

The True Lover of all His Children-Everlasting Father

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- [0 : 00] Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have communion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.
- So God created man in his own image. In the image of God who created man and female, he created man. And God blessed them.
- And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have to lead over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that there is on the earth.
- And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was buried. The Lord God took the man, and put him in the garden of Eden, to work it and keep it.
- And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.
- [1 : 17] For in the day of you, today, you shall surely die. That's a wonderful picture, isn't it, of the world as it's meant to be.
- The world as God created it to be. And the world, of course, as we would love it to be. Perfect peace, harmony, between male and female, between humankind and nature, between humankind and God.
- No wonder the next carol calls us to praise our creator God. But notice when you come to the last line of the carol that it tells another story. We praise, yes, the God who made heaven and earth of naught, but also because with his own blood, mankind he has bought.
- And after the next carol, the next reading, we'll begin to explain to us why that must be so. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.
- He said to the woman, Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden.
- [2 : 34] But God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden. Neither shall you touch it, lest you die. But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die.
- For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.
- And she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field.

On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain and childbearing.

[3 : 57] In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

A curse upon human relationships, a curse upon nature, and a curse upon our very lives. To dust you shall return.

And that is more like the world we actually know. And it's because our rebellion against God has put us in bondage. Through fear of death, people are subject to lifelong slavery.

[5 : 16] That's how the Bible puts it. But you heard God's promise there. Even as the curse was pronounced, that evil would not have the last word, that God himself would intervene in history through the seed, the offspring of the woman, who would at last destroy the work of the devil, and bring liberation to his people.

And down through history, that promise shone, all through long ages of darkness, until at last, at the first Christmas, that promised offspring came.

Came to save us all from Satan's power, when we were gone astray. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God, or give thanks to him.

[6 : 42] But they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God, for images resembling mortal man, and birds, and animals, and reptiles.

Therefore, God gave them up, in the lusts of their hearts, to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature, rather than the creator.

And since they did not see fit, to acknowledge God, God gave them up, to a debased mind, to do what ought not to be done.

They were filled with all manner, of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.

They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

[7 : 59] People often can dismiss, the book of Genesis, as just ancient history, or even myth, but it isn't. St. Paul there, in that reading, expresses exactly the same picture, just in plainer words.

And both simply describe the reality, of a world that we know only too well. And in the Bible, you see, there is no sentimentality. But the Christian Christmas message, is a message of real peace.

Peace descending from heaven. But of course, peace doesn't come to a world in rebellion, without a very great cost, the cost of making peace.

And the cost, is to God himself, who alone, could save us, and bring that peace. And so, or this babe, still infant crying, shadows of the cross, were lying, precious birth, and costly dying.

Sinners, greet your servant king. There shall come forth, a shoot, from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots, shall bear fruit.

[9 : 20] And the spirit of the Lord, shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom, and understanding, the spirit of counsel, and might, the spirit of knowledge, and the fear of the Lord.

Righteousness, shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness, the belt of his loins. In that day, the root of Jesse, shall stand as a signal, for the peoples.

Of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place, shall be glorious. In that day, the Lord, with his hand, and great and strong sword, will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent, Leviathan, the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon, that is in the sea.

The wilderness, and the dry land, shall be glad. The desert shall rejoice, and blossom like the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy, and singing. Be strong, fear not, behold, your God, will come with vengeance.

With the recompense of God, he will come, and save you. Then, shall the eyes of the blind, be opened, and the ears of the deaf, unstopped. Then shall the lame man, leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute, sing for joy.

[10 : 30] And the ransomed of the Lord, shall return, and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy, shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness, and joy, and sorrow, and sighing, shall flee away.

Your God, will come, and save you, and sorrow, and sighing, will flee away. Those are words from Isaiah the prophet, speaking some 700 years, before the birth of Jesus Christ, and promising the coming, of God himself.

Coming to banish, all darkness, all evil, and make that sorrow, that sighing, those tears, flee away forever. God with us.

God with power to save. God coming to reverse, the curse of sin, and to make his blessings flow, as far as that curse, had been found.

And so Christmas is indeed, a message of joy. Joy, to the world. I wonder if you noticed, in that previous reading, that the prophet said, of this coming one, that he would be a shoot, from the stump of Jesse, of King David's father.

[11 : 49] That is, he'd be a man, he'd be a descendant, of King David. And yet he also, calls him the root, of Jesse. Because he, is the root, of all things.

He himself, is God the Lord, who made all things, coming, to save his people, in the flesh of man. That's what the promise, was all those centuries ago.

That's, what the birth of Jesus Christ, fulfilled. King of heaven, born into the squalor, of a stable, come to rescue his people, from the darkness, of our human world, from the anguish, of all our frail mortality.

Listen to one last reading, from the prophet Isaiah, about the coming, of that savior king. People will look to the earth, he says, and behold distress, darkness, the gloom of anguish.

Anguish. But, there will be, no gloom, for her, who was in anguish. The people, who walked in darkness, have seen a great light.

[12 : 58] Those, who dwelt, in a land, of deep darkness, on them, has the light shined. For unto us, a child is born, unto us, a son is given.

And the government, shall be on his shoulder. And his name, shall be called, wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

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, and uphold it, with justice, and righteousness, from this time forth, and forevermore.

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

Out of darkness, we have light. And that's why, on Christmas night, all Christians sing. So before we think a little, of what these words, and the names, of this one to come, really mean.

[14 : 09] Well, we're asking the question, tonight, and in all our, carol services, this year, who is he, in yonder stall? The child born, that first Christmas, which called such, extraordinary reactions, in the world, at that time.

Joy, for the faithful Israelites, Simeon and Anna, and others, who were waiting, for the time to come. All, from the magi, who came to seek him, from the east, from the shepherds, even from the angels.

And also, great hatred, from Herod the king, from many, in the religious authorities. Why were there, such expectations, of this, child, in the manger?

Well, the answer lies, in these words, of the prophets, we've been hearing, who foretold his birth, hundreds of years before. We've been looking, at the words of Isaiah, spoken in, around 734 BC, and particularly, at the extraordinary names, that he says, will signify, what we need to know, about who he would be, and what he would do.

Names, in the Bible, are fraught with significance, much more so than, I suppose our names, tend to be today. Our names may have a meaning, we might be named, after a family member, or somebody.

[15 : 33] But often, it's our nicknames, isn't it, that tell much more, about who we are, and what we're actually like. So, King Edward I, well, that tells you something, about that King of England.

But, Edward Longshanks, the Hammer of the Scots, well, that tells you a bit more, doesn't it? It tells you he was a very tall man, and it tells you, he was the scourge, of this nation, in the days of, William Warris, and Robert the Bruce, and so on.

Likewise, your name might be John, but, if your friends call you, Fat Boy, or something like that, then, that probably tells you, a little bit more, doesn't it? Or in Glasgow, it seems that most men, go by one of two names, it's either Big Man, or Wee Man, as in, all right, Big Man, that common salutation, that some of us, are used to receiving.

You get the idea, you see, Isaiah's names, given to this child, are like that, they tell us, all about who, and what he would be. And he tells us, that the government, would be upon his shoulder, and his kingdom, would know no end.

Tells us, that he would reign forever. And so he's going to be, the Lord of all the world. An extraordinary claim, isn't it? For any mere mortal, quite impossible.

[16 : 51] Then he says, he'll be called, the wonderful counselor. That is the one, who counsels wonders, who purposes wonders, for his people. That is, he will be the true leader, of all mankind, to lead them, into the saving wonders, of God.

This morning, we saw also, that he'll be the true, liberator, of all the oppressed. He will be the mighty God. That is, he is God, who comes to deliver, his people, with his own, mighty hands, out of the darkness, of the shadow of death itself, and into the light, of everlasting life.

That's why the prophet says, the people, walking in darkness, have seen a great light, the light, of his salvation. Well, there's two names left there, you can see, that we're looking at, tonight and tomorrow morning.

And they tell us, of the wonderful things, that this child, born to be the king, and the Lord, of all the world forever, what he would bring, to those, who would bow to him, and rejoice, in his lordship.

He will bring, wonderful love, and he'll bring, perfect peace. Tonight, I want to think, of the first of these. He'll be called, it says, the everlasting father.

[18 : 08] That is, he will be the true, lover, of all, his children. Now again, we have to understand, the Bible's language properly. The word, father, in the Bible, means perhaps, a lot more, than we might, at first realize.

And by using, this language, of the everlasting father, about this child, Isaiah is telling us, that he is indicating, his deity, that he is God, because, that's language, that's only used, of God himself, in the Bible.

Isaiah chapter 64, he says this, but now, oh Lord, you are our father. We are the clay, and you are the potter, and we are the work, of your hand.

You see, he's saying, God is his people's father, he's their creator, just like a potter, with the clay. Chapter 63, he says, you oh Lord, are our father, our redeemer, from of old, is your name.

You see, he's not only their creator, but he's their redeemer, he's their savior. And notice, from of old, there's another famous reading, we often have at Christmas, from the prophet Micah, but you, Bethlehem, Ephrata, from you, shall come forth, one who is to be ruler, in Israel, whose origin is of old, from ancient days.

[19 : 30] There's a great consistency, across the prophets, in the Bible, when you read them, you see. And 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, the one who is called, both the creator, and the redeemer, of all God's people.

That's why the carols bid us, come now with all, to something that is, beyond our comprehending. Love in its fullness, lies in mortal span.

Lo, within a manger, lies he, he who built, the starry skies. And see, that's what Isaiah means, when he says, he'll be called, everlasting father.

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

Hebrews chapter 1, tells us, that he is the radiance, of the glory of God. He's the exact, imprint, of his nature. And he, Jesus Christ, upholds this universe, by the word, of his power.

[20 : 47] He is the creator. And, it goes on, after making purification, for sins, he sat down, at the right hand, of the majesty, on high.

He's also the redeemer. He, this child, says St. Paul, is the image, of the invisible God. And he will come, says Isaiah the prophet, to make known, the wonderful, fatherly love, of God, as creator, and redeemer, here, on earth, in our experience, in human flesh.

That's why the apostle John, at the beginning of his gospel, says, no one, has ever seen God, but the only begotten son, who is at the father's side, he has made, him, known.

Made the father known. 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.

That's Christmas, according to Isaiah, the prophet. And that explains, the joy, the wonder, the awe, of, all those, in the first Christmas story.

[22 : 08] So, I want to think for a few minutes, just what it means, for this child, to be truly, father-like, in that way, to his people. Three things, that the Bible itself, points us to, in our thinking.

First of all, 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, doesn't it? You can't, have the beginning of life, without a father. Well, of course, our scientists, are constantly, dabbling, in all sorts of things, quite controversial things, these days, and talking about cloning, and all that sort of thing.

But Isaiah is not thinking, about anything like that. He's just thinking, about plain, normal life. And he's saying, that God, is a father, who gives life. He creates. Just like a potter, creates with his clay.

Just like he fashions, something beautiful, out of something, that was just a lump, of clay, a lump of dust. And that's what this child, was born to do, to bring, life everlasting, to bodies, that are of themselves, just, just dust, just like clay.

[23 : 23] And he comes, to make something beautiful, something lasting, something useful, and wonderful. Something beloved, and cherished, by its maker. And in the coming of Jesus, you see, the New Testament, tells us, that God's, purpose and grace, from the beginning, from before all ages, has now been manifested, through the appearing, of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Who abolished death, says the apostle. And brought life, and immortality, to light, in the gospel. He comes, to give his children life, everlasting life, from the everlasting father.

I came, says Jesus, that they might have life, and have it, in abundance. Not the dead, religiosity, of human religion.

That is burdensome, that's, that's flavorless, that kills the soul. Maybe some of you, have had experience, of that. It's put you off. That's not, what Jesus is talking about.

But life, life, that conquers death, life, life that transcends, death. Resurrection life. I am, the resurrection, and the life, said Jesus.

[24 : 37] Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet, shall they live, live forever. This child, came to give his children, life, everlasting.

He is, the everlasting father, who begets, everlasting life. And there's no greater assurance, no greater comfort, than to know that, especially as you get older, and as your body, begins to feel more, and more like dust, and clay.

But secondly, this child, comes to give his children, love. As a father gives love, to his children, provides for them, and protects them. So he comes, to give eternally, father-like love, and protection, and provision, for his children.

Of course, we have to say, don't we, that sadly, not all fathers do, love, and protect, and provide, for their children. And we live in a culture, where the absent father, is increasingly common.

And so many of us, may have quite mixed feelings, about fathers. Even though, of course, some absent fathers, for sure, do love their children dearly, would love, and long to be with them, much, much more than they are, of course.

[25 : 57] But there are many people, aren't there, who have known great pain, great disappointment, in their fathers. Not the love, not the provision, not the protection, that I'm speaking about.

But you see, the very fact, of that disappointment, in itself, and even that anger, it tells, doesn't it, that we know, we know, what a father's love, should be. We know, what real fatherhood, does speak of.

And the Bible, portrays God, as an infinitely loving, father. The prophet Jeremiah, and other of the prophets, speaks of the Lord, in these fatherly terms, as one who, who lavishes love, even, even on his wayward children.

He says, I will make them walk, by brooks of water, in a straight path, in which they will not stumble, because, I am a father, to Israel. And Ephraim, is my firstborn.

I will keep him, as a shepherd, keeps his flock. He gives his children love. He cares, for his lambs, like a shepherd.

[27 : 02] And Isaiah, uses exactly, that same language, of the father's shepherd, like love. Behold, he says, he comes with might, and his strong arm, rules for him. Yes, he's a figure of authority, as any good father, must be.

To his children, if they're not to be ruined. Authority, but also, great tenderness. He will tend his flock, like a shepherd. A strong protector, a leader.

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

The one who loves his sheep, so dearly, that he lays down, his own life, for his sheep. That they might come to him, that they might be, protected by him, forever and ever.

He, he gives his children, everlasting love, to protect, to provide, to lead them, to cherish them, as his own. I remember, once watching, a rather sentimental, Hollywood film.

[28 : 19] Didn't really enjoy the film, but I remember, one line, that I've never forgotten from it. And it's a father, speaking, to his as yet, unborn child. And he said this, I will be a father to you, from the day you are born, until the day I die.

And that's true, of the Lord Jesus Christ, to us, to his people. Except that, he will never die, because having been raised, from the dead, he will never, ever die again.

He's the everlasting father. And that means, that you can bank, on his love, and on his care, and on his provision, forever and ever, and ever, if you're his child.

He will always, stay with you. Through all the dilemmas, that you face in life, through all the struggles, that you'll encounter, he will always, provide, for your needs.

So that you don't have, to live in anxiety, and fear. Not necessarily, for all your wants, but like a good father, for what you need, not what you want. That's why Jesus said, don't be anxious, about clothes, or food, or all of these things, for your heavenly father, knows, that you have need, of these.

[29 : 37] And even when it seems, as though he's being, harsh with us, we know, that it's those he loves, as his children, that he disciplines. Because he does love, with real, father-like love.

And you know, that like a father, who cares for his children, he also is interceding, in prayer, at the throne of grace, for his own. Hebrews chapter 7, tells us, that he always lives, to make intercession, for them.

Because he's the, everlasting father. And his prayers, his intercessions, never, ever go unheard, at that great throne, of grace in heaven.

He comes, as a father, to give life, and to give love. And third, this child, who comes, comes to give, his children, a legacy.

As a good father, gives a legacy, to his children, a home, and a family, and an inheritance. So, he is called, the everlasting father, who gives, an everlasting home, and an everlasting family, and an everlasting, inheritance, to his children.

[30 : 52] And once again, that's a wonderful thing, if you have a father, like that, if you have a home, of means, and of substance, and a family, of real love. And many don't. Many fathers, leave a lot to be desired, don't they?

As we know. Many even leave, their children, or orphaned. But the wonderful message, of the scriptures, is that in this child, comes one, who will be, the everlasting father, to extend his legacy, even to those, who have never, ever known, that earthly fatherhood.

Who have never known, the joys of home, of family, and all that, that brings to them. Listen to how, the psalmist, the singer, of the Bible, describes, the God of the Bible.

Father, of the fatherless, protector of widows, is God, in his habitation. God, sets the lonely, in families.

He sets the solitary, in a home. You see, he's an adoptive father. He's one, who reaches out, to draw, into his own family, and under his own, protection and care.

[32 : 05] All of those, who were, who were otherwise, outcasts, who were otherwise, strangers, and lonely, and lost, and solitary, and alone, with no father, with no family, but he comes, to draw them in.

And it's such a feature, isn't it, of our world today, a loneless, solitary people, living solitary lives, lost, and lonely, in the midst of a, a noisy, bustling, busy world.

You see, all that and more, is, is just a symptom, of the far greater, lostness, that the Bible talks about, as the real problem, of our human condition. It's the problem of sin, it's the problem of, rebellion, in our hearts, against God, our father, our creator, our Lord.

That, that is what has, made us, to be cast to drift, like this. That's what caused us, to be cast out, of our true home. To be cast out, of the family of God, from the place, where God himself dwells, the garden of God, that's the imagery there, barred, by those angels, with their flaming swords, because of our refusal, to live in obedience, to God, our heavenly father.

But in this child, in the birth, and the coming, of Jesus Christ, comes one, who makes us, again, his children. He comes to be a father, to give us, again, that true legacy, that true love, that true life, the home, the family, everything, that we'd lost forever.

[33 : 40] In the fullness, of the time, says St. Paul, God sent forth, his son, born of a woman, to redeem, those under the law, that we, might receive, the adoption, of sons.

So be heirs, through God. We've received, he says, the spirit of adoption, of sons, by which we cry, Abba, Father. Father. That's what Jesus Christ, accomplished, by bearing away, our sins, on his body, on the cross, says Peter.

We who were once, straying like lost sheep, but have now returned, to the shepherd, to the overseer, of our souls. As a loving father, he has moved, heaven and earth, to come, and to bring us, home, to a real home, to a real family, to a real inheritance, forever and ever.

That's why Jesus said, to his disciples, just before he went, to the cross, in my father's house, are many rooms, and I'm going, I'm going to prepare, a place for you, who believe in me.

And he did that, through his death. The good shepherd, laying down his life, for the sheep, that they might, at last, come home, and have the legacy, that he had won, for them.

[35 : 02] He came, to bring, a father's love, an everlasting life, and love, and legacy. And that is what belongs, to all who know him, as the everlasting father, as the true lover, of all his children.

So let me ask you, tonight, this Christmas Eve, is he that father, to you? Are you, in his family, do you belong, to him?

His door, is an open door, Jesus said that. I am the door, said Jesus. If anyone, enters by me, he will be saved, clear as day. And yet, it is still possible, isn't it, to refuse, to have anything, to do, with his family.

That was so, in Jesus' day. It's still, the same today. You refuse, to come to me, that you might have life. Here's what Jesus said, to his hearers.

He said that, to some very religious people, to some very, particular, church going people. You, you refuse, to come to me, to have life. And when he said, I am the good shepherd, who loves, and cares, and provides, for all his own, there were some, who refused, and said, he's a, he's got a demon.

[36 : 30] We want nothing, to do with him. This is all, nonsense. Friends, his, is a glorious legacy, of everlasting love, of everlasting life.

But that legacy, can't be, for those, who insist, on writing themselves, out of the will, by scorning, Jesus Christ, and his offer of life.

But listen, this Christmas Eve, even now, the door is open. Even for those, who have, who have scorned him, all their life long, who have spat on him, who have rejected him, who have called him, demonic, and wanted nothing, to do with him.

Still, he is willing, to be, an everlasting father. Perhaps the best known, of all Jesus stories, is that wonderful parable, he tells in Luke chapter 15, of the prodigal son.

Many ways, it would be much better called, the parable of the waiting father. Because the father, is waiting, and watching, and longing, for the return, of his lost son. And at the first sign, of his returning son, he is off.

[37 : 44] And Jesus says, he felt compassion, and he ran, and he embraced him, and he kissed him. And even as he's trying, to get the words out, and confessing his sin, to his father, his father, is clothing him, and putting a ring, on his finger, and a great robe on him, and preparing a great feast, a great celebration, of joy, at his return.

A return, to new life, and to his true, family and legacy, and to his father's, house of love, and to the joy, of all the angels, in heaven, says Jesus.

Jesus. Friends, that is, that is, the gospel, of Jesus Christ. That is, what Christmas, is all about.

In Jesus Christ, the wonderful, fatherly, love of God, is revealed, to rebellious, human children, forever. He came, to be, the everlasting father, to bring home, those, who are lost.

Don't write yourself, out, of his life, and his love, and his legacy, this Christmas. Why would anyone, why would anyone, ever want to do, such a thing?

[39 : 06] Amen.