

“He Will Be Called—Everlasting Father”

Today we're continuing our Advent series. This message series is meant to help us understand what it means that God took on human form and was born to us. I love the way *The Message* translation puts it in the Gospel of John: **“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14)**. Christmas is important so we get ready for it by preparing our minds, our hearts, our homes. We make sure that we remember what it's about, not just baby Jesus and the story of his birth, but that his birth was the beginning of his journey to the cross. His life, death and resurrection was God's way of building a bridge between us and him.

Now, the key scripture for this series comes from the Old Testament. It's one of the prophecies about what God would do in the future. The prophet Isaiah's words point to the Ideal King, to Jesus, and those words gives us some of the names that Jesus would be known by. Each name is rich with meaning and tells us something about this Jesus, the baby, that will be born to all humanity, the King of all kings. Let's look at Isaiah's words, written 700 years before Jesus was born. **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, NIV)**.

So far we've looked at Jesus as Wonderful Counselor, and last week, Mighty God. Today we look at this name of Jesus, Everlasting Father. Jesus being revealed to us as another father makes this very, very personal. Everybody has a father. And the word father starts to bring out all kinds of images in us, and memories, and emotions. Maybe for you the memories of your earthly father are awesome. Maybe your dad is, or was, great and when you think about him you've got great thoughts and feelings.

As a father myself I know it's not easy being Dad. We are far from perfect and we make mistakes. And as you grow up and look back on your dad, if you have good memories, be thankful, that's great. But the reality is that not all of us have good memories about our earthly father. Whether we have good memories or bad memories what we tend to do as human beings is project the image of our earthly father onto our Everlasting Father. We tend to look on Jesus, our Everlasting Father, through the lens of our earthly father. We can think, without really deciding to, that Jesus is just like our earthly fathers.

I say that out loud and it scares me a little bit, because if I blow it, and my kids grow up thinking Jesus is just like Dad. That's some serious responsibility. That's why I said a minute ago that we can think, without really deciding to, that Jesus is just like our earthly fathers. And that can be dangerous. I try to be a good dad, I pray to be the best father I can be, I strive for that, but I do not want my kids thinking that God is like me. In fact, I want my kids, as they grow up, and I grow up, to do just the opposite. I want them to see the traits of the Everlasting Father in me. Not to think that God is like me, as flawed as I am, but to see me striving to be more like Christ, the Everlasting Father.

Here's my point: If all we do is look at God through the lens of our earthly father, we are not going to see Jesus very well. In fact, as good as our fathers may be, it's dangerous to look at Jesus through that lens. As good as our dads may be or may have been they are going to let us down.

I did it last week. I'm going to be talking about Santa for a minute so if you've got kids with you, you may have some 'splaining to do, Lucy. In our house, we've not really played up Santa real big, but we've kind of played along. We've always talked about Santa as a historical person, St. Nicholas the bishop of Myra in the 4th century, known for his generosity to the poor and protection of children. We've talked about the spirit of St. Nicholas or Santa Claus. We've played along. But this year the questions came and we decided to answer them all directly. In the process, and through the tears, Janet and I were told that we lied. What do you do with that one? You can't win here! Even when you try to be clear you get called a liar by your kids!

Even when we're trying to be the best fathers, we're going to let our kids down! That's the danger of looking at our Everlasting Father through the lens of our earthly fathers. And of course, it's especially dangerous if our fathers were never satisfied with our lives, or always angry, or never there, or were abusive. That's why we can't look at God through that lens. But listen I made the decision a long time ago around Fathers' Day, that I wasn't going to bash Dads then, and I'm not going to do it now. Dads and moms don't need guilt and shame, we need a compelling vision of what we **can** become and Jesus gives us that. We can't

look at our Everlasting Father, at Jesus, through the lens of our earthly fathers. But we can look at him through the lens of scripture.

In a minute I want to talk about what our Everlasting Father is, but before I do that, I want to talk about this word, “Everlasting.” It’s kind of interesting to me that the word “everlasting” is even in our vocabulary. As a kid, did you ever get one of those everlasting gobstoppers or jawbreakers? First of all they didn’t really last forever, and second of all, you didn’t want them to! Enough is enough!

Or you buy something with a lifetime warranty. It breaks down in a year and the company has gone out of business. No parts available! Everlasting—not even close.

There are parts of our past that we think will be around forever. I was back in my hometown this past Fall and some of the landmarks of my life are gone. The pool where I swam every summer, the pool where I worked as a life guard, the pool where I taught swim lessons and spent a huge part of my childhood, being destroyed!

My High School is still standing but it’s now an elementary school and that is just wrong!

I bought a fan a couple of years ago to keep on my workbench. And I wanted something solid, metal, none of the cheap plastic stuff. So I found one and everything about it is solid metal, meant to last forever, except one little plastic part that held the front cover over the blades. That little plastic part broke and the thing fell apart. I was able to fix it with some metal wire, but it wasn’t meant to last forever.

I don’t know why the word “everlasting” is even in our vocabulary, because nothing lasts forever. But maybe the word “everlasting” is in our vocabulary because we occasionally get glimpses of that which does last forever. Of the One who lasts forever. The One who is and was and always will be. We get a glimpse of “everlasting” when they capture and beat Jesus, when they break Jesus’ body, and spill his blood, when they kill Jesus, but he doesn’t stay dead! His life is everlasting, his promises are everlasting, his presence is everlasting. The scriptures say this in the New Testament book of Hebrews: “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever**” (Hebrews 13:8, NIV).

One time some religious leaders questioned Jesus on a number of counts. They questioned his authority, they questioned his origin, they questioned his motives. It was a fairly ugly conversation. So finally, Jesus tries to lighten up the conversation by saying, “Guys, lighten up. Just be happy that I’m here!” He says, “After all, ‘your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad’ (John 8:56, NIV).”

See what He’s saying there? “I knew all about Abraham. In fact, I knew Abraham.” Well, these guys pick right up on that and say, “Hold on! You are not yet fifty years old,” the Jews said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58, NIV).

To understand this statement, you have to know that “I am” is the name that God used to reveal himself to Moses. It’s an amazing title, if you think about it – tailor-fit for God. Because when you try to describe God, the most accurate statement you can make about him is, “He is.” He exists fully, everywhere, at all times. He always has been, always will be, is today, full existence.” He is.

So when Jesus says, “I am,” he’s saying, “I am not only older than Abraham, I have existed forever, because I am God.” He is eternal. He has always existed, and always will exist. He’s everlasting father—Father forever.

So let’s put it together and look at what it means that Jesus is our Everlasting Father. Scripture paints the picture of what that looks like and one facet of this is that **our Everlasting Father is Compassionate**. Let’s take a look at some of the descriptors that point to this in scripture and a really good one comes from the Old Testament, the Psalms where it says, “**The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love**” (Psalm 103:8, NIV).

One of the most amazing realizations that people come to in their faith is that there is nothing they can do to win God’s love—because he’s gives that love freely, unconditionally. That’s hard for us to accept, especially if we felt like we had to perform for our dads in order for them to love us and accept us. Some people feel like they have to really work to get Jesus to love them. Some of us feel like we’ve got to impress

him with stuff we do, or our amazing confessions when we blow it. Maybe you've been working it! Doing all the religious stuff, church, prayer, Bible reading, not because you're overwhelmed with the grace of God in your life, but because deep down inside you're worried that if you don't do that stuff, then God won't love you.

But listen to these words from Jesus, word for those of us who are trying to perform and win his love somehow, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29, NIV).**

Rest. Just rest in him. Rest. Stop trying to do everything right. Yes, live a life that honors God, but stop trying to do everything right to get God to love you. God already has this amazing compassion for you, you don't have to win it, rest in it. When we look at Jesus through the lens of scripture we see that he is an Everlasting Father who is compassionate.

We're also going to see that **Jesus, as an Everlasting Father, cares.** He cares. This is God speaking to you and me. Feel this because he's not angry, he's not going to abuse you, he's talking to you and me when he says in the Old Testament, **"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).**

One time, as Jesus is traveling up to Jerusalem, he gets word that the king of Jerusalem, a man named Herod, wants to kill him. Jesus doesn't shiver when he hears this. He doesn't turn around and head back out into the country. He just keeps a steady pace as he's hiking in from the valley.

A few hours later, as he crests the last hill and he looks out over the city laid out in front of him, in almost a whisper he says to himself, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34, NIV).**

Can't you just hear the longings of a parent in those words? O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You have no idea how I care for you! How often I have wanted just to scoop you up and wrap my arms around you.

Another time, Jesus gets word that a close friend of his is near death. He heads to his friend's house, but before Jesus gets there, the friend has died. When word gets out that Jesus is just about to their village, the friend's sister, whose name is Mary, runs out of the house, all the way down the street and in sheer numbing agony, collapses at Jesus' feet in a sobbing heap. Let me read you what happens next. **"When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 'Where have you laid him?' he asked. 'Come and see, Lord,' they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'" (John 11:32-36, NIV).**

That same Jesus there, is the one who is here. That same level of care Jesus had for that one, is the care he has for all...for you. And you can take that to the bank!

When we see Jesus, the Everlasting Father through the lens of scripture we see **an Everlasting Father who is always there.** Listen, it doesn't matter if you never come to church again. He's going to be there for you. It doesn't matter if you never read your Bible again. It doesn't matter if you never pray again; if you go into a tailspin in a life that dishonors God. He's still there for you. The New Testament says this in the book called Hebrews: **"...God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5, NIV).**

This is not somebody's opinion, this is not the words of some theologian, these are the words of God for you. Not for somebody else, not for somebody more religious or faithful than you. These are not words for perfect people, they are words for you and me. Never will I leave you or forsake you.

"Never" is another one of those words! Like "forever" and "everlasting"! It's hard to believe it's in our vocabulary. But the last time I looked the definition of never is still never. God says, "You may forsake me, but I will never leave you or forsake you."

You ever had those times when one of kids just starts screaming. The one I can remember is the dreaded bike wreck. Zoe's just learning how to ride and hits the curb on our driveway and down she goes-- hands bloodied, knees bloodied. The hyperventilating crying. I hold her in my arms and tell her, "It's OK, daddy's here, it's going to be alright, I love you, it will get better, just breathe, we'll fix it..." She starts to settle down and relax and breath.

Today, I want you to know this, when life has dealt you blow, after blow, after blow, after blow, and maybe you're bleeding out your knees, and bleeding out your elbows, and maybe nobody can see the wounds, maybe nobody even knows. But listen, when you go running, maybe screaming, and you jump into the arms of your Everlasting Father, he's going whisper in your ear, he's going to calm you and he's going to give you his peace, and he will never ever, ever let you go. Never.

When we see this Everlasting Father through the lens of scripture we see a father who is compassionate, who is caring who is always there. That's the Jesus of Christmas. And for today that is the Good News.

I thank Rev. Scott Rogers, LifeChruch pastor, Mesa campus, and Rev. Hal Seed, Lead Pastor of New Song Community Church in Oceanside, CA for their resources in this message.