

Everlasting Father Isaiah 9:6

We are continuing our Advent series today, and as we begin, I want us to think about an idea known as “The Golden Years.” (Picture) Some of you are in your Golden Years... This is an idea that’s been around for a long time and is usually used to describe a person’s years of retirement. The idea is supposed to stir up a sense of warmth and peace as you think about a future stage of life where you don’t have to go to work anymore, you can kick back and relax. You’ve got enough time and money to do things you enjoy, to travel, enjoy hobbies, and visit friends and loved ones. These are the Golden Years...

Some of you are there, and I’m wondering how that’s going for you? I’m not sure how many people still hang on to that idea, but it’s not doing that much for me right now. For most of my life it was so far off it just wasn’t relevant, and now as I’m getting older and have started thinking about it, I’m noticing a few potential hang ups – a few things that might possibly get in the way of a golden experience.

Number 1 is health problems. When I turned 40, (which is 6 years ago now) I noticed some things weren’t working like they used to. My eyes aren’t the same, my knees aren’t the same, I can’t eat like I used to. I get cramps. I feel super drowsy after lunch. When I get an injury it takes months to heal. And I can injure myself doing normal activities. What’s it going to be like when I’m 65? Will I be able to do the things I enjoy? Will I even make it that long?

Number 2 is other people’s health problems. People I love are starting to die. And I imagine that by the time I hit 65 or 70, that’s going to be a real common occurrence. How fun is it going to be to go to their funerals in my Golden Years?

Number 3 is the likelihood of financial difficulty – inflation, a volatile stock market, skyrocketing national debt... I knew it was the beginning of the end when I went to a basketball game and had to pay \$2 for a bag of popcorn! Two dollars!!! That’s 100% inflation! But seriously, how much money are you going to have to put away in order to retire? How expensive are things going to be? Will the stock market and American economy survive until then? What happens to all the money we’ve been putting away? I already assume social security won’t be there.

Number 4 is the increase of foolishness and immorality in our society. I'm not really sure I'm going to want to live in our society 20 years from now. If I look at how far things have gone in the last 20 years, it really makes me wonder what things are going to be like 20 years from now. I already detest a lot of things happening in our society today. It doesn't make me look forward to the world we could have in the future.

I could continue, but you get the picture. These are things that keep me from putting any stock in experiencing the Golden Years here on earth. And because of that I find that my soul longs for something different – for peace, stability, longevity, and goodness in a world that I actually want to live in.

Talk about a depressing start to this sermon! But I wanted to start there for a couple reasons: to help you see where the people of Israel were at as they awaited the coming of the Messiah and to help us see where to put our hope as we await his second coming.

We're doing a deep dive into a verse of the Bible that foretold of a future king who would give hope to the people of Israel. Isaiah 9:6 says: *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* This prophecy gives 4 names to the promised Messiah and this morning we're going to look at the third one: Everlasting Father. We're going to see why it would have been significant to the people who lived in Israel at the time Christ was born and then see why it's so important for us today.

From the time this prophecy was written to the time it was fulfilled, the people of Israel were in one desperate situation after another. In the past two sermons, we looked at what it was like for them when they were in exile in Babylon, and this morning we're going to look at what it was like 500 years later, just before Jesus was born. At that time in their history things were depressing – much worse than what we're dealing with. They would have felt a lot of uncertainty, instability, and desperation when they thought of their future. And one of the major reasons they felt that way was because of their king – a man named Herod. (Picture – popular images of Herod floating around) I want to try to help us see what it would have been like to be a Jew in Israel during Herod's reign as king.

In the century leading up to Jesus' birth, Israel had fallen under the control of the Roman Republic, which was the precursor to the Roman Empire. That meant they had a Roman imposed government and officials ruling over them. One of those governors was Herod's father, Antipater, who served as the Roman procurator of Judea for 20 years. He kept the people of Jerusalem and the surrounding area in line and paying their taxes to Rome. During that time, he appointed Herod to be the governor of the region of Galilee, to the north, and when Antipater was killed, the rulers of Rome eventually proclaimed Herod to be King of the Jews.

Now, Herod wasn't a Jew by birth. He was an Arab. His father and mother were from the Arab tribes to the south of Israel and the people didn't like that at all. They didn't want a foreigner sitting on their throne, acting as their king. Furthermore, it was clear to everyone that Herod was loyal to Rome first, caring about the interests of his Roman overlords far before the interest of the Jews. And that didn't sit well with them either.

So Herod was unwelcome in Jerusalem and Judea. They didn't let him in. They wanted one of their own to be king. He was King of the Jews by proclamation, but not acting as king because he was rejected by his own subjects. But, after about a year of being shut out of his kingdom, Rome granted Herod an army to force his way into Jerusalem and take his throne. This is how it happened according to the historical record at LiteratureAndHistory.com:

The conquest of the city of Jerusalem took five months, culminating in the summer of 37 BC, the Jews holding out, as far as the Romans were concerned, far longer than was rational. Livid at the length and brutality of the siege, Roman troops massacred and looted the city once the gates went down. Josephus records the conquest of the city as follows: '[Herod] made an assault upon the city, and took it by storm; and now all parts were full of those that were slain, by the rage of the Romans at the long duration of the siege, and by the zeal of the Jews that were on Herod's side, who were not willing to leave one of their adversaries alive; so they were murdered continually in the narrow streets and in the houses by crowds, and as they were flying to the temple for shelter, and there was no pity taken of either infants or the aged, nor did they spare so much as the weaker sex; nay, although the king sent about, and besought them to spare the people, yet nobody restrained their hand from slaughter, but, as if they were a company of madmen, they fell upon persons of all ages, without distinction.'

The article continues: *“The citizens of the Jewish capital, who hadn’t wanted Herod as their ruler to begin with, now hated him more than ever. But once he was in control of Jerusalem with Rome’s stamp of approval, Herod proved worse than anyone could have imagined. His opening purge of his enemies was as bloody and relentless as any. Forty-five prominent supporters of the Hasmonean dynasty were killed. Anyone Herod could think of who had opposed him or criticized him was executed.”* Sounds a little bit like Saddam Hussein.

That’s how Herod’s reign began. He was not a well-loved ruler, and it didn’t get any better. In an article on Study.com I learned that Herod wanted to integrate Judea into the overall Roman Empire, so he built temples to Caesar Augustus and participated in Greek sporting events. He pushed for his citizens to adopt Roman customs and assimilate into the Roman culture. But that was despicable to many of the Jews who were traditionalists. They wanted nothing to do with Roman culture and felt like their king should be fully committed to the traditional cultural patterns of their land and the conviction of being God’s people. So they disapproved of him and his rule and he never won their esteem and affection.

In spite of his unpopularity, he ended up being king for 33 years, and in the final years of his reign, which were right around the time of Jesus’ birth, I’m sure the people of Israel would have been filled with uncertainty about their future. One of Herod’s overwhelming characteristics as he got older was paranoia which led to multitudes of preemptive acts of violence against family members and anyone he perceived as a threat to his throne. He kept killing off his successors, which were his own sons. According to Literature and History.com, *“Ancient historians draw a portrait of a person capable of horrific violence – an insecure king especially willing to commit mass executions in order to prevent challenges to his reign.”*

That’s exactly what happened when he sent soldiers to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem. Wise men from the East followed the signs in the heavens and ended up in Jerusalem where they were asking Herod where to find the promised Messiah. Perceiving the baby to be a threat to his throne, he told the wise men to notify him when they found the baby because he secretly planned to kill him. But the wise men were warned in a dream not to return, and Matthew 2:16-18 says, *“Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that*

region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸ 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.'"

Herod was despised, paranoid, killing children, killing his own sons, favoring Rome over his own subjects, and leaving them with a dreadful uncertainty about their future. As his reign came to an end, the people of Israel would have been on unstable and shaky ground. No one knew what would happen next, other than it would likely favor Rome and put the Jews in a worse position. In that situation, I think their souls would have ached for something different and that's why I think this prophecy from Isaiah would have been very dear to them, especially the third name of the promised king: "Everlasting Father." Let's look into what that would have meant to them.

In the Hebrew, "Everlasting Father" is a compound word, combining the ideas of everlasting and father. To our ears, this name may seem out of place for Jesus because we know him as the everlasting Son, not Father. But this name was given before the distinctions in the Godhead had been revealed. So the ancient Hebrew reader wouldn't have thought about it that way. To them, this name had nothing to do with his role in the Trinity, it had to do with his role in his kingdom. Albert Barnes writes: *"The Hebrews used the term father in a great variety of senses - as a literal father, a grandfather, an ancestor, a ruler, an instructor."* So a king could be understood to be the "father" of his people and Ellicott's Commentary says this was *"to express the idea of loving and protecting government."* Thinking of a king as "father" emphasized these ideas.

But not only would this king be "Father," he would be "Everlasting." So his loving and protecting government wouldn't last the few years or decades that was typical for a king at that time, it would last forever. Albert Barnes writes: *"The Messiah will not, as must be the case with an earthly king, however excellent, leave his people destitute after a short reign, but will rule over them and bless them forever."* This is the kind of king the Messiah would be and I think the people of Israel would have been longing for his appearing, especially as Herod's reign came to an end.

It was at that time when God chose for Jesus to be born. Herod's attempt to kill him was unsuccessful. He escaped to Egypt with his parents and then returned after Herod's death. The people of Israel had no idea who he was because he was born in obscurity to a carpenter and wife in the tiny village of Nazareth. So he grew up there without any fanfare. But when he was 30 years old, that all began to change when he came on the scene.

He was wonderful and the people loved him. He taught with great wisdom and authority and had supernatural power like people had never seen. He wasn't like the other teachers and religious leaders who seemed to care only about religion, politics, money, and themselves. He actually cared for the people like a father. He ministered to those who were hurting. He healed the lame, gave sight to the blind, and even went so far as to associate with beggars and lepers. His kindness and compassion were magnetic. Many were convinced that he must be the Messiah, that he would ascend to the throne, push out Herod's successors and establish a kingdom where he would lead them in the worship of God forever and ever. Finally, he had come! Everlasting Father...

It must have been shocking, when just five days after they welcomed him into Jerusalem and hailed him as their king, that he was hanging on a Roman cross outside the city, dying like a common criminal. I'm sure there was a lot of confusion at that time – how could it be that Jesus wasn't the Messiah? Everything looked right for him to take the throne and start his everlasting kingdom. He was the kind of king they wanted. But there he was, dying on a tree. How could it be?

The Bible reveals that Jesus did come to establish an everlasting kingdom, but the first thing he had to do was take care of something that was barring the way for any of his subjects to enter. All of his subjects had sinned against God. All of them were guilty. All of them had earned the righteous penalty for their sin, which was death and condemnation – everlasting separation from God. There was only one way they could be part of the Messiah's kingdom. Jesus, the Son of God had to pay the penalty for their sin. As the perfect Mediator between God and Man, only Jesus could die for them and pay the penalty for sin, only he could absorb God's wrath against mankind and remove their guilt. Jesus had to die to open the way for his subjects to come in, which is the greatest act of love a King could ever do for his people. That's why he hung on that tree.

He suffered and died for sin, paying the price completely, but then, on the third day, he rose again in victory. The penalty was paid, the gates were opened, and his people could come in. For everyone who received him and believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God and enter his kingdom. Their sins were erased and they were given the gift of eternal life in him.

From that time until now, Christ's kingdom has not been of this world – not yet. It's a spiritual kingdom that is spreading throughout the earth as Jesus is gathering his subjects. It's visible wherever Christians gather together. We are part of that kingdom. Jesus is gathering his subjects from every nation, tribe and tongue and he's using his people to do it. He's commissioned us to continue his ministry and to spread his good news to whoever will listen and believe.

But one day his kingdom won't just be spiritual, it will be here on earth. When the gathering of saints is complete and the last subject is brought in, Christ will return to bring his eternal kingdom here on earth. And what a glorious kingdom that will be! There will be no more crying or pain. No sin or evil. No tyrannical rulers or governments spreading fear and uncertainty. Only peace, joy, and righteousness with Christ as our king. The celebration will go on forever and ever. This is how Jesus is our Everlasting Father.

The world we live in doesn't give us much hope if we really look at it. There are times when things can be really good but there will always be times of pain and suffering. It was a bleak outlook for the people of Israel under the reign of King Herod, and it can be a bleak outlook for us today. No one knows what the future will look like here on earth. But as the saying goes, we know who holds the future! His kingdom is spreading. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. And one day his earthly kingdom will be established, and it will never pass away.

So all of us who are in Christ can actually be filled with hope and joy today, even in this life, because we know that there's far more to our future than whatever happens in this world. We can have hope and joy because our kingdom is eternal. We may not experience the Golden Years right now, but there's a Golden Eternity on the horizon, and it's never going to end. Peter rejoices in that hope in 1 Peter 1:3-9: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the*

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Let's not hang our heads as we look ahead because the future is bright for those who are in Christ! And if you're here this morning and realize you haven't entered his kingdom or received the gift of eternal life, the time is now for you to begin following Christ and make him your king. Trust in him, believe what he says. Believe in what he did to save you. Receive his Spirit and begin to walk in a new way of life as one of his disciples!