

Jesus Isn't Changing

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[0 : 0 0] Well as I was saying to the boys and girls, I'm sure that for every single one of us, not just children, we are conscious that life is full of changes. Last week loads of boys and girls across the island started school or some maybe went into the Nicholson for the first time or maybe some are preparing to go to university or to start a career after leaving school. Seasons change, summer has flown by and it's not long before we'll be thinking towards autumn and winter. More seriously, there's the threat of climate change. Covid restrictions have changed and which is great, but no doubt more changes are going to come.

Our jobs change, so maybe you've recently started a whole new job or maybe you're just facing new challenges or responsibilities in the jobs you have. Communities change, people leave, people come and we change. Every day we learn new things, we gain new experiences.

There's changes in our bodies, changes in our health, even changes in our tastes. If you'd asked me as a child, what's two of your most disgusting foods that you would never eat that you think are just awful? I would have said coffee and olives. When I was young I was like, who on earth would drink coffee and who on earth would eat olives? Now if you ask me on my top five favourite foods, coffee and olives are definitely there. So there's changes in life in so many ways. Every day we're older, every day the number of heart beats that we've got left reduces. And maybe the hardest change of all is when people we know and love are gone. Change is a massive part of life. It can be wonderful, it can be awful, it cannot be avoided. And because of that I want today to think about one of the most wonderful statements that's ever been made. Today I want to turn back to Hebrews 13.8. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. This is going to be our text for this Sunday morning and for next Sunday morning. I want us to look at two things.

We're going to think about the fact that Jesus isn't changing and we're going to think about the fact that Jesus changes everything. Today it's the first one. Jesus isn't changing.

As you may remember the letter to the Hebrews has one great message and that is don't give up. It was written to Hebrew Christians, that means it's people who have become Christians from a Jewish background. They'd come to trust in the Lord and follow him but trouble had arisen in their lives. Things are getting difficult and now they're tempted to abandon Christianity and go back to their old Jewish religion. This letter is written to show these Christians that going back is not the answer. And in order to do that the person who wrote this letter makes repeated comparisons between Jesus and the Old Testament in order to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament was pointing towards. The Old Testament as we often say was the shadow. Jesus is the full reality and because of that he's actually superior to everything that the Old Testament was pointing towards and the letter is telling these struggling believers don't give up or as the letter itself repeatedly says hold fast your confession. So that's the message of the whole letter and just before we reach the end the writer drops in this amazing statement that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. And I think that's a crucial reminder before the letter ends that all the teaching that he's given in relation to how Jesus is superior isn't just through now, it's through forever. They need to hold fast to Jesus because he is superior and he will be forevermore. In other words the Jesus whom they are following isn't changing. And I want us to think about that a wee bit more today. There's so much that we could say and we're only just going to scratch the surface and look at three things that the letter as a whole highlights in this regard and next week we're going to look a little bit more closely at chapter 13 itself. Today I want to be a bit broader which is why we read from the start. So three things, number one, Jesus isn't changing in terms of who he is. Let me put up the verses one to four that we read again. These opening words are amazing in terms of what they say about Jesus. I want us to look especially at the start of verse two and three.

[5 : 36] It says that in these last days God spoke to us by his son whom he appointed in of all things through whom also he created the world. He's the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. These words are a stunning description of who Jesus is.

He is the Son of God and because he's the Son of God he shares God's nature and character. In other words he's exactly like God the Father. All the beauty, glory and majesty of God is in Jesus and as these verses are saying because of that all that glory radiates from Jesus and seen in him. That's why we can say that Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. Now that word revelation is so important because if you think of all of reality you've got God and you've got everything else which includes us and the only way we can know anything about God is if God reveals himself to us and he does that in various ways but the ultimate way in which he does that, the clearest way in which God reveals himself is in Jesus.

Jesus is the one through whom the infinite eternal unchangeable God is revealed. In other words if you want to know what God is like you look at Jesus and that is such a crucial point for us to keep thinking about. It's one that's so easy to forget because so many people whether Christians or not-get-Christians so many people are led astray by distorted understandings of what God is like and very often that can come from a failure to recognise Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God. So boys and girls do you ever think that Jesus would maybe be a bit too busy or a bit too important to listen to you? Do you ever think you know what Jesus, yeah he listened to grown-ups, he listened to ministers like Thomas but I'm just a wee child and Jesus probably wouldn't really think that I am that important. Do you ever think that God might not be interested in listening to you? Well Jesus took boys and girls like you and put them on his lap. That's what God is like. For all of us if you have a messy past do you think that God would rather keep you at arm's length? Well

Jesus spoke tenderly to a woman at a well who had a very messy past. He touched a leper.

He ate with tax collectors and all the notorious sinners in the community. That's what God is like. If you look at people who are influential and successful and respected and yet you know that they're cruel and harsh and yet everything seems to go well for them, if you look at Jesus you see that he called out those kind of people. He had no time for their hypocrisy.

[9 : 05] That's what God is like. If you feel that you've failed catastrophically and that God is giving up on you, well after Peter denied him, Jesus took him for a walk, he restored him and he gave him an amazing mission for the rest of his life. That is what God is like. And the crucial lesson is this that we have to recognise that you know you will meet lots of people in life and you'll meet lots of people connected to the Christian faith and to the church. Many of these people will be a great blessing to you but sometimes they might not be. Sometimes we can get hurt by people who will openly say that they're

Christians and yet sometimes they can hurt us. If that happens, if someone does something wrong towards you, do not ever think that their behaviour is a reflection of what God is like because we are only ever like God when our words and actions are like Jesus.

It's in Jesus that we see most clearly what God is actually like. So that's who Jesus is. He's God the Son. He always has been, he always will be that has never changed, it's never going to change. But in terms of who Jesus is, there's more than that, there's more than the fact that he is just God the Son. He's also human and that means that he's one of us, he's the infinite God and always has been but he became a human. And of course that must imply a change of some sort. And that's why it's really interesting to ask what the word yesterday means in Hebrews 13.8. So when he writes, this is a very interesting exercise in reading a passage of the Bible, you read that verse, Hebrews 13.8, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. What does the word yesterday mean? Does he mean the day before he wrote the letter? Does he mean the past stretching back into eternity?

Or does he mean the days that he mentions in verse 2 of chapter 1, where the Son of God became human and Jesus lived on earth? What do you think yourselves? What would you say?

Well I would be pretty confident to say that it's not the day before he wrote the letter. I don't think that's, if he wrote the letter on a Thursday, I don't think he's talking about the Wednesday before that. What about the past in terms of eternity past? Well it could be that and that's what I tended to think. You know when I first read that letter I thought well yeah, he's the same, Jesus is the same all the way back and he's the same all the way forward. That's what I tended to think but I'm not sure that I was right because I'm inclined to think that it's the third one. That when he says yesterday he's referring to these days, the days when Jesus came and dwelt among us because at that moment there was a change. The Son of God became the child of Mary but from that moment of incarnation onwards forever Jesus isn't changing. So the writer to this letter, to the Hebrews can say yesterday Jesus walked among us. Today he's exalted but he's still one of us and forevermore he is going to be the same. He's the same yesterday, today and forever and I think that's amazing. Jesus came to become one of us, one of you and now he's never going to stop being one of us but that means that even though he is now exalted at the right hand of God he is never ever going to leave you behind. He's never going to forget about you and that brings us to the second thing I want to say. We're saying first of all Jesus isn't changing in terms of who he is. Second thing we're saying is that Jesus isn't changing in terms of what he's achieved. Again we can see this in the first verses of chapter 1. You can see in verses 3 and in the first part of verse 4 it says that Jesus has made purification for sins and he's finished his work, he's now exalted at the right hand of God. So Jesus has conquered death, Jesus has dealt with sin, he's finished the work that God gave him to do and now he's exalted as Lord of all and that's one of the great truths that this letter unpacks. The fact that what Jesus did on the cross was a once for all sacrifice. It never needs repeating, it never needs to be attitude. Jesus has done it all and now his achievements and his status are totally unchangeable. We can see that if we move forward into Hebrews 9 it says Christ appeared as the High Priest of the

[15 : 02] Good Things that have come that through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands that is not of this creation. So that's just a comparison between the Old Testament system and Jesus. He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption and that once for all phrase is the key thing. Think for a moment about the Old Testament system that these believers were thinking of going back to. They had this system where they would take from their livestock bulls or sheep or goats or smaller animals if people were poorer and they offered thousands and thousands of sacrifices over the centuries of the Old Testament. Every day sacrifices were offered but for every single sacrifice offered there was a question hanging over it all. Is this enough? And they never were enough. There was always a need for more, every day, every year, never enough but when

Jesus offered himself on the cross as the great High Priest as the ultimate sacrifice for sin what did he cry? He said it's finished. And the moment that Jesus cried it is finished means that never again do we have to ask the question is it enough? And that is also amazing because how many people in the world are plagued or even crushed by that great question that hangs between God and humanity have I done enough? And maybe you're the same. Maybe you're asking you're thinking about God and your status before them and you're thinking am I good enough? Have I done enough? Have I understood enough? Or maybe even you're asking have I believed enough? And what you've got to realise is that all of those questions are totally irrelevant because you doing enough has got nothing to do with biblical Christianity.

At the heart of the Gospel is the fact that Jesus has done enough. Jesus has done it all. And that is never going to change. He's crucified, risen, exalted and he's the same yesterday, today and forever. And that's why it's so important that we don't ask the question have I done enough? Because every time you ask the question have I done enough maybe you don't realise it but simultaneously you're suggesting that Jesus hasn't done enough.

If you say have I done enough you're saying you're implying that he hasn't done enough. That's a heresy. And that's why if you're not getting a question God is not calling you to impress him with your enough. God is calling you to trust him with empty hands. And that's why if we add Christians we don't get up in the morning and say please Lord I hope I'm still good enough. We don't get up in the morning saying please. We get up in the morning saying thank you. But there's also something else that we see about Jesus here which I think is really important. As you know one of my bad habits is to use the word amazing and I keep looking at my notes and all I see is the word amazing but this is amazing as well because all of us is telling us that Jesus is untouchable. Now when I say Jesus is untouchable I don't mean in terms of you having to keep away from him. Hebrews is a great letter for telling us that that's not the case that we can draw near through Jesus.

When I say Jesus is untouchable what I mean is that nothing can threaten him. Nothing can manipulate him. Nothing can change him. He's now in a position of total authority.

[19 : 35] He reigns over every square inch of the universe. He's superior to angels, to rulers, powers, to princes, to everything and nothing can threaten him or distract him or influence him or change him. And what I want you to think about and to ask is is there anyone or anything that you can say the same thing about? Is there anything that you can say is completely free from manipulation or change? Even the universe, even the most powerful forces across the galaxies are subject to change. In physics they talk about entropy which speaks about how the energy available for work is decreasing. So they talk about the universe gradually running down. And I'm not aware of any scientists who say that the universe is going to stay the way it is just now for every war. Everybody is observing and expecting change. If planet is constantly changing and that's partly because of humanity's behaviour there was the huge report from the UN this week, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and it's emphasising the changes that we are influencing on the planet. And even the most powerful people in the world can be changed and manipulated. So Roman emperors, some of them went mad and they lost their way through mental illness. Kings and queens throughout history have been puppets in other people's hands. And right up to today many a president or leader has fallen under the spell of a beautiful woman or a charming man who wants to be in control. No one is untouchable or unmanipulatable which is why people change.

And that can be the source of many of life's great disappointments. So sometimes you vote for someone expecting them to do one thing and then you get another. Sometimes you start a job and you really enjoy it only to find that the people we work with become different after a while. And you can even fall in love with someone who later on becomes a very different person. Change is inescapable, it's not always bad, people can change in good ways but often change can be for the worse. That might be through the corruption that comes with power, through the pride that comes with success or through the bitterness that comes from being hurt. All these things can change us and change the people around us. And the result is that change threatens us. Whether it's climate change, economic change, political change, you think of how much, how affected the people in Afghanistan are because of political decisions in the West. Health can change, other people can change, all of that can threaten us. Their susceptibility to change puts us at risk never with Jesus. Jesus is different, untouchable, unmanipulatable, unspoilable, exalted overall. His status as Lord, King and Saviour is unchangeable.

He's the same yesterday, today and forever. No one can mess with him. Which is why ultimately nobody can mess with you if you're united to him by faith. So Jesus isn't changing in terms of who he is. Jesus isn't changing in terms of what he's achieved. Last of all, number three, Jesus isn't changing in terms of what he's doing now. If we go into Hebrews seven, we'll see this mentioned. I won't read it all out, but it's talking about Jesus's role as High Priest. It says that the former priests were many, they weren't able to continue in office because they died, but Jesus is High Priest forever. And then it's verse 25, I want to focus on especially, consequently, he's able to save to the uttermost all who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. Here, we see another of these comparisons that Hebrews is full of, a comparison between Jesus and the Old Testament priesthood. And these words in verse 25, that Jesus ever lives, always lives to make intercession for us. That's what I want us to focus upon. In other words,

Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God, but he's not sitting there doing nothing. He's there as our representative, as our High Priest, the mediator between God and us. That means that if you're a Christian, or if you become a Christian at every second of every day, Jesus is standing before God and saying that he's dealt with your sin, dealt with it all. He's washed you in his blood. He's brought you into God's family and you are irrevocably united to him. That's why he can save to the uttermost all who draw near to God through him. He's your High Priest. He's representing you. He's defending you. He's identifying himself with you. And this is where the truths about Jesus that we find in Hebrews make such a massive difference to every part of our lives. So let me ask you, did you do anything stupid last week? Did you say something you wish you hadn't? Or react to something in a way that you know was foolish? Or did you make a daft decision even that no one else knows about but that's plaguing your conscience? Jesus is interceding for you. Do you have massive regrets about your past? Is there a shadow that niggles at you and you think, I can't shake that off. Jesus is interceding for you. Or do you worry that you're going to make a huge mistake in the future? Does that hold you back from either serving as a Christian or maybe by acknowledging that you maybe are a Christian or that you want to be one or anything like that? Do you think that you're going to muck things up in the future? Jesus is interceding for you. And he's never ever going to change.

He's the same yesterday, today and forever. And this is so crucial to remember in relation to the fact that our lives as Christians are full of ups and downs. It's easy to think that being a Christian is meant to be this continual upward path of progress where we're constantly improving in general plain sailing upward progression. If you think that that's what being a Christian is like then you're totally wrong. It is not like that. And this is why if we think like that we often find ourselves thinking that our best days as a Christian are in the past. So we think maybe when I was first converted and I was on top of the world that's when I was at my best. I had an amazing sense of peace and reassurance.

[27 : 40] Maybe when I professed faith that was when I was at my high point and it's been a steady decline since then. Maybe when you were involved in a camp or an outreach or some activity. Maybe when your prayer life was more alive. Maybe when you saw something remarkable happen in your life. Maybe you thought well that was the high point. I'm just going down. Our Christian lives feel like this graph that I'm going to put on the screen. Up and down and up and down and up and down. And that's accurate. That's what it's like being a Christian.

But the huge mistake that we can make is to think that Jesus follows the same kind of pattern towards us. That he is up and down in terms of his relationship towards us.

That is not true. Jesus isn't changing. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

That means and I want you to really listen to this. That means that Jesus is as delighted with you now as he's always been. You're still putting a smile on his face Christian. Jesus is as devoted to you as he's always been. You're still warming his heart. And Jesus is as excited for you as he's always been. He has still got great plans for you. And if you're not yet a Christian, Jesus is still holding out his hand for you. He's still calling you and loving you as much as he's always been there more than ever today.

And in bringing all this together, I want to conclude by saying that what we've been looking at today is especially important if like these Hebrew Christians, you suffer from a common but awkward ailment in your faith. So sometimes physically we can have common but awkward ailments. We can have things that are very common but embarrassing and that we don't really want to talk about much. So physically we can have lots of these things, things that we have, things that are common that we don't want to talk about. Every time I cut my big toe or my right foot, there's some kind of disgusting stuff in the corner of my nail that I should really get cream for. Don't really want to talk about that.

[30 : 43] There's lots of common but embarrassing ailments we have physically. We can have these as Christians, spiritually. And the Hebrews had one of the most common, an ailment that we don't want to talk about. What was it? They had doubts. And maybe you have them too. Maybe you got doubts about the whole thing. You think, is God really there? Is Jesus really there?

Is the Bible really through everybody has doubts like that? Even Christians? Jesus is who he is. And that reality does not change even if you're plagued with doubts. The identity of Jesus, the facts of his life, the truth of his message, the coherence of the worldview that he gives us, the reality of who he is does not change. He's the same yesterday, never. Maybe you doubt his authority. Jesus can seem weak in a secular country like Irish.

Nothing changes the fact that Jesus reigns over all. Jesus has seen the rise and fall of empires, ideologies, enemies, none of them are threats. I want you to think for a moment of all the attacks that have been launched against Christianity in the last 2000 years.

Executions, governments, ideologies, philosophies, books, blogs, even pop songs, all taking shots at Christianity. The Gospel has had 2000 years of battering. And yet today, there are more Christians in the world than ever. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Or maybe, and maybe this is the most common doubt of all, maybe you doubt his commitment to you. It's so easy to feel like that. But when Jesus says that he's the same yesterday, today and forever, he doesn't just say that so that you'll know he's never going to change.

He says that so you'll know that he's never going to let you go. Your doubts might rise and fall and rise and fall. Jesus' love for you and his commitment to you is the same yesterday, today and forever. And I want you to take all of this theology from Hebrews into every minute of this week. So if you're at work and feeling overwhelmed, it's the same Jesus that you can cast your burden upon and he's not changing. If you're awake in the middle of the night worrying, it's the same Jesus that you can pull your heart out to and he isn't changing. If you're disappointed if things go wrong in the week ahead, it's the same Jesus who's holding you in his hands and he isn't changing. If you're feeling like you're a massive letdown of your self-esteem's at rock bottom, it's the same Jesus who loves you forever and he's not changing. If you're terrified of dying, it's the same Jesus who can save to the uttermost all who come to him and he isn't changing. The world is always changing. Our lives are always changing. Thank God that Jesus isn't. Amen. Let's pray. Lord

[34 : 23] Jesus, we rejoice that you are the same yesterday and today and forever. Thank you so much. Amen.