

Firm faith is found in the word of God.

Isaiah 7:1-9

I am so thankful for our military and our veterans. Those taking on difficult and dangerous tasks to further a mission, to protect ideals. These events change you, they give you a different perspective. Those in combat, in war, all the more may carry with them the gravity of experiences in scars and the emotional weight of trauma.

And those close to it are changed as well, with shifting perspectives. For me it came while serving at the State Department in a warzone. To do my work others had to be willing to sacrifice themselves to protect me... and each time I wanted to take a reporter to see a story of success, I had to weigh the potential of harm to others. Stories became more than a headline, there were people in the balance.

When I returned to Washington it was striking to me the lack of perspective that pervaded even my own office. Everything was a crisis, if the reporter from the small trade publication with a readership of 1000 people got a story wrong we went to defcon 1... It was a stark difference from the Embassy in Baghdad. And while the latest numbers of wind turbine sales was important, no one was going to die if things weren't handled correctly.

I think we all live a lot like that. After all this life is our story, everything that happens to us is consequential. But is our perspective right? Is there meant to be an overriding perspective that guides us through our experience?

This is the tension of Isaiah 7. A crisis ensues and the king responds but the voice of God calls him to something else.

Here it is 735 BC, Syria, a foreign nation and Israel (the rebellious northern tribes) have teamed up because the geopolitical environment is getting hot. Assyria is on the rise becoming a powerful empire known for ravaging lesser kingdoms.

But these two nations need more firepower and the demand Judah join them. Judah has refused and everyone is prepared for war. **Isaiah 7:6** "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," (ESV)

And the heart of the king and his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

Isaiah is sent to the king of Judah, Ahaz, and what is said is specific to his time, but also universal in light of who God is.

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Let's wrestle with what God says to Ahaz and how it can actually be done.

1) Be Firm in Faith

We are kind of taking the text in reverse order this morning to see the defining change of perspective that is meant to happen. Then work back to see how we can get there.

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

It almost sounds like a Christian bumper sticker, this exhortation that comes in the midst of preparation for war. It is a call to trust in the Lord what he has determined for Judah and what he says.

This is really the call of Isaiah all along. “Hey remember who you are and whose you are... live in light of that!” In some places this has been a call back, to repentance that Judah, God's people, would turn away from idolatry and their prized sins. And in other places it is a call forward, into a new level of belief, informed by hope and the very Word of God.

While Ahaz is toiling, checking the stockpile of water Jerusalem has ahead of what he thinks is an imminent invasion, Isaiah speaks a different word.

“Chill!”

“God's covenant with the throne of David still stands, despite his people's failure... The prophet wants us to know from the start that the threat will vanish. There is no need to panic. God is with his people... Ahaz doesn't believe that. He doesn't want to believe it. He prefers dismay and hand-wringing. He feels more normal frantically devising his own salvation and lusting for the success of his own plans, rather than delighting in the victory of God. His heart is hard.” RO

To give Ahaz a little credit, this is no joke. Standing in the face of overwhelming and impossible odds.. outnumbered with your enemies being a war mongering conqueror and your former brothers, that seems daunting and impossible to fight alone.

Grasping at straws. Trusting in self as savior is like bringing a tea cup to an inferno.

How many times have we been in similar situations? Sure it probably hasn't been a pair of invading nations bearing down on us, but the IRS and a Mortgage payment can feel like that! And how do we respond? Do we batten down the hatches? Do we fight a battle we are told we don't need to?

Hiroo Onoda - Japanese intelligence officer and holdout that would not surrender in 1945, would spend 29 years in the jungles of the Philippines fighting his own war until his former superior officer came in 1974 and told him the war was up.

In relationships, in our work, in providing for our families. Checking our stockpile of water instead of heeding the word of God. Determined to be our own champions when we have a crisis with our strategy, our resources...

When circumstances grow difficult in our lives, the temptation increases to cease trusting God.

Here is the house of David, reminding us of the legacy of the Davidic throne, and it's representative, Ahaz, is invited back into trusting God. Setting aside his ability/success and resting in God's control.

4 "Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering wicks." Don't be scared of these cigarette butts!

"Practical people, they would say, you have to live in the real world where political astuteness and military muscle are what counts. But to Isaiah this was not a choice between viable alternatives. It was a life and death decision." Motyer

The odds are impossible, but faith stands tall.

Be firm - trust. Don't waver. If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything!

We love this call. This is something I can get my hands around and strive for.

James 1:2-4 "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (ESV)

This is not recklessness. Wisdom and faith are not in opposition of each other. In fact the next verse in James instructs those lacking wisdom to ask for it in faith! It's more like what's wise in the eyes of man is foolish when you have God's eternal perspective.

James 1:6-8 "the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind...[8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." (ESV)

'Trust or bust.'

God is saying through Isaiah that those that belong to him should be armed with such firmness that they overcome fear.

I would like to give you six steps to being a victorious Christian, having a firm faith... but here there is really only one.

He doesn't mimic the Nike slogan and say "Just do it!" He gives a reason, a foundation for firmness.

2) God's Word is the Basis of Faith

Right away in our text we see God at work - Syria and Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war "but could not yet mount an attack against it."

Prevented from executing their plan... there is a deeper purpose overriding their plans.

Then Isaiah is used to give a specific promise... God tells him to take his son with him and to go to Ahaz and tell him to chill.

"They have strategized against you, they want your throne for their own good... but "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass."

Say what?! You mean, these foreign aggressors won't come at us?

God doesn't wait for Ahaz's prayers but on his own accord promises that he will grant deliverance. The word is meant to build Ahaz and the nation's faith. God has made a promise and they can trust him, be firm in faith in Him.

"Isaiah shows there is nothing to dread... provided that Ahaz fortify himself by the promise of God, and patiently look for that which is not yet seen, and which even appears to be incredible."
Calvin

It is the story of Israel from the beginning! Living in light of promise...

Genesis 12:1-3 "Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. [2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (ESV)

Deuteronomy 31:8 "It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." (ESV)

Joshua 1:9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (ESV)

Psalm 23:4 “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (ESV)

And the specific promises and the overarching promise of care and protection get juiced up in Christ!

Philippians 4:19 “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (ESV)

“The abiding truth of [Isaiah 7:1-9] is that faith in the Lord and in his promises is a practical approach to life however great the crisis.” Motyer

They will come, our capital will feel under siege.

“Crisis is when God takes the training wheels off our bikes and teaches us to ride like the big kids. God is saying, “In your crisis, when it counts for you, trust me. I will keep my every promise. But if you treat me as unreal, you will not connect with reality at all.” RO

Do not fear Ahaz, don't go on blowing in the wind... here is the promise, you are safe, Judah will go on, ‘If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.’”

That's our application then isn't it? Go and be firm in faith, if you are not, you will be as James says, “unstable in all your ways.”

Go be warmed, and be firm!

But what of not staying firm? What about when I, like Ahaz run to the water cooler? What if I look to the latest trend in culture to get me through? What if I treat politics like my religion and voting my sacrament? What if I doubt God in the waiting?

“We know that God is more real than the earthly things immediately before us. We know he is more desirable than worldly attractions. We know he is faithful. We know we should live not out of what is but out of what is promised. We know our hearts must be grounded in finality if we hope to go the distance. And to refuse what we ourselves know to be true tears us apart inside. When we deny the truth we believe and refuse the consent we desire and withhold the trust we were created to enjoy, how can anything go right? The human being unravels. If we are not firm in faith, we are not firm at all. Everything in life, not just religion, flows out of our whole-souled movement toward (*God in faith*).” RO

There is hope... there is a new firmness in town!

3) Shear-jashub

As I was writing my sermon on the victorious Christian life... I realized that God made this promise and invited Ahaz to faith - who he knew would not listen. In fact God will go further with Ahaz and Judah... giving them a sign... "a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel..."

So he knows his audience. But he still makes the promise.

When Isaiah goes to the king he is told to take his son with him. And his son has a name that paints a picture.

Shear-jashub. "A remnant shall return."

Promise on top of promise. "It shall not stand", you will not be overrun, actually Syria and Israel (Ephraim) will be conquered and shattered from being a people. Within a generation, those that trusted in themselves against God's people will be nonexistent. Takes less than ten years for Syria to be obliterated, and Israel will have their ethnicity erased as Assyria injects vast numbers of different people into Samaria.

And even if Judah falls, even when they are carried off into exile, the fruit of their sin and rebellion against God, a remnant shall return. "God is preserving a remnant of people who really know what it means to be saved by grace." "His grace will have the last word on their behalf - the triumph of his grace over their failure." Ortlund

Grace, a promise realized in Jesus.

The one true remnant fulfills every promise, from the promise of blessing through Abraham's family.

"Jesus had become a remnant of one. He was the embodiment of faithful Israel, the truly righteous and suffering servant.

"As the embodiment of the faithful remnant, he would undergo divine judgment for sin (on the cross), endure an exile (three days forsaken by God in the grave), and experience a restoration (resurrection) to life as the foundation of a new Israel, inheriting the promises of God afresh.

"As the remnant restored to life, he becomes the focus of the hopes for the continued existence of the people of God in a new kingdom, a new Israel of Jew and Gentile alike." T. Longman

Jesus as the culmination of the Old Testament. He is the Last Adam, true Israel, the suffering servant, the son of David, the faithful remnant, the ultimate prophet, the reigning king, the final priest.

And because he is, the weight of being firm in faith is lifted. Faith, like grace is a gift, and we live in response to it. Trusting. Secure. Immovable in Christ.

He then is our source, he is our faith. He is our steadfastness.

In the promise of Immanuel and the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, God gives himself as our greatest ally at all times. With him we can face anything.

And in him, you do not need to faint before the cigarette butts of doubt and separation from God. The remnant that is Jesus has come, he has claimed you as his own and to all of the arrows of the enemy, to every situation that feels hopeless, he says "It shall not stand!"

2 Corinthians 1:20 "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. (ESV)

We are faithful by being full-of-faith, trusting God amid great uncertainties and challenges. In light of the sending of Jesus for our salvation, we have sufficient reason for such trust. **Romans 8:32** "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (ESV)

Our faith, our steadfastness is a resting in what Jesus has done and living from it. Where Ahaz has self-assured pride, we come in weakness, need and honesty. And we are given Christ. Salvation, provision, transformation, a dwelling place with God.

"True faith is not the capacity for victorious choices when faced with two equally compelling alternatives. True faith is the capacity to act fully, joyfully, enthusiastically because our eyes have been opened to the glory of Christ."

Even if we don't have a specific promise for each crisis, we have Christ. And he is more than enough.

So we live from the promise delivered. We live from the salvation we have in Christ and he is our immovable steadfastness.

Lean into this Faith - Believe the word - maybe for the first time, that Jesus lived in your place and died as a substitute for you only to defeat death and give you new life.

Then hold tightly to his promises for you. Memorize his word. Surround yourself with a community of believers that will remind you, that will encourage you to be careful, quiet and not fear.

Run to Shear-jashub - Run to the remnant that has returned, run to Jesus. Bring your need. Your anxiety. Your fear. Your strategy. Your success. And surrender them all to Jesus.

Colossians 3:15 “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.” (ESV)

Firm faith is found in the word of God.

The word, the promise of God, realized in Christ changes our perspective. Come heck or high water, we know the place of our trust, we know our steadfast Savior, and we know firm faith by looking to his cross... We sing with John Newton.

“Let worldly minds the world pursue,
It has no charms for me.
Once I admired its trifles too,
But grace has set me free.

Its pleasures now no longer please,
No more content afford;
Far from my heart be joys like these,
Now I have seen the Lord.

As by the light of opening day
The stars are all concealed,
So earthly pleasures fade away,
When Jesus is revealed.

Creatures no more divide my choice,
I bid them all depart.
His name, and love, and gracious voice
Have fixed my roving heart.” - John Newton, *Let Worldly Minds the World Pursue*

May our song ever be that grace has set us free, and in that grace we live by faith for the glory of Christ.