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The Immanuel Principle

Isaiah 9:1-7, But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

2 The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

3 You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

4 For the yoke of his burden,

and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

The book of Isaiah is beautifully divided into three sections. Isaiah 1-39 is a collection of sermons/prophecies that exhorted Isaiah's contemporaries. This section was written for Isaiah's generation.

Isaiah 40-55 is another set of sermons/prophecies intended not for Isaiah's generation, but for those living in Judah at the time of the exile (which would occur a good 100 years following Isaiah's death). Recall that the prevailing theme of this section is trusting God in the face of the bitterness of life. When following God results in persecution and difficulty, the believer must not allow their confidence in God to wane.

Isaiah 56-66 was intended for even a later generation, the people of God who would return to Jerusalem and begin the work of rebuilding. Hence it was written for the generation of God's people living in 538 B.C. and beyond. The focus of this section is as much on the orthopraxy of the people of God as it is their orthodoxy!

Isaiah 1-39 can be broken into four subsections:

1. Isaiah 1-5 contains a general introduction to the prophecy that sets the tone for the entire book.
2. Isaiah 6-12 revolves around two Messianic themes: "Immanuel" and "the Rod of Jesse." It is an incredible section as it begins with the darkness of the death of Uzziah and the sinful nation, yet it ends with the song of the saved community. Dr. Alec Motyer describes it this way:

...by the end of this section, darkness (6:1) has been replaced by singing (12:2, 5) and salvation (12:2-3), and the Lord in all his holiness (6:1-3) is dwelling in Zion in the midst of his people (12:6). Darkness and judgment, then, do not, after all, have the last word. Far from it, for the very promises that appeared to have been forfeited- the David-promises of 1:25-27 and the Zion-promises of 4:2-6- are

the very things that come to pass (9:1-7; 11:1-9; 12:1-6). The exhausting of grace (5:4) has been superseded by the triumph of grace. (Motyer, 1993, p. 76)

3. Isaiah 13-27 details the reign and rule of God/Messiah over the Kingdoms of the world. Herein Isaiah introduces us to the dual concept of “the city of man” and “the city of God” which Paul himself would later pick up on in Philippians. Paul says, “For our citizenship is in heaven...” (Philippians 3:20-21)
4. Isaiah 28-39: picks up where the previous section left off. In this section Isaiah addresses the trials of his day in which Judah struggled with Assyria to their east and Egypt to their south. Here we are introduced to an important Kingdom principle: The Eleventh-Hour Deliverance!

As we’ll see in Isaiah (which most of us already have seen in life), God typically does not bring about deliverance until all hope is lost, when the resources of man have been exhausted and there is nothing to do but wait on the Lord! Thus far we have examined the first section, Isaiah 1-5, and the beginning of the second section, Isaiah 6.

We are going to continue in an overview of Isaiah 7-12 which again revolves around two main themes/prophesies: “Immanuel” and “The Rod of Jesse.”

The “Immanuel Principle”

Isaiah 7:1-16 reveals to us “Immanuel” as a child whose birth signaled a TEMPORAL victory. Recall, in 1051 BC Saul became the first king of Israel, and the people of God became a theocratic nation. Now throughout the reign of Saul, David, and Solomon the kingdom of Israel remained unified. But with the death of Solomon, and the promised cruel treatment of the people by Rehoboam, in 931 BC the nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms: (1) Israel in the north ruled by Jeroboam and (2) Judah in the south ruled by Rehoboam.

Now all things went along relatively easy for Judah until 734 BC. In and around 734 BC, the countries north of Judah were feeling the threat of Assyria. As a result, they joined together to form a unified opposition to the Assyrian threat. However Judah (the southern kingdom), under king Ahaz, refused to join. Because of Judah’s refusal to join the coalition, Rezin and Pekah came against the nation to depose Ahaz and place a king on the throne of Judah who would join their anti-Assyrian league.

Isaiah 7:1-2, 6: “Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to *wage* war against it, but could not conquer it. When it was reported to the house of David, saying, ‘The Arameans have camped in Ephraim,’ his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind... [What was their plan? We see it in v. 6...] Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it.”

This would have been a serious threat in light of the defeat Judah just suffered at the hand of Rezin (cf. 2 Chronicles 28:5). If Judah alone couldn’t beat Rezin in battle, how could Ahaz withstand the combined armies of Rezin and Pekah? It is no wonder that Ahaz’s heart sank! It was at this time that Isaiah was commanded by God to meet Ahaz in a public place and to give him a message.

Isaiah 7:3, “Then the Lord said to Isaiah, ‘Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub [recall his name means, “A Remnant Shall Return”], at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller’s field.”

The “end of the conduit of the upper pool” was a reference to the city’s water supply. Clearly in anticipation of a siege, Ahaz was overseeing the work of securing the needed water to endure the rough days ahead. And what was the message that God gave to Isaiah?

Isaiah 7:4, “And say to him, ‘Take care, and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah.”

When a fire is about to go out all that is left are “the stubs of smoldering firebrands.” In the eyes of God, Ahaz’s enemies were nothing over which to be afraid! Now in Isaiah 7:5-6 we read of their plan to depose Ahaz and place a king on the throne of Judah who would support their coalition.

Isaiah 7:7, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass.’”

As we have seen, the Assyrians soon would attack and begin slicing up Palestine in sections. The first to fall would be the Syrians and soon after that, Israel/Ephraim (cf. vv. 8-9). So what ought Ahaz to do? Listen to the exhortation of God:

Isaiah 7:9b, “...If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.”

Ahaz and all of Judah must trust God!!! To do anything else at this time would prove fatal! This is a high calling, even for devout believers. Accordingly Isaiah, seeing the doubt of Ahaz, invites him to choose a sign to show the veracity of God’s message (this is a reflection of the grace of God by which the Lord has deigned to give us physical/tangible signs to strengthen our faith).

Isaiah 7:10-12, “Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ‘Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; make *it* deep as Sheol or high as heaven.’ But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!’”

Ahaz’s response most likely was inspired by Moses writing in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 6:16, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test...”

This is the height of hypocrisy! Ahaz has no intention of serving God much less following the Lord or submitting to His word. Yet that wouldn’t stop the king from twisting scripture to attain his own ends- which here it was to get Isaiah off his back! And yet though Ahaz sinfully refused to take God at His word, the Lord nevertheless gave him a sign.

Isaiah 7:13, “Then he said, ‘Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well?’”

Notice that God here does not address Ahaz, but the entire nation. Ahaz was a covenant head which meant that the crises facing Ahaz was a crisis facing the entire nation not just the king! Accordingly, God

intended this sign to be a promise on which ALL HIS PEOPLE could depend, not just Ahaz.

Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”

The idea behind the word “virgin” in this text is NOT the “virgin birth” as we know it in theology. In Hebrew, the word refers to a marriageable girl, a young woman who had yet to know a man. Accordingly, this obviously was in reference to a young woman who was known to Ahaz, Isaiah, and the nation. Who was this woman? The text continues:

Isaiah 7:15, “He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows *enough* to refuse evil and choose good.”

“Curds and honey” is the food of a king. From this we conclude that the child in reference here was of royal blood. With this, let’s piece together what we have. Evidently there was a famous wedding in Ahaz’s household which all of Judah followed. The result was that a child would be conceived. It is this child that was the focus of Isaiah’s message here. And what was the message?

Isaiah 7:16, “For before the boy will know *enough* to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.”

So here is the sign: Ahaz only needed to watch the progress of the child soon to be born. Before this child was weaned, Ahaz was assured of the downfall of the countries that opposed him. What was the name that God attached to this sign and by which the child would be known? Immanuel, which brings us to the significance of the sign.

The word “Immanuel” comes from the combination of two words: **עִמָּנוּ** (*immanu*) which means “with us”; and **אֱלֹהִים** (*el*) which is a term for “God.” Together they form the title, “Immanuel” or “God with us.”

Now to the ears of an Old Testament saint, this gave expression to the truth God gave to His covenant people throughout redemptive history; specifically that He was “with His people” (cf. Genesis 17:7; 28:15; Exodus 3:12; 19:5-6; 23:20, 24; Joshua 1:5; 2 Samuel 7:9; 1 Kings 8:57). This means that the Covenant Presence of God amongst His people was a principle of the greatest blessing. Listen to Genesis where God spoke to Jacob and gave us this assurance:

Genesis 28:15, “And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Clearly involved in this glorious promise is both a commitment on God’s part to be with Jacob (Positionally) and a resulting nourishing, which Moses picked up on in Exodus. This was Moses’ request following Israel’s sin and yet the Lord’s command to lead them from the wilderness to the Promised Land:

Exodus 33:15, “Then he said to [God], ‘If Thy presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here.’”

The “Presence of God” was a promised blessing of the covenant by which God’s people were assured that they would thrive and blossom as a people regardless of their surroundings. In light of this presence, Moses would rather stay in the wilderness with the assurance of the Lord’s blessing than dwell in the land of milk and honey bereft of this special benefit! Think of Korah who wrote this:

Psalm 84:4, 6, “How blessed are those who dwell in Thy house! They are ever praising Thee... [the Psalmist here is reflecting upon the Covenant Presence of God. And what would be the result?...] Passing through the valley of Baca [weeping], they make it a spring, the early rain also covers it with blessings.”-

God’s covenant presence is an oasis in a dry and hot desert. It brings health, life, strength, confidence, and encouragement in the face of despair! And thus David wrote this:

Psalm 23:4a, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil [Why?], for Thou art with me...”

We see this embodied in Peter, when he was in the presence of Christ? He was bold, strong, and courageous! But what happened when he was bereft of the Lord? He became a coward, fearing the scorn of the woman who asked him, “Aren’t you a follower of Jesus?”

The Covenant Presence of God, “the Immanuel Principle” was and is a most important promise given us in Christ. Notice, when the Christian rebels against God and so deigns to “go it alone,” the Lord doesn’t forsake the believer; yet He does remove His Covenant Presence. The Psalmist spoke of the rebellious people of God in the wilderness:

Psalm 106:15, “And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.”

Isaiah 59:1-2, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden *His* face from you, so that He does not hear.”

Truly, one of the many blessings of being a member of the family of God is that through salvation the Lord joins Himself to His people in an intimate way so as to bless them in and through all things! In view of this, do you understand the significance of the sign that God gave Ahaz in our text? To the one familiar with the Old Testament promises of God and who purposed to trust the Lord, it would have meant so much!

- Trial and difficulty is not a sign that God has forsaken you or abandoned you! Remember the words of Christ, “...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20)!
- Accordingly, that God gave His people the “sign of Immanuel” meant that they were not a forsaken people. If His people waited upon Him, no foe could stand against them!

This was the promise given to Ahaz! Remain faithful to God and His word, and you will thrive in a bleak and barren land! And yet you must see that there is far more to this promise than what appears on the surface. We know that the birth of Jesus ultimately fulfilled the prophecy that Isaiah gave here to Ahaz and Judah. After describing the details surrounding the birth of Christ, Matthew added:

Matthew 1:22-23, “Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which translated means, ‘God with us.’”

In Christ, the valley of weeping has become a spring! Now the question is: did Isaiah understand this? Are we reading too much into Isaiah 7? Or did God have Christ in mind when He gave this prophecy of Ahaz? Indeed he did!

Isaiah 9:1-7 pictures “Immanuel” as a Child whose birth signals eternal victory. Picking up on the theme of a “child of promise,” Isaiah continued:

Isaiah 9:6-7, “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this”

It is obvious from this that “the child” referenced in Isaiah 7:14 would be much more than a prince in the house of Ahaz. Rather, this child would be an eternal King who would reign over the house of David forever! This brings us once again to a very important tool used in Biblical prophecy known as Telescoping. A telescope has two lenses which by themselves are rather useless, but when used together they enable us to see things we could never see on our own. By looking through the near lens at the image on the far lens, we gain a clear perspective on things far away.

In the past we’ve applied this to life. When we look through the trials and difficulties of our current life and gaze upon eternity, we see God’s plan with clarity! Yet we also are called to apply this to many of the temporal prophecies God gives in Scripture. When we do that in Isaiah 7, we note that the child born in Isaiah’s day (signaling the restoration of God’s covenant presence- Immanuel) was but a type of child who would be born much later. It is this child who is described in Isaiah 9. Notice that He would be:

- Wonderful counselor: which evokes the idea of the wisdom of Solomon on steroids! This person’s counsel would leave the recipient in awe (that’s the nuance of “wonderful”); he’d give awe-inspiring counsel.
- Mighty God: this child would be Divine and so manifest the Divine marks of omnipotent sovereignty, might, and power.
- Eternal father: this is NOT in reference to the first Person of the Godhead, BUT to Christ’s role as a covenant head of His people. The “father” or “head” of a clan was the patriarch who bore responsibility for the welfare of the tribe. Accordingly, “the child’s” role as Covenant Head would be eternal!
- Prince of peace: this child wouldn’t just usher God’s people into an era of peace. Rather, He would mediate a peace between God and man which would never cease.
- Furthermore, He would sit on the throne of David, ruling over this world forever (v. 7)!

There is no question; the text before us was intended by Isaiah to be a description of the true identity of “the child” referenced in Isaiah 7. From the description, who only could be this child? Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now with this, notice three important elements to Isaiah's announcement here- elements which comprise "The Immanuel Principle" which we simply are being introduced to here. Following the announcement of the bitter providence that awaits God's people who will not believe, Isaiah described the inclination of the sinner.

Isaiah 8:19, "And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? *Should they consult* the dead on behalf of the living?"

We are so foolish, aren't we? In the midst of pain and suffering, rather than fleeing to God, we flee to every other resource! In response, Isaiah exhorted the people of God...

Isaiah 8:20, "To the law and to the testimony! [truly, our only refuge in time of trial is the word of God and so the God of the word!] If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn."

Those who do not turn to God in the hour of trial are spiritually appraised! Yet such was the generation in which Isaiah lived.

Isaiah 8:21-22, "And they will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward. Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and *they will be* driven away into darkness"

Such is the sad state into which God's people would enter in their rebellion. And yet as dark and bleak as this may be, you must see: this is the backdrop for Isaiah's introduction of Immanuel to the people of God, both in Isaiah 7 and here in Isaiah 9. We'll return to this next time, but for now notice the context/backdrop out of which the Immanuel Principle comes to pass: it is the failure and spiritual bankruptcy of man! With that we come to the people for whom the Child would come.

Isaiah 9:1, "But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles"

The focus of this prophecy is two of the most insignificant lands in Israel, Zebulun and Naphtali. The reason being is that through both of these territories ran the trade/commerce of the ancient world. Accordingly, it was "tainted" by Gentile people and their money! As such, both in Isaiah's day and in the time of the New Testament it disdainfully was called, "Galilee of the Gentiles." No respectable Jew boasted that he came from these regions. Yet according to this passage, the child — "Immanuel" — would bless this land with His presence. He specifically would come to this place and bring the covenant presence of the Lord and that is exactly what Christ did:

Matthew 4:12-17, "Now when He heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles- 'The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those who were sitting in

the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” - where did Christ begin His public ministry? At the cross-roads of life where God intersects a sinful world! Do you understand? The “Immanuel Principle” is given NOT to upright, clean individuals who through their living have merited God’s blessing. Rather, it rests upon any and all in darkness who brought to the end of themselves renounce self and cling to God! When this occurs, notice threefold result.

Covenantal Blessing

Isaiah 9:2, “the people who walk in darkness [“darkness” as used here refers to when God hides His face from His people. And so to those people whose manner of life knows not the blessing of the Lord...] will see a great light; those who live in a dark land [lit. “in the shadow of death”], the light will shine on them.”

Based on the contrast presented here, the “light” references the restored blessings of God in all their fullness. “Light” truly is the source of the blessing that comes when we are refreshed by Christ!

Increase

Isaiah 9:3, “Thou shalt multiply the nation, Thou shalt increase their gladness; they will be glad in Thy presence as with the gladness of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.”

Notice the two realms in which the child of God is said to be blessed: harvest (which is creation) and spoil (which involves history and so life). In other words, there wouldn’t be a realm in which those in Christ would not know “gladness.” The fullness of joy, covenant blessing, refreshment and grace would be reaped in all places and at all time!

Deliverance

Isaiah 9:4-5, “for Thou shalt break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.”

The words of the Exodus are invoked: yoke, staff, rod. In other words, Isaiah calls upon his countrymen to think upon that time when God’s people were at their worse. With that in mind, notice the deliverance: the yoke, staff, and rod would be broken. As at the battle of Midian, think of this battle... Gideon’s large and able army was whittled down to such an insignificant size that deliverance could only come from the Lord... and so is every “deliverance” brought about in Immanuel!

With this, let me summarize what we’ve seen as it relates to the Immanuel Principle. Through the use of Dual Fulfillment/Telescoping, Isaiah speaks of a child named, “Immanuel,” whose birth would mark the destruction of any and all foes and so the deliverance of God’s people. The stage on which both the destruction of our enemies and our deliverance is secured is one of darkness and hardship. You cannot grow in your understanding of Immanuel outside of this hardship.

God does not delight in bruising us. But rather out of the hardship He brings that which He has intended for us from the beginning: covenant blessing, gladness, fullness of joy, and ultimate deliverance. This is God's program of growth for ALL His children! This is where Immanuel is found and the blessings He promises! Do you understand this? You want to know blessing in life? Look not for fair weather, but harsh seas! You want to know blessing in relationships? Look not for ease of days, but conflict through which only Christ could bring you. You want to know blessing in your marriage... work... endeavors... ? Again, look not for calm seas, but ones fraught with large swales out of which Christ only can deliver!

We need to hear this, for so often we can be found fighting against God thinking that

- Setbacks.
- Failure.
- Conflict.
- Defeat.

...is the ultimate blow against God's plan and so covenant blessing. What happens when you prevent forest fires from ever cleansing a mountain? What happens when you help a butterfly out of its cocoon? What happens when you keep an orange tree from freezing in the winter?

It is through all these things we hinder that which is necessary in order to enjoy the riches of God's creation! And so it is in life when we are so frightened of bad weather we refuse to sail on the seas of life!

Listen, the people of Isaiah's generation were up against incredible odds against which they would not prevail. As a whole the nation would falter and so abandon God. Yet God would not and did not abandon them. AND HE HAS NOT AND WILL NOT ABANDON YOU! That is what the Immanuel Principle is all about!

Bibliography

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on July 22, 2012. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.