

# Jesus Is Always The Same

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**Bible Text:** Hebrews 13:8  
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## First Presbyterian Church

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*Our gracious God and Father, we bless you that the heavens are full of your praise and that from the earth there is an answering chorus of worship and adoration. We join with your people this evening who have worshiped from the rising of the sun now until its setting. Our desire is that the name of the Lord should be praised throughout the earth, and we pray as we come before your throne and as you show us the scepter of your word, that you would direct us afresh to the glory of your Son, that your Spirit would shine brightly upon him, that he would take what belongs to the Lord Jesus and show it to us and fill us afresh with love for him, with newfound trust in him, with humble repentance for our sins because he is such a Savior and fresh yieldings to him as our Lord and Master. So we look to you again as servants to the hand of their master and maidservants to the hand of their mistress and we pray that you would open your hand and supply each of us with what we need and direct us to your glory. And this we pray for Jesus Christ our Savior's sake. Amen.*

Please be seated.

Now we're turning this evening again to Hebrews 13. Those of you who are visitors maybe want to know that in our morning services we have been studying Hebrews since the beginning of the year and we came to the very end of Hebrews and studied verses 20-25 of chapter 13, and just in case any of your are curious, I am not now beginning to go through Hebrews backwards, but I did want to pick up a glorious verse that we skipped over almost last Lord's day as our Scripture reading and text this evening, Hebrews 13:8 which last Lord's day morning I said just suddenly appears in this letter to the Hebrews without explanation. It's a little like Melchizedek earlier on in the letter, he just appears out of nowhere. These words,

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

As I was thinking about our worship this evening, I suddenly remembered that many years ago I had been asked to contribute to a book, a symposium which was entitled "If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach." I wasn't quite sure when that book had been published but I did remember that each of the contributors were asked to contribute the sermon text, the whole exposition, which was a challenge since I don't customary write sermons, and in addition an essay, a little essay explaining why it is that this would be the last sermon

we would preach. Not remembering much about the book, I, modern man that I am, did a Google search and the first thing I discovered was a review of "If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach" in the magazine entitled "Preaching." The review began like this and I didn't read it to the end, "Many years ago, I remember reading a book called 'If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach,'" writes the reviewer. "The photos of the ministers on the front cover jacket made me think twice about reading it, though, because they had some of the sourest expressions I've ever seen. Oddly enough, I don't remember one word of any sermon in that collection." That didn't seem a very auspicious beginning for me in my quest for this book, although I checked that this particular book, "If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach," yesterday afternoon was available new on amazon.com for \$115.67, although apparently you could get a used copy for 1 cent plus postage, which usually makes \$4. Then I looked at the date and the date was 1966, and I thought I have got the wrong book entitled "If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach," and so I set off and discovered another book with the same title, no dust cover with sour looking Scottish ministers, and this one published in 1994, and just in case you're wondering, you can buy it new on Amazon for \$77.86. Cheap at the price, but if you want a secondhand copy, it will cost you not 1 cent but 96 cents.

Actually I can only remember a couple of things about that book myself, and I remember writing two things, that if I'd only one sermon left to preach, then I would want two things to characterize it. The first that I'd try to keep it simple, try to keep it simple in order to hold my own emotions in check and to make the Christian faith clear. And in addition to making it simple, no guarantees here you understand, I'd try to focus on what was central and have the Lord Jesus Christ as the theme of the sermon. Just in case any of you is rashly inclined to rush home and buy this book on amazon.com, this sermon is not the sermon that is in the book. But this text certainly meets those two principles, doesn't it? It's simple. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. It's all about Jesus and it could hardly apparently be simpler.

Three things about Jesus: he is the same yesterday, today and forever. Actually there is more to it than meets the eye, isn't there? First of all, he says that Jesus Christ is the Jesus Christ of yesterday, and he's wanting to draw the attention of these Hebrew Christians who perhaps had some acquaintance with the four Gospels, certainly the first three Gospels, to the Jesus of whom they had read and of whom they had heard as the Jesus who, from their point of view, just yesterday had walked the earth and ministered to men and women and gone about doing good.

Earlier on in Hebrews in Hebrews 5:7, he had described yesterday with a longer expression, in the days of Jesus' flesh, and he uses a description of Jesus with which we're all familiar, the most common description of Jesus, he is Jesus Christ, so common that I'm sure many people still think that Jesus was his Christian name and Christ was his surname. But we have studied the Gospels in the New Testament frequently enough to understand that Jesus is his personal name, and Christ is a description of the ministry that he exercises. Christ is the Greek version of Messiah, the anointed one. And we are sufficiently familiar with the Scriptures to understand that in the Old Testament Scriptures the prophets occasionally at least were anointed for their ministry, the priests

were anointed for their ministry, and when a king was enthroned as still today, the king would be anointed for that ministry.

So what is being described here is what in the Reformed churches has always been known as the threefold ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. First of all, that he is the supreme priest, a great them in Hebrews, but he is the priest who actually accomplished what all previous priests could only illustrate in their ministries, and one of the tasks of the priest as you remember in the Old Testament Scriptures, was to detect leprosy. And so priests would be able to examine someone who came along and discerned whether they had leprosy or, in fact, simply had some skin inflammation that wasn't leprosy, and if the person had leprosy, then the priest would be the one who would banish them from society and the priest would also be the one who, if an individual remarkably was cured of leprosy, would be the one who would examine them and then declare them to be clean. But the one thing the priest could not do was deliver people from leprosy. Recognize leprosy when it was present, recognize when it was absent, but without power to cleanse, without power to change, and therefore without power to restore. A gripping illustration of what Paul says, isn't it, in Romans 8 when he says, "The law could not effect what it commanded because it lacked the power to transform life."

And then, of course, even more central to the priest's ministry was the bringing of the sacrifices, and any intelligent understanding, believing man or woman in the Old Testament Scriptures who saw these sacrifices, understood that these sacrifices could not take away sins. For all the elaborate ritual, for all the detailed way in which these sacrifices were being made, it was clear to anyone who understood what was happening that these sacrifices could not take away sin, for if they did, as Hebrews has taught us, they would not need to be repeated day after day after day after day.

But Christ comes to be our priest and he offers himself as sacrifice for our sins. Remember Watts' hymn,

"Not all the blood of beasts and goats,  
On Jewish altars slain,  
Can give the guilty conscience peace,  
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb,  
Bears all our sins away,  
A sacrifice of nobler name  
And richer blood than they."

And this is what the author of Hebrews is saying as he points us to Jesus Christ. Yesterday he came into the world to deal with the pollution of our lives, to provide a sacrifice that actually would take away our sins, and so at the beginning of his ministry as he is inaugurated into this divine priesthood, he stands in the River Jordan and symbolically the sins of the people who have been baptized by his relative John are poured over him until that day comes when the baptism that held him in until it was

accomplished took place on the cross of Calvary, and there he effected the ministry into which he had been anointed by God and bore God's judgment upon our sins, every single conceivable kind of sin in order to be the priest who would say to lepers, men and women spiritually leprous like ourselves, "Be clean."

But in addition to that, the author of Hebrews has in mind that Jesus is also our prophet and able to speak the word of God to us because he actually is the word of God. Remember how he had taught us this earlier on in chapter 4 when he'd spoken about the word of God being quick and active and able to break through into our consciences to illumine our minds, to touch our hearts, to melt our wills, to bring us in submissiveness before him, so that from the very beginning of his ministry until the end, the word that was used about Jesus' preaching and teaching was that gracious words proceeded from his lips and he spoke with authority. It's actually very difficult to define what does it mean when someone speaks with authority except this: the words that are spoken get inside our souls and show us who we really are. And this is the kind of prophet our Lord Jesus Christ is, who, I supposed, supremely illustrates that ministry with that couple on the road to Emmaus on the day of his resurrection when they reflect on what has happened to them as he has taught them from the Scriptures about himself, and all they can say is, "I felt my heart was burning within me as he spoke to me." In some ways that's the evidence that we're really in fellowship with God, isn't it? That when he points us in his word to the Lord Jesus, there's something within us that seems to catch fire.

So he is the prophet as well as being the priest, but in addition to being the priest, he's also the king, the one who is anointed by God to rule over his people. Remember how our Catechism puts it, that Jesus as king rules over all his and our enemies. That's why he's a perfect Savior, because we're not able to rule over our own enemies.

And he has the power to set us free. Sometimes he does that very suddenly and dramatically and it seems just in an instant an individual is liberated from their bondage and their addictions and their confusions, and Christ seems to have broken the shackles that all their lives long have held them in some kind of bondage. We sometimes sing that hymn of Charitie Bancroft's, "Before the throne of God above," but she has another lovely hymn that we don't often sing,

"The King of Glory standeth  
Beside the heart of sin;  
His mighty voice commandeth  
The raging waves within;  
The floods of deepest anguish  
Roll backward at His will,  
As o'er the storm ariseth  
His mandate, 'Peace, be still.'"

And then this,

"At times, with sudden glory,  
He speaks, and all is done;  
Without one stroke of battle  
The victory is won,  
While we, with joy beholding,  
Can scarce believe it true  
That e'en our kingly Jesus  
Can form such hearts anew."

But sometimes, my friend, he doesn't work quickly and suddenly. He didn't work quickly and suddenly with Simon Peter, did he? Again and again he had to exercise his kingly rule, and again and again the old shackles still seemed to be dragged along behind Peter's slow feet as he refused to bow to the Lord Jesus. And we're in one situation or the other most of us, aren't we? Some of us who have been gloriously delivered, and others still fighting his kingship and his lordship, but this is the kind of reign that he exercises. He's able to set us free from our bondage and sin and our bondage to self, to bow before him.

And all of this, Jesus had learned as we know from the great pictures of himself he found in the Old Testament Scriptures, that as a priest, as Hebrews tells us, he would need to be able to deal gently with those who are wayward, and he'd read about himself in the servants' songs of Isaiah that the Savior would come who wouldn't break a bruised reed or snuff out a dimly burning wick. And as the prophet of God, he would need to be able to speak the word of instruction and encouragement to those who were weary, and he was able to do this because, as Isaiah says, morning by morning his heavenly Father would awaken him. And as he grew, he would learn what it meant for the prophetic word of Scripture to come into his own life and to go from his life in a way that would transform the lives of others, and that though he would be marred beyond human semblance, the day would come when the kings of the earth would shut their mouths before his great glory. And that's why he's called Jesus, because as prophet and priest and king, he's able to save his people from their sins.

Remember as a teenage, young teenager in Bible class learning a little song about the Lord Jesus.

"He did not come to judge the world,  
He did not come to blame.  
He did not only come to seek,  
It was to save he came.  
And when we call him Savior,  
And when we call him Savior,  
And when we call him Savior,  
Then we call him by his name."

This is what Jesus was like yesterday, but now, you see, he's going to say, "Let me tell you what Jesus is like today, and this is the thrilling thing: he is the same today as he was yesterday." I'd like to put in little parenthesis, as you know, and here's a little parenthesis,

I think if you understand that, you have the key to reading the Scriptures and especially the Gospels. Jesus is the same today as he was yesterday. I say that because it's all too easy for us under the influences in our subculture to read the Gospels in order to look for ourselves, to read the stories of the Lord Jesus in order to ask ourselves, "Like whom am I in this story?" And to try and find yourself in one of the Gospel stories. "Are you like Zacchaeus?" Well, actually I'm not like Zacchaeus, I'm not a little man and I'm not a tax collector. "Well, are you like the rich young ruler?" No, I'm not actually like the rich young ruler because I'm not rich. And so and so forth, and we try and find ourselves in one of these stories.

I have one or two books that have been translated into Hebrew and I love to give them to people, sometimes to theological students just to test them and they look at the front of the book and then they remember, "Whoops, it actually begins at the back and I'm holding the book upside down." And they have to kind of flip and reverse if they're going to be able to read the book and, my dear friends, the same is true in the Gospels. When we read about Jesus in the Gospels, we're not reading there in the first instance to try and find ourselves. This is not Find Waldo. We're there to ask the question: who is Jesus and what is Jesus like in the Gospels? And you know, that simple principle can be for some Christians like at last looking through the right end of the telescope in order to understand what's going on here and what the author of Hebrews is saying to us is, "Whatever you find that Jesus is like in the Gospels, that is what Jesus is like. He is the same Jesus today as he was yesterday."

So we read the Gospels with new eyes and wonder at how all-sufficient the Lord Jesus is for us. You can take any passage at random and find the glory and majesty of Jesus portrayed before you, and instead of losing him by looking for yourself, you find yourself because you have discovered him. Take almost at random a passage in the Gospels, that is, two wonderful tales woven into it and it's told in each of the first three Gospels. The man whose little girl has died, she is just a little girl and she's 12 years old and he's so anxious that Jesus will come and by the time Jesus is going to get there, she's going to be dead, and just as they're going there, you imagine this father anxiously rushing the Savior along, "There's not time, Jesus, come and save my daughter!" And suddenly Jesus stops, turns around to the crowd that are bustling around him and says, "Who touched me?" And the disciples are saying, "Forget about who touched you, everybody's touching you! It's far too critical! Don't stop! Jesus, get on, Jesus!" And he turns around and he looks into the eyes of a woman who has been suffering every year that this little girl has been living, she has been suffering from hemorrhaging which in the Old Testament law would have rendered her unclean, so she suffers physically and she suffers spiritually. And he calls her out of the crowd, "Somebody touched me," he says, and she comes forward and she says, "I am the one who touched the hem of your garment." And you can imagine the anxiety, the fear of the father, "Jesus, come on! This woman is still alive, this woman is getting on! My daughter is just a child, her life is far more important than this woman!" And Jesus pauses and, you see, he wants to clarify for this woman what has happened to her. She has not been cured because she touched the hem of his garment but because she believed that the one who was wearing the garment would be able to heal her even if she just touched the hem of his garment. And he wants this man, he lingers long enough to

discover that this woman has been suffering from hemorrhages as long as this little girl has been living, to raise the faith of this anxious father to see that if Jesus can reverse what has been taking place in 12 years, then is it not possible that in his little daughter he is able to reverse the ravages of death.

And he's such a Savior. He's much slower than most of us would think he should be. Actually, he's much slower than most of us are prepared to allow him to be with others. Isn't that the truth? We discover some Gospel truth and then we snap at somebody that doesn't share that Gospel truth yet, although we've only discovered it three months ago. And he has his own timing, and he's wise, and he's gracious, and he's kind, and he knows exactly what he's doing, and he is the same today.

Oh, don't you wonder why anyone who read the Gospels and understood that he is the same today, why would anyone linger and not come to him? Why would you hold onto anything that you thought displeases him when he is such a Savior? When he doesn't break bruised reeds and he doesn't snuff out dimly burning wicks, why would you be so frightened of what it means to give yourself without reservation to him or to come to him in your sin and in your need and say, "Alas, Jesus, I see! You did not come to condemn me but to save me and to bless me, and you're kind, and you're loving, and you're gentle, and you're wise, and you're gracious, and there's no one else I can turn to to help me! I can't explain my situation to others but you seem to understand!"

Is that where you are tonight, my friend? Don't you see how gracious he is? How loving he is? How kind he is? And he is the same today. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. I don't know if Professor Bates knows this but his late father-in-law, Carl Henry, who was one of the great Evangelical leaders in this country, was once at an occasion with a most famous theologian whose views of the resurrection were a little suspicious, and Professor Carl Henry stood up in the meeting and said, "I am Carl Henry from the journal, 'Christianity Today.'" And he asked this question about the resurrection, and the theologian, famous theologian, one of the most famous theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century snapped back at him, "Are you from 'Christianity Today' or 'Christianity Yesterday'?" And Professor Henry had the speed of mind to say, "From 'Christianity Yesterday, Today and Forever.'"

Now why is that true? Because this is true. Isn't it interesting if I had been the author of Hebrews, and just in case there's any confusion about the anonymous author of Hebrews, I am not the author of Hebrews, I would have said, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow." I mean, that fits better, doesn't it? It kind of, it's the universe of discourse, you're talking about yesterday, today, tomorrow, and he is the same tomorrow, but the glorious thing is that he is the same all tomorrows.

Remember the words of the angels as the disciples were kind of struck by Jesus just disappearing into the great cloud of God's glory that took him back to heaven and the angels said to them, "Why are you standing here looking up into heaven? This same Jesus will come again in the same manner in which you have seen him go." And he'll never change. You'll never need to doubt, you'll never need to fear that there's something

hidden, that you haven't seen the whole Jesus. No need to fear there's anything unkind in him, anything unwise, anything unjust. He is exactly the same in his glory. Isn't this one of the emphasis that we have throughout the letter to the Hebrews? He will be the same forever and when you see him face-to-face in all his glory, he'll be the same kind Jesus, the same loving Jesus, the same strong Jesus, the same saving Jesus because he is the same yesterday, today and forever.

That's a great thing to remember, isn't it, on an evening like this when some of our emotions are raw at the thought of parting? Ministers come and go and there is no greater danger than comparing one with another because we are all stewards of the mysteries of Christ and only Christ is the Master of the house. One plants, another waters but it's the Lord who gives the increase. Others labor and we enter into their labors, but Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today and forever.

That's another little song I learned in Sunday school in Glasgow. I didn't know it was written by A. B. Simpson who was the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and it went like this,

"Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same,  
All may change, but Jesus never, glory to His name!  
Glory to His name! Glory to His name!  
All may change, but Jesus never, glory to His name!"

My friends, I say to you one more time are you trusting him? Do you know him? Have you sensed how great and gracious he is? There is none like the lowly Jesus and here you are, perhaps you have been resisting him with this fear that seems to take over our lives, "I cannot let go of that which is most precious to me although I know it is not pleasing to the Lord." Do you think he would take that from you and not give you riches in its place beyond your wildest dreams? And if you lose or sacrifice for him, do you not understand that such a Savior will keep his promise that whatever we yield to him in the Gospel, he will repay to us a hundredfold in this world, even if there are struggles and persecutions, and in the world to come, eternal life? So I plead with you, my friends, urge you lovingly to look to Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Let us pray.

*Lord Jesus, we thank you that because you are the same today, you stand among us in your risen power, and we pray now as we move from the ministry of the word and the use of the voice to the ministry of the table and the use of the symbols, that you yourself would come to us and draw near to us that we may have fellowship all together with you and yet marvelously, mysteriously each of us have fellowship with you as though we were the only person in the world who really mattered to you. So come and feed us, we ask, for your name's sake. Amen.*