

Everlasting Father

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[0 : 00] Well, now, as we look back at the history of our country, South Africa, over the last few decades, I think most people would agree that our best time as a nation so far was the Nelson Mandela era, right?

I think most people would agree with that. No, our country was by no means perfect. I'm not saying that. But during his presidency, it was better than we'd seen in a long time before, both socially as well as economically.

The evils of apartheid were behind us. We were respected in the international community. The Rand was stable. And we won the Rugby World Cup. I mean, when's that going to happen again? And what's more, something we haven't seen since, really, is that the politicians were by and large there to serve the people. So now, 20 years later, we look back on that era and we wish, don't we, that it had lasted just a little bit longer.

I mean, after all, Mandela was only a president for five years, from 94 to 99. I mean, for an African president, that's like dipping your toe in the water. That's nothing.

[1 : 09] And we would have liked him to stick around a little bit longer. I think all of us would agree with that. But why? What made Nelson Mandela such a good president? What made him the kind of president that we want to keep?

Because I don't think we've since come across a president that we want to keep. What made Nelson Mandela the kind of president that we want to keep? Well, I think it was because he was a president who actually loved his people.

I think he had a genuine care for the people of South Africa, irrespective of their color, and they knew it. They called him Tata Madiba. And not just black people. You would find just as much the rich white housewife in Santon admitting, Yo, I love Tata Madiba, hey?

And so everyone loved him. And while he wasn't without fault, Mandela's love for his people was, I think, his redeeming feature as a president.

And a rare one. I mean, how often do you find a leader like that today who really genuinely loves his people? And when you do find a leader like that, they don't stick around for long, do they?

[2 : 19] Either they get old or they get ousted by people with far less noble motives than they have. Sad, isn't it? That's the way politics goes. The leaders who we actually want to be in power are the ones who don't stay in power.

But that's also why the third name that Isaiah uses to describe the Messiah in Isaiah 9 verse 6 is so important to understand this morning.

Now, we've been working through, as Michiel mentioned, we've been working through the different names that the Messiah has given in Isaiah 9 verse 6. This king that God promised through the prophet Isaiah to send to his people to be their new leader, which they desperately needed at that time in Israel's history.

But, of course, we've learned, as we've been looking at these names, that it's a king we all desperately need, no matter what age we're living in. But the question, of course, is, as this prophet is telling the people about this new king to come, the question is, well, what will he be like?

What will be the characteristics of this new king? And that's what these names are given to tell us. They're like his CV in Isaiah 9 verse 6. They describe his characteristics and qualifications that make him fit for the job.

[3 : 28] Now, we've already looked at two of them, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. If you've missed those sermons, they're on our website. I would encourage you to listen to them just because at Christmas time it's so important to understand deeply what these names that are so often read mean.

But this morning we're going to be looking at the third name, Everlasting Father. And this name is so important because it reveals to us the kind of relationship this new king is going to have with his people under his rule.

It's a relationship that is best described as a father's relationship with his children. In other words, this ruler won't just rule his people. He will love the people he rules.

He will genuinely care for them and want their best interests. And here's the thing. Unlike other leaders that we may have had from time to time, like that in history who genuinely love their people, this king's rule of his people will not end.

It will be everlasting, hence Everlasting Father. This is a title that describes the type and the duration of the rule that this king will have.

[4 : 42] And so that's what we're looking at this morning. Exactly the type of leader we've actually always wanted, but never lasts. This one will last. Now the reason we're doing this series at Christmas time, if you haven't picked it up yet, is that Isaiah 9 is a prophecy that was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ to earth, which is what we remember at Christmas time.

It became apparent pretty soon after he arrived that he was the Messiah that the Old Testament spoke about. In fact, that's what Christ means. It's not his surname, by the way. He's not Mr. Christ. And he wasn't the son of Mr. and Mrs. Christ. Christ is basically an anglicized version of the Greek word, which means Messiah. It's his title.

It's just in his name we can see that he is the one that the whole Old Testament has spoken about. It's very sad that Jewish people today haven't picked that up yet. And hopefully with the illumination of the Holy Spirit and us helping them to see, they will see that the Messiah they're waiting for has already arrived at Christmas time in Jesus.

And so this name, Everlasting Father, describing the Messiah in Isaiah 9, actually tells us something about the way Jesus rules his people today. And so it's very important that as Christians we understand it if we're going to relate to Jesus and trust in him as we ought to do.

[6 : 11] But now the first difficulty we need to overcome is this idea of Jesus being a father. You see, God has revealed to us that he is a trinity, that he is three persons in one God.

He is a divine community. And he always has been in eternity past. A God who is comprised of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's what we've had revealed to us in Scripture.

And it's amazing. And it's so difficult for us to get our heads around because, well, if we could fully understand God, if he could fit in our heads, he wouldn't be God. So there are certain things that we'll just never fully grasp that God can be three persons in one God.

He's not three separate gods. And they're not just three different modes of God. They are three distinct persons with a relationship in one God. God is a divine community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Problem is, though, if we get to Isaiah 9, the Son, Jesus, is here described as Father. Now, how does that make sense? Yes. Doesn't that go against the idea of the Trinity? That's the first problem we need to overcome.

[7 : 19] And no, it doesn't go against the idea of the Trinity. If you consider the different ways that the word Father is used, the different ways that we use the word Father, we don't only use it to describe the person who is our actual physical Father, do we?

We also use that word to describe a characteristic that someone who's not necessarily a Father can still fulfill. Like, for example, Tata Madiba.

Tata is the also word for Father, right? Now, people who call him Tata Madiba weren't saying that he was their actual Father, but they were saying that he has the characteristics and he rules his people in a Father-like way.

Well, Isaiah is saying the same thing about the Messiah here. He's not saying the Messiah is the same as God the Father. He's not denying the Trinity. Actually, what he's saying has nothing to do with the Trinity.

And Isaiah probably didn't even fully understand and know the Trinity because it hadn't been fully revealed at that time yet. Rather, what he's saying is that this coming King, this Messiah that he's been given a vision of, that he's trying to describe with all these words, he's saying that this Messiah rules his people in what best can be described as a Father-like way.

[8 : 33] Which makes sense because Jesus came to reveal the Father to us. They're different persons in who God is, but Jesus came to earth and was made a person to connect with us, to reveal to us what the Father is like, even though he is the Son.

So in John, later on, after the passage Gene read for us, Jesus actually says, I and the Father are one. In Hebrews, right at the beginning of Hebrews, he's described as the exact representation of who God is in all of his characteristics, which means if you want to know anything about what God is actually like, you don't listen to what people try to guess and what different religions try to say God is like.

If you want to know anything about what your Creator, who made you and made this world, is like, you look to Jesus. That's the only place you will find out anything about who God really is because that is the way God chose to reveal himself to us in his Son, Jesus.

And therefore, how do we know what it means for God to be our Father? We often call God our Father when we're praying as Christians. Jesus taught us to pray God our Father in heaven. What do we actually know what it means? How do we know what it means for God to be our Father? Well, we look at Jesus. We look at how Jesus represents God's fatherliness to us in the way he rules his people.

[10:08] And so how does he do that? What are those father-like characteristics that Jesus exhibits towards the people under his rule? Now, I'm going to start talking about them and unpack them in a second.

But before I do, there's another problem. And that is that when you think of the word father, depending on your upbringing, that might not bring back the best memories.

I'm a pastor. I know people's upbringings were not all a bed of roses. Sadly, it turns out some fathers, many fathers, are bad fathers.

But that's the thing. Even people who have unfortunately had bad fathers know that they were bad fathers.

And therefore, they have a concept in their mind of what a good father is. And that is a concept that God has put in our minds. Because he is the ultimate good father.

[11:03] He is the true father of all. He is the one who started our lives, not our earthly father. God was the instigator of our lives originally.

And it's God in whose image we're made. Even if you might bear physical characteristics that look like your earthly father, actually, the Bible says you were made in God's image more even than your earthly father's image.

So he is our true father. That's what the Bible teaches us. He's the one who gave us life. He's the one in whose image we're made. Our earthly fathers, therefore, are just temporary. They're just means by which our heavenly father gave us life.

And Jesus came to show us in what way God is a father towards us. And so it's in Jesus and it's in how he lived and how he taught and what he did and how he rules his people that we can see what God the father is truly like.

And so you're starting to understand why Isaiah calls him everlasting father. And so let's look at some of the main characteristics of a good father. I want to look at four in particular.

[12:14] Firstly, compassion. Now, the word compassion, if you like etymology and where words come from, this is a great one because it literally means to suffer with.

Come, with, passion, suffer. That's why we call it the passion of Christ, his suffering. Passion actually means to suffer originally. And so the word compassion means to suffer with.

It's to feel the pain of someone else. And a good father or a good mother, a good parent, can't help but feel pain that their children go through. I mean, I know this weekend, right, Rowan and George? And others whose children have suffered. You can't help but feel what they're going through.

They're helpless and you want to protect them. You can't help but feel their pain. And you know that old phrase, as a father is about to discipline his child and he says, this is going to hurt me more than it's going to hurt you.

You heard that before? Well, that's true if he's a good father. That's what compassion means. Now, the problem, of course, with physical discipline is, and why it's such a controversy today, is that so many fathers don't have compassion.

[13:27] And it doesn't hurt them to discipline their children, and so they probably shouldn't do that. In fact, the qualification for physical discipline should be compassion. It should be that only do it if it hurts you too.

But you see, God is a God of compassion. He feels the pain of his children. And even if it's by his own hand for discipline, he feels that pain that we go through.

Or just the pain of living in a broken world, which we suffer, whether it's sickness, whether it's loss, whatever it might be. When we all feel the pain of living in a broken world. And if you haven't yet, you will.

It's only a matter of time. But you see, God is a God who's not removed from that pain. He doesn't sit back far away and look down his nose at our suffering pain and not feel anything.

He feels that pain. He feels the pain of his children. That's what a father does. And that's why Psalm 103 verse 13 says, As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion, suffering with those who fear him.

[14 : 33] And of course, the ultimate proof of God's compassion is in the person of Jesus. Leaving the glory of heaven and entering into our broken world to feel our pain with us.

Jesus was not removed from pain. He felt pain. He suffered with the people he came to be with, his people. Which is also why Hebrews can say, when it describes Jesus as our intercessor, our high priest, it says, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

He came as a compassionate king to his people, feeling their pain. And when he was on earth, he showed the compassion of his father.

Remember, Jesus came to show us who God is. The psalm tells us the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. Where do we see this compassion? We see it in Jesus. Because how often did he come across people?

If you've read the gospels, you'll recognize this. How often did Jesus come across people and they were in need? They were in need of him to do a miracle. And he did a miracle and we're told it was because he had great compassion.

[15 : 51] How often do you read he was filled with compassion? He didn't only do miracles just as a teaching aid or to demonstrate his power, which they do, but we're told because he had compassion for people.

As he was walking in the street, he saw them and he had compassion for them because that is a compassion that this king feels towards his people. Towards you, if you are one of those people. Think about that. He has, the Bible assures us and tells us that if you are the subject of Jesus, if you are one of his people, he right now has a deep compassion for you and whatever you are going through.

He is not removed from that. When you feel pain, he is not absent. He feels that just as a father would for his child. Even if he allowed that pain or caused that pain to happen for your good, know that it still hurts him to do that because he has compassion.

And so how much more seriously should we take that discipline when it comes? It hurts him to send it, but he knows when he sends his children, when he sends his people pain, it's for their good.

[16 : 59] And so when that happens, and we know that Jesus still has compassion for his people, we should take that seriously and we should learn the lesson that it's come for. We should not ignore it. So that's the first trait of a good father, compassion.

Secondly, a desire for his children's happiness. Happiness. Just as a father feels pain of his child, so he enjoys the happiness of his child. Am I not right, fathers?

A father is deeply pleased by the laughter of his children. The other day, we were driving in the car with our kids and the discussion got into, I don't know how, the discussion got into mom and dad's special powers.

And because we have special powers, apparently Gene's special power is making the children feel better when they're sad. And my special power is making them laugh when they're grumpy. With a vast array of dad jokes, which I'm pretty good at.

Here's one. Why did the scarecrow get a promotion? Because he was outstanding in his field. See what I mean? They're that good. They're all that good. But have you ever wondered why dad jokes are called dad jokes?

[18 : 07] Why they're called dad jokes? Because dads will do anything to make their children smile when they're down, won't they? A good father delights in the joy of his children.

Well, you know what? So does God delight in the joy of his children. And he gives his children joy not by using corny jokes, but he gives his children joy through the whole of his creation.

Flavors in food, sunsets, the smell of fresh pine trees, things that he put in this world for us to enjoy. He didn't have to.

He didn't have to put those pleasing things in the world, especially in this fallen world. And yet he still desires our enjoyment of him and his gifts.

It gives him great pleasure when we have pleasure in him. One of my favorite examples of Jesus doing this was at the wedding in Cana in John chapter 2, his first recorded miracle.

[19 : 09] We looked at this a few months or... No, I don't think it was a few months. No, it was last year. John, our series in John. But remember that when he turned water into wine? And we're told, a little interesting detail, it wasn't just any wine.

No, it wasn't your Robertson box wine that you get at Spa. No, this was the best wine the emcee had probably ever tasted. Now, the thing is, it didn't have to be for the miracle to show us what it needed to show us.

It could have just been any wine, and yet Jesus made it really good stuff. Why? Because he could. And he wanted people to enjoy it. But you see, that miracle was only a sneak peek.

When we understand and unpack and realize what he was doing in that miracle, we realize it was a sneak peek at his kingdom to come. The joy that he desires for his people in his kingdom in the future.

Which Psalm 1611 anticipates when it says, You make known to be the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence. With eternal pleasures at your right hand.

[20 : 23] Eternal pleasures. This is the picture of the kingdom. This is a picture of God releasing all the joy that we could ever experience onto his people once he's liberated us finally from the power and penalty of sin.

Heaven is not sitting on clouds playing harps. Heaven is not like one long church service. Heaven is, look at this, eternal pleasures.

Filled with joy. It's enjoying everything that God has ever designed for us to enjoy without end and to the full. Jesus said, I've come in the reading, John 10, I've come so that they may have life and have it to the full.

And so if you're one of Jesus' people, if you're one of this king's subjects this morning, know he desires your happiness. And he is perfectly capable to give it to you far better than you can ever give it to yourself.

If you would only believe that. And be patient and stop trying to seek happiness apart from him in this world and never find it. And yet carry on trying to seek it because you think that this world can give you happiness.

[21 : 37] Believe. Start to believe. If you call yourself a Christian, if you call yourself one of the subjects of Jesus the Lord, and this is true, believe. Believe that your ultimate joy can actually be found in Jesus and only in Jesus as your king who came to bring you ultimate happiness.

That's the second aspect of what a father desires for his children. The third aspect of fatherliness that Jesus shows us is access. Access. Access. A good father is always available to his children. Is he not? I remember growing up, my dad worked in a shipping company in town, and he was often always very, very busy.

But I knew that I could always phone him up if I needed to talk to him or ask him a question. He was always available, even if he was up to his eyeballs in work. Now, sometimes he was irritated.

But he was always available. And that's something that always stands out for me. Something I always respected about him. Well, you see, God is the ultimate father.

[22 : 46] And he is always available for his people. David, for example, when he was in some serious trouble and being hunted down by government agents, hiding in the caves around Jerusalem, he could still say this, Psalm 34, verse 17, the righteous cry out and the Lord hears them.

And by righteous, he didn't mean people who had never sinned, but people who God counted as righteous because they were his. They were in his family. They were his children.

And he was always available to them whenever they cried out. In fact, Jesus illustrates this so well in Mark 10, this access that God gives. When some children wanted access to him.

Remember the story? I'll read it from Mark 10. See, the disciples thought that access to Jesus was limited to those who had earned it.

But Jesus rebukes them and says, no, the opposite is true. In fact, access to him and his kingdom is only available to those who know they can't earn it like these little children.

[24 : 11] And if you know that, if you realize that you could never access God's kingdom by your own merits, that is exactly the kind of person that Jesus allows access through faith in his merits.

And so when your sins weigh you down and that guilt seems to separate you from Christ, it's in those moments that you need to remember, if you are one of his subjects, that he is always available to you and ready to forgive you.

Always. Like a father is for a child. Because that is the kind of king that Jesus is to his people. Each of his subjects has a direct uninterrupted line to him day or night to find grace in their time of need. Which is even more remarkable when you consider that all of those subjects are sinners who at one time or another have been guilty of treason against their king. We all have.

We call him our king and yet we are guilty of treason. We are guilty of turning away from him and following other gods, idols, pleasures, money, whatever it might be that we've made more important than our king and we've put in place of our king to worship.

[25 : 32] We've all committed treason against him. So it's mind-boggling that he will allow access to people who have been accused and found guilty of treason against him. And so how can he do that?

How can you be sure that you actually have access to him knowing all the sins as you do? That the people sitting around you don't even know but you do know deep down inside.

You know those sins. You know those sins that you've not admitted to anyone. Those ones that you're so ashamed of. How can you possibly have access to this king because he knows those sins too?

Well I'll tell you. Because that's where the last of his fatherly attributes comes in that I want to talk about this morning. And that is sacrifice. Sacrifice. Now of course this is an attribute like all of these which is just as true of mothers.

Sometimes more so. And yet I can only speak from personal experience as a father myself. And I can tell you there is an instinct deep inside a father which is a willingness to give up everything they have, even their own life, to save their child from danger.

[26 : 39] In October 2015, a family was out walking in a forest in Tennessee in the States.

And one of the daughters, 10-year-old Haley McCary, was collecting rocks near a train track when she heard a train approaching. And she tried to get out of the way and she realized that her foot was stuck in the tracks.

Her shoe was tangled up in the tracks. She couldn't move. She called out to her father, Justin, who ran to her. And he got down and managed to untrap her foot and push her aside just as the train struck and killed him.

And that is the sacrifice of a father. And that is something that Jesus did on a much bigger scale for you. When he deliberately went to the cross to save you from the mortal danger you were facing, the eternal punishment for your sins against God.

And you were helpless. You were stuck. You were unable to save yourself when Jesus came to this world and he put himself in between you and danger and he took it on himself instead so that you could go free.

[27 : 47] And he pushed you out of the way when he died on the cross for you. That is the kind of king that God has sent to us. Isn't it amazing? A king that we should therefore unhesitatingly follow and obey in our lives because we know that he is for us far more than we could ever have hoped for.

And if you believe that, if you believe these things, then you will have no problem following this king and obeying him every single day of your life. It will be a pleasure to do so because he is the kind of king that we have always wanted and he is the kind of king that we can keep following without end because his rule is eternal.

When you put yourself under his rule, you will forever be under his rule and you will never want to not be under his rule. Because that's the type of king he is.

Question is, is he ruling you? This morning. We can call him Christ. We can call him king. We can sing songs about him. We can come to church.

We can call ourselves Christians. But really the rubber hits the road when we ask the question, is Jesus in charge of my life today? Or am I? Is he my king or am I my king?

[29 : 06] That's the most important question you could ask yourself. And if you are in his kingdom, if you are truly one of his subjects and he is your king, then you can know and you can rest in the

fact that all of these things are true for his relationship with you today and every day of your life. And if you are not in his kingdom yet, if you are not his subject yet, then I hope this morning you have realized that this is the king you've always wanted. This is the king that you desperately want in charge of your life. The king who wants the king who wants the king who seeks your joy. The king who gives you access to himself and to eternal life because he's the king who made the ultimate sacrifice for you to be saved. All that's left for you to do is trust in him and become one of his subjects today. And you can do that. Go home and say, Lord, I want you as king of my life. Take control. Come into my life. I trust in your death on my behalf. And you will be in his kingdom instantly. Because he's done it all for you.

[30 : 23] Don't hesitate. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we pray to you. We thank you for being our wonderful counselor.

Thank you for being our mighty hero, God, who saved us. And we thank you for ruling us as an everlasting father, forever loving and giving yourself for us to be saved. Help us, Lord, to trust in you and to submit to your rule every day of our lives. And may you be glorified through us in Jesus' name. Amen.