

Why it Will Always be *All About Him* Hebrews 13:8

August 28, 2016
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It is a great joy to once again speak to our church family on the glorious truth of the centrality and supremacy of Jesus Christ. In a way every biblical sermon is an *All About Him* message, or it should be. But it has been life-giving to our church family to do so intentionally and annually. It reminds us of the bottom line of bottom lines. It has united us over the years as people from many different backgrounds find a uniting principle in the person and glory of Jesus. We try and keep him the main thing. By keeping the main thing the main thing, so many of the lesser things that could divide us don't. And I hope won't.

It has also been a great discipleship tool because being a disciple is following Jesus. The more worthy we see him to be, the more eager we are to make him the center of our lives. I don't regret starting this so many years ago and it's my privilege to do so for the 20th time today. Now here is the deal. I don't want the emphasis of *All About Him XX* to be on the "XX." Great. We've done it 20 times. In fact, this is the last year we are going to put a number on it. From now on it's just *All About Him* Sunday. We don't call it Easter 1986. Let's put the focus on him. *All About Him*.

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 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.... Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." (Hebrews 13:7-9, 15 ESV)

Our focus is verse 8, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*" Let's see that this verse isn't there in isolation. It is nestled between a positive statement in verse 7 and a warning in verse 9 and following.

Verse 7 is a commendation of faithful church leaders. Hebrews says, remember them, consider their lives, and follow in their example. I am profoundly thankful for faithful church leaders that I grew under over the years. Thank you Gary Moosey, David Graham, Ed Dobson, Dan Cummings, and Kimber Kauffman. You likely have a list too. Remember them. Be thankful for them. Our church has a list of past church leaders here. Thank you pastors Joe Stowell, Jerry Smith, and Marv Troyer along with many other lay leaders over the years. Faithful godly church leadership is to be considered, commended, and followed.

Then you see verse 8 on the unchanging nature of Jesus. But right after verse 8 is a warning section about unfaithful leaders who mislead the church into "*diverse and strange*" teachings. Based on what he says about grace rather than laws about food, these were likely the Judaizers who tried to mix salvation by grace AND a little bit of Old Testament law. A little grace and a little works. A little of what we do instead of it all being what Jesus did on the cross.

So how do you safeguard against a gospel compromise to the constantly changing winds of time? That is why verse 8 says what it says and why it is where it is. Church leaders are great but the problem is they have this nasty habit of dying. No matter how great they are,

they just keep dying. So we may consider them and commend them but what a failure it would be to put our hope in them. Our faith needs something far more enduring than an elder, pastor, deacon, or leader. What do we need, or who do we need? Verse 8. *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

This might be the most famous verse in Hebrews. But why would Jesus' sameness be so wonderful or comforting? We generally view this as a negative in people. We say critically, *He'll never change*, or *She's just that way*, or *He's so set in his ways*. Jennifer celebrated our fourth wedding anniversary this week (massive thank you to Jennifer for loving me for four years!) and I remember being warned before the wedding, "You've been single a long time. You are set in your ways. Are you ready to change?" I sensed a tad critical perspective on slightly older bachelors. The idea was that to be a good husband, I would need to adjust. Flex. Be different than I was, which is certainly true. A non-changing, inflexible, uncompromising husband would be a very bad thing.

But Jesus is the husband of the church and it says clearly here that he doesn't change. He's always the same. What does that mean and why is it good for Jesus bad for the rest of us?

The unchangeableness of Jesus (and the whole Godhead) is called ***immutability***; will not, cannot change. This speaks to Jesus' character and his nature. Clearly his incarnation was change in that in eternity past he did not have a body but by the miracle of the Holy Spirit, he became flesh. Became human. And he always will be. That's change. But it's not the change 13:8 is addressing. Jesus became man without any of his eternal qualities or nature changing.

God's character is completely perfect in every way and in every possible degree. This is difficult for us to understand because while we use the word perfection, there is nothing in our experience that is actually absolutely perfect. It is either temporarily subject to decline over time or apparently perfect only to be improved. Did you see the old footage of Nadia Comaneci's perfect 10 performances in the 1976 Olympics? Compare them to Simone Biles now and perfect 10 back then wouldn't medal today or possibly even make the team. But that's our world and our reality. Everything is always changing. Society changes. People change. Cultural morals and values change. Life is always changing all the time.

But not God. God's nature is perfect. He is never usurped by something or someone coming along and doing better. He is perfect forever. Every quality that he has is that quality's absolute standard. So we think of attributes like holiness or power. He is totally holy and has absolute and infinite power. He is perfect in his power. But then consider other qualities like mercy and love. God doesn't grow in his love. He doesn't work on his mercy. He has these absolutely and perfectly and completely.

- *"For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."* (Malachi 3:6)
- *"God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it?"* (Numbers 23:19)
- *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."* (James 1:17)

Change or improvement for God is not a possibility. He is always the same but that same is always absolutely perfect. "He cannot change for the better for He is already perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse." (A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 58)

The focus of verse 8 is not God the Father or God the Spirit (although immutability certainly applies to them). The focus of the verse is the unchangeableness of Jesus Christ. It brings emphasis by highlighting that he was unchangeable in the past (*yesterday*), he is unchangeable in the present (*today*), and he will never change in the future (*tomorrow*). This could have easily been said in one word, "eternal." But the Holy Spirit inspired the text to say "*yesterday and today and forever.*" Why?

Because while we may somewhat understand eternal, we don't live in eternity yet. We live in time. We live in days, hours, minutes and seconds. We live with calendars that remind us what we did yesterday, what our today entails, and what our tomorrows will likely include. The sorrows of the human experience come in yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Yesterday? Regret and guilt. Today? Weakness, frustration, depression. Tomorrow? Worry. Fear. Terror. We live our lives in days. Jesus' unchangeable character is applied to the actual life we live. Yesterday. Today. And tomorrow. I can't understand an eternal Jesus but I can understand a yesterday Jesus, a today Jesus, and a tomorrow Jesus because my life has a yesterday, a today, and I hope a tomorrow.

Yesterday Jesus

"*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday.*" (Verse 8) This clause provides the baseline for the other two. What it is saying is that the Jesus of yesterday is the same Jesus as the Jesus of today. So to understand the nature and heart of Jesus today, we simply have to see how he was in the past. What was he like then?

This is impossible to describe fully and remember John said the whole world could not contain the books describing his wonderfulness. A sermon can't either. But here is my summary attempt at Yesterday Jesus:

Jesus, the eternal Son of God became fully man, lived a life of miraculous power and extravagant love, died to save sinners from eternal divine wrath, and his resurrection overcame death granting eternal life to all who believe in him.

This is a summary but within this are incredible qualities that Jesus displayed.

Passion for God's glory and truth

Think of the zeal he showed in cleansing the temple and crying out that "*My house shall be a house of prayer.*" (Luke 19:46) Or his High Priestly prayer in John 17 where Jesus begs the Father to glorify himself through his willing obedience. Or his statement, "I have not come to abolish [the Law or the Prophets] but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17) Even at 12 years old he was in the temple talking about Scripture and truth. His whole life was passionate for the glory of God and his Word.

Breathtaking compassion for human suffering

The examples are so famous that they can be too familiar. Just think of who he healed. Lepers. Lepers were ostracized. They were not allowed in society or in a home. Jesus healed 10 of them at once. The man with the withered hand. He did it on the Sabbath knowing it would cost him his life. Before Doctors without Borders there was Jesus crossing social taboos to heal. He healed the Roman centurion's daughter. The hated Romans. The Gentiles. How about the ear Peter cut off the guy who came to arrest Jesus? Ever think about that? If I'm being wrongly arrested, I think I let that ear lay right there on the ground. Jesus healed him.

We could add to this so many things. Humility. Courage. Wisdom. Mercy. Power. Kindness. Patience. Of course, incredible love and sacrifice to give his life as a ransom for us. All these we see in yesterday Jesus. This is what he was like yesterday.

He is the same yesterday....and today.

Today Jesus

The unchangeable nature of Jesus means that the Jesus we find in Scripture is the same Jesus seated at the right hand of God. Same love. Same mercy. Same friend of sinners. But Jesus is at the right hand of God in his role as our high priest. What is he doing? *"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 7:25) Jesus is praying for us. Jesus is pleading our cause. Jesus is reminding the Father that we are guiltless in spite of our sins. Is he pointing at the scars on his hands and feet? *I died for them!*

We know as our high priest he understands our weakness and advocates for us from his unique position as a human priest to God. Talk about a friend in high places. The friend of sinners is at the right hand of God pleading for us as our faithful high priest. Do you think God the Father listens to his Son?

Our yesterday Jesus is our today Jesus. He hasn't changed. He hasn't reconsidered his commitment to save us. He isn't wavering in any promises he made to us. The Jesus of yesterday is the same Jesus as today.

Do you find the Jesus of the gospels compelling? He is the same person today. Do you find the Jesus of the gospels radical? He is just as radical today. Do you find the Jesus of yesterday desirable? He is just as desirable today as he has ever been.

Tomorrow Jesus

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)

Forever is much longer than simply tomorrow. Forever is all our tomorrows; all the future of eternity. Here is where immutability is most helpful to us. The fact that he never changes means ultimately that he is dependable. Trustworthy. Our trust in him is based on who he was in the past and because he never changes, I can rest on the fact that he will be my Savior, Lord, and friend forever.

Maybe you've always thought this but have you perhaps just assumed it? What if everything the gospel promises was the same except this one characteristic of Jesus was removed? Do you see how devastating it would be? Yes, he's true to his promises *today* but there's no guarantee about *tomorrow*. Sure he's loving and caring toward a sinner like me today but who knows about tomorrow? The gospel has tremendous blessings for today as I live in relationship with God through Christ but if that was subject to possible change in the future I would have no security at all.

My wife Jennifer has an old friend whose husband some years ago fell off a roof. His brain took such a blow that it altered his personality. He is a very different person and now the wife endures a very difficult change. He is different now.

But that cannot happen with Jesus. All the prophecies about the future will happen exactly as they say because Jesus cannot change. All the promises about the return of Jesus, resurrected glorified bodies, eternal life, new heaven and earth, no more death or sin or guilt forever will happen because Jesus cannot change.

He was a willing Savior when he died on the cross yesterday and today he is still willing to save any who call on his name. He was tender to the brokenhearted yesterday and today his heart still fills with compassion for you if you are hurting today. Christian, today he loves you and his love will last a billion trillion of your tomorrows. He never changes. He is always the same perfect Savior and friend of sinners.

Human history marches on through these days. Today is tomorrow's yesterday. Tomorrow will be a yesterday soon enough. Leaders come and leaders go. Empires rise and empires fall. The Assyrians came and went. The Babylonians came and went. The Romans came and went. And with them their great leaders came and went. They are just footnotes in history at best. The United States is another empire that will come and go and its leaders, including whoever wins this election, just obscure footnotes in the story of history. (Adapted from John Piper quote in "I Want to Turn Your Dreams Back On," Desiringgod.org/articles, December 28, 2013) But Jesus, he is the same glorious Savior yesterday, today, and forever!

Church leaders are great and the church has known many of them. The apostles. Polycarp. Irenaeus. Athanasius. Augustine. Luther. Hus. Tyndale. Zwingli. Knox. Carey. Bunyan. Wycliffe. Whitefield. Wesley. Edwards. Wilberforce. Livingstone. Moody. Tubman. Lewis. And many, many others. Consider them. Imitate their faith.

But there is only one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His name is Jesus. If we lived a thousand years and could do a thousand more *All About Him* Sundays, the styles and approaches would change but the message would not because he cannot change.

All About Him. Same message. Same truth. It doesn't change because he doesn't change. The yesterday Jesus is the same as the today Jesus. The today Jesus is the same as the tomorrow Jesus. He is the God "*who was and is and is to come.*" (Revelation 4:8) He is "the Alpha and the Omega," the beginning and the end. (Revelation 1:8) "*Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever.*" (Hebrews 13:8) Amen.

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