

Once again this week, I'm attempting to weave together several different texts, rather than preaching from just one passage. The goal of preaching this way is the same as practicing our hymns in four-part harmony: it's hard to keep track of four passages in your mind, but when you hear them combine together, it's more beautiful and more glorious than any one part by itself.

The theme that keeps these passages from being four separate songs is the idea that Jesus is born into the world as *the Son of David*. This isn't just interesting ancestry.com stuff; the Bible's not just reminding us where Jesus *came from*. It's telling us where He came from *so that we will know who He is going to be*. In America, we've lost sight of this somewhat, since it's no longer a foregone conclusion that sons will join their fathers in the family business, but that expectation was very much alive when the Bible was being written. *Here's a Davidson: he's going to do what his father David did*. And this is very good news for scattered sheep who need a shepherd, and for oppressed people who are crying out to God for a king to save them.

That's what we hear in the first reading, in our call to worship from Psalm 80: "Give ear, O *Shepherd* of Israel". Of course, God is Israel's shepherd, but who else do you think of when you hear "shepherd of Israel" if not David? The plea is for the shepherd to deliver the sheep. They've wandered away and now they're in trouble from their enemies.

In particular, I want you to see in v. 17, the Psalmist's hope is in *the man of God's right hand*, the son of man whom God made strong. That man will be the instrument of salvation who gives life to God's people. "Send us a king like David to shepherd and save us!" That's a prayer of faith in the face of fear, and I want you see these key ideas in our other passages: a Son of David, fear, faith, and salvation. Those ideas are our SATB lines: *Son of David, fear, faith, and salvation*.

Let's look at how those themes play out in Isaiah 7: at this point, Ahaz Davidson is on the throne, but he's a terrible shepherd. Because Ahaz is *unfaithful*, he's *ineffective*, and in Isaiah 7, he's just found out that Ephraim (the kingdom formerly known as Israel) has joined up with Syria to come and attack Judah.

Translating this into Davidspeak, Syria and Ephraim are the new Goliath, and when all Israel looks to the Son of David, he's not practicing on lions and bears; he's wetting himself. Ahaz is terrified because he doesn't share David's faith. He's not acting like David; he's acting like Saul! Bad choice. But God loves David so much [vs. 13: hear then, *O house of David*] that He sends the Prophet Isaiah to Ahaz and promises to rescue Judah. He's willing to prove it by any sign in heaven or on earth, in order to bring Ahaz from fear to faith.

But Ahaz, who has never been pious before, suddenly remembers a Bible verse. "Oh, I won't put the Lord to the test." But trusting God to keep His own word isn't *testing* God; it's *believing* God. And that's what Ahaz won't do, because if God proves His trustworthiness to Ahaz, then Ahaz will actually have to live like He trusts God. He'll have to act on his faith and lead Israel out to face the giants, and he doesn't want *that*.

But God promises a sign anyway, and it's a sign that absolutely *requires* faith. What Ahaz wants is a bigger army, maybe a few attack helicopters, tanks, atomic weapons. What God sends him is a baby. Kinda like when God's people were facing a giant, and instead of a bigger giant, God sent a kid who was really good at throwing rocks. God is *weary* with Ahaz's lack of faith, and so it's as if he ups the ante: He sent a boy to save Saul; but maybe that didn't make the point clear enough, so He sends Ahaz a *baby*.

The baby is a *sign*, a pointer to a greater reality, and that greater reality is that *God is with His people!* That's the baby's name: Immanuel. By sending a baby as the token of His presence, God is making a point: It doesn't matter how big and strong your enemies are. You've got Immanuel. *Believing that God is with you is the answer to fear.*

And get this: saving you from Syria and Ephraim is no more impossible for God than bringing a baby out of a *virgin's* womb. Make no mistake: Ahaz can't save Judah from Syria and Ephraim. It's impossible. But so is a virgin birth. And the same God who can enable a virgin to give birth can defeat Syria and Ephraim. So here's the sign: a virgin who gives birth to Immanuel.

Here is where we see our themes: Ahaz is *afraid*. God speaks to the house of *David* and sends a sign of His presence and a promise of *salvation*. This sign calls for *faith*: jumping back to Isaiah 7:9 – God says, “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.”

Now look at Romans 1. In this passage, Paul sets out his gospel, the gospel that was promised through the prophets concerning the Son of God, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and proven to be the Son of God by rising from the dead. Jesus Davidson won a great victory for God's people and sent Paul to spread the news in order to bring about the obedience of faith (v.5). In other words, Jesus took down the giant, now you go take care of the mop-up operation. Jesus defeated sin with a capital “S” to prove that He's with you; now you go fight your sins by the power of the Spirit.

Remember, the obedience of faith is where Ahaz lost interest. “I don't want your sign, cause then I'd have to obey.” But Paul is proclaiming that God sent Jesus anyway. It doesn't matter whether you want the sign or not: the sign has come, descended from David according to the flesh. The gospel of God calls you to put your faith in Jesus, the Son of David. Jesus proved that God was telling the truth: God came down to *be with* you, and He *saved* you.

And now look at Matthew's gospel. Matthew records the events that are the *foundation* for Paul's preaching: why should you put your trust in Jesus, put away your fear, and walk in obedient faith? Because the birth of Jesus took place in this way...

Matthew's account is full of connections to our themes: Joseph Davidson, like Ahaz, was *afraid*. But in answer to his fear, God's messenger reminded Him of God's promise through the prophet Isaiah, and what's more, the angel tells him that God's promise is being fulfilled in Mary's virgin womb.

What happened with Ahaz was just the foreshadowing of this great event. *This* Immanuel is the *ultimate* sign of God's presence, proof that that God is with us, which means, that since God is with us, *we don't need to be afraid*. And unlike Ahaz, Joseph responds to the sign with the obedience of faith. He takes Mary as his wife and names the virgin's child Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.

The virgin birth of Jesus Immanuel Davidson is the sign of God's saving presence. This is God's *answer* to the cries of His people from Psalm 80. It quiets our fears by proving that He is with us (Isaiah 7). It gives us the *foundation* for the gospel we celebrate in Romans, and the *engine* that drives our faith-filled obedience. Why do we obey? Because we have faith that Jehovah saves. What is this faith founded on? The fact that what God promised by the prophets came true through the womb of the virgin Mary in the birth of Jesus Davidson, the sign of Immanuel.

The best way to remember the four-part harmony of these passages is by looking at the name. In the Bible, naming not only distinguishes one person from another; Bible names tell a story. Bible names are *sermons, confessions of faith*. When we put these passages together, we get the name **Jesus Immanuel Davidson**. So let's look at this name in reverse order, and hear the story that it tells, and what it means for us.

Davidson – God keeps His covenant promises to raise up a shepherd/king to rescue us. Don't piously refuse to take God at His Word like Ahaz! Maybe there is a Word from God that you are struggling to believe: God's promise to answer prayer; His call to turn the other cheek and forgive; His promise to forgive you, or even the miracle of the virgin birth itself. Unbelief will churn out a hundred pious-sounding excuses for not trusting and obeying, but at the end of the day, unbelief is just a cover for disobedience. You aren't helping God out by not stress-testing His promises! You are wearying Him! Don't be like Ahaz; follow Joseph. The virgin birth of David's son is a sign of God's *truthfulness* and it says: "*Stop doubting and believe.*"

Immanuel – God is with us. Who is with *them* doesn't matter. Immanuel means that you are not alone, and since God is with you, you will not be overcome. Where "Davidson" attacks our *unbelief*, "Immanuel" overthrows our *fear*. By believing God and accepting Immanuel, Joseph went from fear to faith. And in particular, his faith overcame the fear of *shame*. Mary's shame at being an unwed mother, and Joseph's shame at marrying a pregnant woman; these fears were swallowed up by this promise: God is with us.

As we saw in 1 Peter, following Jesus will bring all sorts of shame on you: the shame of not participating in sin, the shame of being judgmental and condemning sin, and the shame of believing crazy things like the virgin birth, that Jesus was "incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary", as the Nicene Creed puts it. But Christmas happened! Immanuel was born! Since this is true, it means that God is with you, so don't be afraid of Ephraim and Syria, or Goliath, or the shame of following Jesus. *Immanuel*.

Jesus – The name Jesus means “Jehovah saves”. “God is with us” is good news because God is with us to *save* us. The birth of a Son of David is good, but we don’t need another faithless *Ahaz* Davidson. We need a giant-killing *Jesus* Davidson, the Son who was born to save, and who *accomplished* that salvation for us by dying for our sins and rising from the dead on the third day. So what does this mean for you? It means “Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel has come to thee, O Israel!” Jesus Immanuel Davidson: God’s Shepherd-king is with you to save you.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Let us pray:

O Lord God, Shepherd of Israel,

In the psalms of David, in the words of the prophets, in the dream of Joseph,

your promise is spoken, eternal God, and takes flesh at last in the womb of the virgin.

May Emmanuel find welcome in our hearts, take flesh in our lives, and be for all peoples the welcome advent of redemption and grace.

We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose Day draws near;

your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**¹

¹ Adapted from *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2nd edition, D.1.4.17, pg. 436.