



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 22, 2013

Advent 4

Sermon Text: [Isaiah 7:10-14](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 7:10-14](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 24](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 1:1-7](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 1:18-25](#)

Promises Made: *God's Kingdom Will Come Through The Child Immanuel*

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

One of the things for us at times that makes reading Scripture a little difficult is that so much of communication, even among us as we talk to each other, is nonverbal. If I remember correctly from studies I read, about 30% of our communication is verbal. Seventy percent of what people pick up on is nonverbal, what we call body language. When you read Scripture, you don't get that communication, right? It's just the written Word or the spoken Word as you are listening to it and you don't have any of that nonverbal communication to get the context.

An example would be whenever you read about Jesus with Pilate. On Friday, he is there with Pilate, and Jesus talks about everyone on the side of the truth comes to him, and Pilate says "What is truth?" Every year I always think, how exactly did he say that? There are so many different ways he could have said it which would change how you would understand what he is saying.

I say all this because as you listen to Isaiah 7 this morning and you hear King Ahaz, the king of Judah, say to the prophet Isaiah, "I'm not going to put the Lord our God to the test and ask for a sign. I will not put the Lord to the test," you might think to yourself, yeah, we're not supposed to. Jesus himself (when he was tempted) said you should not put the Lord your God to the test. This is a good thing Ahaz is saying. We don't have his body language to read, but we do have the Scriptures to read, and if you know anything about Ahaz, he was long gone past putting the Lord your God to the test. I think that dog had left the kennel a long time earlier when Ahaz took some of his sons and sacrificed them to Kemosh in the fire. I think you've long set aside putting God to the test when you've worshiped false gods and you've sacrificed your own children to them and now you stand piously before God's prophet who came to you with a message of God's grace and mercy for you and you piously say, "Oh, I'm not going to put God to the test." Do you think Isaiah might have wanted to punch him? If the prophet was Randy, he would have wanted to punch him. This is ridiculous.

Do you and I put the Lord our God to the test? We read this or we hear this read to us and we think, why is Isaiah giving him such a hard time? Maybe we put our God to the test because we don't know the history he has put in Scripture for us. Are there times the only thing we really know from Scripture are the Bible story lessons we learned as a child, the *Christ Light* or *God So Loved the World* series, whatever it was when we were

children? Or is it what we hear from the readings every Sunday? And we don't know the deep cuts of Scripture, so to speak, the B-side tracks on God's 45's? Maybe we put God to the test because we're saying, "Hey, God. Why would you do this?" And he is really sitting in heaven saying, "I've already told you why. If you would have read the rest of Scripture, you would know."

If you are convicted by that, and I know I am, then the fact that God sends Isaiah to Ahaz at this point in time with the message that he does, it's a message that should make your heart rejoice. Because I just told you a little bit ago what a spiritual wreck Ahaz was, yet God was coming to him and sent Isaiah, who had just told him the king of Aram and the king of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, those two kingdoms had joined together and had laid siege to Jerusalem. Isaiah came and said, "Don't worry about them. The Lord will not let them hurt you. They are not a threat to you." Those two kingdoms and the kingdom of Israel to the north had tried to set up an alliance against the Assyrians who were coming, and God had told Ahaz earlier, "Don't put your trust in any humans or anyone else. Put your trust in me." But Ahaz didn't do that of course. He wanted to make an alliance with Assyria against these other kings, which God had told him not to do. Yet in his grace and in his mercy God comes and says, "Don't worry about them. I'm going to deliver you from them." God had always got a bigger plan than just what is going on in the immediacy of the moment.

Ahaz was just a terrible, terrible king. Just awful. Yet God delivered him because he was a son of David. God's plan was that a son of David, the line of David had to remain so that a different son of David would come. So here comes God in the midst of Ahaz putting on this display of false piety, just lying through his teeth to God, as though God couldn't tell. And he comes with a beautiful promise of grace and forgiveness. He says, "If you aren't going to ask for a sign, even though I told you to do it." Don't put God to the test on your own terms, but if the good Lord comes and says, "You put me to the test on this," then we better just be quiet and do what he tells us, don't you think? We should say, "Okay Lord, you said put me to the test. Do this and then I'll know that you're doing it." Other believers had done that, the fleece that got wet and then dry when everything else was wet. So putting it to the test, it's the attitude in putting it to the test. His attitude here of not putting to the test was an affront to God.

God says, "You won't ask for a sign, I'll give you a sign. Here's the sign that's not just for you Ahaz. It's for all people of all time that illustrates my great patience and my great love for my people. Here's the sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel." Immanuel means, as we heard in our Gospel, "God with us." "Here's the sign. There is going to be a conception that goes against the very laws of nature. There won't be any human father at all involved in any way, shape or form. Yet I will see to it that this child is born and this child will be called 'God with us' because this child will be God, who has come to redeem the sins of Ahaz," your sins, my sins and the sins of the whole world. God's kingdom would be protected, not through people like Ahaz. God's kingdom would be extended, not through people like Ahaz. God's kingdom will come and be extended through the child Immanuel.

That kingdom centers not in earthly wealth or earthly blessing that are physical in nature. The blessing that is of the kingdom of God is that he takes people like us, who put him to the test in the wrong way all too often, and he takes people like us who don't put him to the test when he tells us to do that. He's told us. "Test me in this and see if I will not bless you." We don't listen to him when he says that to us in his Word. But he sends the Savior who would come and live perfectly in our place, and then die in our place and take away all of our sins.

Yes, you and I can be convicted by God that we have put him to the test, that we have tried the patience of our God by our thoughts, by our words, by our actions. Yet God, who remained faithful to Ahaz, also remains faithful to us and takes away our sins. He sent his Son to be born, to be born for no other reason than what Paul talked about in the letter to the Romans. For no other reason than to be declared not only human, but to be declared true God by his resurrection of the dead after he lived and died to take away our sins. That's the glorious promise of the Gospel.

Our God's patience is beyond understanding. Our God's love is beyond understanding. Even in those times when you and I have taken it for granted or abused it or refused it, his love remains steady, constant and true. And when his Spirit awakens in us that spirit of repentance and we say, "Lord, forgive me for all these things I have done to you," he washes our sins away as though they never existed.

The other thing that is amazing about our God is that he preserved Ahaz so that from Ahaz would come a son that didn't get sacrificed in the fire, a son called Hezekiah. If you know anything about Hezekiah from Scripture, I remember being taught, even at the seminary, I don't think I ever heard my professor say "Hezekiah" without the two words in front of it... good king Hezekiah. There were so few kings of Judah that were faithful to God like David was. But Hezekiah, who grew up in the household of Ahaz, was one of them.

God is patient because he has a plan to bless his people, to bless them with forgiveness and bless them with other people that will respond to his love and his mercy and serve him faithfully. Out of that dysfunctional family, God raised up a faithful king who was a blessing to his people. God works through people like us, who at times have been unfaithful to God, so that we can be beacons of light to share Christ in a world that is darkened by sin and unbelief. We can share it faithfully and we can share it fearlessly because the One who promised a Savior born of a virgin kept that promise. He'll keep his promise to be with us and bless the Word of God that we speak to ourselves, to one another, and to those who don't yet believe. Amen.