



His Name Shall Be Called Everlasting Father

Advent 2015

Isaiah 9:6

David Sunday

December 13, 2015

We are spending four weeks during Advent in one verse—Isaiah 9:6. Today I want to zero in on this verse alone. Let's worship God as we hear His holy, living, abiding Word that will forever prove true.

*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.*

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we pray that You would shine into our hearts the knowledge of Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. We ask for Your Spirit's generous outpouring and empowerment upon the preaching and hearing of Your Word so that we might more closely follow You as our Father, loving You and entrusting ourselves to You—now and forever. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

An article by pastor James MacDonald of Harvest Bible Chapel observed that few words in any language evoke the kind of visceral response that the word "father" does. He said, "Feelings of honor, love and gratitude can fill one person, while another is consumed with shame, hatred and bitterness at the mere mention of 'Dad.' We all long for a healthy and intimate relationship with someone we can call 'Father,' and we are all either delighted or distressed by what we have."

Another McDonald—the English writer George MacDonald—dedicated his first book to his father with these words: "Yet most I thank thee, not for any deed, but for the sense thy living self did breed that fatherhood is at the world's great core." I think that's true. Some of us will

feel a sense of loss this Christmas season, either because we have had fathers who were wonderful to us and they are now gone, or because we've lived with a lot of unfulfilled longings for a father we never had.

Many of us are fathers, and whenever I have a chance to talk to someone who is a dad, I find an almost universal sense of wondering, "How am I doing in this most important role?" Probably no role next to that of husband is more important in a man's life than the role of father. We want to do well, and most of us wonder, "How am I doing?" I hardly ever talk to a man who feels like he's doing a perfect job as a dad.

So how wonderful it is to come to this passage in which the prophet Isaiah writes of the birth of a Child Whose name shall be called Everlasting Father. The "Infant of Days" is also the "Ancient of Days," the Father of eternity. And under His care and protection, and through His provision, we are safe and will be satisfied for all eternity.

I invite you now to marvel with me at the wonder and character of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is called our Everlasting Father. Out of all the names of Jesus in this passage, this is the one that has intrigued me the most. This is the one that I feel like I least understand, and I was really looking forward to this Advent series to try to get a better handle on what is meant by Isaiah when he says, "*His name shall be called...Everlasting Father.*"

Because I want this to become clearer for us, I'm going to follow an old Puritan style of preaching that was designed to achieve clarity. What they would do is first state a doctrine, then explain the doctrine, and then apply the doctrine.

Doctrine Stated

So first, the doctrine stated: Jesus, our Messiah, will forever be perfectly fatherlike in the way He shepherds and leads us. In Jesus, we have a perfect Father forever.

Let that sink in for a little bit. He will forever be perfectly fatherlike in the way He shepherds and leads us. In Jesus we have a perfect Father forever.

As I was thinking about this, I was reminded of the stanza in that great hymn by Henry F. Lyte, "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven," where it says:

Fatherlike, He tends and spares us,
Well our feeble frame He knows.
In His hand He gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.

That's such a beautiful description of the fatherlike character of our God. Jesus, our Messiah, will forever be perfectly fatherlike in the way He shepherds and cares for us. In Jesus we have a perfect Father forever—that's the doctrine stated.

Doctrine Explained

Now, I think that requires some explanation because we might be wondering how can He be called Father? When I hear these words from Isaiah, I've often wondered how about that. How can Jesus be the Son of God and the everlasting Father? So let's move now to the doctrine explained.

1. Isaiah is not confusing Jesus the Messiah with the First Person of the Trinity.

Isaiah is not saying God the Son is God the Father—that they're the same Person. That's a heresy you do not want to believe, okay? That was denounced by the early church long ago. In fact, it's unlikely that Isaiah even had the Trinity in mind when he spoke these words. He's not referring so much to the role of Messiah within the Godhead. Instead, he is referring to the Messiah's character toward us—how He represents God to us.

Pastor and author Sam Storms calls this “a descriptive analogy pointing to Christ's character...He is fatherly, fatherlike, in His treatment of us.” The ESV Study Bible describes “father” as a term that speaks of a benevolent protector. In Job 29:16, Job says, “*I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.*” Job looked for needy people whom he could show benevolence toward and protect.

“Father” was also often a title applied to royal leaders. Isaiah 22:21 is a good example of this. The Lord speaks there of the king being “*a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.*” So in Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah is highlighting the fact the Messiah is a King who will be the benevolent Protector of God's people. He will be fatherlike in his character. He's not saying that God the Son and God the Father are the same Person.

2. Isaiah is, however, highlighting the divine nature of the Messiah.

How do we see this? Well, His name is called “Everlasting Father,” or “Eternal Father.” It could just as easily be translated “Father of Eternity.” Probably out of all the writers in the Old Testament, Isaiah is the one who loves this idea of eternity the most. He speaks often of God's eternity. In Isaiah 57:15 he says God is “*the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.*” He uses the same type of language to refer to the Messiah.

So the second thing we see is that Isaiah is highlighting the divine nature of the Messiah by using a title that could refer to the Lord Himself, the high and lofty One Who inhabits eternity. Think of what it means when it says He is the “Father of Eternity.” Jesus called Satan “the father of lies,” meaning all deception finds its origin and source in Satan. When Isaiah calls Messiah “Father of Eternity,” he means that God’s Son, God’s Messiah, is the origin and source of eternity.

There was never a time when He did not exist. He never came into being. Someone has said, “Eternity belongs to Jesus, and He has a blueprint mapped out for it” (Greyfriars sermon preached 12/20/2009). He is the One Who gives eternal life because John says, “*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men*” (John 1:4).

This reminds us of the wealth of Messiah’s reign. It is everlasting in duration and unlimited in resources. He has all the resources of eternity at His disposal and His reign will endure forever. He is “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13). He is the “One Who was and is and is to come, the Lord Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). Praise be to His name, the Everlasting One. He is divine.

It’s mindboggling because Isaiah is speaking to us of a Child Who is yet to be born 700 years in the future, yet he’s making clear that this Child is the Author of eternity. He’s looking forward to the day when the Father of Eternity is going to step into time, shepherding and leading His people in a bodily fashion forever. He’s Everlasting Father.

3. Jesus the Messiah is the only One Who can reveal God’s fatherly character to us, for He is one in nature, essence and substance with God the Father.

Jesus the Messiah is fully God, and He alone can reveal God to us. We can’t find God in any other way. We will not know the father heart of God apart from the Messiah, God’s Son, revealing the Father to us. And it is His good pleasure to do so.

Let’s look at three passages in the Gospel of John because Isaiah could never have fully seen the light of glory that shone from the face of our Lord Jesus Christ as we have beheld it in the Gospels. As we listen to Jesus’ words, we hear marvelous things about His nature, His essence and how He is of one substance with God the Father.

Looking first at John 8:18-19, Jesus says:

“I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.” They said to him therefore, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”

Jesus said, “To see Me is to see the Father. To know Me is to know the Father.” Conversely not to know Jesus is not to know God. You can’t know God the Father without knowing Jesus the Son. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus.

In chapter ten of John’s Gospel, we read in verse 30 a remarkable statement that Jesus makes. I think this is one of His clearest claims to divinity, to being God. He says, “*I and the Father are one.*” Think about that! Amazing! “*I and the Father are one.*” A few verses later Jesus says:

If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father (John 10:37-38).

“*The Father is in me and I am in the Father*”—what an amazing statement! One in nature, substance, essence—there’s a unity in the Godhead. There is only one God Who eternally exists in three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God—these three are One.

Finally, in John 14 we find a conversation Jesus is having about heaven and how He has gone to prepare a place for those who believe in God and in Him. His disciples are wondering what the way to that place might be, and Jesus explains, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). Philip responds in verse eight, “*Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.*”

Let’s just pause there for a minute. If you make your Christmas wish list, wouldn’t this be a good wish to put on the list? “Lord, show us Who You are, and it will be enough for us.” Can you be satisfied on Christmas with a gift of God’s Son, with knowing God? “*This is eternal life,*” Jesus said, “*that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*” (John 17:3). Philip says, “If we could just know the Father, that would be enough for us.” And I love how Jesus answers him:

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves” (John 14:8-11).

If you put these verses together, what do you find? If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. When you see Jesus, you see everything God wants you to know about Himself. You see the perfect imprint, image and stamp of the divine majesty in Jesus Christ. You see in Jesus God coming down to us, clothing Himself in our frail humanity. And when you see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, you see God clothed in your afflictions, in your sorrows and in your pain and suffering. You see God experiencing your temptations, yet without sin. When you see Jesus, you see the face of God.

We cannot know God if we ignore or deny Jesus Christ. He's the way we come to know Who God is. Jesus alone makes the Father known to us. Friends, left to ourselves we could never find God. God had to come down. God has to reveal Himself. We are darkened in our understanding. We would grope in the darkness were it not for the light God has shone into the world in Christ. We cannot find God on our own. We cannot reach God on our own. God must show Himself to us and He has done that in Jesus Christ.

There's a beautiful statement of this by the theologian Herman Bavinck that is rather dense theological wording. First we need to grapple with this theology, then I'll start massaging this truth into our hearts by way of application. Bavinck writes: "If for insignificant, guilty and impure persons there is to be a possibility of...genuine fellowship with God..." In other words, if sinners like us are ever going to experience a relationship with God and know and enjoy Him, and experience His salvation and eternal life—if we're ever going to do that, "then God on his part must reestablish the broken bond, again take them into fellowship with Him and share His grace with them, regardless of their guilt and corruption" (Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, 4:204).

Do you believe that is true of your condition? Is your condition in sin so desperate that you would have never found God had He not taken the initiative to show Himself to you? If He has, are you not forever grateful to Him for revealing Himself to you? If you have not yet come to know God, I want you to know that God is able to do that today. This message of Christmas isn't just about history past—it's about a Savior Who is alive today and Who is able to bring you into a relationship today with a heavenly Father Who longs to do that. Look to Jesus and you will find knowledge of God, fellowship and friendship with God and salvation given by God.

Bavinck continues, "[God], then, must descend from the height of His majesty, seek us out and come to us, take away our guilt and again open the way to His fatherly heart." I just love that phrase. Isn't that beautiful? He came down and opened the way to God's fatherly heart.

“If God were to wait until we...had made ourselves worthy, in part or in whole, to receive His favor, the restoration of communion between Him and ourselves would never happen, and salvation would be forever out of reach for us” (Bavinck, pp. 204-5).

Good news. God has come down to bring salvation. Salvation is now in reach through Jesus Christ. The way of God’s fatherly heart has been opened to us. So we’ve stated the doctrine, we’ve tried to explain it from Scripture, now let’s move to application and try to massage this into our hearts.

Doctrine Applied

We don’t want to just get our minds filled up with truth—we want our hearts to be affected by these truths. So think about this doctrine again: Jesus, our Messiah, will forever be perfectly fatherlike in His shepherding and leadership of us. In Him we have a perfect Father forever. This means so many things to us!

- He opens the way to God’s fatherly heart.
- He leads us to the Father. No one comes but through Him.
- He treats us as His children.
- He lets us know we’re loved.
- We know this God against Whom we’ve sinned loves us still and receives us as His dearly beloved children. “*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*” He “*sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,*” by Whom we cry, “*Abba! Father!*” (Galatians 4:4-6).
- He provides for us.
- He protects us.
- He pardons us.
- He even praises us, His loved children. Psalm 103:10 says, “*He does not deal with us according to our sins.*” He does not treat us as our sins deserve. Isn’t that good news? He does not always chide us. He is slow to anger, swift to bless. He is tender toward our frailties and patient with our failings. He is full of pity, compassion and kindness toward us.
- He is 100% forever for us as our strong Advocate.
- His loyalty and His faithfulness to us are as high as the heavens are above the earth (Psalm 103:11).
- We can always depend on Him.
- He has no memory of our sins and failures because He’s removed them from us “*as far as the east is from the west*” (Psalm 103:12).
- But He never forgets our name.
- He never stops noticing our needs.

- He always cares for us. God in heaven, the Father, never says, “Oh, this family is driving me crazy with all their needs and requests!”
- He loves to tend to His flock.
- He loves to provide for His children.
- Finally, He will find great pleasure in welcoming us home to the Father’s house, and saying to His faithful children, “*Well done, good and faithful servant!*” (Matthew 25:21).

What is this truth telling us? It’s telling us that everything you ever dreamed a father could be—everything you’ve ever desired or wanted to have from your relationship with a father—Jesus is and Jesus will be to you. That’s what it’s telling us.

Think about it. Sometimes we do everything possible to keep Him at a distance, but He has done everything possible to bring us near. We have done everything to drive Him away, but He has done everything needed to draw us near. He comes to us as a helpless little Baby, as if to say to us, “You can get close to Me. You don’t need to be afraid of Me. I won’t hurt you. You can get as close to me as your heart desires.” He’s come to us in Christ and drawn us near.

So as I thought about this wonderful truth, one of the things I was reflecting on was the sadness of knowing that so many people have never experienced the kindness, care and faithfulness of a loving father. I’ve been alive long enough to know that it’s not uncommon for people, when they hear the word ‘father,’ for their visceral reaction not to be warmth, tenderness and love, but maybe the first words that come to their minds are words like these: distant, non-communicative, passive, angry, selfish, unaffirming, absent, unreliable, irresponsible—even cruel.

In 2002, the well-known actor Steve Martin wrote this on Father’s Day for the New Yorker magazine. This is where a lot of people find themselves.

In his death, my father, Glenn Vernon Martin, did something he could not do in life. He brought our family together.

After he died, at the age of eighty-three, many of his friends told me how much they loved him—how generous he was, how outgoing, how funny, how caring. I was surprised at these descriptions. I remember him as angry. There was little said to me, that I recall, that was not criticism. During my teenage years, we hardly spoke except in one-way arguments—from him to me. I am sure the number of words that passed between us could be counted. At some point in my preteens, I decided to officially “hate” him. When he came into a room, I would wait five minutes, then leave...

Generally...my father was critical of my show-business accomplishments. Even after I won an Emmy at twenty-three as a writer for "The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour," he advised me to finish college so that I'd have something to fall back on. Years later, my friends and I took him to the premiere of my first movie, "The Jerk," and afterward we went to dinner. For a long time, he said nothing. My friends noted his silence and were horrified. Finally, one friend said, "What did you think of Steve in the movie?" And my father said, "Well, he's no Charlie Chaplin."

Now, I've lived long enough to know that that's not rare, and I've been in the church long enough to know that, sadly, even in Christian homes that can be a child's experience of his father. Not so from Jesus. We will never experience emotional indifference and self-centered neglect from our Everlasting Father. The good news is that Love came down at Christmas so that truly He could teach us to love one another. His law is love; His gospel is peace (adapted from O Holy Night by Placide Cappeau and Adolphe C. Adam, 1847).

The Father came down into this world in Jesus so that our hearts could be filled with His love, so He could teach us dads how to love better, how to be more faithful in reflecting the care of our heavenly Father to our children. That's one application of this truth.

As I was thinking about how to personalize this truth that is so precious but may seem remote, I thought of two basic experiences we have with fathers. We have the experience of distress with fathers, and we also have the experience of delight with fathers. I've told you of some of the distress, and I now want to describe to you some of the delight.

When I was considering the visceral response the word 'father' evokes in me, it was really meaningful for me to write a few things down. I've had a lot of time to think about it this year, because my dad has gone through some significant health issues which have caused me to reflect on how much I appreciate him. Here is what I wrote down.

When I think of the word 'father,' I think of a man who built confidence in me, because I knew he loved his bride—my mom—and I never had any fear that he would leave her or abandon us. I knew he was committed to that beautiful woman. I think of a man who worked hard to make sure our family was provided for.

He played hard too, and to make sure I didn't take life too seriously—only reading books and playing the piano—he made me learn to do things I never thought I'd be able to do. He taught me to water ski and then to drop a ski and slalom. And boy, he had to be patient with me, driving that boat around and around and around to pick me up. I think of someone who made me feel safe and secure. I wasn't afraid in our home. It was peaceful because it was led by a faithful man and woman.

I remember a man who would go into his office at night when I was a little boy and memorize Scriptures—sometimes whole chapters—and then quote them to us because he wanted to know God. I remember seeing his green Living Bible all underlined and falling apart, especially in the Proverbs. I knew this was a man who fears the Lord and is wise. I've always valued his wisdom and counsel to me.

I remember working for several summers and Christmas breaks at the construction company where my dad was vice-president. I was not cut out for that line of work, believe me, they kept giving me a job. I remember feeling proud of how my dad demonstrated integrity in the workplace. I also remember how he treated me when I crashed one of his company's trucks into the fence in the back of the construction yard while he and his boss were watching from the window, waving frantically and yelling, "Stop! Stop!" But he didn't shame me.

I can't ever remember a time when I felt like my dad was trying to expose me as a failure or to point out my sins. He was actually so proud of me—and still is—that it's almost embarrassing. My dad still calls me most Sundays after he listens to my sermons and is so ready to affirm and encourage me, saying, "This is what I've learned!" Dad also has a great sense of humor and pokes fun at me like no one else can, so I can laugh at myself.

When I think of my dad, I think of uncommon generosity. I wonder how would I have ever bought a car, gone to college, grad school or seminary, bought a house or raised three kids without all the surprising provision he has made over the years through his uncommon generosity toward us.

I also think of someone who has breathed hope into our darkest moments. Back in January of 2010, the first weekend Kate was sick, we were in the hospital and got the first radiology report from her CT scan. After we read the report, all we could think was, "This is just dreadful!" We didn't know what it all meant, but we knew it was bad. But dad was with us in that room and I remember him saying, "David, she's going to be all right. She's going to get through this. She's going to live another 20 years." I thought, "Dad, you're bugging me right now. You're not taking this seriously enough." But you know, every day that year he called my wife to see how she was doing, to encourage her and care for her. I knew my dad loved her like she was the daughter he never had.

Those are some of the things that are part of my visceral response to the idea of father. As I thought about it, I thought, "You know, I don't have a single negative connotation with that word. It's God's grace and goodness." Why am I telling you this? I'm not telling you this to make you feel badly if you haven't had that kind of experience. I'm telling you this because I think God is incredibly kind and shows great tenderness to us in our humanity when, by way of analogy, He describes His relationship to us as Father. I'm telling you this because I believe God wants you to know that for everything a good father could be on earth, Jesus is 10,000 times

more. I know my dad's not perfect, and if he weren't probably listening to this sermon I could tell you some stories about him!

But I have never, ever had a complaint about his character or his care for me—and I won't ever. You know what? The only thing I don't want to think about when I think about my dad is when I'm going to have to say goodbye to him. I know for some of you that's the only sadness you have when you think about your dad—he's not here anymore.

That's why I'm so grateful that His name shall be called Everlasting Father. He keeps His children. If you are a child of the Everlasting Father, that means you have everlasting life. He's never going to become bereaved of His children, and His children will never be bereaved of Him. I love the way Charles Spurgeon put it: "There is no unfathering Christ, and there is no unchilding us. He is everlastingly a Father to those who trust in him."

Let's pray.

Oh Lord Jesus, eternally one with the Father, we thank You that the protection of Your child and treasure is a charge that on Yourself is laid. Lord Jesus, You are our Messiah, our King, King of the nations, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and You will reign forever. We thank You that when we look up at Your throne of grace, we will not be terrified by Your majesty, although we will stand in awe of You. But we will be able to draw near to that throne of grace and we can do so even this very day.

We thank You that You will receive us as Your beloved children and that You regard us as princes and princesses in Your glorious Kingdom. So help us to live as such this week, to go forth into this world as children of the One Who rules this world in truth and grace, and may we declare to our neighbors and the nations—through our lives and by our lips—the glories of Your righteousness and the wonders of Your love. We love You, Lord, and we rejoice in You. Amen.

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