

Promise
Immanuel • Message 4
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Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Thank God for being with you always.
- Pray for hope and courage to face any challenges.
- Ask God to guide you to live today focused on His kingdom.

Scripture Reading:

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Matthew 1:18-23 (NIV)

A. Introduction

The Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, built in 425 C.E. in Ravenna, Italy, is famous for what's inside it: stunning mosaics, deep blues and golds, images of resurrection and eternal life. (Show Picture)

But here's what surprises most people. You can't see it all at once.

The building is intentionally dim. Light only comes in through small windows. So you don't take in the whole picture, you only see portions. A section of the ceiling here. A detail on the wall there.

Everyone wants to see the whole thing. Some people even try to bring in artificial light.

But we are limited, not by the lack of beauty. It isn't the art. It's a lack of light.

The mosaic is fully there, but our experience of it is partial.

And in many ways, that's how we experience God.

But Scripture tells us a different story.

God's presence isn't measured by our feelings; it is promised to us. But it is a promise to be trusted.

When worship feels warm, God must be near us.

Somewhere, many of us learned to measure the existence of God's presence by how we feel. When our prayer lives feel dry, God must be distant. When life is steady and comfortable, God must be pleased with us. When everything is falling apart and feels uncertain, God must have stepped back.

If that is true, the real question shouldn't be, *Do I feel God with me?* The real question is, *Am I aligning my life with God, who promised to be with me?*

B. Align Your Life with...

1. God's PROMISES.

(Isaiah 7:1-14. C/R: Deuteronomy 31:6))

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."

Isaiah 7:10-12 (NIV)

When Isaiah spoke these words, he was speaking into a real crisis.

In Isaiah 7, Jerusalem is under threat. Two enemy kings are moving in, and King Ahaz is afraid.

God sends Isaiah with a message. He does not give strategy or advice. The enemies will not succeed. The threat will not stand. And as proof, God gives a sign.

A child will be born.

And before that child grows old enough to know right from wrong, the danger facing Jerusalem will be gone. In other words, God is saying, *Relief is coming sooner than you think, and I am with you. You don't need to fear.*

That first fulfillment matters.

Isaiah's words were not abstract theology or distant prediction. They meant something to people standing on the brink of invasion. God was faithful in their moment.

King Ahaz, because of his fear, was choosing how he would live.

He could have lived for God, thinking it was his mission to save Israel. He could have lived from God, seeing himself as more important than God. His life of wickedness could be an indicator of this reality.

Or his fear could be living life, taking all that he could from God, choosing to save his life and a bit of the kingdom, but paying a heavy price.

In spite of all that Ahaz had done — and the wickedness in his life — God still invited him into a life with God by offering a sign.

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Isaiah 7:10-12 (NIV)

Ahaz refused the sign from God with a religious excuse.

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Isaiah 7:13-14 (NIV)

The sign was not vague.

Before that child knew right from wrong, the land of the two kings Ahaz dreaded would be laid waste. God was saying, *You don't need to manipulate outcomes. You need to trust me.*

The child was a promise that God was with His people in their immediate crisis.

But Isaiah's sign does more than solve a short-term problem.

The child is called Immanuel, which means *"God with us."*

And that name carries more weight than any ordinary child could bear.

As Isaiah's prophecy unfolds in the chapters that follow, the child grows in significance — until Isaiah speaks of a coming king whose reign will never end, whose justice will be perfect, and whose very presence reflects God dwelling with His people.

That's where Matthew comes in.

Matthew is not pulling Isaiah 7:14 out of context.

He's not forcing Jesus into the passage. He's showing us that what God did partially in Isaiah's day, He did fully in Jesus.

The earlier child in Isaiah's day was a sign that God was with His people. Jesus is God with us in the fullest sense of the phrase.

Born not only at just the right time (Galatians 4:4), but in a miraculous way that makes one thing clear:

Salvation does not come from human strategy or political deals. It comes from God alone.

So Isaiah 7:14 works on two levels:

1. God was with Judah in their immediate crisis.
2. God came to be with us forever in Christ.

The promise was real then, but it was fulfilled Messianically by the virgin birth of Jesus.

That's the story of how God keeps His promises sometimes sooner, and sometimes deeper, than you expect.

For many of us, we approach God in different ways. We often need the experience of His nearness differently. Some need to experience His power. You might need to experience His love and tender care. For some, you need to be reminded of His goodness.

But the promise is the same. God wants to be with you. With us.

Don't allow your religious nature to interfere with God's activity and desire to be with you.

The God who met His people in crisis was already preparing to meet us face-to-face.

2. God's FAITHFULNESS.

(Matthew 1:18-23. C/R: Luke 19:10)

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Matthew 1:18-23 (NIV)

The virgin birth isn't some strange detail that we keep around because of the traditional telling of the Christmas story. It is an essential belief of our faith, to who Jesus is, and what He came to accomplish.

The Scriptures teach us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin to show us two things at the same time.

First, Jesus is fully God.

His life did not begin like every other human being on the planet. He is divine and has a divine origin. That teaches us about salvation not coming from any human strategy, tactic, or plan. It comes from God alone.

Second, Jesus is fully human.

He was born of a woman and entered into our world. He shares our weakness, was tempted in every way and lived among us.

This fulfills the prophecy following sin's entrance into the world. Genesis 3:15 states that the seed of the woman will overcome the seed of the enemy.

Because of the faithfulness of God to fulfill His promise by the birth of Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, we have the opportunity to be united with God.

Jesus came to be with you. He didn't come so that you might get Heaven, He came so you could get God. He came to get you and fulfill His God given mission.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Luke 19:10 (NIV)

Christmas is coming, and if you are connected to a little child during this season of the year, it is an amazing thing to experience. You get to see their expression of the things that they treasure.

They make a list, perhaps drawing pictures, writing letters, and finding persuasive ways to ask. They also begin thinking about their good works getting them what they want, especially in those last few weeks. Now they might take screenshots of what they want on a tablet or show you a YouTube video of the thing they desire most in this life.

But to me, some of the magic of this season is not the treasuring of things. It is when these little ones get united to the things that they treasure.

Watching a child receive the thing that they have been wishing for, perhaps even praying for, is something to behold. I would say something to be in awe of.

Yet this is the same thing we see in the person of Jesus throughout the Gospels. Some treasure Him and just want to be with Him. Others want to use Him for their own means. Others are so concerned about Him abusing His supernatural power that they fear Him and ask Him to leave.

But if you are at the place of exploring faith and really seeking to understand who Jesus is, you might begin to start to treasure Him.

Yet many of us stop short of the reality of this uniting. It's like a little child who finally receives their gift they treasure, and yet you tell them you can't open it or take it out of the package until New Year's.

Many of us live under this reality. We receive the gospel for our eternity, but we can experience the reality of the future right now. God's "withness" is available to His children right now!

Jesus kept God's promise to be with us. He fulfilled the promise of Isaiah 7 and every promise we've discussed in this series and more. He came to be with us. To rescue and unite us with God.

And while the Scriptures tell us that we see in partial or as if under a veil, the Scriptures don't end with that promise and story of Jesus with us. No, Scripture ends in Revelation.

Revelation shows us what God with us looks like when nothing stands in our way of living life in complete and perfect union with the Father.

What we begin to experience with Jesus now is only the beginning of what God has promised for us.

3. God's FUTURE.

(Revelation 22:3-7. C/R: Genesis 3:17, Exodus 33:20-23, Psalm 90:12)

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place." "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll."

Revelation 22:3-7 (NIV)

Earth was cursed because of the sin of Adam. All guilt, conflict, struggle, difficulty for survival, illness, sorrow and death will be gone on that day. (Genesis 3:17)

Moses could not see the Lord's face and live, but one day God's people will see His face and live!

(Exodus 33:20-23; 34:29-35)

Not only will we worship God in the throne room of God, which will make the entire city a worship venue, but we will reign as kings over the new Earth, forever and ever.

Most of the people who read Revelation approach the book with one lens. They want to know what happens. But verse 7 gives us the key to approaching our everyday lives, understanding the future of the world.

Blessed is the one who **keeps** the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.

The blessing doesn't come from knowing God's future story; it comes from living its reality.

Order your life now around the future God has promised. How do we do that?

3 very practical things:

1. Practice nearness now.

Living in His light, seeing God's face, serving in His presence, worshipping in a new venue. You don't have to wait to practice this type of intimacy. You can experience this today.

If you've ever been through a missed opportunity season, you can feel the distance from God. Maybe it was a job, a future home, a potential move or mate. Those can cause us to feel distance now, but we have an opportunity right now, wherever you are, to be near to God because of Jesus.

2. Live like you know the end of the story.

We don't have to panic. We don't have to fear. The moment that you are currently living in isn't the ultimate moment of your life.

This should encourage us to live our lives more concerned about faithfulness than speed, productivity, or success. Our victory is already won.

For me, I think about this when it comes to conflict. If you spend any time doing leadership of any kind, you are going to disappoint people. In fact, I think leadership is learning to disappoint people well. But when you are in a situation where you are having to deliver disappointment, you can know that this isn't the end of the story. God truly is faithful and near.

3. Endure the present because the curse is temporary.

Suffering is real. It is tangible, and sometimes it can feel like forever. But this curse is coming to an end.

So you can persevere during great pain and suffering without having to fret about God's goodness.

You can truly grieve without losing hope. You can stay faithful to God. It isn't an easy journey. I've got three babies that I'll meet one day in Heaven. I don't know their names or their faces, but one day I will be able to meet them with full freedom in the relationship. I will get to experience their joy and love in an unhindered way. I can't wait for that day.

God's future isn't meant to be admired and memorized. It is meant to shape your life right now.

God's presence is a reality you live from. He promised to be with His people. He fulfilled that promise in Christ, and one day we will live in the reality of that presence unhindered from anything the enemy has to throw at us.

Let's Pray.