

Everlasting Father

SCOTT HOEZEE

One of the hallmarks of Jesus' teaching while he was on this earth was his referring to God as his Father. When Jesus taught his followers how to pray, he said: Start with this: Our Father in heaven. Jesus regularly calling God his Father, along with his talk about sending also his Holy Spirit is what led the Church to develop the doctrine of the Trinity. That is a well-known teaching that our God exists as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet, in his well-known prophecy about the nature of the Messiah in Isaiah chapter 9, the prophet Isaiah tells us that one of the titles that would apply to the Messiah was: Everlasting Father; but if Jesus, the Messiah, was the *Son* of God, who referred to God as *his* Father, then how can Jesus also be an everlasting father? We will wonder about all of that today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are in the third program now of a five-part series that we are rooting in Isaiah chapter 9, where we get those titles for the Messiah; and we have looked at two of them already: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God...still to come in the next program will be Prince of Peace, and in this program, as we just said, Everlasting Father; and then in the fifth program in this series we will look at the larger frame of Isaiah 9 about light shining on people who have been in the dark.

DAVE BAST

Right; yes, light and darkness; and it is worth pointing out that each of those titles in the original is a two-word phrase, kind of a noun with an adjective. So, it is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince Peace or Peace Prince...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Prince of Peace, we say; and so, now in the top of the program, Scott, you pointed out kind of a problem about this third one: Everlasting Father. I will tell you frankly it has never bothered me before, but now it has started to bother me. You pointed out: Wait a minute, why are we calling the Messiah, who, as we know, would be the *Son* of God when he came...why are we calling him Father here?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because indeed in classic Christian orthodoxy since the 400s until today when the doctrine of the Trinity was kind of finalized, one of the things that we are always taught is do not confuse the Three Persons. They are separate persons; one God, but they have different roles, and you do not want to confuse them. You do not want to say the Holy Spirit was born of the Virgin Mary. No, only the Son was. The Father was not crucified on the cross, only the Son was.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is actually an ancient heresy, the idea that the Father died on the cross; but maybe we should also observe that this would not have been a problem for Isaiah...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Because really, Isaiah did not yet completely understand, or even maybe a little bit understand what the real eternal nature of God was. That was something that took time to be revealed in scripture.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so in this program, we are definitely going to be thinking about how Jesus is the Everlasting Father, but just to be real clear at the outset, we are not being heretical, we are not confusing Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in any way, shape or form, but there are going to be father-like aspects to the Messiah, and that is what Isaiah predicted; and as you said, Dave, Isaiah did not have the doctrine of the Trinity to worry about, he just knew the one powerful God of Israel. Here is a passage from Isaiah 6, where we get an idea of how Isaiah pictured God, because he had a great vision of God.

DAVE BAST

And it starts out in verse 1: In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on the throne; and the train of his robe filled the Temple. ²Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying, ³and they were calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord—is Yahweh—the Almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴And at the sound of their voices, the doorposts and the threshold shook, and the Temple was filled with smoke.

So that is the God that Isaiah knew and worshipped. Maybe we should also say there are hints in the Old Testament pointing to the triune nature of God, but it would not be clearly unveiled or unpacked until Jesus came into the world, and those who saw him and believed in him realized that he too was God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes; the disciples worshipped Jesus, and they had been raised never to worship anybody who was not God, so they recognized Jesus as God, but he called himself a Son, and he referred to a Father, and he also predicted a Holy Spirit would come; so, those are the building blocks; but again, Isaiah knew that this singular God, Yahweh, the Almighty God of Israel; and in subsequent parts of Isaiah he will talk about the coming of the Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, as we now call him the Christ, he often referred to that as the Servant of the Lord, and that is the one who would come, and that is the one in Isaiah 9, now, that among those four titles he gives, he said he is going to be Everlasting Father; and again, for Isaiah, that was just sort of going to be the nature of the one who is coming, that this great and powerful God is going to send.

DAVE BAST

So what we want to do in this program, really, is take Isaiah at face value and think about what the fatherhood of the Messiah would have meant in an Old Testament context. In what ways does the Old Testament reveal the fatherliness of God? What does that mean? What does that involve? And yes, we are going to see the ultimate in the New Testament in Jesus, but it is also, I think, a useful exercise to look at the Old Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and you know, we are so used to now as Christians...we are so used to reading Isaiah 9 and similar prophecies through the lens...looking backward in history through the lens of Jesus because now we know who it was, right? And so, we forget that in Isaiah's day, when he made these prophecies, when he stood up before Israel and said these things, they were heard by somebody for the first time, once upon a time, they

were heard by the people who were Isaiah's contemporaries. They were not looking back; they were not thinking of Handel's Messiah; they were not thinking about Jesus of Nazareth; they were just listening to this in great anticipation because things in Israel had fallen apart. The people were in darkness, that is why the last program in this series is going to think about light coming to people in darkness. Isaiah worked in difficult times. Isaiah's assignment was a difficult assignment, to basically judge the people for their failures. So, yes, what did this sound like the first time anybody ever heard it?

DAVE BAST

Let's think ourselves back into the situation of the first hearers, and that, incidentally, is always a good rule for interpreting any part of the Bible—any passage. What would it have meant to those to whom it was originally addressed? Part of the problem we get into, for example, in interpreting the book of Revelation is that we try to cast it completely in contemporary terms. No; what did it say to the first hearers? So, these first hearers were the people of Israel with destruction, death all around them; exile staring them in the face; and looking and longing for the promised Messiah, who would deliver them; who would set them free; and the promise is, he will be to you an Everlasting Father. What would that have meant in their ears? And that is where we will turn next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, maybe a good place to pick up the idea in Old Testament terms of what it means to be or to have an everlasting father is to look at a theme that crops up quite a bit throughout the Old Testament, and a great passage that brings it to our attention is actually also from Isaiah, from chapter 1.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so let's listen to this: Isaiah 1. God, in this setting now, is telling his rebellious people how they need to behave. That is sort of the setting. So, these are the words of God that Isaiah channeled to and proclaimed to the people: ¹⁶Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong. ¹⁷Learn to do right: Seek justice; defend the oppressed; take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. ¹⁸"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they will be like wool."

And so, obviously for our purpose in this program, Dave, the line that jumps out of that is in Isaiah 1:17: Take up the cause of the fatherless.

DAVE BAST

What we are asking is: What does it mean to say that God is an Everlasting Father, to say that God's Messiah—God's Servant—will be like an everlasting father to us? And the way to get at that is to begin with understanding what it meant to be fatherless in the culture of the Bible; and to be fatherless, of course, in their terms was to be an orphan, even though you may have had a mother... We think of an orphan as somebody without father or mother, but in that culture the father was so central a figure, the father was so important, that to lose your father made you an orphan. So, there is actually a trio of the vulnerable, and this phrase occurs over and over in the Old Testament: The widow, the orphan, and the alien.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; sometimes called the *anawim*. Right, that triplet is all over the place: A widow, an orphan, an alien (that would be a non Israelite—an immigrant we might call them today), and that comes up again and again, and God is always calling on his people to take extra special care of widows and orphans and aliens. We did a series on the book of Ruth once, in which we noticed that Ruth kind of fit all three categories. She was a foreigner from Moab, so she was an alien; she was a widow, her husband had died back in Moab; and she is

probably an orphan; her parents do not seem to be around...

DAVE BAST

Well, her father-in-law was gone...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He would have taken her under his protection, so she is fatherless, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, her mother-in-law is also a widow; but why does God always single those groups out? Because they were the most vulnerable groups in ancient times. These were the people who were the most likely to fall through the social cracks and have no income. They could maybe be abused. I mean, in the book of Ruth there are hints that she could be raped—she could be vulnerable to rape and nobody would defend her necessarily because, nah, she is just an alien woman with no rights; so, to be fatherless, to be an orphan, was to be very, very vulnerable to all kinds of bad things.

DAVE BAST

You depended on the man of the family, frankly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

He was the one who had the strength to go out and work. He would earn a day's wages. Again, you think of those parables of Jesus where the laborers go out and they get their pay for a day. That is how you lived; that is how you ate; and take away that father, take away that husband, take away that head of household, and you might starve except for the compassion of those who cared for you; and supremely, God says in the Old Testament he is a father to the fatherless; he is the one who cares; he is the one who will provide.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, we said in the first part of this program, Dave, how did these words sound the first time anybody ever heard them, who were not thinking about Jesus or the Messiah or Handel's oratorio. Well, to them this would have been a wonderful promise. Think of that; not only a father, an *everlasting* father, because our earthly fathers...sooner or later they die. Maybe they die of old age; we feel orphaned, but we are okay; we are actually adults now. Sometimes we lose our fathers when we are very, very young, very tragically; but one way or another, unless you die very prematurely yourself, you live to see the death of your parents. The father will be gone someday and the only hope is that you are an adult by then so you can take care of yourself, but not *this* one. *This* Father is going to be everlasting. You will never be vulnerable again. He will never leave you. What a rich promise that must have been.

DAVE BAST

Here is some of Isaiah again, from later chapters—chapters 63 and 64, who talks about God in these terms: ¹⁶But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, or Israel acknowledge us (In other words, the Patriarchs—the physical fathers of the people—even if they were to fail—even if they were to forget us) you, Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then here is from Isaiah 64: ⁸Yet you, Lord, are our Father; we are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

So, this comes up more often in Isaiah, other than just the famous Everlasting Father in Isaiah 9. The fatherhood of God comes up often in Isaiah because that is something that the people of Israel, at a time when again they were in dire straits, by their own fault, let's point out...they are going to be punished for their wickedness eventually; but nevertheless, they were in dire straits and felt so very vulnerable. So, here it is...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are going to get a father that will never go away.

DAVE BAST

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, too...I mean, I think of a famous verse from Psalm 103: As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. So again, oftentimes our human fathers maybe have fallen down on the job. It may even be hard for someone, and painful, to think of God as Father just because of the experience they have had, either lacking a father or an unworthy father; but the Lord is a perfect Father and he not only promises to provide and care, but he has this compassion that we often identify with the mother...well, God is like that, too; but there are all these beautiful things wrapped up in what is actually a metaphor. It is an image of who God is. He is the Everlasting Father.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is good news, as we said, for Israel in that day, but it is good news for us. We all, I think, whether you had a wonderful father who is now gone from you due to death, or whether you had an abusive and terrible father whom you do not even like to think about, even then you have this father-shaped hole in your heart, if you will. We long for that kind of tenderness and nurture and nourishment and protection; and in the Messiah, we get it; we get an Everlasting Father who is always going to be there for us, always is going to be gentle and tender with us. So, for all of us even today, this is such incredibly good news; and of course, we now believe that that good news all came to its head and it all coalesced in and came to fruition in Jesus; and so, as we close out the program, we will go to the New Testament and look at some of the ways by which Jesus himself shows himself to be father-like; and we will take that up next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are thinking about Jesus the Messiah as the Everlasting Father; and we started out by saying something about the triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit. We do not want to confuse the Persons—the Father and the Son—but they are very closely related; and now we want to turn to the New Testament, where all these ideas that run through scripture about what it means that God will be our Father, and that he will do that through Christ, they come together.

So, here is a passage from John 14:

¹“Do not let your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me. ²My Father’s house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you with me so that you may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵But Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus answered, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁸Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” ⁹And Jesus answered, “Don’t you know me, Philip? Even after I have been among you for such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ ¹⁰Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the

Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing his work. ¹¹Believe me when I say I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

So again, in good Trinitarian fashion, we don’t confuse the Son of God, who we believe is the second Person of the Trinity—who is the one standing in that upper room in John 14—we don’t confuse him with the Father (or with the Holy Spirit, for that matter, but just thinking Father/Son here) but, one of the other hallmarks of classic orthodox Trinitarian theology is that the unity among those three Persons is so tight that you cannot speak of one without thinking of the other two, and the unity is so tight that they really are just one God, not three separate gods, one God; and here is one of those passages where Jesus says: Yes, I am the Son, he is the Father, but we are close; so close that you really, you know...you hear me, you hear him.

DAVE BAST

Yes; pretty profound. I don’t know how you react to this, Scott, but I kind of react with a sense of wonder at what Jesus is saying here. I do not think I am going to fully understand this or grasp it, but: He who has seen me has seen the Father; and you say wow. Just imagine how Philip must have reacted. I bet his jaw must have dropped to the floor when Jesus said that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, every once in a while...I mean, sometimes we will meet a son, you know, and he is an adult now, and we will say: Oh, George, you are the spitting image of your father. Well, in this case, it is a little tighter even than that. Jesus is the Son, who is his Father all over again. He is a chip off the divine block. They are very, very united; and that is who Jesus is, right? He looks and acts and speaks just like the Father who had sent him into the world; but you mentioned, too, Dave, about Philip. I would guess his jaw kind of hit the floor, because the disciples had a lot of memories of seeing Jesus, all right, over the years, but he was a very human person. They had seen Jesus nod off and fall asleep because he was exhausted. They had seen him throwing his head back in laughter. They had seen Jesus, all right. He sure looked like a human being, as normal as the next guy, and now you are saying every time we have seen you we are seeing the Almighty God, the Father? That had to be quite shocking.

DAVE BAST

Very shocking, but also intriguing—alluring—appealing—because they had also seen Jesus show infinite compassion to the very people...you mentioned the term from the Old Testament...the *anawim*...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

The widow...think of Jesus raising the widow’s son, you know; her only means of support...the orphan...the fatherless...the outcast...the woman taken in adultery...the tax collectors and sinners who were so scorned and despised and completely rejected by respectable, decent, proper people, you know; and Jesus himself criticized for being too open and familiar with them. “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” This is who God is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

This is what God does. This is what God is like. This is what it means to be a father. It is to welcome...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And to embrace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And let's also point out that that was one of the reasons the Pharisees and the religious leaders of the day just could not buy it, that Jesus was the Messiah, because they shunned those groups. For them, it had to become all about keeping the rules and purity and, well, you get too close to some of those sinners and tax collectors and prostitutes and non Israelites and you will get contaminated. So, they were all about keeping their distance, but Jesus, as you just said, Dave, was all about closing the gap, and apparently that is what the Father wants. The Father seems to have a soft spot in his heart for sinners, for the weak and the vulnerable. Should be no surprise, that is what the message throughout the whole Old Testament was; God revealed that to Israel long ago; but in Jesus it gets concentrated in a real human being. So, they had seen Jesus in so many ordinary circumstances, rubbing shoulders with so many unlikely people; and if they connected the dots...and maybe the disciples did...but if they connected the dots...and I think we can in our own lives today...there is something absolutely wonderful about that, because what it means is that if in all of those ordinary, daily, day-to-day, week in-week out circumstances of having dinner or falling asleep or walking along a path...if in all those times it was the Father who essentially was with them, well that means the same is true for us today...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are never...no matter how ordinary our day is, no matter what we do or where we go, the Father is right there.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely. You know, we have been quoting Handel's Messiah from time to time in this series because of the great chorus: Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, etc, etc, but I have just now been thinking, Scott, of another great composer and another famous choral work, Beethoven's 9th Symphony, and in the last movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, there is this mighty chorus. Beethoven sets to music an ode or a poem by a German poet named Schiller, and the main line of it goes: Brothers, beyond the starry heavens there must a dear Father be living. Okay, yes, but what Jesus shows us, and what the Gospel proclaims is that he is not just beyond the starry heavens...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

He is not just the Father way up there, far away and aloof and unfeeling, unmoved by our pain and grief. He is the Father who is with us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, with us.

DAVE BAST

He is here.

Scott Hoezee:

In the grocery store, in the hospital room, at a funeral. He is with us in all those ordinary times, even as Jesus was there in all those ordinary times for his disciples, he was, indeed, the Everlasting Father; and for us that is a great joy and a great comfort to know that about Jesus, the Son of God, who is his Father all over again; now, tomorrow, and every day forever.

DAVE BAST

Thanks be to God. Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we find hope in the Prince of Peace. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know other topics or scriptures you would like us to dig into here on *Groundwork*.

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Printed on July 25, 2025