



Do You Want to Go to Heaven?

Sermon for the First Day of Christmas

Sermon Text: Isaiah 7:10-14

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: 11 "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." 13 And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

On a cloudless night and far away from any kind of civilization, we can stand in awe of the sky. How big the sky is and how trivial the problems that we have here on earth are. Elon Musk, the founder of the company Tesla and Space X, doesn't just dream about the heavens. He also makes real plans to relocate to space and to live there. The only problem is that we who are here on earth and have problems can't escape them in a shuttle to space. It's natural that all the problems we have here are carried with us and brought into space too because sin is tightly anchored to our human nature, as is hate and unkindness. We can neither find nor make a heaven. As long as we carry this sin within us, we will carry hell with us no matter where we go. Do you want to go to heaven? Let's dream about heaven today and ask God: "God, is there a place where we can find peace? God, is there a place where heaven is?" And "Give us a sign from heaven!"

The Israelite King Ahaz had many problems here on earth. He had even made a plan to free his people and himself from an evil fate. But he got so lost in these problems that he had absolutely no more time to dream about heaven. Neither God nor God's Commandments were to be found in any of Ahaz's plans. Ahaz had gotten lost. He was also in a political dilemma. In northern Israel, a strong military group threatened him. And that's why he connected himself to the pagan Assyrians so he could defend himself from this strong military group in the north. But this protection from the Assyrians had a high price. The Assyrians were a package deal - political support didn't come with complete surrender. The Assyrians demanded that Ahaz establish their idols in Jerusalem - not just political support but the whole package, including their false gods. And so, Ahaz set out to convert his people to the false gods of the Assyrians. And that wasn't at all difficult. The Assyrian religion was attractive to the Israelites. Instead of a nameless and invisible God, they could choose gods who could be placed directly in their houses. And instead of the 10 Commandments, you could do whatever you wanted. Ahaz took all the items out of the Holy Temple of Jerusalem and consecrated the Temple to the Assyrian false gods. The Israelites even began to offer human sacrifices. And it was in this situation that God sent the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah brought along his son who was called Shear-jashub. Shear-jashub means "a remnant shall return!" These words summarize what Isaiah had said – return to the true God. Don't do things halfway with God. You can't serve pagan gods and the Living God at the same time. And then God sent Ahaz another special message. Ahaz should demand a sign from God so that it is clear to everyone who the true God is and who is not. It should be a sign from heaven or from anywhere else, but it should be a sign from God that would create clarity. When that happened, there would be absolutely no doubt where truth is and what

is a lie. Everything would be crystal clear. Oh, how we would like such a sign. We all want to know where we stand with God. Does God like me? Am I on the right path? Does God want to tell me something important about the future? Oh, how we would like such a sign from heaven! Not Ahaz. He declines. When I first read that, I thought: How silly is that? How can someone decline such an offer? Upon reading it again, it became clear to me why Ahaz had to decline. He already knew that God existed. He already knew that it would be simple for God to give an undeniable sign. But he also knew that he would then have to change his life and all the lives of the people of Israel. Repentance would have to come - a path away from idols and back to the one true God. And that was the problem. He didn't want that. He didn't want to change his own life or the fate of all the people of Israel. He didn't want to repent! He preferred wickedness. He preferred the lie. Even when this lie would lead directly to disaster. And how terribly pious he then said - "Thank you for the message, Isaiah. But no thank you, I don't want to test the Living God!"

We must pause and ask ourselves: Aren't there also important turning points in our lives where God speaks with us, where everything is crystal clear, but we just don't want it? The problem is not that heaven is far away from us. The problem is that we are far away from heaven. The problem is that we don't want heaven. We don't want God. We don't want to see Him because then we must change ourselves.

Yet Ahaz would receive a sign. We will also receive a sign. The sign surprises Ahaz, just as it may surprise Elon Musk. Just as it surprises us all that we must look amazed and longingly toward heaven.

Do you want to go to heaven? Yes, you should also want to end up there. And I should tell you something: Heaven is not up there where you look with intense gaze. Heaven is much closer. Heaven is here, with us. The sign that Isaiah gives Ahaz is this: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" - that means "God with us." That means that heaven is here with us. The baby in the manger came from heaven to earth and God wants us to come from earth to heaven from now on. The path of this baby in the manger was a difficult path that had to end at the cross on Golgotha. God doesn't want our lives to end miserably, God doesn't want us to die in our sins. That's why He took this path to the manger and to the cross. Manger and cross - these things belong together and both tell us that the way to heaven is open. Do you want to go to heaven? The door is open, the journey begins today. Amen.