

AM Hebrews 13:8

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[0 : 00] Greetings from God's Word now. The first is Psalm 90. This is a new experience for me wearing a visor. I think I ought to warn you that I can only see rather vaguely through it.

Perhaps it would help if I had glasses on underneath. Do excuse me a moment while I get reorganized.

That is better. I first knew that I needed glasses back at Lincoln when week after week people would say to me, my Bible seems to be different from yours.

And of course the words were fuzzy to me and I was reading the wrong words occasionally.

Hopefully I'm okay now. Psalm 90, a prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

[1 : 26] You return man to dust and say, return, O children of man. For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

You sweep them away as with a flood. They are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning. In the morning it flourishes and is renewed.

In the evening it fades and withers. For we are brought to an end by your anger. By your wrath we are dismayed.

You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath.

We bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty. Yet their span is but toil and trouble.

[2 : 30] They are soon gone and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you?

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord, how long? Have pity on your servants.

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.

Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. We now turn over to the New Testament, and to Hebrews chapter 13, and just the first eight verses.

[3 : 48] Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

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.

So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper, I will not fear, what can man do to me?

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

[4 : 58] Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

We'll come back to that final verse a little later, but let's just... And verse 8. Very familiar verse.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. It's very rare for me to preach on the same text in successive sermons, even if it is in different churches.

But that, however, is what I'm doing today. Back on March the 15th, a long time ago, the last Sunday before lockdown, I had the privilege of preaching in Southwark and Colvend, and I chose to preach on Hebrews 13, and verse 8.

It seemed appropriate then to remind them of the unchanging Christ, our rock, in the midst of these changing times.

[6 : 34] Five months on, with the churches starting to reopen, it seems even more appropriate. Back in March, I was only able to preach for about ten minutes.

I have a little more scope today to say a little more on this wonderful text. So much has changed, hasn't it, in these last five months.

Some of those changes are obvious right here in this service. The preacher wearing a visor, all of you wearing masks, having your names and telephone numbers taken as you've entered the church.

If anyone had predicted that a year ago, we wouldn't have believed them. It would seem like some dystopian vision of a police state.

But there we are. That's what we have to do now because of the virus. Go into the shops and everyone is wearing a face mask.

[7 : 48] If indeed those shops are still open at all. Many people have lost their jobs. Others are uncertain what the future will hold.

Travel plans are disrupted. Whole cities are closed down with only a few hours' notice.

Thousands of people have caught the virus and some, tragically, have died. Many of them in care homes where their own families have been unable to visit them.

unrelated to the virus but still important to us here in Dumfries Free Church, our own minister has left for a new ministry in Northern Ireland.

It's all change, isn't it? Amidst it all, of course, there have been some happier changes. there is a new baby in our congregation.

[8 : 57] We ourselves, Jane and I, we have a new grandchild and another on the way. Life goes on. It isn't all doom and gloom. But by and large, it's a sad and troubled world out there.

And it's a time of uncertainty here in this church. How good to know, then, amidst all of these troubles, that Christ is still there, our unchangeable rock.

I want us to consider today the unchanging Christ, the unchanging gospel, and the unchanging faith that is required of us.

first, though, let's notice the context. Hebrews is essentially a letter of encouragement in troubled times.

It was written sometime in the second half of the first century AD to Jewish Christians, possibly in Judea, or possibly in Rome, it doesn't say.

[10 : 15] by then, a whole generation had passed away since the days of Christ. Judea itself was in a state of turmoil, with the Jewish revolt which led eventually to the destruction of Jerusalem.

These Christians had endured years of persecution. Verse 2 mentions that there were some who were still in prison. Some of their own leaders had passed away.

They were getting weary, and some were thinking of giving up, or maybe going back to Judaism.

This letter encourages them to keep going, and the chief encouragement is Christ himself.

How can you even think of giving up when you have such a wonderful saviour? Many of you will know the letter to the Hebrews, and you'll know that it's Christ, Christ, Christ, greater than everything.

He sets Christ before them in chapter 1 as the Son of God, greater than the angels. Chapter 2 as the Lord of all the earth, and the captain of our salvation.

[11 : 51] Chapter 3 as our great leader, greater than Moses. Chapter 4 as the one who leads us to heaven, greater than Joshua.

Chapters 5 through to 10, he opens up that tremendous subject of Christ as our great high priest, greater than Aaron, who has offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins, the mediator of the new covenant between God and his people.

These are wonderful chapters, they're well worth reading. in chapter 11, he reminds us of the faith of God's people down through the ages.

They didn't give up, they kept going. In chapter 12, he urges us, like them, to keep looking up to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.

We're citizens, he says, of the new Jerusalem, the eternal city which cannot be shaken, therefore, don't be shaken yourself. Now, chapter 13 begins with some practical directions, and then an exhortation to remember their leaders, the people who spoke to them, the word of God, and an exhortation to imitate their faith.

[13:24] But what was their faith? In a word, it was Christ. Which brings us to our text, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The same Christ that your leaders trusted in, the same Christ that those heroes of Hebrews 11 trusted in, he is your Lord today and your Lord forever.

trust in him as your everlasting rock. So let's look then at our text, and first, the unchanging Christ. The wording of our text leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is God. God. It's a very similar formula to the one that we find in Revelation 1 and verse 4, where John says, grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.

Again, Revelation 1 verse 8, I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

[14:51] Again, Revelation 4 verse 8, where the angels cry out, holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty who is, who was and is and is to come.

Past, present and future, always the same. speaking of God. Here, it says the same of Christ.

He is God. You find the same thought back in the Old Testament. Isaiah 41, for example, who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning, I, the Lord, the first and with the last, I am he.

Or chapter 44, thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, I am the first and I am the last. Besides me, there is no God.

And yet, the writer here uses the same expression to describe Christ. God says, besides me, there is no one else.

[16:02] Clearly, Christ himself is God. God's eternal nature is implied in his very name.

Remember how Moses was told, say this to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you. The name Yahweh or Jehovah is thought to mean the living one, the one who is, the I am, the one who always has existed and always will.

God is eternal and so is his son. He is the only one who is eternal. You and I had a beginning. We were born like baby Eleanor. We'll also have an end. One day, we will all die. We read that in Psalm 90, didn't we?

The years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80, but yet their span is but toil and trouble and they are soon gone and we fly away.

[17:17] That's the reality, isn't it? We're here but for a moment. But in contrast, Psalm 90 says, God is everlasting. Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had brought forth the world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. God is eternal and so we're told here in Hebrews is his son.

But not only is God eternal, he is also unchanging. He not only is forever, he is the same. forever.

He says so himself in Malachi, I the Lord do not change. He always was and always will be holy.

He always was and always will be merciful. He always was and always will be gracious. He always was and always will be loving.

[18:27] all of this is true of God the Father. It's true also of God the Son. The same yesterday, today and forever.

This is actually a recurring theme in Hebrews. In Hebrews 1 we're told that God made the world through Christ and made him heir of all things.

There you have it, the beginning and the end. Also in chapter 1 he quotes from Psalm 45, your throne O God is forever and ever.

And he applies that to Christ. Chapter 5 he quotes from Psalm 110, you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

And he speaks of eternal salvation through him. Chapter 7 he says he always lives to make intercession for us.

[19:28] Forever, forever, forever, always, always, always. That's the theme all the way through Hebrews. Now this is not just a theological doctrine.

It's a wonderful encouragement to us to trust in Christ. You can rely on him. You can't rely entirely on anyone else.

People change or they lose their powers or they grow old and die. All of us, when we were young, we relied upon our parents and rightly so because parents normally love their children and will do anything for them.

But the day comes when they become frail and old and we have to look after them and then they're no longer here.

That will never happen with Christ. He will always be there. He said himself, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.

[20 : 41] It's an encouragement too to imitate those who have gone before us. That remember is the context. Remember your leaders and imitate their faith.

The Christ they believed in yesterday is still the same today. Indeed, the Christ you believed in yesterday is still the same today.

That I believe is why he says yesterday rather than saying from all eternity. To focus upon the historic reality.

The past is another country they say. The past is different from the present. But the Christ of the past is thankfully the Christ also of the present.

much has changed in the world in the last five months. But has Christ changed? Five months compared with eternity is nothing.

[21 : 49] Even if it were 50 years of lockdown compared with eternity it's nothing. The eternal Christ is still the same as when he made the world.

He's still the same as when he lived here upon earth. Yes he's been glorified now. But the same mercy the same compassion the same of love that you read of in the gospels Christ still has exactly that same character.

He's still the same as he was in the days of the apostles. The same as he was in the days of the reformers. The same as he was in the days of the covenanters.

The same as he was in the days of the founding fathers of the free church. He's still the same as he was when you first heard of him. Whether it was in early childhood or whether it was later in life.

He hasn't changed. And he will be the same forever and ever. Our eternal rock. That incidentally is why we can learn from history because their rock is our rock.

[23 : 06] Always the same. But let me go on now to my second point. Rather more briefly. The unchanging gospel.

This is implied in our text. If Christ never changes then his word never changes. changes. And in particular the way of salvation never changes.

It always has been and always will be through Christ alone. The world today is in one respect exactly the same as it always has been.

We are still sinners in need of salvation. salvation. They say that the nation has changed during lockdown.

People have become kinder looking after their neighbours and so on. Well that may be true to some extent. And if it is then that's good. But deep down people remain still as self centred as ever.

[24 : 16] And they remain as hostile to God and as hostile to God's law. as they always were.

Strange isn't it that for the sake of our physical health we will put up with all kinds of laws imposed on us by the government.

But when God speaks to us about our spiritual health and gives us wise and perfect laws for our own good we refuse to obey and think we know better.

our deepest problem today is not coronavirus nor all the economic and social problems of the lockdown serious though they are.

Our deepest problem is still our relationship with God. Our deepest problem is still sin. sin. And the answer to that is still the same.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[25 : 33] as the letter to the Hebrews reminds us Christ has given himself as the once for all sacrifice for sin.

He died that we might live. Just consider how amazing that is. The eternal unchangeable Christ who is God suffered the most extreme change of all.

voluntarily coming down from heaven to this world becoming man and suffering death for our sakes. The agonizing death of the cross shedding his own blood for our sins then rising up and ascending to heaven for us.

That is the gospel and that gospel is the same yesterday and today and forever. This is the message our forefathers preached and it is the message that we must continue to preach as a church throughout all generations.

[26 : 45] The great commission never changes. Go into all the world and preach the gospel. people. And this is the word that the world still needs to believe.

This is the only gospel that can save you. Nothing has changed there in the past five months. Nothing has changed in the past 2,000 years.

Before the lockdown what was Christ saying to people? He was saying come to me and be saved. And what is he saying now after lockdown?

Come to me and be saved. Exactly the same. As it says in another context in scripture, all day long I have held out my hands to a rebellious generation.

Perhaps he's saying it even more urgently now. these past five months have been a reminder to us of our own mortality. All of us must die sooner or later.

[27 : 57] Maybe sooner than we expect. And the great day of judgment is drawing ever closer how we need to trust in Christ and in his everlasting salvation.

salvation. Which brings me to my final point, the unchanging faith required of us. The gospel is not merely Christ died to save us, but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

We need faith. faith. We need faith right at the very outset to receive salvation and we need a constant unchanging faith to hold fast to all the benefits of salvation.

That's what the letter to the Hebrews is calling us to. Unchanging faith. In chapter three, for example, we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence.

in chapter ten, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. For he who promised is faithful.

[29 : 13] And again, do not throw away your confidence which has great reward. It's not required of us that we should not change.

Indeed, it's required of us that we should change. Jesus says you must be born again. Paul says if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

Old things have passed away. Behold, the new has come. We're being transformed into the image of Christ and we must continually change until we're perfect.

The greatest change of all will be when the Lord returns. The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed into his very likeness.

I don't say either that the church should never change. We should always be looking for ways to improve, ways in which we can serve the Lord better in our generation.

[30 : 18] But one thing should never change and that is our absolute faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Saviour.

If you have already trusted in Christ, hold fast to that faith. Never give up. Never give way to doubt. Hold fast to the unchangeable truth of the Gospel.

Hold fast to the unchanging Saviour himself. Whatever storms may come, he is your rock. And if you're not yet his, the everlasting Gospel still stands.

With that everlasting invitation, look to me, all the ends of the earth, and be saved. May the Eternal Lord speak to all our souls today.

Amen.