

Another signpost - **Isaiah 7: 10 - 14 and 9:1-7 - The Immanuel and the Wonder.**
Tregear 6.12.20

In 1937 Nikola Tesla, **one of history's greatest thinkers, predicted that he was "convinced that within a century, coffee, tea, and tobacco will be no longer in vogue. Alcohol, however, will still be used. It will simply be no longer fashionable to poison the system with harmful ingredients."** He may have been on to something with the tobacco, but coffee and tea? Nice try, Nikola

Another guy, a science editor for the New York Times, wrote in a reputable science magazine that **sawdust and wood pulp would be converted into sugary foods. Sugary foods I like but sawdust – not too sure about that. Many predictions by people. Not many come true, but some do. We're thinking about predictions, prophecies in these 3 weeks as we lead into Christmas.**

Last week Di shared a prophecy, a signpost, from 2 Samuel 7 to the coming of Jesus, Jesus the king The king who was the shepherd king; a surprising king; a glorious king. A king we can trust.

Today we continue the series leading up to Christmas looking at more prophecies that accurately predicted Jesus' coming at Christmas.

Isaiah is a book written over many years, about 40 years, by Isaiah. During this time he saw the northern Kingdom of Israel overrun by the Assyrians and they almost took Judah, the southern kingdom as well. In the first half of the book there is a lot of prophecy related to judgement. Different nations that will fall. But as we will see today there are glimmers of hope. We need to understand what is happening for Israel in the book of Isaiah. From the time of Moses, Israel was known as God's chosen people, God's representatives – they're being watched by all the nations around them. God calls them his children and sets them in a place of honour; but how do they respond? They are rebellious; they not only ignore God but run after other gods made of wood and stone. The crazy thing is that they know what God has promised them. Back in

Moses' time God said I will watch over you if you are obedient, but if you rebel and go against me there will be judgement. In Isaiah we see the Israelites continuing to turn their back on God. They scorn their true identity as God's people. A key focus in the whole book is whether the people are going to trust God. The whole way that they live will flow from that core decision.

Our reading in chapter 7 sees a situation where Judah, the southern Kingdom, is under threat from the kings of Israel and Syria. God sends Isaiah to tell King Ahaz of Judah to stop worrying. God says that the invasion will never happen and to remain firm in their trust in God. And this is where our reading kicks in. in v.10&11 God sends a message to King Ahaz, "Ask me for a sign to confirm what I told you. Anything at all. Make it as difficult as you like, as impossible as you like." So God is saying I want to show you that I mean what I say. But you need to trust me and the way you will do this is to receive a sign from me.

But Ahaz says, "No, I will not test God like that." What he's really saying is, "I don't want to trust God." God says, "Ok, even though you don't ask for a sign I'm giving you one" And so we have these words in v.14 – "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

So the faithful ones at the time wondered and puzzled over what God was saying here. Ahaz' son, King Hezekiah was a faithful king who trusted God. Maybe he was the sign; maybe his mother was the young woman (another way the Hebrew word virgin could be translated); but no his kingship did not last forever; maybe it could be the Jews who returned after exile; for years the Jewish people pondered over this prediction – "Immanuel" means "God with us". It had seemed like God had abandoned his people. Where was God? "God with us" – what could that possibly mean?

700 years later, Matthew understood the final layer of God's prediction – in 1:23 – he quotes Isaiah 7:14. God is saying this is the biggest event in all history – all the Old Testament points to it. God coming to earth. Why? Because he failed with Israel? because he couldn't think of another plan? No, it had been part of his plan all the way

along. Matthew records 46 other prophecies fulfilled by Jesus – prophecies that were made hundreds of years before. In case you didn't get it world, this really is the Immanuel – God is present and living amongst you. As Di shared last week Jesus did things that no one else did; spoke things that no one else spoke; and died a death that was totally undeserved. What was it like to have Immanuel with us; to have God with us? We saw someone who loved like no one else; even when beaten and tortured for doing no wrong – he loved us passionately; forgave absolutely; no one was too far gone for him to rescue and deliver – remember the demon possessed man that Rob spoke about a few weeks ago?

If you were God would you want to come down to earth, lower yourself, have yourself beaten up and killed in a cruel death? This is the mystery of the Immanuel – God with us, displaying a love that we could only dream about; displaying a passion for his created beings that just doesn't make sense, unless, unless, he really does love us with a unique love.

And then our second prophecy in chapter 9. Among the many warnings that Isaiah gave to the people of Israel there was another prophecy that pointed to the Immanuel. Again it points to a child being born; God would give a son, a son who would rule with righteousness; he would rule justly. No political campaigns or election rigging or saying words that you wondered if you could believe. No, this was a king, a leader, that you could completely trust.

The description of this ruler is crazy. In v.6 he would be called; Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Who is this guy? It cannot be a human. When Jesus came, again, the Jewish believers saw that these descriptions fitted Jesus, especially after his resurrection. There is so much to try and understand in these 4 phrases. I'm just going to take one phrase – “Wonderful Counsellor”.

So counsellor is someone who gives advice – wise advice. Jesus is the supreme counsellor, the source of all wisdom. And God's wisdom is so different from the world.

You know we think of Christmas as a time of peace; a little baby; family get-togethers; it's all goodwill. But Jesus comes into the world and he comes as the Counsellor. The world's wisdom has failed. The reason for Christmas is because the world's wisdom has failed. God sent his Son to be THE Counsellor, the wise one, to lead us in the way of wisdom.

Why did God need to come to earth? An illustration might help. Imagine our 2 storey home. I'm upstairs working away. George is out. I'm looking after the kids. The kids are downstairs. I hear a bit of squabbling. I ignore it at first. But it's getting louder. Dad calls out, "Hey kids, play nicely". Noise dies down. A few minutes later noise intensifies. Dad says, "I don't want to have to come down." A momentary break, but very quickly it's more intense. Dad need to go downstairs; become flesh, not just a voice. Dad incarnate in order to fix the situation. We have plenty of advice here on earth. God sent prophets, his messengers, but they were rejected, not listened to; the world relied on its own wisdom. But we're so in darkness, the wisdom of this world is so inadequate. God needed to come down. The true Counsellor needed to come. And the world would have said, "Okay, if you're coming down to rule you'll need to come down with power, show them who's boss. Get the leaders on side. Work out where the power blocs are. You would never suggest to be born in a manger amongst the straw and the animal urine; not to be a part of any of the power groups in your society; then to die on a cross, humiliated.

Christmas has made foolish the wisdom of this world

So just before Jesus was born, Luke's gospel tells us that when the angel Gabriel said to Mary, "You're gonna get pregnant, even though you've not had sex with anyone" – did she say, "Ah, the true meaning of Christmas. How wise God is. God works through little people like me, that's just wonderful."

She said, "What! How can this be? That's impossible!" Christmas shattered her understanding of what was possible. Worldly wisdom says this is impossible; but

Christmas says this is God coming; so Gabriel actually says to her, “With God nothing is impossible”

God becoming human – the world says that’s impossible. A life like Jesus’ life could not possibly produce a movement of people like we have today. Just 12 disciples, and a motley group at that, none of them powerful or influential – and today over 2 billion people say they follow Jesus.

Worldly wisdom says glitz and power is what’s really important; everything has a natural cause; we’re in control; we can deal with our problems on our own – but Christmas has made foolish that.

You know there are 2 things that have struck me this year as I’ve talked to people. These are 2 things that we desperately need to be in order to be able to handle life and worldly wisdom can’t give it to you.

- 1.To be able to face death with assurance and confidence and even joy
- 2.You have to be able to forgive your enemies even if they have done the most unforgiveable things like raping and murdering your family

The Counsellor though shows us how to face death; he shows us how to forgive – the wise one showed us this in his life

The word that goes with Counsellor in Isaiah 9:6 is “Wonderful”. The Hebrew word for “wonderful” means “a miracle, a marvel, a wonder” which indicates “something extraordinary, incomprehensible, inexplicable.” These words roll off the tongue but how can we understand this word. Wonder is the key element here and wonder leads to praise, an involuntary praise – you cannot help but praise as you gaze in wonder at something or someone.

CS Lewis has some really helpful thoughts here. He says praise is a sign that there’s something right in your heart; but even more than that praise is the means to get even

more health in the heart. When you really love a work of art, a place, a person, you are filled with wonder at this beautiful place, or work of art, or beautiful piece of music, you just want to grab someone and say look at this!!!! You're praising it to them; the wonder that you felt, you can't enjoy it fully unless you praise it. We praise because the praise completes the enjoyment. So it doesn't seem so strange that angels and us will be delighting in constantly praising God – hardly tolerable bliss will be flowing out from us. **When God commands us to glorify him he is inviting us to enjoy him.**

Listen to this. I found this mind blowing. The Father, Son and HS have been constantly praising each other. They see so much in each other that gives them wonder; so they praise each other, they enjoy each other. So they didn't make us so that they could get some more praise – they already had it. So why does God command us to praise him – **because he wants us to have the joy that he has**; and until we fix our hearts on the ultimate object of beauty.... God is the ultimate beauty, the ultimate work of art, God is the ultimate landscape. Music, landscapes, stories – these are just offshoots of God – the core, the focus the ultimate beauty is God. It's not just a matter of saying I believe this, we have to wonder; we have to praise him, voluntarily in a discipline until the praise becomes involuntary. That's the main thing we need this morning – it's the sense of wonder; it's the experience of his beauty, of being overwhelmed with it. So today as we look back 2,700 years at two prophecies that pointed to the child born of the virgin, as we look with wonder at the Wonderful Counsellor how do we respond? How can we learn to be filled with wonder so that we praise, and so as we praise our joy is made complete.

Part of it is like what Di said last week, let us be full of thanks to God – as we are thankful for all that we see in this world, all that God does in our life, so we can be filled with wonder and praise. George and I love looking at sunsets. When one of us sees a lovely sunset we'll say, "Hey come look at this." We'll sometimes go outside to get a better view. I've even been known to stand in the middle of the road to get the best view. As we look with wonder we say, "Good one, Lord. Love those purple colours." So our wonder, gives way to thankfulness and praise and as we praise our joy is made complete

Sunset

As I am thankful that I can face death with assurance and confidence and joy – I know where I am going, I am going home.

As I ask God for the strength to forgive and as he says, 'Learn from me, watch what I do' – see how I forgive on the cross, and as Holy Spirit gives me the strength to forgive I am filled with wonder at the strength he gives me, and so I am filled with praise, and as I praise I am filled with joy.

This Christmas we're reminded again to be people filled with wonder. As we gaze at the baby in the manger we see the Immanuel and the wonder, the Immanuel and the Wonder, Jesus Christ.