

The Everlasting Father: Who Shows Paternal Love for All His Children

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[0 : 00] Well, in that last reading, the prophet Isaiah promised that the coming one would be a shoot from the stump of Jesse, King David's father.! That is, he would be a man, he would be a descendant of David.

But he also calls him the root, the origin of Jesse, because he is the root of all things. He is himself God, God come to save in human flesh.

And what was promised all those centuries ago is what the birth of Jesus Christ fulfilled. King of heaven, but born into the squalor of a borrowed stable.

To rescue his people from darkness, from the darkness of our human world, from the anguish of our frail mortality. Listen to one last reading from Isaiah about that coming Savior King.

Listen to what he says. They will look to the earth, but behold distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish.

[1 : 14] The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has the light shined.

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. Of the increase 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. To uphold it. With justice. And with righteousness. From this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. See the message of Christmas is the one who comes to those walking in darkness.

[2 : 20] And brings great light. Out of darkness we have light. And that's why on Christmas night all Christians sing.

So before we think a little more of that wonderful name given to this child. The child in a manger.

Let's sing of the news of our merciful King's birth.

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Let's sing of the news of our merciful King's birth. Who sent the cross to glory, his grace, the love of heaven and the earth. Who sent the cross to glory, his grace, the love of heaven and the earth.

[4 : 06] Angels of glory to see, all the glory to see the new will be. Angels of glory to see, all the glory to see the new will be.

Amen. Well, we've been asking the question this year that's asked in one of the lovely carols. What child is this who laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping, whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?

And why also do we find these extraordinary reactions to his birth? The joy of the faithful like Simeon and Anna that you read of in the Gospels.

The awe of the Eastern Magi, the shepherds, the angels. But also the hatred. Hatred of Herod, the paranoid king.

Why were there such expectations of this child's birth? Well, the answer is because it was a birth long foretold by the prophets like Isaiah.

[5 : 40] Isaiah who gave those extraordinary names, which signified so much of who he would be and what he would do when at last the promise one came.

Now, remember that names in the Bible are full of great significance. I suppose for us, sometimes a name may have significance if perhaps you're named after someone, for example.

I guess more often it's our nicknames that tend to tell the story about a person. Edward I of England. And that tells you something about that king. But Edward, the hammer of the Scots, that probably tells you a good deal more, doesn't it?

Certainly about what he was regarded to be up in this part of the world. I had a friend when I was at school called Rubik. That was because Rubik cubes were in fashion then.

And Rubik had a very square-shaped head. And it stuck. And if you live in Glasgow, most men go under one of two descriptions.

[6 : 42] Wee man or big man. As in, alright big man. That's a salutation that I hear fairly frequently. And in just that kind of a way, Isaiah's names tell us all about this promised child.

About what he would be, who he would be, and what he would do. He tells us he would be called Wonderful Counselor. The Wonder Counselor. That is the one who counsels, who plans, who purposes wonders for his people.

As the permanent leader of mankind. And then he tells us he'll be a man, but one who is called the Mighty God. Who has power to redeem, to powerfully liberate all his people from the darkness.

The darkness of death itself. And that's why the prophet says, those who are walking in darkness have seen a great light. But there are two more names for us still to consider.

Tonight and tomorrow morning on Christmas Day. And these names tell us the wonderful things that this child, born to be king. Born to be lord of this world forever. The wonderful things that he will bring to those who rejoice in that lordship.

[7 : 51] He will bring wonderful love. And he will bring perfect peace. Until this Christmas Eve, I want us to think about this wonderful love.

The paternal love that he brings to all his children. Because he will be called Everlasting Father. Again, we need to understand the Bible's language properly.

Because to use the language of father for this child, Isaiah is being very clear about his identity. He is saying that he is God. That's language that he uses all through his prophecy only of God himself.

The Lord God of Israel. Listen to this from chapter 64 verse 8. But now, O Lord, you are our father. We are the clay. You are the potter.

We are the work of your hands. God is father. He is the creator of his people. Just like a potter with clay. But father means more than just that.

[8 : 54] In Isaiah. In chapter 63 verse 16. He says this. You, O Lord, are our father. Our redeemer from of old is your name.

He's not only their creator. He's their redeemer. He's their savior. And notice he says from of old. Another famous Christmas reading from a prophet. Micah. Is very similar.

But you, Bethlehem, Ephrata, from you shall come one who is to be the ruler in Israel. Whose origin is from old. From ancient days.

You see, there's a great consistency in the prophets of the Bible. So, to say that this child will be called the everlasting father. Is to say that he, a human being. Born as a baby.

Would be a creator. And the redeemer of his people. This little child. That's why the carol bids us.

[9 : 53] Come now with all. To something that's beyond our comprehending. Love in its fullness lies in mortal span. God become man.

Low within a manger lies he who built the starry skies. And that's what Isaiah means when he says he recalled everlasting father.

He's the one who is himself the creator and the redeemer of his people. And the New Testament tells us plainly everywhere that that is who Jesus Christ was.

Hebrews chapter 1 begins like this. Telling us that he, Jesus, is the radiance of the glory of God. He is the exact imprint of his nature. And that he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

He is the creator. And he says, after making purifications for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

[10 : 57] He's the creator, but he's the redeemer. The savior. He, this child, the apostle Paul says, is the image of the invisible God.

And he will come, says Isaiah, to make known the wonderful paternal love of God. God, our creator and our redeemer. He will do it here on earth in our sight, in our experience.

Apostle John says, no one has ever seen God, but the only begotten son who is at the father's side. He has made him known. Right here on this earth.

Jesus said, whoever has seen me has seen the father. I and the father are one. He, this child, the Christ child, the one who will be Emmanuel, God with us.

He shall be called everlasting father. And that is the Christmas that Isaiah the prophet foresaw hundreds of years before.

[12:04] And that explains all the joy, the wonder, the awe that we find in that first Christmas story in the gospels. But I want to think for a few minutes this evening, just what it means for this child to be truly father-like to his people.

Three things that the Bible itself points us to in our thinking. First, this child came to give his own children life. As a father gives life to his children, so he is called the everlasting father who gives everlasting life to those who are his.

That remains a simple fact that you cannot have the beginning of life without a father. Of course, scientists today are constantly dabbling with things like cloning all kinds of technologies with frightening implications.

But Isaiah is not thinking about anything grotesque like that. He's thinking about God as the father who gives life, who creates just like a potter creates with clay. Fashion something beautiful out of something that was just once a lump of clay.

And that is what this child would be born to do, to bring life everlasting for bodies that of themselves are just dust, clay.

[13:24] To make something beautiful, lasting. Something useful, something beloved. Something cherished by his maker. And in the coming of Jesus, the New Testament tells us God's purpose, God's grace, grace from before the very beginning of the world has now been manifested.

Through the appearing of Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, says the Apostle Paul.

He came to give his children life, everlasting life, from an everlasting father. I came, said Jesus, that they might have life and have it abundantly.

Not the dead religiosity of human religion. That is just burdensome. That's flavorless. That kills the soul. Maybe some of you have had experience of that in the past.

No, not dead religion, but life. The life that conquers death. The life that transcends death.

Resurrection life. I am, said Jesus, the resurrection and the life.

[14:39] Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. This child came to give his children life. Life everlasting.

From an everlasting father. And there's great assurance, isn't there? Great comfort to know that. But secondly, this child also came to give his children love.

As a father gives love to his children, provides for them, protects them. So he will give eternal father-like love and protection and provision for all of his children forever.

Now, of course, it must be said that not all fathers do love and protect and provide for their children.

Now, last, we live in a culture, don't we, where absent fathers is an increasingly common thing.

And I suppose many children may have quite mixed feelings about fathers. Although, of course, even some absent fathers do love their children dearly, long to be with them much more than they can be.

[15:49] But there are people who have known real pain, real disappointment from their fathers. They haven't known that love, haven't known the provision, the protection that I'm speaking of. But even the very fact of that great disappointment, perhaps even great anger that some may feel.

That tells, doesn't it? It tells that we know what a father's love should be. It tells that we know what real fatherhood does speak about and should look like. And the Bible tells us that God is the infinitely, eternally loving Father.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks about the Lord in fatherly terms. As one who lavishes love, even on very wayward children. Who dries the tears from their eyes.

I will lead them back, he says. I will make them walk by brooks of water in a straight path where they will not stumble. Because I am a father to Israel.

Ephraim is my firstborn. I will keep him like a shepherd keeps his flock. He gives his children love as well as life. He cares for them like lambs.

[17 : 03] And Isaiah uses just that same language of the father's shepherd like love. Behold, the Lord comes with might and his strong arm rules for him. He is a figure of authority as a father should be.

And must be if his children aren't going to be ruined. But he's also a figure of great tenderness. He will tend his flock like a shepherd. Yes, a strong protector. A leader.

But also he will gather his lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young. And when this child was fully grown as a man, Jesus said, I am the good shepherd.

I am the one who loves my sheep so dearly that I lay down my own life for my sheep. So that they might not come to harm, but be protected forever.

He gives his children everlasting love to protect, to provide, to lead you from the day you are born until the day I die. And that is true of the Lord Jesus Christ to us, except that he will never die.

[18 : 15] Because the apostle Paul tells us that being raised from the dead, he will never die again. And that means that you can bank on his love.

On his love, on his provision for you as his child, if you are his child. Forever. Forever. Forever. He will always stand with you.

And all the dilemmas that you face in life. All the struggles that you encounter in life. He will always provide for your needs. So that you don't have to live in anxiety and in fear.

Not all your wants, perhaps. Though a good father would give a child everything they want, but everything you need. Jesus said, don't be anxious about food and clothes and all these things. Because your heavenly father knows that you need at ease. And even when it seems like he is being harsh with us, we know that it's those that he loves that he disciplines.

[19 : 15] Because he does love us with a true father's love. And you know that like a father who cares for his children, he is interceding in prayer at the throne of grace for his own.

And the book of Hebrews tells us he always lives to make intercession for us. Because he's an everlasting father. And his prayers, his intercessions, never, ever, ever go unheard at the throne that rules heaven and earth.

He's praying for his children. He comes to give life. He comes to give love. But thirdly, he comes also to give his children a legacy.

As a good father leaves a legacy to his children. A home. A family. An inheritance. Well, so he who is called the everlasting father gives us an everlasting home.

An everlasting family. An everlasting inheritance for those who are his. Now, once again, all that is wonderful.

[20 : 24] If you have such a father. You have such a home. Of means. Of substance. You have that kind of family of real love. And many, of course, don't. Many fathers leave a lot to be desired.

Some people are left orphaned without a father at all. Or even worse, abandoned. But you see, the wonderful message of the Bible is that this child will be the everlasting father who extends his legacy even to those who have never, ever known that earthly fatherhood.

And never known the joys of family that that brings. Listen to how the psalm writer describes the God of the Bible. Father of the fatherless.

Protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God sets the solitary in a home. He sets the lonely in families.

You see, he is an adoptive father. He's one who reaches out to draw into his own family under his own protection and care. Those who otherwise were outcasts, were strangers, were lost, were solitary, were alone.

[21 : 42] With no family, with no father. It's such a feature, isn't it, of our modern world. Aloneness. So many solitary people.

Living solitary lives. So many people lost and lonely in the midst of an increasingly noisy and busy world. but isolated. But all that, you see, and more is a symptom of a far greater lostness that the Bible talks about and tells us is the real problem in the human condition.

The Bible calls it sin. What it means is the rebellion of our hearts against God our Father, our Creator, our Lord. And that is the thing that has left us adrift as people.

Cast out of our true home, the family of God, the place where God dwells, the garden of God that is now barred by the flaming swords of those angels. And it's because of our rebellion.

It's because of our refusal to live in obedience to Him. But this child comes to be a father again, to give that true legacy again, the legacy that we had lost, a home, a family, an inheritance.

[22 : 58] and He comes to give it forever. In the fullness of the time, says the Apostle Paul, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, to redeem those under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons.

And so be God's heirs. We who know Jesus Christ have received the spirit of adoption of sons by which we cry, Abba, Father, says Paul.

And that is what this child accomplished by wearing away our sins in His body, on the trees, says the Apostle Peter, the cross.

We who are once straying like lost sheep, He says, we've now returned to the shepherd, to the overseer of our souls. As a loving Father, He has moved heaven and earth to bring us home, to a real home, to His family, to an inheritance that is ours forever.

And that's why Jesus can say to His disciples just before He went to die on the cross, believe in Me, He said. In My Father's house are many rooms and I'm going to prepare a place for you.

[24 : 15] And that's what He did through His death. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for His sheep so that at last they might have that legacy that He had prepared for them.

He came to bring us paternal love, a Father's love, the everlasting life and the everlasting love and the everlasting legacy that belongs to everyone who knows Him as Savior, as the true lover of His children.

Let me ask you this Christmas, is He a Father to you? Are you part of His family? His is an open door. Jesus said, I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.

But no one comes to the Father except through Me, He said. And that means it is possible to refuse to have anything to do with His family.

That was so in Jesus' day. It's still so today. You refuse to come to Me that you might have life, He said to people. To some very religious people, very church-going people of His day.

[25 : 36] When He said, I am the Good Shepherd who loves and who provides for all His own, when He said that, we're told that some rejected Him. He's got a demon, they said.

This is all insane, they said. This is nonsense. We're not having this. His is a glorious legacy of everlasting love and of everlasting life.

But that legacy cannot be for those who insist on writing themselves out of His will, who scorn His life. And so that door being open is a warning as well as a glorious promise.

But here's the thing, Jesus says that even for those who have in the past scorned on Him, have spat on Him, have rejected Him, He is still willing to open that door and to be an everlasting Father. Perhaps the best-known parable of all in the New Testament is the one that Jesus told of the prodigal son. It might actually better be called the parable of the waiting father because it was the father who was waiting, who was watching.

[26 : 54] And at the first sign of His son returning, His lost son, Luke tells us the father felt compassion and he ran and he embraced him and he kissed him.

And even as the prodigal was still confessing his sin, as the words were coming out of his mouth, the father was clothing him and he was preparing a wonderful celebration of joy for his whole household at his return.

A return to a new life, to his true home and family and legacy, to the father's heart and the father's house of love and the joy of the angels in heaven.

Friends, that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is what Christmas is all about. In Jesus Christ, the wonderful, paternal love of God is revealed to rebellious human children.

He came to be an everlasting father. He came to bring home those who are lost.

[28 : 05] So don't write yourself out of His life and His love and His legacy. Why would you do that?

Why would anyone want to do such a thing to such a great and wonderful message? Amen. Let us pray.

O Lord, raise up, we pray thee, thy power and come among us and with great might succor us that whereas though our sins and through our wickedness we are sore, let, and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us through the satisfaction of thy Son, our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Spirit be honor and glory world without end.

Amen. Amen.