of God's king and set a new foreign king on the throne. And how have God's people been feeling?

Verse 2. The heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook. That's the trees of the forest. They're shaking in their boots.

It looks like the end. Everyone is against them. Everyone is against God. That this world is just going off the rails around them. And it looks like all of God's plans are about to fail.

Because if these enemies come in and kill and replace the king, what happens to God's promise of a kingdom? It's ended. Kids, you thought about this earlier.

You can't have a kingdom without a king. God's rule in this world, the protection over his people, his promise to save the world through a king, it feels like all those promises are just about to be wiped out.

[8:23] And so we need to realise that this is not simply a political war going on here. This is the spiritual war in action. This is Satan, through Israel and through Syria, trying to win the spiritual war.

Trying to destroy God's kingdom and his king. Just like we've seen in Genesis, Satan tries to stop salvation, stop God restoring this world, but by going after God's chosen family.

Well, this is Satan going after the royal family. As with any war, this spiritual war, it's a battle of kings. And so if you take out God's king, just like in chess, you take out the king, game over.

And it looks like that's about to happen here. It's like they're faced with the impossible. A terrifying future where God doesn't win in their lives.

And that's like how we can feel, isn't it? We see all the forces against God, against his church, piling up against us. All this godlessness flourishing around us, and we can fear, where is this world heading?

[9:40] All the pressure against our faith at work, and at school, even in our families, all that pressure just not relenting. And we can fear,

where is the church heading? And our hearts are at war, aren't they?

We feel like we just want to give in. All those things inside us, that pull us away from God. And we can fear, where is my heart heading? And we're scared because we wonder, can God even do anything about this?

Is he really in control of this world, of my life? And that's spiritual war. It's happening here on the global stage, here in Judah. But what does God say to Ahaz, verse 4?

Be careful. Be quiet. Do not fear. And do not let your heart be faint because of these two smouldering stumps of firebrands.

While the world is on fire, God says, relax. Calm down. Do not fear. Why?

[10:49] Because those threats, those two nations that you see, they're just two smouldering stumps. So you know when you make a fire, you ever made a fire? And you let it burn down.

And after a few hours, what do you get? You kind of get these faintly glowing lumps of wood. And you know, as you see those kind of slightly glowing lumps, you know you can't relight that.

There's no life in it. It's just going to die soon. Well, that's Israel and Syria. It looks big and scary, but God is going to kill that fire.

Look at verse 7. It shall not stand. And it shall not come to pass. Syria and Israel, your enemies, they're going to be extinguished. I'm in control of all of this.

In this spiritual war, I am the one who wins. And that is what happens. Israel and Syria both get invaded, brought into exile, and those nations are put out.

[11:53] And so God says, do not fear. But it's one thing saying that. It's another thing showing us why we don't need to fear.

So imagine you're up a tall ladder and it feels sketchy and wobbly at the top. And someone below just shouts to you, relax, don't worry. You hear that.

That alone is pretty useless. Maybe I should worry. Maybe I am going to fall. But if you look down the ladder and that person is holding the ladder and they're saying, don't worry, I've got you, well, that's an entirely different situation.

That's a sign that I really don't need to worry. Well, as the kingdom feels wobbly, that the fate of God's people feels sketchy and it looks like God's promises are about to fall, God says to King Ahaz, look down the ladder.

I'm going to give you a sign to show you that you don't need to fear. A sign showing you that the enemies of this world, all these spiritual forces behind the curtain, will not win and my kingdom will come.

[13:11] And what is that sign? Verse 14. Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.

Here's why you don't need to fear in this war zone. Here's why my kingdom will come. Here's why the fears of all this world are about to end because God has given a sign that he's holding the ladder.

He's in control and that sign is the miraculous birth of a son. And this is my next point. The virgin birth is God's sign not to fear.

The virgin birth is God's sign not to fear. I want to look closely at what God promises here in this verse. And I want us to see why this sign is the reason you don't need to fear in this world.

So look what God says. Behold. It's like God saying, just watch. You're scared about your future.

[14:18] You think, I can't do anything about this world. You think this is the end of the line for my kingdom? Just watch. And watch what? What's coming?

A son. The big threat has been, what if God's royal line ends? God promised a king to come from the line of David to rule the world.

But what if these enemies actually come in and end that line? God's rule ends. The war is lost. The world is lost. Satan wins.

But what does God say? Just watch. Behold. I'm going to bring a son. And this is the son.

This son is the king to end this war. And who will that son come from? Behold. The virgin shall conceive and bear a son.

[15:18] God is saying, even if Satan ends this line, Ahaz, even if you die, do you think that that can stop me? Do you think I'm dependent on you for my plans?

Do you think you're the one in control here? No. Even if you die, Ahaz, I can even raise up a king from a virgin. Syria.

Kings. Satan himself cannot stop me. I am bringing my king. And how he arrives from a virgin, this is the sign of my power in this world.

I can do the impossible. But this won't be any old king, not just any old son. What will he be called? She shall call his name Immanuel.

Now, the word Immanuel literally means in Hebrew with us God. I'm going to give you a quick Hebrew lesson. Imah, that means with. Nu means us.

[16:19] El means God. Put that together. With us God. God with us. This son is going to be God himself.

Come to his people to rule them and protect them and bring victory over the forces of darkness in this world. God himself bringing his own kingdom. God is saying here as you look at your fear-filled lives, as you look at this war zone and the evil in this world and the battle in your hearts and you wonder if God can do anything about this, here's the sign, here's the proof that I can.

It's a son, a boy and when you see this boy you can know I'm in complete control. I'm holding the ladder, the future of my people is certain and I will win this war.

That is what God is promising here. And so, if we follow the hyperlink back to Matthew, it gives an even deeper meaning to Jesus' conception.

As Jesus first appears in the womb of Mary, that little speck, as the nine-month wait to his birth begins, that little boy growing in her womb, that son, is the guarantee of God's victory in this world.

[17:51] That son is the one to end all fears in this world. And that is exactly who we find in the Lord Jesus. as you look back to that birth, that son, we can say, behold, this is the son, the king, to end the war of this world.

The child who came to guarantee God's victory in the war zone, to defeat evil, to defeat the devil and end even death itself, to bring God's perfect kingdom into this world.

And that is what Jesus has done. on the cross, bearing the guilt of his people, the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world, bearing the curse of creation upon his brow, and in doing so, disarming the devil, taking all power from the evil one.

And three days later, rising from the dead in victory over death, and now enthroned as king with complete control over creation, sitting in victory over this war.

That is who the Lord Jesus is. The sign of God's victory in this world. And that's what's going on in creation right now. Like Judah, we can feel the threats all around us.

[19:17] Like we're in a losing battle. Like it is just getting harder and harder to be a Christian. Like the whole world is up against us. It's not easy at work, it's not comfortable at school, I'm not looking forward to the family gathering at Christmas.

Like Judah, it feels like we're losing this spiritual war. You see the decline of the church in the UK like it's fizzling out, you see godlessness becoming normal, and it feels like just Satan's winning this spiritual war.

We feel that in our hearts as our faith feels fragile and thin, and it feels like sin has the real power in my heart. And we are just scared about what lies ahead, and we wonder how can the church even survive?

How can I survive? That is what it feels like. But what is the reality? God says, look. Behold.

Look back to this son, his birth, his work, all that he has done, this son is God's side. He's proof that God has victory in this war.

[20:26] He's now already sat in victory over this war. Yes, battles rage down here, but with the coming of Christ, the war has now been won.

All that is going on in this world is actually just a losing battle for Satan. he cannot kill the church. For those who belong to Christ, he cannot snatch you out of the Father's hand.

He's not in control of your future. No, God is in control of Satan's future. Satan and evil and even death, they are like smouldering stumps in this world.

They're still there, but they're going to be utterly extinguished soon. And so God says to his people, you don't need to fear about your future.

You don't need to fear about the battle that lies ahead, because I'm in control. I am the one who wins in your life, and how do you know, well, behold, my son.

[21:37] This is the sign, the proof. you can look back to the birth of Christ, and know that is God's sign, guaranteeing my future.

But this victory, it's also related to this son being from a virgin. Have you ever wondered why a virgin birth is promised here? Why this is so key to the Christian faith?

We even confessed it this morning in the Apostles' Creed. We said, I believe in Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. Why, of all things, why is the virgin birth a sign, proof, that God will win this war?

Well, it's because it's key to how God wins this war. Because what does it take to win this spiritual war? Our sins need to be paid for.

We need a sinless human, a sinless son, to bear our sin for us. But what is the problem with how every human, every son, is usually born in this world?

[22:46] When anyone is born naturally in this world, we are born in sin. I won't do the birds and the bees for you, but when a father and a mother have a child in this world, that is two sinners producing another sinner in this world.

we all inherit the sinful nature of our parents. But, what if you have a child not conceived naturally, but supernaturally?

Not by two sinners coming together, but by the Holy Spirit creating something new. What will that child be like?

he will be sinless. Still a man, but he wouldn't inherit that sin that we are all born into. And that is key to God's victory in this world.

We see evil all around us. It feels like sin has the power in this world, but as that sinless child appears in that womb, that is God breaking the power of evil in this world.

[23:56] With every pure thought he had, with every righteous act of obedience, with all that love in his heart that he had for his father, that was the Lord ensuring victory for his church.

It is through the sinless Christ that is how God wins this war. Satan tries to accuse us of all that we've done wrong. He tries to bring up all our sin before God, And so how do I know Satan won't win that court case?

How do I know I'm truly accepted before God and that my sin isn't what defines me anymore? Why do I not have to fear about that? What's the sign?

What's the proof? Behold, look to the virgin birth. That is God's sign for you. that is your sinless saviour.

God has brought victory in this world and it's through the virgin birth. And it's through this son being Emmanuel. In the womb of the Virgin Mary, that little speck, that is God taking on human flesh to be with his people, to dwell with us.

[25:19] and that is key to how God brings victory into this world. Because how did this war start? Where did all this evil and fear and threat and all these enemies come from?

It all stems from us not being with God. We walked away from God in that garden. He cast us out of his presence and that was the beginning of the war.

And salvation and victory in this spiritual war has always been found by coming back into God's presence. It's there in the tabernacle. It's there in the temple.

That is where humanity always finds restoration and safety in this war. And here, in the birth of Christ, the restoration has come.

God with us. God is the promise here in Isaiah is the advent of God making this world right again. And God is saying, I'm ending this war by being with you.

[26:28] And this is why God says to his people, do not fear. In this sketchy world, and everything seems against God, and it feels like we're about to fall, and the church just feels wobbly, God says, here's the sign.

Here's the proof that I'm in control, and holding the ladder, look to the virgin birth. Look to Emmanuel. Do not fear. I'm with you.

And for those in Christ, that goes for everything in your life. You may fear where the world is heading, or where your faith is heading, or where the church is heading, but you also may just be fearing what lies ahead this week.

That meeting, that phone call, just the unknown, and it feels like threats all around. Well, God says to you, do not fear.

Look to the virgin birth, look to Emmanuel, I'm with you. And if you're here tonight, and you're scared about where this world is heading, and you've come here just looking for answers, God says, you can actually know the future.

[27:47] You can know where all of this is going to end up. He's given you a sign, proof. Behold, look at the birth of his son.

History is going to end with God winning. And not only that, trust in him and your future becomes secure.

people, you get to share in the victory in this world. History ends with the church winning. Christ has come to end the fears of this world, to guarantee the future of this world.

Trust in him and you will have nothing to fear. Let's pray. God to to to have to have to have