

## Firm in Faith

### Isaiah 7-8

**MPS** Jesus proves sufficient to hold life firm when He is the center of all hope and faith.

**OBJ** Every person should trust in Jesus because of He is the Way that holds our faith firm.

#### INTRO

#### READ Isaiah 8:11-22

*For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: <sup>12</sup>“Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. <sup>13</sup>But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. <sup>14</sup>And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup>And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”*

*<sup>16</sup>Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. <sup>17</sup>I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. <sup>18</sup>Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. <sup>19</sup>And when they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? <sup>20</sup>To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. <sup>21</sup>They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. <sup>22</sup>And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness. **Isaiah 8:11-22***

**Things are not going well in Judah, the southern kingdom. But they are about to get a lot worse.** Ahaz, grandson of Uzziah, is king. Second Kings (16) provides a synopsis of Ahaz by recording that he became the King when he was twenty years old, and reigned for sixteen years. It says of him(16:2b-3), “*And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done, <sup>3</sup>but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel.*” “The ways of the kings of Israel” is not compliment. It means he rejected God to favor his own ways and others counsel over obeying God. When we come to Isaiah 7, Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel, the northern Kingdom, allied to war against King Ahaz in Judah. God sends Isaiah to Ahaz to tell him not to fear these two kings(7:4), and to tell him “what’s what; “*If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.*”(7:9) But Ahaz didn’t listen. Fear not only skews our perspective but blocks our receptivity sensors so we don’t receive nor listen to wise counsel.

**God tells Ahaz to ask for a sign from God, an invitation to strengthen his faith.**(7:10-22) Ahaz denies God’s invitation and tries to hide his fear by gaslighting God with hyper-spiritual, religious jargon. In other words, Ahaz twists God’s words to use them against Him so he does not have to be bothered with listening to or obeying God. But God was not fooled because He cannot be fooled; you don’t gaslight the One who is truth! So God provides a sign anyway, and it becomes a warning to Ahaz to not go the wrong way that he is choosing to go. God’s sign states, “*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*”(14) **God’s sign of judgment is the prophecy of a Savior. But for those who will not believe, this sign will not be one of hope but of utter destruction.**

**Maybe you are familiar with this verse.** **Have you ever wondered how the greatest of all good news could become bad news? And, who takes good news this way?** Those who live in opposition to God, who do not worship nor obey Him, who do not care about Him. But these are not strangers. They are God’s people. Isaiah warns Ahaz that if he does not heed God’s warning, every “hair” of dignity will be removed in humiliation, not from the threat he fears, but from where he ignorantly runs into out of faithless fear. God is very clear; if you do not trust me, you will not stand.

**But nevermind what God said.** Ahaz’s fear drove him to strike an alliance with Assyria to help protect. Ahaz couldn’t hear God because he only listened to the bad counsel of his fear. And his fear drove him right into the judgment of God. Ahaz’s undoing was allowing his fear to rule him so that it stripped him of faith in God. Ahaz put his fear in the wrong place his faith in the wrong hope, which caused him confusion in the counsel he listened to, and darkness in his thinking, so that he ran to



the “wrong conclusion”; he trusted in his alliance with Assyria instead of his promise from God of a Savior. Ahaz’s sin was not in taking action to protect Judah. **Ahaz made a deal with the devil; he hardened his heart and would not listen to God and invited the enemy in for utter destruction.**

**Isaiah again warns Ahaz of the real threat he should fear.** (Isaiah 8:1-10) God’s judgment is coming through his ungodly alliance with Assyria. And it will come faster and be more utterly devastating than he could imagine. God’s warning is now intended for the whole Kingdom of Judah. Like a swelling river, Assyria will rise, and destruction will cover everything like flood waters. In all of this, God tells the people that He is the One who brings this judgment. They will take counsel among themselves, but it will be useless. **God will be in their midst, but for those who reject God’s warning and promise, “God with us” will serve as a judgment because they did not believe and trust.**

**Q?** Who is the judgement for? What about the people who DO trust God? How should they live in such a time of judgment? We must ask this question because we now live in a new reality that we have not fully awakened to and are too often thinking about it with a great “brain fog”.

**ILLUS A New Reality** The world has changed, shifting at a faster rate and in ways we’ve never conceived, and to a greater extent than even imagined possible. The hardest thing for most is the new reality that America is becoming post-Christian, but it is hard to imagine what you’ve never known. In this election year I am increasingly concerned for the little “c” church, that Christ-followers do not lose hope.

**Politics are more polarized today than ever before in a culture peaked to rage.** A recent article from The Washington Post<sup>1</sup> states that the hardening divisions among people, becoming known as “affective polarization”, is due to feelings-based, emotional responses to those one holds visceral dislike toward, that we’ve tied our politics too closely to our identity instead of greatly divergent policy preferences. The article goes on to state that political psychologists – (now that’s a ‘group mix’ we want guiding us, like serving a social cocktail of strychnine and fentanyl) – point to evolution as one of the major factors causing this divide, stating that it is inevitable for us to divide in this way. This is not a shocking argument for a left-leaning media outlet owned by Jeff Bezos to make. However, blaming evolution not only misses the point further by presuming an unproven theory is foundational truth, but even more akin to this generation, it completely dismisses personal responsibility! But no one is surprised that politics and news media are wrong. Investigations of the last few years have taught us this by exposed legitimate evidence of what was once labeled “conspiracy theory”.

**TRANS** But lest you think I’m here to blame our problems on the world power or communication sources, aka the Enemy’s puppets and megaphone, let me move to a more personal factor.

**The North American church has changed, and continues our decline.** The “Christian deconstruction” phase has devolved into the de-churching of this generation. De-churching does not simply mean people are leaving the church but that they are deconstructing the church into any number of self-made amalgamations, and pre-dominantly sourced and formed by social media influence. Many churches are splintering over wrongly prioritized secondary issues, rightly splitting over first-order issues wrongly allowed and affirmed to begin with, or propagating a pseudo-gospel of any number of varieties. And at the heart of it all, pastors are morally falling out, being kicked out, bailing out, and burning out. Just this week Gallup.com posted an article showing that the confidence in pastors is at an all-time low in the U.S., only above that of Journalists, Senators, and members of Congress.<sup>2</sup> –(I’m shocked we didn’t plan an awards ceremony for the announcement!)– This can hardly be shocking, though, when 18 months prior an article like the one from the Cultural Research Center of Arizona Christian University begins, “A new nationwide survey of America’s Christian pastors shows that...just slightly more than a third (37%) possess a biblical worldview and the majority—62%—hold a hybrid worldview

<sup>1</sup> Achenbach, Joel, “Science is revealing why American Politics are so intensely polarized”, January 20, 2024, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2024/01/20/polarization-science-evolution-psychology/?utm\\_source=pocket-newtab-en-us](https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2024/01/20/polarization-science-evolution-psychology/?utm_source=pocket-newtab-en-us) Last accessed January 27, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Brennan, Megan, and Jeffrey Jones, “Ethics Ratings of Nearly All Professions Down in U.S.” <https://news.gallup.com/poll/608903/ethics-ratings-nearly-professions-down.aspx> Last accessed January 27, 2024.



known as Syncretism.”<sup>3</sup> Syncretism is any “gospel + theology”, when we add things to make a different gospel.

**TRANS** Now I don’t know if I’ve piqued your interest yet or not, but I pray I have. God is speaking today with Isaiah’s message to Ahaz. We need to hear and heed it, church.

**Jesus proves sufficient to hold life firm when He is the center of all hope and faith.**

**Q?** How does one stand firm and wait for the Lord when the enemy looms and utter destruction threatens? Our passage today is the point where Isaiah turns from those who would not listen to any who will. Those who will not heed God’s message have only darkness and doom to anticipate. But any who will listen, there is a way to follow the Lord.<sup>4</sup> **God’s way is the only way, and always the way, to life.**

**OBJ** **A Way to stand firm in Faith and an Invitation to trust.**

**First, recognize your fears and confess them to Jesus. 8:11-12**

The people followed Ahaz to become as fear-filled as he was, and to ignore God. But so often we are ruled by our fears because we ignore them. Fear is not a symptom of illness or disease to treat. It is the state of a heart set on any idol unable and incapable of satisfying it. Idols always stoke our fears. FOMO was the first deception tactic the Serpent used in the Garden when he told Adam and Eve they would become like God. Second to that, fear of man fueled by sin-driven comparison in life, also reveals where faith in God is lacking. And what does fear produce in us but walking by a faithless manner into a God-denying, God-ignoring reality. **Fear is universal to all people because it is the first fruit of sin.**

**Genesis 3 teaches that fear originates from three primary sources.** Listening to wrong influences(ers) / sources is the first fear-producer, which includes listening to too many influencers too. A second fear-arousing source is a skewed perception of reality; we see things not as they are but as we have created them or come to believe about them. The third fear-arousing source is a confused identity. When we are unsure or unstable about who we are, we don’t know what to believe about anything else. I am convinced a vast majority of fears today are simply aroused from being overwhelmed by taking in too much information. We are unable to process it all, and our confusion forms a new reality and a confused identity. We are constantly consuming. If we ate the way we take in information, we would all weigh 900 pounds. Exhaustion is the most fertile ground to produce an abundant crop for fear-farming. **Do you know what arouses fear in you, when they rise and how they rule you? What are you doing with your fear? Fear only has one right response, to confess it to Jesus until and replace it by faith in the truth of His Word.**

**2. Honor the Lord in all your life and ways so fear is consumed in Him. 8:13-15**

Uncertainty and chaos has consumed every person, generation, and culture since Genesis 3. This is why “Do Not Fear” is the most recited command in all the Bible. Fear is a form of honor. When anything or anyone other than Jesus holds all our fear, it is consumed in that which is unworthy. Peter reminds us that until we get our heart set to honor the Lord first, we are not ready to trust Him in any other way or area.(1 Peter 3:15) Proverbs reminds that when we acknowledge (honor) the Lord in all our ways, He directs us.(Proverbs 3:6) “*Acknowledge*” means we recognize who He is. And who is He? Isaiah says He is the “Lord of Hosts”, a title given to our warrior God who goes before and fights for us to bring victory to us. **When we confess your fear and honor the Lord as holy, we overcome by taking refuge in the One who is the “Overcomer”.**(1 John 5:5) Fear fixates you on what it says “is”. Faith lifts your eyes to the One who says, “I Am” to bring salvation. **Instead of fixating on what is coming, fix your eyes on the ONE you are following by faith who has overcome.**

<sup>3</sup> Munsil, Dr. Tracy F. “New Study Shows Shocking Lack Of Biblical Worldview Among Pastors”,

<https://www.arizonachristian.edu/2022/05/12/shocking-lack-of-biblical-worldview-among-american-pastors/> Last accessed January 27, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> F. Derek Kidner, “Isaiah,” in New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 640. DKidner writes, “The general tenor of the paragraph is that Israel is refusing the light (19–22) and thereby losing God’s teaching and blessing (16–17). All they will have is signs (18); all they can expect is darkness. But vs 16–18 are a kernel of immense promise. With the expression my disciples, God introduces a new definition of his people and their relation to him (cf. Jn. 6:45).”



### 3. Immerse your life in Christian Community where God's Word is sealed into your life. 8:16-20a

Isaiah tells the people to grab hold of what God has told them and teach it among the disciples. Real Christ-followers get serious when it comes to God's Word because they understand it produces faith and hope in you, provides wisdom, strength and light for you, and brings peace to you. When Christian community is centered on God's Word it produces an endless source of three blessings. Christian community centered on God's Word becomes a refuge of your life.(.17) A life surrounded by others trusting the Lord Jesus Christ produces an inner strength and an outer protection for faithfully following the Lord Jesus. Christian community centered on God's Word builds a witness with your life.(.18) A faithful witness for Jesus is formed and enlarged as we stand with one another in following Jesus by faith. Christian community centered on God's Word provides counsel for your whole life.(.19-20) When you are walking with people you know are following Jesus by faith, you not only trust the Lord to direct you, but you come to trust the people through whom you know He is working around you. In all these ways, Christian community provides immeasurable blessings. **The more you want to honor the Lord and walk faithfully unto Him in your life, the more deeply you should immerse your life, and the life of your children, in Christian community to treasure the Lord and His Word together.**

**TRANS** Now, an invitation. Every act of judgment is an invitation to look to the Lord and trust.

**God's warning is His invitation is to put your trust in Him.**(Isaiah 7:4)

When God first sent Isaiah to Ahaz, He was inviting him to trust instead of fear. The counsel God gave to Ahaz is good for us today too. Whether or not you are ruled by fear and anxiety or trust in peace will always be determined by who you look to, and where you place your hope. When God gives an invitation to trust Him, and provides a sign to prove it, we should not hesitate to take it! When the Lord fills our heart, we do not grow faint.

If you are to receive the Lord's invitation you must understand, God's promise of Immanuel stands sufficient for you today. The Savior who Isaiah said would come is the Savior who now HAS come; Jesus came, died, rose from the dead, and is enthroned in Heaven. The gospel proclaims to us that Jesus is worthy of all our hope because He has conquered the Enemy, and in Him we will overcome. **Have you heard God's invitation to trust in Him and put your faith in Jesus? Jesus is not the best way; He is the only way.**

**Jesus proves sufficient to hold life firm when He is the center of all hope and faith.**

**CLOSE** Christians are not called to live blind to the world around us. But we are called and empowered by Holy Spirit, to walk in this world with our eyes fixed on Jesus. No matter what happens in days and weeks to come, make sure your eyes are set on the only One who has already overcome, Jesus Christ.

