

“The Everlasting Father”

(Isaiah 9:6)

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December 6, 2009

This Advent season we're taking a look at the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter nine, and our focus is on the titles given for the Messiah. “Messiah” means “anointed one,” like the kings of Israel were anointed. The Messiah was also the person God promised as the Savior of the world, and Isaiah calls him by the royal titles “Wonderful Counselor,” “Almighty God,” “Prince of Peace,” and “Everlasting Father.” This morning we're thinking especially about “Everlasting Father.”

Isaiah promised a different kind of king. During his ministry, he saw both good kings and bad, and one day he saw the future God would bring, and brought the message about a different kind of king who was coming. What kind of king? This is a king who reigns well. He is a king whose kingdom is secure. He is a king who reigns with justice and righteousness.

Isaiah was talking about the Messiah, God's anointed one, our Savior. He's the one we celebrate at Christmas. He was born in a barn in Bethlehem, and he became a king like no other. He's the way God does more than tell us he loves us, he shows us. That's the one that Isaiah's talking about.

That's why he's called a Wonderful Counselor—someone who deals with all our enemies. He's called Mighty God—someone who has the power to reign and to deal with all our problems. He's called Prince of Peace—someone who brings wholeness and happiness to the people and to the nation. It's a different kind of king.

The title we look at today is “Everlasting Father.” What does that mean?

Isaiah isn't saying that Jesus is indistinguishable from God the Father. He's using the term father like it was often used of a king who protects and supports those under him with care and authority, like a father protects and supports his family. Jesus is the king who protects and supports his people. He's just like a father to them. The difference is he doesn't do it for a while, or till the kids grow up and go off to college, but forever.

Jesus isn't the same as the world's rulers. Let's think about three differences.

First, earthly kings don't always care about their people.

There are lots of examples in the Bible of kings that were more concerned about holding onto power than with serving the people they were supposed to protect. If a king wanted a piece of land and the owner stood in the way, he found a way to steal the land. If a king had his eye on another man's wife, the king had the raw power to have him killed and take the wife for his own.

That's like a lot of leaders in our times, too. They're put in office to serve the people, but they get intoxicated by power, and it seems like their only goal is to get what they can for themselves. It's sort of like if a president decides to pardon a friend of theirs who's convicted for a crime, there's not much we can do about it. Of course we all know terrible examples of worse

abuse of power across our world, like Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, who simply sees leadership as a way to make himself richer.

But Jesus, like a father, cares about his people.

He never gets compassion fatigue. He knows everything about you, and he never loses track of you in the crowd. The gospel of Mark talks about Jesus' earthly career, and how he healed people and gave them hope, and stood up for them and put their needs ahead of his own. Mark says,

“When Jesus ... saw a large crowd, he felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34).

Jesus cares about you—passionately, relentlessly, inexorably, unshakably. There's nothing in your life that Jesus doesn't know about, and still he cares for you, just like a good father cares for his family. That's what it means for Jesus to be the Everlasting Father.

Second, earthly kings can't always protect their people.

Israel was a little country, and it was surrounded by powerful empires like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. The kings of Israel always worried about enemies who wanted to control them. They faced many wars for their survival as a nation.

Sort of like that for us today. Earthly power can't make you invincible. Even as a superpower, there are certain things that just seem beyond the power of our leaders, like terrorism that has no central, identifiable organization, or the ups and downs of a global economy.

But Jesus, like a father, protects his people.

Jesus is the king who has no problem protecting his people. He protects them just like a good father protects his family. Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, said this:

“He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear” (Luke 2:69-74).

Jesus can protect us today. There's nothing he can't handle. He can protect us from anything. The Bible says,

"If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?" (Romans 8:31-32).

Jesus, like a good father, is able to protect us.

Third, earthly kings die just like everybody else.

Some of Israel's kings were killed in battle at the height of their power. Some were assassinated by their own sons or officers. Some just died because their time ran out. But no matter how great and glorious their reign of power, someday they had to give up power to

somebody else. So in the end, no matter how good a king might be, in the end, they left the people looking for the reign of God himself.

Earthly kings can't always protect their people. They don't always care about their people. And no matter how good they might be, in the end, they all eventually die.

Jesus, the Everlasting Father, doesn't have these problems:

But Jesus, because he is eternal, will never die.

Jesus came to show us the love of God, and to die, and then to come back to life, and now to reign forever. Now he says,

"I am the living one who died. Look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave" (Revelation 1:18).

Jesus defeated our great enemies of sin, death, and the devil, and he's alive today. And the Bible says,

"Christ died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us" (Romans 8:34).

Not only is Jesus alive today, but he is praying for us. You don't need some saint or spiritual superhero to intercede for you, because you have the Son of God himself pleading before the throne of God for you. And he helps *us* to be better fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters to each other.

The web site *Breakpoint* told the story this week about a seven-year-old girl named Mencia and her five-year-old brother who slept wherever their parents would lay them down for the night. It might be in a dirty room in a cheap hotel, or maybe on the street. The only place they had to play was in trashy parking lots and alleys that smelled like stale booze.

Things were hard enough already, but one day their world fell apart when their dad Jose was arrested on drug charges. Now the kids weren't just homeless, but fatherless, too. Jose was overwhelmed with guilt. But in jail, he heard the gospel, and came into a relationship with Jesus. He grew in his faith and told anyone he could about his faith. His wife Mayra was addicted to cocaine, and didn't trust anything her husband said.

But on Christmas Eve, there came a knock on the door of the room where Jose's family was staying. There was a UPS delivery man with a great big box. There was a tag that said the box was from Jose. They could hardly believe it. Jose was in jail! The kids could hardly stand their excitement—they had Christmas presents from Dad! It turned out the gifts were from a ministry called Angel Tree that makes it possible for people in prison to get gifts to their families on the outside.

Mayra said, "I cannot describe to you the joy that my children and I felt when we opened [the presents.] I thanked God right there, I cried, and went on my knees. This is when I knew that God loved me, and I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into my life." Not only that, but Mayra prayed that God would deliver her from her addiction to cocaine, and God miraculously freed her then and there. When Jose was released from prison, he and Mayra both dedicated themselves to serving the Lord by sharing Jesus' love with prisoners.

No other king can always protect their people, they can't always care for their people, and they all die in the end. Jesus is different. He always protects his people, no matter how bad our circumstances might be, to bring about his good purpose in our lives. He cares for every one of us. And he's conquered death. That's what Isaiah meant when he called Jesus the Everlasting Father.

A king like this deserves our worship. At Christmas we remember Jesus, who was born to be King of Kings. I invite you to worship Jesus the Everlasting Father, maybe for the first time, by joining his Kingdom and serving him. Jesus is the king who protects and cares for his people forever.