

## “Everlasting Father”

Isaiah 9:6

FCF: Longing for something more lasting than the celebration

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because Jesus is “Everlasting Father,”

(anchor) we have no need to fear and are freed to follow Him.

### SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

This time of year we hear many a seasonal song – some of which are appropriate for settings such as this, some are not. Take, for instance, “O, Why Can’t Everyday Be Like Christmas?” It’s certainly had no shortage of renditions. ([READ lyrics](#)):

*O, why can’t everyday be like Christmas?*

*Why can’t that feeling go on endlessly?*

*O, if everyday could be just like Christmas,*

*What a wonderful world this would be.*

Such goes the crooning question. The answer isn’t quite as catchy. The celebration would get old. The special features would take on a stale flavor. And worse, to assume otherwise is to lose sight of what Christmas is all about – that light has broken into the darkness of this world, a world too dark to realistically expect “that feeling to go on endlessly.” It’s as naïve as thinking you’ll find everything under the tree you asked for.

But the longing is there nonetheless. It’s a good longing and can be commended. And it’s a longing that is not completely bereft of some fulfillment. For even if Christmas cannot last the whole year through, its effects can. For the heart of Christmas is not a sentimental feeling but a historical figure – who has come and is with us now.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Isaiah 9:1-7](#)

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

### SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Many of us have a favorite ornament to hang on the tree – perhaps because of where it came from, its history, or what it conveys to our imagination. I happen to have a least favorite ornament. So much so, that you won’t even find it on our tree. It’s of “Father Christmas” and was given to me by an elderly relative when I was quite small. He is standing with his long white beard, a stoic expression on his face, clothed in his long red robes, carrying two things – a mysterious sack and a handful of wooden switches. Now, I have to tell you, I never much cared for that figure. That is not the Santa I wanted. No more so than the one of the song ([READ lyrics](#)): *You better watch out, you better not cry. You better not pout, I’m telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town.* Santa, in his all-knowing-ness, knows when you are sleeping, when you’re awake, whether you’ve been bad or good so you’d better be good for goodness sake. And why? Because if you don’t, when it comes to presents, he won’t. Santa, you understand, is merit-based. His kindness is conditional, his gifts come not just with bows tied but with strings attached. Which frankly means I’m getting nothing for Christmas.

I found this a bit disturbing as a child. If I couldn’t hide and I couldn’t measure up, what hope did I have? So much was riding on this. And Santa was the man. He had to come through. The hope I had was tenuous – all the more so since it was hinging on me. The one I was counting on might not come. Now shift that forward a few years. Move it from a child’s concerns at Christmas to adults’ concerns through the year. How tenuous are our hopes? Will the things we are counting on come through?

Now shift things back 900 years to the time of this morning’s text. This is the third in our series on the names given to this Child spoken of in Isaiah 9. The setting is sometime around 733 B.C. The Assyrian Empire is on the move. The people of Judah –

seeing the exile as it is beginning to transpire in the northern tribes of Israel – are fearful. Dark clouds are on the horizon. Was there any hope? Indeed there was for Isaiah came with news of light, of this One who was to come. A “Wonderful Counselor” – guiding and speaking with divine wisdom. “Mighty God” – ruling, reigning with divine strength. To hear of such care would surely have been encouraging. But what kind of care would it prove to be? Would there be conditions? Such titles would raise their hopes. Would those hopes prove to be tenuous? Hardly. For this Child is also “Everlasting Father.”

## **I. FATHERLY CARE**

Let’s look at how He is described – as a Father. Or perhaps more accurately, as One who is fatherly in His care. There’s no need to be confused as to which member of the Trinity is being spoken of here. Isaiah is describing this Child’s relationship to us, not to the other members of the Trinity. This is clearly about the Messiah.

### *A) Explanation of Terms*

But the inescapable thing is that the descriptions made of Him are the very things said of the LORD Himself. Which ought to tell us something.

#### 1. Compassion

The LORD is clearly portrayed in the Scriptures as a compassionate father (**READ Psalm 103:8-13**). This word for “compassion” is a kind of love stemming from a close personal relationship. It is associated with the womb itself. No explanation is given as to why He feels this way. Just simply that He does. And that is enough. Except that such compassionate paternal affections are also present in the heart of the One here in Isaiah 9.

#### 2. Knowledge

But there’s more. Psalm 103 continues (**READ Psalm 103:14**). This is a love that knows not only those under care but the weaknesses that would bring them under as well – their temperaments, tendencies, temptations – all of which are known and taken into account.

#### 3. Provision

So much so that He then provides in an appropriate way – protection from ourselves, according only to what is truly needed (and not always deeply wanted). Discipline as well. In fact, that aspect of this fatherly care seems to be the kind Isaiah speaks of the most in his references to the LORD as a father (**READ Isaiah 63:15-17; 64:7-9**). Fathers discipline their children. It’s a sign and a means of their love. And the same is true here.

### *B) Significance of Title*

And, ultimately, as you look at Isaiah 9 and the freight of the meaning behind this reference to this Child’s fatherly care, all of this is being said of Jesus. These same characteristics attributed to God are attributed to Him. And they are borne out in His treatment of us. Think of what we see in the Gospels. Think of how these things unfold.

#### 1. Compassion

His compassion for those ravaged by their sin and the misery of the Fall. His willingness to heal, to teach, to dialogue, to interact, to expend Himself utterly and completely. The ache of His heart for us (**READ Matthew 9:36**). His weeping at Lazarus’ tomb. His caring for His mother while hanging on the cross. Such is His compassion.

#### 2. Knowledge

Such is His knowledge – knowing what is in the heart of men such that He would not entrust Himself to them, knowing their idols, knowing what needed to be said and just how to say it. Knowing His followers’ limitations and working through them.

#### 3. Provision

Providing for them, for us, at every turn. For material needs and spiritual lessons. For tender encouragement and tough rebukes. We tend to forget that this time of year. He didn't stay in the manger, you know. He grew up. And He has a way of stirring things up ([READ John 2:13-17](#)). His is a love that is not interested in leaving us as He finds us.

All of which is to say there is a tenaciousness about His affections, a steadfastness to His concerns, an unwillingness to let anything stand between us and Himself.

*Illustration:*

It's a rugged kind of love, a love captured in some of our favorite stories. Take, for instance, the story of Mr. Edwards and the Ingalls family from Little House on the Prairie. Some of you may have seen the show or read the book. It was Christmas Eve and the girls were worried. It was plenty cold but there had been no snow. How was Santa to get there? And worse, the rains had swelled the creek and Pa had said no one would be able to cross. That night they went to bed with little hope for the morning. But at first light there was a knock on the door and it was their neighbor, Mr. Edwards. They couldn't believe it. Not only had he crossed the creek to make good on his invitation for Christmas dinner but he came with gifts for the girls – those girls whom he loved so dearly, who had such a soft spot in his heart. He couldn't let them down. He had to come. And so he walked the miles, brought the gifts, and risked it all to cross the creek.

*Application:*

Let me read you this excerpt. After the girls discover the treasures in their stockings – a cup, a cookie, a candy cane, and a penny of their own ([READ Christmas on the Prairie, p.36](#)). Now I don't know how all this strikes you. We all respond in different ways – some with tears, some with stunned silence. But the fact is this. Jesus, this One of whom Isaiah speaks, has walked the miles, brought the gifts, and risked it all to cross the creek for us. Such is His fatherly care. That's what we celebrate this time of year.

## II. FROM AN ETERNAL ONE

But there is still a question left to be answered. What are the limits of this love? It so often seems that the affections, the loyalties, the friendliness of so many around us are conditioned on something – on what they can get out of us, on what we give to them. What about here? What about with Him? What are the limits? How long will it last?

Isaiah tells us. This Child of which he speaks is not only “Father.” He is “Everlasting Father.” “Everlasting” – again, what does that mean?

A) *Explanation of Term*

The Children's Catechism is instructive here (not just for young ones but for us older ones as we go through it with them). “*What is God?*” The answer reads, “*God is a spirit and does not have body like we do.*” Or, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, “*God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.*” He is “everlasting” ([READ Isaiah 57:15a; 26:4](#)).

1. He is without beginning or end

You Cecil B. DeMille fans should know this. Think of the burning bush ([READ Exodus 3:14](#)). “I am the Being One.” No beginning and no end. He is the Fountain of all that is.

2. He is without need

He is completely, utterly self-existent – dependent on nothing and needing nothing from anyone or anything. Samuel Coleridge put it this way ([READ summary](#)): *the universe minus God equals nothing, but God minus the universe equals God.*

3. He is without change

He is without need. And He does not change. He cannot get better for He is already perfect. And since He is perfect, He cannot get worse. His character does not change. He is now who He has always been. What He has declared, how He works, the purposes He pursues – none of these things change for He is without change. He is “everlasting.”

*B) Significance of Title*

Now again, transfer all these realities to the One of whom Isaiah is speaking.

1. The wonder

Do you see the wonder of this? The unchanging One coming as one who quite literally, needed to be changed; as One who would grow and mature “in wisdom and in stature;” as One who needed companionship, food, rest, and shelter; as one who would bleed and die.

2. The reality

And yet that is exactly what we see in the descriptions all through the New Testament of Jesus. We’ve read from Colossians over the last few weeks and John this morning. Now listen to what our Lord says of Himself in Revelation (**READ Revelation 1:8**).

*Illustration:*

Now in some contexts, someone being described as being without change would be a criticism – stubborn, unyielding, unwilling to listen or bend. Something like the commercial running these days of customers standing outside the production plant, trying to gain a hearing, only to walk away saying, “*It’s like talking to a brick wall.*” But that’s not what you find here. This is the most encouraging message of all. Here we find ourselves saying something more like, “*It’s like being held in the strongest arms.*”

*Application:*

“Everlasting.” Read the Nativity accounts with that in mind and let yourself be filled with the awe and the wonder you should. Of what other child could these things be said? Who is this? Who could it be? Who else could it be? And how? And why?

**CONCLUSION:**

But let’s take this a step further and bring these two astonishing realities together the way Isaiah does. This Child, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh is not just “everlasting.” Nor is He merely father-like in His care. He is described as “Everlasting Father” – the two parts together as one. That is to say, His loving care and protection will last forever and never fail. He is our tender, faithful, wise trainer, guardian, and provider now and for eternity. He guards His people and supplies for our needs now and forever. And nothing will change that. Our circumstances may indeed appear to be dire. But that does not mean we are no longer His. Our failures may be great. But that does not mean He will let us go. No, He is our Father eternally – eternally! And nothing can change that!

You see, unlike the Santa on my childhood’s tree, unlike the Santa sung of in the songs, Christmas itself is grace based. Think with me. Even as the child gets down from the jolly old elf’s lap at the mall, even after being asked, “So, have you been good this year?” – what else do you so often see in the picture? Parents carrying shopping bags of gifts. They carry the children and they carry the presents. And on Christmas morning, the two are brought together and it has nothing at all to do with how good they were.

That’s what we see here. The Lord Jesus loves us, protects us, provides for us in a paternal bond that cannot be broken. It is everlasting. It is, like we sung a little while ago, a love that will not let us go. And that, my friends, is the hope of Christmas. That is why, as dark as the darkness may be, this light, this news, shines all the brighter.

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) Because Jesus is “Everlasting Father,”

(anchor) we have no need to fear and are freed to follow Him.