



## DID GOD REALLY SAY...A VIRGIN WOULD HAVE A BABY?

~ ISAIAH 7:10-17 ~

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*<sup>10</sup> Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, <sup>11</sup> "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." <sup>12</sup> But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." <sup>13</sup> Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. <sup>15</sup> He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, <sup>16</sup> for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. <sup>17</sup> The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria."*



Grace, mercy and peace are yours, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

"Mommy, Daddy...wake up...eat too." This is an all too common phrase in the Rieke household early in the morning. Our little girl Grace has only recently realized the ability to get out of bed and come to mommy and daddy's bedroom and ask us this. How can you resist a little girl asking a cute question like that, even if you haven't gotten enough sleep the night before? And she asks it with no concern, nor worry, just a simple request. I'm sure as Grace gets older the questions will change, but the requests will still keep coming. I pray that I am ready for when that happens.

I wonder how often we view our prayers to God in a similar light as that request from Grace? To be able to come to God and ask him for anything is an amazing ability we have as Christians, even though we don't take advantage of it near enough as we could. We pray for our family, we pray for health, we pray that our country remain strong, we pray for the growth of Grace-Vail, but even all of these prayers are only scratching the surface. All of these prayers are not even opening up the store house of blessings God has prepared for us. To be fair, as small minded, sinful creatures, we can't even begin to imagine all these blessings.

Take for example Ahaz, a king of the nation of Judah. He was given an opportunity that few have ever been given. A direct instruction from God to ask for anything – **"in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."** And he doesn't even take God up on the offer, he refuses. So instead, God gives him a sign. A sign that is the focus of our "Did God Really Say?" sermon series this morning. **"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son."** And we ask the question that many Bible skeptics have: DID GOD REALLY SAY A VIRGIN WOULD HAVE A BABY? This question plants the seed of doubt in our minds. It:

1. Exposes our selfishness but
2. Reveals God's power and grace

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah lived during a time when God's people Israel were split into two nations – one retained the name Israel, while the other, took up the name Judah. It was a time that was, materially and economically speaking, a very good time for these two nations. But you couldn't tell that from Isaiah's book of prophecy. Because even though Judah and Israel enjoyed great material success, their spirituality was sorely lacking. They had adopted the religions of the native people around them. They set up altars on every hill and mountain. But after trusting in his own strength, King Ahaz of Judah found himself in a tight spot. Despite being the same ethnicity, Judah and Israel did not always get along, this was one of those times.

The king of Israel was teaming up with the nation of Aram, a neighboring nation, against Judah. Even with Ahaz's political strength, he could not take on two nations. So he sought the help of the world power to the north and east – Assyria. This is where we pick it up with Isaiah speaking to the king. Isaiah is trying to convince Ahaz to put his trust in the Lord God, the God of the Jews, and not trust in his own power or strength. Isaiah tells Ahaz to ask God for anything to prove that God is on his side, **“Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”**

This proved to be too much for Ahaz, he didn't want to trust in God's strength, he had gotten by without God so far, he was going to do this on his own. He still feigned godly piety by saying, **“I will not put the Lord to the test.”** Isaiah called him out on this right away saying, **“Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?”** Isaiah called Ahaz out on his selfishness and on his godlessness. Ahaz refused to let God help him, and you know what God said? Fine! Be that way, I won't help you, but I will give you a sign, **“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”**

This sign from God, like us questioning whether God really said this, exposes our own selfishness. For Ahaz, he wanted to continue in his own selfish ways, he like many kings then and now were power hungry, and did not want to give up power to anyone or any god. Some kings even put themselves on the same level as gods. There is nothing more selfish than that. All of Ahaz's decisions he made were selfish for his own self interests. God was going to do something for Ahaz that would prove his interests in helping the nation of Judah, but now he politely was going to step out of the picture which Ahaz didn't want him in. He would eventually destroy the nation of Judah along with Israel, but did not leave them without hope, which is what this promise is.

It could be very easy for us to think that the only people who can be selfish are the ones with so much. It's easy for kings, politicians, and athletes to be selfish because they have so much. And while I'm sure there are plenty who are selfish, there are plenty who are quite giving as well. But selfishness does not breed only in rich people. Selfishness breeds in all people, of all backgrounds, because all people are sinful. This is where the idea of evolution comes from – “survival of the fittest.” Philosophies across the world hold to this model – you do whatever is in your best interest. The basic role of government is to control the self-interests of millions of people, making sure they do not get in the way of the self-interests of others.

But how does the question, “DID GOD REALLY SAY A VIRGIN WOULD HAVE A BABY?” expose our own selfishness? Quite frankly, we are selfish when we impose our interpretation on what God has spoken. Most of the discussion in this whole question focuses in on one key word, the word that many

English translations give as “virgin.” “Virgin” in our language means a person who has not slept with another person. Critics will say, and rightly so, the original Hebrew word does not mean “virgin,” but rather just “young woman.” (this is reflected in the recent NIV note on this passage). So that’s it, case settled, our translation is wrong and it’s led to a gross misunderstanding of Christian doctrine. Not quite!

Simply put, even though the Hebrew word does not specifically mean “virgin,” the word is quite clear in its understanding that this woman talked about is an unmarried woman (which in Hebrew culture would have been a virgin). The gospel of Matthew confirms this in the New Testament, when Matthew as he is quoting this passage from Isaiah in the Greek uses a word that can only mean “virgin.” To think that God said otherwise, is not letting Scripture speak for itself. It is imposing our selfish judgments upon God’s Word.

God stating that a virgin will have a baby exposes our own selfishness in other areas as well. Ironically, our own selfishness oftentimes ends up hurting ourselves in the long term. If we are selfish with money – we may neglect the other blessings in our lives such as family and health. If we are selfish and never think about others’ best interests or the community’s best interest, we can forfeit other blessings that could be ours. Maybe we even disguise our selfishness in piety – like Ahaz did – and say something like “God would never want me to do this,” or “he trusts me to do this.”

Selfishness so often is self-defeating. The purpose of selfishness is to do something that will benefit you, it will be in your best interest. But so often our selfishness leads to anything but that. And so it’s no wonder that not only does the Bible point you to be selfless, but it points you to the one who was selfless for your self-interest.

## (2)

This one is none other than THE VIRGIN’S BABY. God showed the ultimate selflessness by sending his Son. In sending his Son he revealed his power and grace. He revealed his power through the miracle of a virgin birth – so that his Son might take on human flesh and yet at the same time remain fully God. This is brought out in the name of the child – Immanuel, God with us.

We see God’s power in judgment upon Ahaz and his rejection of the one true God. God would turn his back on Ahaz, just like Ahaz had turned his back on God. This power would be shown when Ahaz’s ally, the Assyrians, whom he trusted in more than God, would turn against him. And yet God’s power and grace are revealed in the sign of the promised virgin’s son. God’s power to preserve the line of David, through which the Messiah was to come, and his grace to preserve it even though he had no human reason to.

God’s power is still evident to us today from the miracles he performed in the Bible. We can see God’s power in the way he organizes our lives “just so” in order to bless us (And remember, blessings may not always be pleasant). But the greatest way God shows his power is how he chooses his own. Through something as simple as baptism – God gives the saving miracle of faith to a little infant who cannot tell his right hand from his left. He continues to pour out that power through his Word to nourish the faith which he created. And all this power is evidence of his grace.

There is nothing in us that would make God look at us and say, "I want him, I want her." There's nothing we could do, nor can do to improve our standing before God. Even our dedicated Christian lives of service don't do that. It is purely by God's grace – undeserved love, that he saves us, he uses his power to create faith in us. We are only the objects of God's power and grace.

If we are really looking to selfishly pursue our own best interests, we follow Christ the selfless one who gives us our greatest self-interest of heaven. No other path can offer this, no temptation Satan throws in our way holds a candle to the offer that God gives. And it's only offered through the virgin's Son. So you see, if there was no virgin's son, there could be no Savior – at least a Savior for heaven. But GOD REALLY DID SAY THE VIRGIN WILL HAVE A SON. He answered the request all of us should have been asking, "How do I get to heaven?" Through the virgin's son.

We have the incredible comfort as believers to be able to approach God our Father in heaven and ask for anything that we want. When we don't know what to pray for we know, **"the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."** We have a God who has given us the greatest blessing of faith, will he not also give us the smaller things? This is our knowledge in prayer, so that when we pray to God we no longer ask for that which is selfish, but that which is selfless. All because GOD REALLY DID SAY THE VIRGIN WILL HAVE A BABY. Amen.