

Text: Isaiah 7:1-25

Title: "The peaceful soul made still"

Time: 6/8/2025 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We sang this morning that great hymn, "Be Still My Soul." It was written by Katherina von Schlegel, a Lutheran sister in Christ, whose life in 18th century Germany was contemporary with the Pietist revivals of that land. Her poem was set to the music of Jean Sibelius's Finlandia, after which the hymn was sung widely by Christ's churches, bringing comfort to many especially during the Second World War.

On Friday, we remembered the 81st anniversary of D-Day. One WW2 veteran, Virgil J. Bachman, wrote the following about his experience with von Schlegel's hymn as a soldier in France:

"I had probably sung 'Be Still, My Soul' many times before, but it was not until I sang it in a small stucco church in a tiny village in France during World War II that [it] became part of my life.

"The war in Europe was going badly. The news from the front was disheartening. We had suffered reverses. We were edgy, confused, and discouraged. It was at this crucial time that some Chaplain arranged a service in this quaint church somewhere in France. It seemed the roof of that little village church actually opened up as we weary, dirty GIs blended our voices under the leadership of that Chaplain and the church's old pump organ.

"Halfway through the service it happened. Softly the organ began and we sang, 'Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side.' How badly it was needed. It was as though the Lord was speaking to me in a very personal way. 'Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain' - the cross of war with its hardships, misery, separation and pain.

“As we began the second stanza, ‘Be still my soul, Thy God doth undertake to guide the future as he hath the past,’ God seemed to whisper; ‘Don’t give up. I’m still in command, yes, even here. I’ll guide the future as I have the past.’

“The thoughts of dead and missing friends came as through a choked-up throat I sang, ‘Be still my soul, though dearest friends depart.’ Soothing, personal assurance [came] at that moment and in that spot. With renewed spirit I was able to sing the final stanza, ‘Be still my soul, when change and tears are past, all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.’

“Peace! Either here or in eternity. As we left that little church, the peace I felt among the horrors of war was nothing but a gift of the Holy Spirit. God did spare me and allow me to return to my loved ones and His service and still preserves me.”

In our passage this morning, the Lord offers Ahaz, the king of Judah, peace among the horrors of war (v. 4). Sadly, in unbelief and with grave consequence (see 2 Chronicles 28), Ahaz rejects the Lord’s offer to have this peace. I want us to see four things that our passage says about the peace of the soul made still.

I. The fear of man is the enemy of a peaceful soul (vv. 1-6).

Illustration: Too much wind can certainly cause a disturbance. Not long ago, I was on an American Airlines flight on a very windy day, which was trying to land at Manchester airport. After descending to just feet above the runway with the plane still tossing back and forth, the pilot aborted the landing and took off into the sky again. We circled around and had less trouble with less wind on the second attempt.

Application: Isaiah arrives because the hearts of Ahaz and the people of Judah were trembling like trees shaken in the wind (v. 2). We are watching our neighbor’s house, and when there is a storm they ask us to check whether a tree has fallen on the house because that happened to them before. There are four

nations mentioned in our passage. In addition to trembling Judah, the passage mentions Assyria, ruled by Tiglath-Pileser, Aram or Syria, ruled by Rezin from Damascus, and Israel (the ten northern tribes that had separated from Judah) ruled by Pekah from Samaria.

Of these four nations, only one is trembling like trees shaken by the wind – the once godly kingdom of Judah, the house of David (v. 2). Trouble with both Syria and Israel had happened during the reign of Ahaz's father Jotham (2 Kings 15:37), but now they had leagued together against Ahaz's Judah (v. 2). The cause of this recent trembling was likely a siege that the alliance of Syria with Israel had produced against Judah (v. 1; 2 Kings 16:5).

Unlike the WW2 soldier, the truth of the song, "Be Still My Soul," meant nothing to Ahaz. This was likely the first year of Ahaz's reign, and he knew that trouble was on the horizon. In spite of the fact that he was the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, and so ultimately the son of David who had defeated the great Goliath, he trembled before a king Isaiah deliberately calls "a son of Remaliah." In terms of the Davidic covenant, Remaliah was nobody. The Lord tells Ahaz that his fear makes no sense. He was treating two smoldering firebrands as though they were a blazing forest fire (v. 4).

Illustration: When you go to a fast food place, if you really want your health to deteriorate quickly, you can supersize your meal. I always have to resist the temptation to do that with the Chick-fil-a waffle fries.

Fear of our enemy always supersedes our enemy in an irrational way. Ahaz's sad plight teaches us that the fear of man is the enemy of the peace of a soul made still. Luther refused to fear the greatest enemy we face, though he often came face to face with his forces, both human and demonic: "The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him." The Lord's

message to the fearful king challenges us to see all of our enemies as the Lord does. They are stronger than we, but no match for Him. As Katherina's song counsels, "Be still, my soul; the Lord is on thy side."

II. God's promise is the hope of a peaceful soul (vv. 7-9a).

Illustration: Some of us have been around long enough to remember President Obama's "red line" threat against Syria. He said that if the Asaad regime used chemical weapons, it would face the attack of the United States. Not soon after, Asaad killed 1500 people in a chemical-weapons attack, and no response came from the Obama administration.

Application: In our passage, the Lord lays down a "red line" for Syria and their ally Israel's northern kingdom. Their plans for the destruction of Judah simply shall not happen. The reasons they will not happen are two simple truths: (1) God is sovereign (v. 7); and (2) man is not sovereign (vv. 8-9a). Later the Lord whistles for Assyria and Egypt like they were His dogs (v. 18).

The promises of God draw a line of defense around His chosen people, beyond which no enemy can reach. Satan had to ask the Lord how far he could go with Job. He could go no further than the Lord would allow. Rezin's predecessors in Syria had crashed into this truth years prior as they tried to attack Elisha and his assistant.

"And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray

thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha" (2 Kings 6:15-18).

The Lord will never allow any leeway to the enemy that makes our victory of faith impossible (1 Cor. 10:13): "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Promises like these bring us the hope of a peaceful soul made still: "Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know His voice Who ruled them while He dwelt below." Jesus rules every threat we face. When He says we are going to the other side of the sea, no storm can prevent that from happening.

III. Only faith can produce a peaceful soul (vv. 9b-16).

Illustration: Charles Blondin is remembered today as the greatest tightwire performer of his day. A plaque at Niagara Falls commemorates the day Blondin successfully crossed the Falls on a tightwire with his manager on his back. During one of his performances in London, Blondin pushed a wheelbarrow out to the middle of a wire suspended between two tall buildings that contained a stove on which he cooked an egg for his breakfast while out there on the wire.

After finishing his meal, Blondin returned to the top of the building where a crowd of young boys had been watching him with great amazement. Blondin asked one of the boys whether he had been afraid while the performer was on the wire eating breakfast. The boy boldly claimed that he had not been afraid.

Then Blondin asked the boy whether he believed that he could put someone in the wheelbarrow and take him over the wire to the top of the other building. The boy declared confidently that he believed that Blondin could do so. Then Blondin asked the boy to get in the wheelbarrow. Suddenly, the boy no longer

believed. He disappeared into the crowd, refusing to get into the wheelbarrow.

Application: Ahaz's refusal to ask the Lord for a sign has a pious ring to it: "I will not ask; neither will I tempt the Lord." But what he really meant was, "I will not ask; neither will I trust in the Lord." We know from the history of Ahaz recorded in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles that this godless king chose a path of extreme paganism for his administration. That downfall begins right here with his refusal to trust the Lord. His unbelief was the sin that led to all the others.

Spurgeon ("The Sin of Unbelief"): "You may turn over this whole Book, and you will find that there is no atonement for the man who died in unbelief; there is no mercy for him. Had he been guilty of every other sin, if he had but believed, he would have been pardoned; but this is the damning exception—he had no faith." Ahaz had no faith, and he and those who followed him wearied God with their unbelief (v. 13).

So what does God do for the man who does not want to see a sign that would cure his no-faith condition? God gives him a sign anyway. It is the sign given to every unbeliever, which should cause each to believe and trust in the Lord (vv. 14-16).

The part of the sign that Ahaz would see fulfilled is verse 16 – after three years Syria would fall to Assyria, and after 13 years Israel would fall too. After the 65 years mentioned in verse 8, Assyria would repopulate Israel with foreigners. One commentator explains: "At that point those deported after the fall of Samaria (722 BC) were bereft of a land to return to and thus finally ceased as a sovereign people." Ahaz would see this happen, but he would credit his own alliance with Assyria for his safety, not this promise of the Lord.

But you and I this morning look back to this text about a sign promised by God in 735 BC, and we can see a much fuller fulfillment. We see what Ahaz saw, but so much more now. We

see that Mary was the virgin, and that she named her child Immanuel, meaning *God with us*. We see that Jesus was indeed God with us, God who took on human flesh. We see that He was born into the poverty of an oppressed house of David (the curds and honey of v. 15 refer to this state of affairs). And we can look back to see that the Lord was faithful to give us a sign to believe, even though Ahaz refused to ask for it or believe it.

So will we believe? Will we obtain a peaceful soul made still, knowing that God is with us in Jesus Christ, knowing that He died to be our Savior, knowing that God promised He would be born of a virgin more than 700 years before Mary conceived and bare this Son. Will we place our faith in the One who can offer a sign like that to help us believe in Him?

IV. Unbelief brings the opposite of a peaceful soul (vv. 17-25).

Application: Imagine a history of Israel in which Ahaz believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. Imagine that he asked for a sign, perhaps revival in the land, so that many were saved from idolatry, even the popular high places, and Judah's future became bright again. Imagine that they had defeated all their enemies, and that the glory days of David and Solomon had returned. Imagine that the house of David now had nothing to fear from Assyria and Babylon, let alone from Damascus and Samaria. Imagine that this revival spread to the north and that Israel reunited as one people. That is the world where Ahaz had asked for a sign. That was not Ahaz's world.

Instead, because of this king's unbelief, judgment does fall on Judah. In spite of some good kings still to come, the nation would meet the end the Lord describes in these verses. They would do so because Ahaz did not believe. He trusted in his own plans rather than in the promises of the Lord. Unbelief brought more trembling, not a peaceful soul to Judah.

Conclusion: You may remember that Isaiah was accompanied by his son when he went to the aqueducts with his message for

Ahaz (v. 3). The Lord wanted Isaiah's son there because Shear-jashub means "the remnant shall return." Broad is the road that leads to destruction. Like in Ahaz's Judah, even so today, many choose that way of unbelief. But Shear-jashub is there to remind us that it does not have to be that way with us. Immanuel did come; He was born of the virgin Mary. We can believe. We can be saved. We can be the remnant who returns to the Lord.

Katherine von Schlegel testifies that through faith, we can be still with a soul made peaceful by the promise of the Lord to save us:

"Be still my soul! The hour is hast'ning on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.

"Be still my soul; when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last."

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching