



Jesus Christ: Yesterday, Today & Forever

Hebrews 13:8

David Sunday

December 27, 2015

Yes, we do worship Him Who is eternally worthy of our worship. Let's continue in worship as we read His Word together. Hebrews 13 is a memorable and well-loved passage in the New Testament that is fitting for us on this last Sunday of 2015. We worship God as we enter into the hearing of His Word attentively, praying for the transformation of His Spirit through the Word. Let us love and adore our great God as He speaks to us now.

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" ⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

Thank God for His living and abiding Word. Amen.

Father, I pray that the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts would be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord our Rock and Redeemer. I pray for the empowerment and anointing of Your Holy Spirit upon the preaching and hearing of the Word. I pray that You would transform us by Your Spirit through the beauty and power of Your gospel. I ask this in the living, eternal name of Jesus, Your Son. He is worthy, and we would lay our lives before Him now. Amen.

One of the realities I've come to expect at the cusp of every new year is that I really don't know what to expect from a new year. When I think back to where we were a year ago and all that has happened in my life this year, there were joys and there were sorrows that I could not

have anticipated a year ago. And I expect that this coming year is going to be similarly marked by unexpected, unforeseen, uncontrollable events and situations.

Just think about 2016. Hopefully by this time next year, if there's not a disputed election with hanging chads in Florida and things like that, we will have elected a new President for our country. Some of us will become parents for the first time, or new children will be added to our families that we're not even expecting yet. Others of us will become grandparents. Some of you will meet the person with whom you will fall in love and become married for the rest of your life. Others will graduate from school. Jobs will change. Church will change. New people will come. Dear ones we've known for years will move to new places. There will be unexpected sickness. We'll have to say goodbye to people who are very dear to us. None of us is guaranteed another day.

Sometimes change is good. None of us wants to live in a world where nothing changes, where everything is always the same. We crave a little bit of excitement. We want adventure in our lives and we don't want to stay the same ourselves. All of us hope to be better people a year from now than we are today. That's what New Year's resolutions are all about. We want to improve.

Aren't you glad that Jesus changes us? Aren't you glad that He doesn't leave us the same as we are now? Aren't you glad there are people in your life right now who do not know Christ, but who will by His power and grace come to know Him in this coming year? And maybe some of you are going to experience a whole new advance forward in your faith in ways that you could not anticipate. So sometimes change is good.

But at the same time we long for normalcy. We long for familiarity. We want to feel at home. We want to go home at night to a place that is the same, with people who know us and whom we know. We often have a hard time accepting changes in our lives. It can be very unsettling and difficult.

I remember a restaurant our family used to love and they had half-priced fajitas on Tuesday nights. We didn't go there every Tuesday night, but for sure not a month went by that we didn't go to this restaurant. They had homemade tortillas that were so good and made the fajitas so tasty and fresh, and the salsa was unlike any other place. Whenever we'd go there, we'd always see people from our church because it was inexpensive and everyone loved going there.

Then one day they changed the name of the restaurant, they changed the menu, and everything about it was different. It was no longer the same place. And to this day—a decade later—when we drive past that place, we often say, “Oh, I miss Carmelito's. I wish we had that restaurant back.”

I can remember a friend who was very dear to us back in high school and college and early in our married life, then one day that friendship changed. There were no more phone calls or get-togethers. It became very different. We know what it's like to have relationships that go sour. All of a sudden something changes and friends become distant. There's a coldness there.

We long for something stable, something solid, something that will not change. So on this last Sunday of 2015 I want to point you to that Rock, that immovable Hope, that Person in our lives Who does not and will not change, of Whom the writer of Hebrews says in 13:8, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*" I want us to worship Him, trust Him and love Him for His stability.

We can resonate with the lament of an old poet, Frederick Faber:

Lord! my heart is sick,
Sick of this everlasting change;
And life runs tediously quick
Through its unresting race and varied range:
Change finds no likeness to itself in Thee,
And wakes no echo in Thy mute eternity...

A beautiful thing—You, Lord, don't change. Faber goes on to lament how time goes so slowly in grief, and then in joy it runs so quickly. He concludes, "Oh, change and time are storms for lives so thin and frail as ours." We get really battered and bruised by change. We struggle with it.

Change is inevitable, but Jesus Christ is immutable. Change is inevitable, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. This doesn't mean that Jesus is the "same old, same old." He's never boring or predictable. He's never manageable or controllable. Jesus Christ is full of unexpected surprises for every believer. He is "*able to do exceedingly far more abundantly than all that we ask or think*" (Ephesians 3:20).

If you follow Jesus, life is not going to be just predictable and easy and smooth. It's going to be full of excitement and adventure. Yet there is a rock-solid dependability, stability, consistency and reliability in Jesus that you will find nowhere else in this changing, fickle world. We need that. We need an immutable Savior.

So what do theologians mean when they speak of the "immutability" of God? Paraphrasing R.C. Sproul, it means that God is what He has always been and He will be that forever. It doesn't mean that God is static or paralyzed or in a state of inertia. He's not the God of philosophers. He's not Aristotle's "unmoved mover" who is perpetually inert.

He is active, a God Who moves over the waters and over the church and over its people. He is active in His creation. He's moving and changing us. Yet His character never changes. His

perfections never change. His purposes remain stable and secure. His promises never fail. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

When the writer of the Hebrews speaks about the immutability of Jesus Christ, he is making an unmistakable affirmation of the full deity and divinity and “Godness” of Jesus. When we read this in Hebrews 13, it’s almost like a summary statement of everything the writer of Hebrews has been saying about Jesus—His supremacy and sufficiency, His uniqueness—in this whole letter.

It brings us all the way back to Hebrews 1:8-12, where the writer is comparing Jesus to the angels, saying He is superior to them. He tells us of the things God says of His angels, but then we read this: *“But of the Son [God] says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.’”* So God calls His Son God. *“The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”*

So God proclaims the supremacy of His Son, then the writer of the Hebrews quotes Psalm 102 and applies it to Jesus:

You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.

When we look at the mountains and the seas and this created order, nothing seems more firm, nothing seems more stable and secure, than creation itself. But the writer of Hebrews says all of this is going to be changed. God’s going to take off this creation like a man would take off a shirt—rolling it up and putting it away—and make a new creation. But Jesus Christ remains the same and His years have no end. He is more stable, more secure, more enduring than the creation itself. He is supreme. His throne is eternal. His holiness is unimpeachable.

In the words of the Westminster Confession, Jesus Christ is “eternal, unchangeable, immutable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” That means you can depend on His wisdom because His Word will not change. You can rely on His counsel because it has a proven track record. You can rest secure in His love because He’s not going to be warm toward you one day and cold the next—and nothing can separate you from His love. You can entrust your heart to Him without fear because His character is constant. His faithfulness is unfailing. He is rock-solid and dependable—yesterday, today and forever.

Let’s look at these three markers.

First of all: yesterday. It matters to us that Jesus today is the same as He was yesterday because we see in the context of this passage the exhortation in verse seven to remember your leaders, the people who spoke God's Word to you. He's saying, "Consider the outcome of their faith. Many of them laid down their lives for Jesus. They were willing to die for Him. Consider the outcome of their faith and imitate their example."

A lot of these leaders have now died or have gone to other places, and the people of Hebrews have believed in Christ, but now they're tempted to shrink back, to go back to their old Jewish ways, to think that maybe the gospel of Jesus is not enough. He's not worth living all out for and dying for. The writer of Hebrews is telling them, "Hold fast. Do not turn back. Do not drift. Do not turn aside from Jesus. Look at the example of your leaders—how they lived and died for Jesus. And know this: that the Jesus they served is the same Jesus you are serving."

The Jesus of your grandparents, the Jesus of the great forefathers and foremothers of the faith—He's the same Jesus today. Whatever He was to them, He is to us. That's comforting. But I think the writer wants us to go back even further than just a few generations. He wants us to go all the way back to the first century here, when Jesus lived among us, "*in the days of His flesh*" when He "*offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence,*" and "*he learned obedience through what he suffered*" (Hebrews 5:7-8).

How do you know Jesus today? It's not through some mystical revelation. It's not through some new word that Jesus is going to speak to you today. It's not through you making up some religious idea of Who Jesus is in your mind. We know Jesus today through a Book, through a living Book. Hebrews 4:12 says this Word is living and active. It's sharper than any double-edged sword. It's a Book that's reading us, even as we're reading it.

He's alive in this Book and He reveals Himself to us in these pages of Scripture. What the writer of Hebrews is telling us is when we read about Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and when we hear the testimony about Jesus in the Letters of the New Testament, they all point us back to the Old Testament that Jesus knew and loved and believed. When we read the Bible, we're reading of a Savior Who is the same today as He was in this Word. He's alive and active today.

So you can trust in the revelation of Scripture. It's not just a dead historical record—it's a living Word. Trust in the Jesus Who is revealed here in these pages and the life He lived here on earth. As you read this Word, you encounter the living Christ. You encounter truths unchanged from the dawn of time that will echo down through eternity.

Jesus is the same yesterday—**and today**. Let's focus on today for a minute. How crucial it is that we recognize that the Jesus we read about in these pages of Scripture is the same today as He was then. Everything He was in the pages of Scripture He is to us today through His Spirit. In John 16:7, Jesus said to His disciples, *"It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."*

It is to our advantage today that we have the Holy Spirit of Jesus. It's even more advantageous for us than it was for the first disciples who walked with Jesus on the dusty roads of Palestine. That's because the Holy Spirit takes the words, actions, power, beauty and the precious promises of Jesus, Who walked here on our planet, and the Holy Spirit takes that living Christ and makes His words and deeds and transforming presence real to us today.

And He does that simultaneously for millions of believers all around the world. Right now millions of people are experiencing the same Jesus that Peter, James, John, Andrew and all the disciples experienced in the first century. We are experiencing this same Jesus through the Holy Spirit—and Jesus says, "That's good for the church. It's what the church needs." We all need the living encounter with the risen Christ, and we all have that encounter with the risen Christ through His Spirit. He's here with us now. The Jesus of Scripture is here today through the Spirit.

That means we're not impoverished. We're not at a disadvantage as we go into this new year. We don't go into 2016 in a weaker position than Peter, James and John did in A.D. 33. We are as strong and mighty as they were if we trust in the Jesus they trusted in—because He's the same today.

I don't know what you think about that, but I think we struggle to believe that. I think that's a hard one for us to get our minds around. I think we live too often like Jesus is far off in the distant past, and His power is remote and inaccessible. We don't live with that sense of His nearness and that faith in His presence.

Let me give you a verse that always challenges me a little bit, always unsettles me: John 14:12. Let me read this and see if anyone wants to stand up and tell us what this means. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."* Now, can we just chew on that for a minute? Do you believe that? Anyone want to explain that to us? "Greater works will he do because I'm going to the Father. The Holy Spirit's coming."

We don't go into the world weak and at a disadvantage. We go into the world as Kingdom ambassadors of Jesus, Who is alive, Who is present, Who is the same today as He was yesterday. Does that mean when I go to Delnor Community Hospital and visit sick and dying people that I

can walk in and speak the word and raise the dead? Jesus said, “Greater works will he do.” No, it doesn’t mean that.

I think it means something even better than that. It means that when the church goes into the world—into this broken, sinful, war-weary, hurting, aching, anguished world—and we proclaim the Word of Christ, and people hear Him speak through His Word, the spiritually dead receive new life. The blind are given their sight. The deaf hear. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. It means that the gospel gives life to people—not just life that’s temporary for a few more decades here on earth, but life eternal.

Through this gospel, people who are dead in their trespasses and sins are raised to new life that will never end. It’s a powerful gospel. Jesus says that as the church goes into the world and proclaims this eternal gospel that’s the same today as it was yesterday, greater works are going to be accomplished in all the world than even were accomplished when He walked among us.

Church, we need to believe that. I want to read something that Ray Ortlund, Sr., said back in 1975. This came from his son who sat in his church in Pasadena, California, and heard him preach these words.

Jesus wants to express His *fullness* through you. Always begin your thinking and your planning and your deciding from the standpoint of Jesus’ fullness in your life. Always begin with the plenty of God. Face life with all you have in Christ. Never face life from the standpoint of all the problems and all the needs and all the difficulties. Always begin with your standing in Christ. You have rivers of living water, Christ in you, fullness of grace and truth. That’s what Jesus gives us!”

He’s the same today. A.W. Tozer said, “Anything that God has ever done, He can do now. Anything that God has done anywhere else, He can do here. Anything that God has done for anyone else, He can do for you.” Look at that. Who believes that? Who lays hold of that truth? I think he’s right on target there. I think that’s what we need to believe. Jesus is the same today as He was yesterday.

Yesterday, today—and, **finally, forever**. Forever. Praise God that He’s the same forever. I’ve experienced getting to know someone new and becoming really good friends. We’re enjoying each other, texting each other, talking with each other and hanging out with each other. But for how long?

Maybe some of you are falling in love with someone right now, and oh, you’re so excited! There’s this glow in your relationship. But down in the pit of your stomach you’re a little worried.

“Will she still love me a week from now?” “Will he still be faithful to me months from now? What if he changes?” “What if she decides she wants someone else?” See, our relationships are insecure, aren’t they? We can look in our own hearts and know we’re fickle. We’re unfaithful. We’re inconsistent.

Charles Spurgeon said this:

Cast the burden of the present, along with the sin of the past and the fear of the future, upon the Lord, who forsaketh not His saints. Live by the day—aye, by the hour. Put no trust in frames and feelings. Care more for a grain of faith than a ton of excitement. Trust in God alone, and lean not on the needs of human help. Be not surprised when friends fail you; it is a failing world. Never count upon immutability in man: inconstancy you may reckon upon without fear of disappointment.

This is what you can depend on from people: they will let you down, without fail. But not so with Jesus. He is the same forever. “In every change He faithful will remain.”

The writer to the Hebrews underscores this in so many ways. Listen to a few of these verses.

- Hebrews 1:8, *“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”*
- Hebrews 5:6, *“You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”*
- Hebrews 6:17-20, *“So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*
- Hebrews 7:17, *“For it is witnessed of him, ‘You are a priest’”—how long? “Forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”*
- Verse 21, *“But this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever.”’”*
- Verses 23-25, *“The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”*

- Hebrews 7:28, *“For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.”*
- And lastly, Hebrews 9:15, *“Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”*

What is he telling us? Jesus is the same forever. His priesthood is permanent. The blood He shed on the cross will never lose its power to atone for the sins of everyone who ever trusts in Him, because that which He did in the past will have enduring effects for all eternity.

Nothing will ever need to be altered, nothing will ever need to be improved, nothing will ever need to be completed, and nothing will ever need to be revised in what Jesus has done. The work He did in the past remains eternally secure and abiding. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. That’s good news. That means our salvation is secure in Christ. He is the same forever.

I love to read The Chronicles of Narnia with my kids. We went through it several times when they were younger. In the story of Prince Caspian, the Pevensie children leave our world to go back to Narnia again. As they get to Narnia, Lucy is the first one to catch a glimpse of the great lion king, Aslan—the creator king. At first she just sees bright flashes of light, but then she’s sure she saw him.

Finally, he reveals himself to her. And the first thing she says when she realizes it is him is that he seems larger than he was before.

Aslan,” said Lucy, “you’re bigger.”

“That is because you are older, little one,” answered he.

“Not because you are?”

“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”

(C.S. Lewis, Prince Caspian, Chapter 10)

May that will be our experience in 2016. Jesus is the same forever. He’s the same Jesus that He was in the past, He is today and He will be forever. He doesn’t get bigger. He’s always infinitely big. But our conception of Him grows as we grow. As we grow, may Jesus become larger and larger and larger to us.

Let me give you some applications to think about:

1. This truth strengthens us to exercise patience in the midst of suffering. The writer exhorts the people so that they will be willing to go to Jesus *“outside the camp and bear the*

reproach He endured" (Hebrews 13:13); so they will be willing even to lay down their lives for Jesus just as their leaders had done. In order to do that, they need to see that the Christ of history is the same today, and He will be forever, therefore He's worth giving everything up for.

2. This truth exhorts us to renounce materialism. "*Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have*" (Hebrews 13:5). Why? Because He's with you and He will never leave you or forsake you. He will be a treasure that will never fail. Treasure Him. Lay up treasures in heaven. Don't become infatuated with the things of this earth.

3. This truth urges us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ in the way we live. There should be a recognizable Christ-like quality to Christians in every generation and in every place. Our conduct should be full of love (Hebrews 13:1), hospitable to strangers (verse two), remembering those who are in prison (verse three), faithful in marriage (verse four) and every other exhortation in this passage.

And it shouldn't matter whether we live in 2016 or 1416 or 616. Christians are Christians because we are clothed with Christ, Who is the same yesterday, today and forever. And if Christians from a thousand years ago came and dwelt among us, they should recognize the presence of Christ and they should see that we are very similar to them. Our lives and our beliefs are similar because we hold to the same Christ.

4. This truth warns us to resist fads, resist novelty and renounce false doctrine. Don't go running around looking for something new and exciting. Verse nine states, "*Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings.*" There are all kinds of them out there. Goofy teachings. Heretical teachings. No! Hold firm to Christ. Never move on from the gospel. Let your heart be strengthened by His grace. Don't get distracted by teaching that's not centered on Christ the Foundation. Don't look for novelty. Ask for the ancient paths. Ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. Jesus is that Way. Adhere to Him.

5. This truth gives us grace to accept change in a world where change is inevitable. We want to change. We want to become more like Jesus—and that's going to be painful. If you really want to change, the Spirit will disrupt your life. It won't be easy. Change is not fun.

But if we adhere to the One Who never changes, we won't get so flustered; we won't get so bent out of shape by all the changes that inevitably come into our lives. We'll be able to accept them. We'll be able to hold a little less tightly to our way and our predictable routines if we are holding tightly to the One Who never changes, and if we know that He will never lose His grip on us. That gives us security in a world where everything changes.

I love how pastor Scotty Smith puts it: "The scary becomes the sacred when we're wearing the lens of the gospel." When Jesus controls our thinking, when we're clinging to Him

and He's clinging to us, whatever we're afraid of becomes the sacred, a holy opportunity to experience the unchanging Christ.

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