

**Everlasting Father
Prince of Peace, pt. 3
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Good morning everybody!

[Turn to Isaiah 9, p. 683]. If you're sitting in front of a rack that has Bibles in it, look round your row and if anyone in it doesn't have a Bible, please pass them one.

If you have been with us these past 2 weeks, you know that God couldn't wait to tell people about the coming of Christmas. So 700 years beforehand, 2700 years ago now, God foretold the Christmas story by choosing a prophet named Isaiah to tell the world about an amazing baby who would be born the prince of peace. (If you haven't been with us these past 2 weeks, I hope you'll pick up the tapes on your way out this morning.) Either way, the learning continues this morning with the words of Isaiah's prophecy. – Words that George Frederic Handel made even more famous by immortalizing them in his famous Hallelujah chorus.

As we've done for the past 2 weeks, since everyone always stands for the Hallelujah Chorus, we're all going to stand for the reading of these verses.

I'll start with Isaiah 9:1.

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan – Isaiah 9:1

***The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
On those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.
You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;
They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. – Isaiah 9:2-3***

***For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them,
The bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.
Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. – Isaiah 9:4-5***

***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***

***Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
Establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
From that time on and forever. – Isaiah 9:7***

Let's pray.

Have a seat. And keep this passage open on your laps.

Primarily, what I want to do in this message is continue the progression we've been making through the 4 names that God says His Son will be known by. Two weeks ago we've covered why He is called a Wonderful Counselor. Last week we covered why He is called "Mighty God." So this week we've cover why He is called, "Everlasting Father." – And primarily this message will be a heart-message. A message that is aimed at warming up your heart to this babe born in Bethlehem.

But before we aim for the heart, I want to aim for your head for a few minutes and give those of you who like facts and data some brain candy. Okay?

So concentrate for a few minutes because I'm going to give you lots of information. Some of it will be review for some of you, much of it may be new for many of you.

First, some geography [put up **Map 1**]

Some of you have been wondering what Zebulun and Naphtali and Galilee of the Gentiles and the Way of the Sea are up there in v. 1. So let me show them to you. (Use pointer.)

This is a map of the ancient tribal areas of Israel.

When the children of Israel exited Egypt and moved into the land of Palestine, their leader, Joshua, divided up the land into 12 portions, like states, or counties, and assigned those portions to the 12 tribes of Israel.

A little history:

Israel was the grandson of Abraham, to whom God issued the promise that He would make of him a great nation from which all the world would be blessed. The O.T. tells us that Abraham's first 2 sons were named Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael is the father of the Arab nations, and because they were not the inheritors of the promise, they have been at war with the sons of Isaac ever since.

Isaac was the son to whom God continued his promise to make of him a great nation. And Isaac had 2 sons, Esau and Jacob.

The name Jacob, in Hebrew means, "subplanter," or "usurper." Jacob was the second son of Isaac. According to ancient Near Eastern legal code, when a father died, his

property was divided into equal shares based on the number of sons he had, plus one. So, if a father had 3 sons, his property would be divided into 4 portions. If he had 9 sons, his property would be divided into 10 portions. Near Eastern law dictated that the eldest son inherited 2 portions, and the rest of the sons each received one.

But Jacob, the second son of Isaac, was a usurper, or subplanter. So in a McGyver-like move, he tricked his older brother out of the inheritance due the firstborn son. His older brother wasn't the only one Jacob conned. He developed a habit of usurping, so that it became a lifestyle for him.

But God had made a promise. His promise was to build a nation through Jacob, out of which the whole world could be blessed.

The world could hardly be blessed by a nation led by a conniving usurper who would no doubt pass on that lifestyle to his own children, so God knew that He had to correct this character-flaw in Jacob before Jacob could lead a great nation.

One night, the angel of the Lord came to Jacob and wrestled with him about this nasty habit. God's wrestling with Jacob was so effective, in the morning God said, "Because of our wrestling together, you're not a conniver anymore. So I'm going to change your name. Instead of being called, "One who usurps," people will call you "One who has wrestled with God." That phrase, in Hebrew, "One who wrestles with God," is "Israel."

Jacob, now called, "Israel," had 12 sons. Those 12 sons had many more sons. Till eventually, the clans of those sons formed a great nation.

It is out of that nation that the whole world has been blessed, because out of that nation, the Christ-child was born.

Neat stuff, isn't it?

Two of those 12 sons of Israel were Zebulun and Naphtali. ***[Zebulun and Naphtali were 2 of the 12 sons of Israel.]***

Their descendents settled in the northern regions of Israel and flourished there for about 600 years until the time of Isaiah, when the Assyrian army (from approximately where modern day Iraq is today), came and invaded and took over their region and settled non-Jewish people there.

Anybody know what non-Jews are called? "Gentiles."

Map 2. After the Assyrian invasion, this region, known as ***Galilee was resettled by Gentiles*** and henceforth became known as "Galilee of the Gentiles."

So if you look back at your text, Is. 9:1, when you see Zebulun and Naphtali, you can see why they were in gloom and how they had been humbled. They had been conquered and taken over by Gentiles.

Map 3. – By the way, this lake in the middle of the region is known as the “Sea of Galilee.” Most armies and trade caravans from foreign lands would enter Israel this way (use pointer). Israel had three major north-south highways or trade routes. This in the middle is a low valley called the “Jordan Valley.” It’s below sea level, and there are mountains on either side of it. So people traveling from Europe or the East into Egypt had three choices of routes they could take. – The 5, the 805, and the 15.

The route closest to the Mediterranean Sea coast was cleverly named, “The Coastal Highway.” The route that skirted Israel entirely, going east of the mountains was known as the “Way of the Desert.” It was actually the preferred way of traveling, because it avoided all the stops one had to make when traveling inside Israel and going from city to city. So this route was the preferred route of the kings of Egypt and became therefore known also as, “The King’s Highway.”

The third route, the route inside Israel, crossed through this valley, right past the Sea of Galilee, so it became known as “The Way of the Sea.”

So all three of these descriptions in Isaiah 9:1 picture the same thing. ***Zebulun and Naphtali, and Galilee of the Gentiles, and The Way of the Sea are all synonyms.***

(read 9:1)

Bonus brain candy:

Right here is a town called “Megiddo.” It stands right on the edge of this valley, guarding it from north to south. So this valley is named “The Valley of Megiddo,” which in Hebrew is, “Ar-megiddon.” – Anyone heard of the battle of Armegiddon? This is where it will be fought.

No army from the east can invade Israel on foot without crossing the valley of Armegiddon. The history of Israel is replete with battles that have been fought by major world powers in that valley.

Extra bonus brain candy: ***[Map 2 again]***

Jesus was raised in the town of Nazareth, in the middle of this valley. In history class, he would have studied the history of this valley. Though he was not a world traveler, where he was raised was the nexus of international history. Jesus was well aware of the nations of the world and their importance to God as a result of His upbringing.

Brains full yet?

How about ***A little literature:***

The book where these verses come from is called, “The Book of Isaiah.” Anybody know why it’s called “The book of Isaiah”? *Because it’s Isaiah’s book. It’s the book that Isaiah wrote.*

Isaiah wrote from about 740 BC to 680BC, ***[Isaiah wrote between 740-680 BC]*** and he lived down here (use pointer) in the southern part of Israel, during a time when the northern part of Israel was being chewed up and assimilated by the Assyrians. ***[Northern Israel was at war with Assyria.]***

So it was a scary time in Israel’s history. They were at war eastern peoples.

During the first 1/2 of Isaiah, God addresses the nation of Israel to warn them about this war and how to cope with it. During the second section of the book, God addresses Israel about the aftermath of the war, to give them hope. So there are 2 sections to the book, one about how to live before hope comes and one on how to live now that you have hope.

Anyone know how many chapters there are in the book of Isaiah? 66. ***[Isaiah has 66 chapters.]***

The first 39 chapters are the pre-hope chapters.

The last 27 are the in-hope chapters. They’re all about knowing God and having a relationship with Him.

Interestingly, anyone know many books the Bible has in it? 66

The Bible has 66 books. The O.T. has 39 books. The N.T. has 27 books.

Like the O.T., the first section of the book of Isaiah divided into subsections.

Are your brains almost full?

I won’t take time list all the subsections. I’ll just tell you that ***Isaiah 7-12 is called, “the Book of Immanuel.”***

It talks about the coming of Immanuel, God with us. In 7:14 it says that he will be born of a virgin. In 11:1 it predicts that he will be from the house of Jesse. 11:2 says that God’s Spirit will be upon Him. Next week we’ll look at the prophecies in chapter 11 of when He comes, not the first time, but the second time, when the government will physically be on His shoulders, not just spiritually, as it is today.

Alright, enough brain food, now let’s go to the heart.

Isaiah says,

***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***

“And he will be called, ‘Everlasting Father.’”

Which is really intriguing. Of all the titles given to the Christ-child, this one probably raises the most questions. After all, how can a child be a father?

And how can a newborn be so old as to be called everlasting?

Answer to question 1 – *He’s going to grow up.*

Answer to question 2 – *He had an existence long before He came to earth.*

For those of you who want just a few more facts,
Everlasting Father = Abi-`ad

It’s actually a hyphenated word and it means pretty much what you imagine it means. “***Abi***” = “***Father***.” (It’s the root from which we get the word, “Abbot,” for the chief father at a monastery, for instance.)

`ad = everlasting Or, eternal, or “unceasing in duration.

The child born in Bethlehem will be recognized as *eternal* – He had no beginning, He has no end. He existed before He came to earth, and He will exist forever.

Everlasting Father.

What did God have in mind when He gave Him this title? What did He want us to imagine when He announced this 700 years before it happened? Better yet, what difference does that make to me?

Want my honest answer?

From a technical standpoint, I don’t know for sure.

But here’s my best understanding.

People were living in shaky times, so they wanted something they could cling to. (Is that you?)

And people in shaky times want someone they can depend on – a father-figure, if you will.

So God promised them both in His son.

He said first, “The One who’s coming is everlasting.” In other words, “He’s eternal. He’s always existed and always will.”

If you wonder about that one, just look at this for a minute.

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***

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!”*** – ***John 8:57***

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” – ***John 8:58***

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, always will be, is today, full existence.” He is.

So in this statement, when Jesus says, “I am,” He is 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.

The second part of the phrase is “father.”

His Son was born a child, yes. But look what happened when Jesus grew up: He care for people. Like a father does.

He nurtured sick people back to health. Like a father does.

He prayed for people. Like a father does.

He was there for people. He was strong and dependable, like a father.

See, fathers, if they are to be anything in the lives of their children, ought to do certain things and hold certain places in their lives.

For instance, fathers ought to believe in their children. Study the life of Jesus, and you'll find someone who believed in people.

Fathers ought to be firm, but loving. Which is how Jesus handled people.

Fathers ought to provide a place out of which their children can derive an identity. So they can say, "I'm a Smith, and I come from a long line of Smiths. We know who we are." Jesus did that. For 2 millennia followers of His have been saying, "I'm a Christian, and I am historically linked to generations of Christians all the way back to Christ."

Fathers ought to be thinking about and planning for their children's future. In John 14:1, Jesus said, "I am going to prepare a place for you." – He was thinking about His kids' future.

Let me tell you 2 stories that illustrate the fatherliness of Jesus.

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 His head 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***

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 He 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." – John 11:32

When Jesus saw her weeping... he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. – John 11:33 (Translated, he got sad.)

“Where have you laid him?” he asked.”

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied. – John 11:34

Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” – John 11:35-36

Very fatherly, wouldn't you say?

Look at this manger for a second. See this child? He's tender. He's parental. He's a fatherly towards His children, and He always will be.

Last week, we discovered that the phrase just before “Everlasting Father,” means, “Strong, strong God.” At the end of the message, a number of us put our hands in our laps and then opened them to God and said, “God, here's the stuff that's troubling me.”

Last week was quite a week for my son Bryan. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, right after school he went out to Bonsall and did several hours work for Matt Basson, who volunteers on our sound board. From there he came straight here to the church to rehearse for the Bethlehem Hotel, then he'd stay up till 11 doing his homework. On Thursday and Friday he served tables and was part of the Bethlehem Hotel performance. And then on Saturday he had a piano recital and a final performance of the Hotel.

Then on Sunday he played four games in a hockey tournament in Irvine.

Well, Monday morning he comes down the hallway with one of his school binders in his hand and says to me, “Dad, can I stay home from school today? I am so tired I'm about to cry.” – Which, at age 14, he doesn't do much anymore.

Now friends, just so you don't wonder about what a wimp dad I am, letting my kids stay home every time they have a hang nail or sniffle, Bryan in 14 and he's never stayed home from school unless he had a fever before.

But Lori and I talked it over, and it just seemed right to lighten his load a bit. So I told him, “You can stay home, Bryan.”

And then I took the binder out of hand, and I put my arms around him. And for about a minute, we just hugged, and I could feel his shoulders heaving just the tiniest bit he was so relieved.

Last week, some of you handed your binders to God. And that felt good. You know what the next move is? To let Him wrap His fatherly arms around you and just hold you for a minute.

Listen to these words, friends.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem..., how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...

Close your eyes for a second. Just relax. Nobody in the room is watching, so just take a minute to build a little hallway in your heart. Now, in your mind's eye, imagine yourself handing Jesus all the stuff that's troubling you.

Now, take a deep breath, and imagine Him right now, wrapping His fatherly arms around you. Maybe you can even let your shoulders heave a few sighs of relief.

Jesus, thank you for being a father forever to us. May your tenderness overwhelm these people in new ways this Christmas season. Because that's part of the promise *Your* Father made to us 2700 years ago.

Amen.

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