From Darkness to Light: The Glory of the King, Part 3

**Isaiah 9:6** 6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

*Jesus The Father*

The literature on this Messianic title, like the other titles given here in Isaiah 9.6, has been lamentably terse. However, the title is worthy of extensive exposition. It really does challenge us from the Trinitarian angel to formulate our comments about this Messianic title carefully noting the important orthodox dimensions of this doctrine. How for example can we think biblically about Jesus here being explicitly referred to as “Eternal Father?” How is this compatible with the Fatherhood of the Father, the sonship of the Son and the filial relationship between the Father and the Son in Trinitarian theology? Furthermore, what does this title say about the debates over Modalism, Unitarianism, and Jesus Onlyism? Of course, room does not allow us to give ample refutation to each of these heretical systems. Here however, we are looking to give a more positive presentation of these Christological implications from an exegetical perspective as well as from the historical situation and the biblical theological development of Messianism. There are three degrees of truth at work here. There is first, the ontological level of this passage, precisely how Father and Son should be related in terms of there Being, there subsistence and relation especially their distinction and oneness. There is also the messianic degree of revelation. The Son’s revelation of the Father and its connection back to this title. This is found supremely in the words and works of the Son during His earthly session. And finally, there is the Messianic angel which gives us the deepest degree of understanding the nature of this title and its truth value in the teaching of Scripture and the purpose for Jesus as the Messiah. There could be a fourth point that we will need to mention which is the imminently practical one; *how does the “fatherhood” of Jesus affect us as His people*? These questions and many more are the reasons why this title demands so much of our attention.

*Jesus And The Father Are One*

To begin, as a point of hermeneutics and our entire approach to Scripture on doctrinal matters and typically even more importantly, when matters are more complex, we always begin with the clearest passages of Scripture and use the clarity and perspicuity of Scripture to drive our synthesis of biblical texts and thus build our doctrinal formulations that way. First then, the obvious reading of Scripture is that Jesus is *not* the Father at the ontological level leading us to embrace what was historically known as Modalism. This would make innumerable passages of Scripture hopelessly redundant, contradictory and meaningless. Every reference to Jesus as the Son *of* the Father would be a self-refuting statement. Jesus’ designation of *His* Father would also be meaningless since He would be referring to Himself. The Father who speaks from Heaven at Jesus’ baptism saying, “You are My beloved Son in You I am well-pleased” (Lk. 3.22), would also be hopelessly unintelligible.

But at the ontological level we also must guard against confusing the persons of the Godhead by supposing that the Father shares in the person of the Son and the person of the Son shares in the person of the Father and the Spirit and so back and forth between the persons so much so that we lose the distinction of the persons. *Perichoresis* is a doctrine that emphasizes the interpenetration of the persons by virtue of their ontic unity as well as their pouring their love into one another in reciprocal fashion, but it does not negate their distinction either. Each person holds their own personhood, center of consciousness, and distinct identity in co-substantial relation to each other. At the same time, it is important to note with the great creeds and confessions that each member of the Godhead though being fully God in themselves and deriving no Godhood from themselves nevertheless share fully in the other members of the Godhead in a real eternal essential oneness, unity and indissoluble divine nature and essence so that the three are One! Incomprehensible? Yes! But not unintelligible and necessarily biblical, and theologically indispensable. All of this to say that Jesus is *not* the Father but *a* father. But if Jesus is not *the* Father, than how do we understand His title as “Eternal Father” here in Isaiah? Perhaps it is best to begin from the stand point of what Scripture says regarding Jesus’ capacity to show us the Father.

*Jesus Reveals The Father*

To answer that all-important question, we need to begin with Jesus’ revelation of the Father. This is not only *what* Jesus does but also *who* Jesus is. In other words, it is not just that Jesus at one point, at His incarnation for example, revealed the Father to man, but in His very person and nature, is himself an eternal representation of the Father:

**Hebrews 1:1–3** 1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

This is important because as we think of how it is that Jesus is conceived of in terms of *fatherhood*, we could say it is because He is himself the eternal representation of the Father, that He could be said to be a Father to us! They are bound together not only their essence and nature, but also in their work of creation (cf. John 1.1-4; Col. 1.15-17) and redemption (Zion’s “Redeemer” Is. 59.20; Rom. 11.26, “Deliverer” (Gk. ῥύομαι as in LXX); Gal. 3.13; 4.5). Remarkably, as we think about God the Father- that title of Father is not readily used in the OT like it is in the NT; however, Isaiah does use the title in connection with the great work of God as *Redeemer*:

**Isaiah 63:16** 16 For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us. You, O Lord, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name.

For the Messiah therefore to be “Eternal Father” has to do with the fact that He himself is qualified, fit, and capable of truly revealing the Father to us. This is further reinforced by the fact that Jesus shares such intimate, functional unity and identity with Father, that in Him, that is, in the Son we may see the fullest expression of the Father and experience the very Fatherly love of God through Him and by Him:

**John 1:18** 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

**John 14:6–11** 6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. 7 “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.” 8 Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” 9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. 11 “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.

Only the Son, who enjoys perfect ontological unity with the Father and the Spirit, can properly possess a functional unity and a functional identity with the Father even as He does the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 3.18; also 1 Cor. 15.45) so that He can say, “I and the Father are one” (John 10.30). His perfect, Triune unity with the Father, makes Jesus the “exact” glory of the Father’s heart and nature toward us. Furthermore, Jesus, in His work does not merely reveal the Father to us, He *brings* the Father to us and us to the Father (cf. 1 Pet. 3.18), and leaves us with the Father to abide with Him as much as He, the Son and Father, abide with us. Such incomprehensible divine condescension. Oh, that God would come down! But Jesus is unmistakable, unflinching, fearless, and unapologetic about this fact, that through Him we are also one with His Father to know His love even as Jesus has known the love of His Father that we should know that love, that we should be known by the Father in the same communion bond of everlasting filial fellowship without end! *First*, see the Son bound in love to the Father:

**John 15:9–10** 9 “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

*Second*, see how the Son communicates that love to us:

**John 16:25–28** 25 “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. 26 “In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. 28 “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.”

In his indispensable commentary on the Gospel of John, Herman Ridderbos comments that in this passage the Father expresses His desire for His people to worship Him in Spirit and truth. He comments, “Love for Jesus restores direct access to God. In that love the Father recognizes his own… It is the one great love by which God loved the world in his Son and which returns to him in those who, in the name of his Son, turn to him as their Father…” (Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John, A Theological Commentary* (1997), 543). In other words, when Jesus orients our lives back to God, He turns us to a Father, to *the* Father, and a relationship with the Father- a relationship of the most pure, holy, whole, healthy, sacred, and full of filial love; a communion bond of fellowship. In a word, it is a covenantal love in the covenanted kingdom of God (cf. Lk. 21.28-30).

*Jesus As The Eternal Messianic Father*

Perhaps the deepest degree of truth that connects the idea of fatherhood to Jesus is connected to His messianic identity as the Father-King of His people. For the ANE and the world of Isaiah’s own day, a king was known as the ‘father’ of his people. So, J. Ridderbos in his *Student’s Bible Commentary* says, “[the term] “Father” bears on His relation to His people: this King cares for them with loving goodness as a father his children… His fatherhood is forever, for of His kingdom there is no end” (*Isaiah*, 1985, 103). Jesus as the head of the messianic community therefore is our perfect Father-King. He is the father *par excellence* of His people because He is the perfect King of His people. Most commentators stress the eternality of the fatherhood of the Messiah as precisely what distinguishes Jesus’ royal supremacy over other kings. Unlike the transient nature of past kings and kings of other nations, Jesus’ kingship, like His kingdom, will have no end and his fatherly care for His nation will have no end either. There would be no national lamentation for the loss of this king; He is the “Eternal Father.” As the eternal father therefore, He cannot fail to govern, protect, and provide for His people. This grounds the fatherhood of Jesus in the *eschatological* as well as in the redemptive.

From the redemptive angel, Jesus’ fatherhood is seen from His saving solidarity with His people. Isaiah has already hinted at this as Messiah work on behalf of His elect, His remnant- the church. Speaking in prophetic symbolism, Isaiah, as he does elsewhere, embodies the Messiah’s own mission when He declares, “Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion” (8.18). From this perspective, the fatherhood of Jesus is a metaphor that belongs to other metaphors. The total picture given in Hebrews represents a mixture of metaphors to convey the total messianic picture:

**Hebrews 2:11–14** 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, “I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.” 13 And again, “I will put My trust in Him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.” 14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

The children entrusted to Jesus are thus also His brethren, the brethren and children for whom He died and for whom He triumphed over the devil and death. Finally, this profound, indeed mysterious and deep doctrine of the fatherhood of the Messiah also shows the perfect fatherhood of Jesus because of His filial love and providential care for His children. He not only lays down His life for us (John 10.11), calls us to himself, justifies us, and inevitably glorifies us (cf. Rom. 8.28-29); He also sustains us and cares for us in the interim. When we see this, it becomes apparent that Jesus’ fatherhood cannot and should not be conceived of apart from its Triune reality. That is to say that in Jesus’ care for His children, the citizens of His kingdom, it is the care of God for His children. Precisely what Jesus himself taught so that God’s fatherly heart hits us right where we are at:

**Matthew 6:25–34** 25 “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 “And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ 32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Oh, mystery of mysteries that the child to be born to us would be a father. He reveals the Father, is one with the Father, and will be a Father-King to His people in the government that will have no end, in a kingdom that cannot be shaken, in the bond of communion that cannot be severed. His care will be forever known but the beauty of this is that His eternal fatherhood as great and high, as unfathomable and eternal as it is, extends to us now in the most minute matters in our lives. In a world where plagues, earthquakes, turmoil, wars and rumors of wars, social deterioration, the constant decay of health, and the weariness of life, it is essential for us to detect the love of Jesus for His children. Is it any surprise that one of Jesus’ favorite metaphors for His disciples was the designation “children” (cf. John 13.33; 21.5); for such we are, children of the King.