

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (5-1-1992 Cleland Baptist Church)

Hebrews 13:8

Introduction

What better theme to look at, at the start of the new year, as we face the future, with all its uncertainties, darkness, unknowns, than the reminder that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. In a constantly and rapidly changing world, Jesus Christ is the unchanging and changeless One. We are going to consider Him, the immutable and unchangeable One, and our relationship to Him.

Same in Himself

The fact that He is the same makes Him different from everyone else we know or know about. The great aim of the epistle to the Hebrews is the glory and complete finality of Christ. He Himself was superior to Moses, Joshua and the Old Testament priests. His sacrifice on the Cross was superior to the animal sacrifices of Old Testament times. They all had their day, did their job, and then passed from the scene. Others came on the scene, had their task to do for God, and then the curtain comes down and their voices are ever silent. But Jesus Christ is always the same, always there, always dependable. In His person He is the same, His atonement was perfect and final, His covenant is eternal, the salvation He brings is eternal, the inheritance He gives is eternal.

There is a permanence, perfection, finality about Him you find nowhere else. From year to year, century to century – He is the same. Why is this so? Because in His person there is this difference. All others are men, and mere men. He also was truly man, He partook of flesh and blood, but also He was perfect God, the eternal Son. **The Son is the radiance of God's glory** (Hebrews 1:3), **Your throne, O God will last forever and ever** (Psalm 45:6; Hebrews 1:8), **You are the same and your years will not fail** (Psalm 102:27, Hebrews 1:12), He lives **in the power of an indestructible life** (Hebrews 7:16), **he always lives to intercede** (Hebrews 7:25).

As the God Man, time never touches Him, years and centuries mean nothing to Him. In His heavenly life, which He shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit, He knows nothing about babyhood, youth, middle age, old age and death. His sovereignty and power is forever. "The changeless Christ in a changeable world."

What a contrast from us. We have many things that remind us of how much we change and how much the world changes – old photographs, old magazines, we revisit somewhere we used to live, a church we used to attend, we discover changes, people who have passed on, so many new people that we feel a stranger. All is changing. Life is really so short and empty.

*"Change and decay in all around I see"
"Time, like an ever rolling stream
Bears all its sons away"*

If only we could stop the world and get off! Nothing is stable, secure or permanent about us, or the world.

Our text points us to the changeless, unchanging and unchangeable One, who is always the same, eternal. C.f. The Statue of Liberty, outside New York harbour – ships come and go, the statue is always there, immovable, unalterable, in all weathers, year in year out. What comfort and security it gives to know Jesus is unchangeable. What wisdom and sheer common sense to build lives on Him. Through Him we are linked to eternity. We can possess a life and a relationship unaffected by the ravages of the years. Though the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day and will last forever.

*“On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand”*

Life built on this sure and lasting foundation. Nothing about that life is fleeting, perishing or passing away. Infinite, immutable, reliable, eternal, un-altering Christ. How trivial, transient and empty the world is beside this. How feeble our hope is if it is in the world. But in Christ we have something permanent and solid.

Same in His truths

The truths about Christ never change. The epistle to the Hebrews warns against strange doctrines, false teachings, which may side track the believer. It commends and urges us to hold onto the great truths about Christ. He is the perfect revelation of the Father, **the exact representation of His being** (Hebrews 1:3). In previous ages God had spoken to men through prophets, but in these last days He has spoken finally and completely in His Son. God has nothing more to say – all has been said in His Son. Faith has once for all been delivered to the saints.

We need to grasp and hold these facts. They are under attack in various places. Some people regard Scripture’s teaching as only being of relevance at the time it was written, but not for 20th century man. Others would say Christianity is all right – but not enough, we need to add to it from other religions. Try a little bit of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism – to get to the final truth.

But it is the exclusiveness of Christianity and its claims which are so offensive. When we proclaim that Christ was God’s eternal Son, in Him alone is salvation, there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved – these eternal truths do not go down well in today’s society. This was the Gospel of New Testament times – and it has never changed or altered. There is no newer, up-to-date, modern Gospel. Reason? Because Jesus is the same. He comes to men in the same conditions. Every generation of men has believed salvation can come by morality religion and ritual – but to every generation the Gospel says “by grace alone, through faith alone”.

The truths about the future also remain unchanged. It is still true that those who believe in the Son will have everlasting life. And that those who do not believe in the Son (however sincere in their beliefs and religions they follow) will not see life, and

the wrath of God abides on them. This truth is the same yesterday, today and forever. Reason? Because Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

This Gospel came through the same mode of working. From the beginning, **God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe** (1 Corinthians 1:21). See the history of the church and the story of revival – preaching has always been central. There is no substitute for the man filled with the Holy Spirit, with the Word of God on his lips, the love of God in his heart, preaching from the heart to heart as he looks men in the eye.

God uses not only the preaching of the word, but the prayers of people to make His word effective. The early apostles gave themselves to the ministry of the word and to prayer. This is a minister's supreme work. Was the secret of Spurgeon's success his voice? his ability to illustrate? his ability to apply the Scripture? his command of the language? His own answer – "My people pray for me." People pray, the Holy Spirit blesses the word to the salvation of men and women and to the up-building of the church. This has always been God's way – the preaching of the truth, the blessing of the Holy Spirit in response to the prayers of His people. When men no longer pray, and when they try to do without His power, God soon does without them. Social amenities, religious discussions, entertainment – no substitute for the prayer meeting.

Same in His invitations and requirements

Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, the stories and teaching of Jesus in the Gospels is still relevant and up to date. We cannot dismiss them by saying "but that was 2000 years ago". We live in an affluent age when men are quite convinced that life consists in the abundance of things they possess, and they say to themselves "Take ease, eat, drink and be merry" – and He still says "You fool, this night your soul will be required of you." Similarly to the moral and religious men and women of today – just like Nicodemus – He says "You must be born again". His warnings about a lost eternity are as valid as ever "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish". And to those who repent and come to Him, He gives them peace of soul and rest of conscience, "Go in peace, your faith has saved you", He still says. In the face of death – "Today you will be with me in paradise".

All He has ever been to His people over the centuries, He can still be today. The vine, to nourish their spiritual life; the bread of life, to satisfy their aching hearts and weary spirits; the light of the world, to ensure they do not walk in darkness. He still makes it possible that all things work together for good.

So the demands on us are the same. To love God and love your neighbour, to deny self daily and follow Him. And yet He is so compassionate when we fail Him. **For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust** (Psalm 103:14). In our failures, His hand is still outstretched to pick us up. Do you feel guilty, wretched, miserable, that you have failed your Lord? Remember Peter. All that God was for the first disciples, the early church, and to the faithful down the centuries, He can be to us today, and even more tomorrow. Whatever the high-water mark of spiritual experience past, it can be exceeded in the coming days. There is yet fuller, richer, deeper blessing awaiting those who ask, seek and knock. He who has called you and brought you to Himself – He will not fail you now.

Conclusion

He is the same – in Himself, in His truth, and in His invitations and requirements. This is a cause for rejoicing and gratitude, for assurance and challenge. Do you know Him? Build your life in Him? Trust in Him? Seek Him while He may be found.

*“We have an anchor that keeps the soul,
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
Anchored to the rock that cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour’s love”*