

Lamb of God

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Date: 21 December 2025

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[0:00] So, we come to what might be one of the more confusing, perhaps one of the more difficult, of the names of Jesus that we find in the Bible. Theologically, it causes some people a little bit of confusion. Why is this promised child being spoken of at the same time as being a father? And some people have gone wrong by thinking, well, here is this proof that God the Son is God the Father, so that when Jesus comes to the earth, it's just God taking a different form.

And that's not at all what it's saying. That's a wrong way of thinking about it, but it can seem confusing. But it can also be hard for us personally, because I imagine that some of us, when we hear the word Father, it comes with particular connotations and emotions.

It's interesting to see the number of, this time of year, Christmas movies where father issues of one kind or another become a dominant theme. We think of *It's a Wonderful Life*, and we think of *George Bailey* and his wrestling and his redemption. Is he content to live in the small town with his small family, to be part of the community? We think about the Santa Claus with Scott Calvin and his son Charlie. Think about *Elf* with Buddy the Elf and his dad. There's definitely a theme that emerges within the way people tell Christmas stories. If you've seen the John Lewis ad this year, it's been praised for the way it has tried to handle the complexities of how fathers and sons bond across the generations, the challenges that particularly as men we have in sharing emotions. And so John Lewis recognized, well, there are issues in communicating and relating to fathers, so let's try and make a story to help us towards that. And all that to say that when we come to a title like *Everlasting Father*, it's important for us to recognize that we'll all come with a certain amount of expectations, a certain amount of emotions. So why did Isaiah use it is a really important question for us to ask.

How can we find hope in Jesus, our *Everlasting Father*, regardless of how the word *Father* can often at surface level make us feel? And that's what I want us to think about this evening, to think about the wonderful gospel hope that is in thinking about how is Jesus like an everlasting father to us?

To think about the fact that Jesus is now being presented to us as the everlasting one who can perfectly meet our needs. Those basic needs that we have to be seen and known, to be loved, to have safety and security. We're being told that in this coming son, this everlasting one, he has a father's heart and he's a perfect father and so he can meet those needs.

[3:15] We're also being told that Jesus as everlasting father is one we can trust in when we understand his nature and his character being divine. He is good, he is faithful, he will always act for the good of the children of God. And so through this Christmas season, and indeed through the changing seasons of our lives, it's important that we are able to see what Isaiah is pointing us towards, to understand why this title offers great hope and comfort. And all we're going to do is think about two words together.

We're going to think about the word *covenant* and we're going to think about the word *compassion*, because I think everlasting father contains both. Firstly, to recognize that when we talk about Jesus as everlasting father, what we're invited to see is that Jesus is our covenant king, and he's the covenant king of his people forever. Because in Isaiah's day, father was a family word, but it was also a kingship word.

And more than that, it was a covenant word. Because when you look at covenant treaties from the day when great kings and lesser kings entered into covenant, the language will be used of the great

king being the father and the lesser being like the son. In 68 nations of the world today, the leader of that country or the founder of that country is known as the father of the nation. Interesting fact. But what we're being told about here is that this son of Isaiah chapter 9, he is the king of kings, and he is the father. He is the founder of an eternal kingdom. And he has this covenant commitment to act in such a way to secure an everlasting relationship with his people. When we think about Jesus as everlasting father, we recognize he is committed in covenant to be for us and for our good. Now, when we think about that announcement as it came at the time of Ahaz, we recognize this coming as light in the midst of darkness. So we were thinking about Ahaz a little bit this morning. We were remembering he was a terrible king. We remember in Isaiah 7 that there was this twin threat that Ahaz was facing. There was Israel and there was Syria. And Ahaz is called to trust in his God and to ask for a sign to strengthen his faith. And he refuses to ask. And God gave the sign, the child who would be called Emmanuel, God, with us. But what happens after that?

[6:18] Well, if we go to 2 Kings 16, we hear how the story turns out. What Ahaz does next is he doesn't turn in repentance and faith to the one true God to say, God, you're my king. I'm going to trust you in this moment of threat. Instead, he goes to Assyria and to their king, Tiglath-Pileser. And he said to that foreign king, in effect, you are now my master. I regard you as my overlord and as my father.

If you will help me, O king of Assyria, I will give you authority over Judah. I will give you authority over my cell. You can see that in 2 Kings 16. Now, do we see the problem with that?

God had already established covenant relationship with his people. And he invited them to trust him as their God and their king. And so in this moment, because of fear and because of threat, we find Ahaz trusting the wrong king, turning to the wrong covenant father. He's giving the wrong father control over his life. Now, it's very easy, I imagine, for us to point the finger and to say, well, Ahaz, you should have known better. You had the stories of how God cared for the people in the Exodus account or in the stories of previous kingships. How could you lack faith?

But maybe when we take the time to look in the mirror and to think about our own lives, you know, when things go wrong in our story, perhaps when our position is threatened, when our sense of security is shaken, or when those who we expected to be friends disappoint or turn on us, do we ever find ourselves doing an Ahaz, looking around for someone, maybe even looking to ourselves to provide the answer, rather than turning to and trusting in God and Jesus, our covenant king, our everlasting father? Well, into Ahaz's story, and I trust into ours as well, the titles that we find, the descriptions of Jesus and Isaiah 9, they represent good news.

Because here is our Emmanuel, here is God with us, who is also our everlasting king, our everlasting father with covenant commitment, and he comes to bring transformation by his grace.

[9:11] That's the theme of Isaiah 9. Humiliation becomes honor, darkness becomes light, fighting and fear becomes peace. Because this child king will be born, and will grow up to be the crucified king.

And that in the shedding of his blood, he establishes the new covenant, and that covenant is unbreakable, it is eternal, it is unshakable. And he comes to establish that covenant, that relationship, with all those for whom he came to save. And now that Jesus has gone to the cross, and he has risen from the dead, and he has ascended to heaven, and he's taken the seat of the father's right hand as the glorified king, he continues to rule over us in his love and in his faithfulness.

He hasn't broken his covenant commitment to us, he continues to pray for us, he continues to send the spirit, he continues to speak through his word. He is the one who said, I am with you always, to the very end of the age. He is covenantally committed to that promise. He is the one we can trust and give control of our lives to. That Jesus is our everlasting father means Jesus is our covenant king. And this calls for our faith in Jesus Christ. This is the way of salvation. It's the way of trusting him as our covenant king. The covenant in the Bible, it always required faith. The people of Israel heard that if they would trust their king, and if they would obey their king, they would enjoy blessing and they would enjoy life. But on the other hand, if they turned away to false gods and into disobedience, the curse would come, judgment would come upon disobedience. When we get to the New Testament, the writers of the New Testament say to us that Christ can be in our lives either the cornerstone that we build our life upon or the stone that we stumble over because we are offended. The difference is either we place faith in Jesus for our life and for our salvation, or we

have the faith in ourselves that we can gain salvation by our own good work. And into this desperate situation in Isaiah 9, God invites Ahaz and Judah to lift their eyes to see that they are weak, but Jesus, the promised king, he will be eternally strong.

And God would do the same for us as well, to lift our eyes from ourselves and our circumstances to see our great king. And for this title, Jesus as everlasting father to be good news, it absolutely requires us to have personal faith, that looks and see Jesus as our king, that we trust him to save us and defend us, that we are able to rest and trust, knowing that he is eternally committed in all his goodness towards us.

So Jesus is our covenant king. But when we think about this title everlasting father, secondly, it means that Jesus is our compassionate king. And this is where this title becomes really personal to us also.

[13:01] Before we look back at our text, just to ask this question, when we think about how God views us today, if we're a Christian as his child, how would we draw the face of God towards us?

We're invited in the Bible throughout the pages of Scripture to recognize how deep the Father's love for us is, to recognize that he has pity and compassion and mercy on us as his children.

But often despite reading God's word and hearing the gospel, it might be the case that the face that you picture is a stern face, perhaps a frowning face. Perhaps we imagine God is the Father who's ready to pounce on our every mistake.

And maybe that's because of our own upbringing, our own experiences, and our great need is to let God through his word and through his gospel show us the true picture that he is the perfect Father, and that Jesus shows us the Father's heart.

That God is the original and perfect blueprint of Fatherhood. He is the Father from whom all Fatherhood is named, and then Jesus comes into this world to show us, here is what the Father's love is like in flesh and blood as he walked among us.

[14:42] So just very briefly, to just trace something of the theme of God's compassion and how it connects to Jesus, our compassionate King.

Just to, I was just thinking about it this afternoon, Dane Ortlund has a wonderful book, Gentle and Lowly, talking about the heart of God, the heart of Christ.

It's a wonderful, rich book to read. And so often it talks about and captures that sense of the mercy and compassion of God and goes against some of our natural instincts.

So, you know, we sin, and just like Adam and Eve in the garden, our instinct is to hide away in our shame. And what we need to understand, and what the Bible shows us, is that it's our sin, actually, that moves the heart of God, that moves the heart of Jesus to come in order to save us.

Compassion is rooted in the gospel. So it's a wonderful book to read. But just to think about compassion as we find it in God's word. Exodus chapter 34, as God describes himself to Moses.

[15:57] Moses wants to see God's glory, and God gives him a picture of himself. He says, he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord.

And what's the first quality of God's character? The compassionate and gracious God. Exodus 34, verse 6.

What God wants us to know about him is he is compassionate and he is gracious. Then we sang in Psalm 103.

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. And that compassion is fueled by his knowledge of us because he created us.

He knows how we are formed and he remembers we are dust. And he explains the extent of his compassion from everlasting to everlasting.

[16:59] The Lord's love is with those who fear him. We can never exhaust the compassion of God and God's compassion will never be exhausted. God wants us to know that.

And then to very briefly jump to Jesus speaking about himself in relation to God. John chapter 10 or John chapter 14.

we hear Jesus say on multiple occasions, I and my Father are one. He encourages people to believe in the works that they have seen that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father.

And then as he speaks to his disciples in John 14, as he speaks to Philip, he says it this way, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

The amazing truth, author of Hebrews takes us here also, Jesus is the perfect image, the perfect representation of God. Jesus in his time on earth and now that he rules in heaven displays for us the fatherly compassion of God.

[18:23] Perhaps sometimes we find God a distant idea, but if we want to know the Father's compassionate character, we look at the person of Christ. We can look at his life, we can look in his ministry and we see it in so many ways.

We see it in his humble birth in Bethlehem. Jesus didn't come to lord it over us, but to fully identify with us, to sympathize, to empathize as he walked in our shoes.

We think about his compassion for the marginalized and for the weak. His heart that was moved for the widow that day in Nain.

His heart of love for the sinful women despised in society. It's there in the touch of the leper. It's there in the feasting and the hospitality extended to tax collectors.

God's compassion comes through Christ in the stories he told. Maybe most famously the compassion of the father in the prodigal son story. Embracing his wayward rebel son in all his filth, in all his disgrace.

[19:36] Welcoming him back into the home, honoring him and throwing a feast for him. We hear the compassion of Jesus in his preaching, announcing to the world the son of man came to seek and to save the lost, urgently, lovingly calling people to enter his kingdom, persuading them that it wasn't by their merits, but by God's grace and through Christ's merits.

presence. We see the compassion of God at the cross. He is the king who comes as the humble suffering servant.

He has wept over Jerusalem and even as he dies, he dies praying forgiveness for his enemies and he dies welcoming a thief into his paradise kingdom.

And the compassion of Jesus doesn't end at the cross. We see it too when he comes to his troubled disciples after he's risen from the dead. He takes the time to show them that these things had to happen.

He had to suffer and be rejected and die and then rise again. He showed them his hands and his feet. He ate with them to persuade them that he was the long promised Savior.

[21:03] And he welcomed them in all their doubts and confusion and fear. And we see the compassion of God displayed through Jesus in the story and the message of the gospel.

If we use the idea of fatherhood spiritually, outside of Christ we are orphans. cut off from God, cut off from life with him because of our sin and our rebellion.

But into that comes Christ, the eternal son of God, the everlasting father, our compassionate savior. And what happens to him? He willingly is cut off.

He faces that sense of being forsaken by God his father so that by God's grace you and I can be forgiven, we can be adopted, we can know the loving heart of God.

Here's how J.H. Bavinck puts it, Jesus takes away our guilt and again opens the way to God's fatherly heart.

[22:15] Sometimes even as Christians we can get stuck with that idea that God is our judge and only our judge. And what Bavinck is reminding us and what the gospel teaches us is that by trusting in Jesus and his completed work our relationship to God fundamentally changes so that now he is our father in heaven.

Because of that great transfer that takes place where the son is willing to suffer and die in our place and bear the penalty and the wrath of God for our sin and he's willing to give us his perfect record of righteousness in exchange.

Now when God the father looks at us in Christ the son he loves us as much as he loves Jesus. Jesus came to show us the fatherly heart of our God.

And remember Jesus is described as our everlasting father and as Spurgeon once said there is no unfathering Christ and there is no unchilding us.

This quality of Jesus will never change so we will always know God's love in him. There will never be a point where that well of Jesus love and compassion for his people runs dry.

[23:35] That the one who died to make us his brothers and sisters now lives to keep pouring God's love and grace out on us. he is our covenant king and he is our compassionate king.

There is good news in this title that Jesus is our everlasting father. But to hear that good news we must first discover for ourselves the goodness of our creator and our savior.

we must trust that his commitment and his care towards us will never end. Because if we carry a wrong view of God or carry a wrong view of Jesus that God is a source of terror, that he is a harsh tyrant and the idea that he is everlasting father, well that might not seem like good news, that might come across as bad news.

And so we always need to be reminded and to uncover more of his goodness and his word as we worship in the gospel.

So that we have this true picture of God our father and Jesus who shows us the father's heart.

Because we have this wonderful promise in Christmas and the birth of Jesus.

[25:07] We are invited to see God is everlastingly committed to saving his people and to loving and caring for his people.

And the wonderful thing is that while we go back to Ahaz in Isaiah 9, he trusted to Tiglath-Pileser and to the strength of the Assyrians.

And that empire has long since crumbled as Isaiah has is. But the kingdom of Christ never will. We can trust him. And we can trust in his love and goodness.

Here is the king we can trust to control our lives. And so that's our invitation this Christmas. Will we turn to him? To give our hearts to him?

To grow in appreciating his love for us. Thank you.