

Hebrews 13:8

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Date: 02 May 2017

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[0 : 00] I just want to speak on that one little verse. In verse 8. And it's always dangerous isn't it? When you take one verse and you kind of take it out of the context that it's in and you remove it from that and you can probably end up preaching heresy and this verse particularly you can do that.

Because there is a sense in which it's not true. There is a sense in which Jesus Christ is not the same yesterday, today and forever. In fact our salvation depends upon Jesus Christ not being the same today as he was metaphorically yesterday.

So, do you remember? The Lord Jesus in his incarnation when he came to earth when he took on flesh he became one of us. Augustine says without ceasing to be what he eternally was he became what he eternally was not.

He's become one of us isn't he? The word that was with God the word that was face to face with God the word that was there right at the beginning of creation that word became flesh and dwelt amongst us and we beheld his glory the glory of the one and only full of grace, grace and truth. After he was raised from the dead he ascended bodily, didn't he? into heaven. And so that now this lunchtime there is a man in heaven.

[1 : 25] He didn't discard his humanity. He didn't discard like a new set of clothes when he returned to his father's presence. And so at the Lord's Supper we remember his death on the cross until he comes.

I love the words of Luther he says something like this I live as though Christ died yesterday rose again today and is coming back tomorrow. Christ died yesterday he bled and died upon a cross he suffered abject pain and shame and humiliation yesterday he died on the cross today he is alive from the dead and so we proclaim him in word and in sacrament and he's coming back tomorrow with all his holy angels it's not true to say that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

So clearly you can't take verse 8 and rip it out of its context in an unqualified way. And so what I want to do this morning is I want to speak about the unchangeableness of Jesus Christ.

What does this verse mean within Hebrews 13? And the first thing I want to say is that Jesus Christ is always the same person yesterday today and forever he is always the same in his person in his person.

The context is interesting. Look at verse 7 Remember your leaders who spoke to you the word of God consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

[2 : 54] And then look at the other bookend in verse 17 Obey your leaders submit to them. So verse 7 Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you And then verse 17 We're told to obey your leaders and submit to them for they will give an account.

So Hebrews 13 is about leadership It's about past leaders Remember them And it's about present leaders Verse 17 So in verse 7 who are their past leaders?

Well we don't exactly know We think it may be Stephen or the first Christian martyr or James the brother of our Lord the leader of the Jerusalem church who was beheaded Remember those leaders Remember those who spoke the word of God to you Now whenever there's a new leader or a change in leadership the tendency is to compare isn't it in church life One tendency is to romanticise the past and idealise the heroes of the faith to put them on pedestals I read this about the pastor If he visits his flock he's nosy If he doesn't he's a snob If he preaches longer than 10 minutes it's too long If he preaches less than 10 minutes he can't have prepared his sermon If he runs a car well he's worldly If he doesn't he's always late If he tells a joke he's flippant If he doesn't he's far too serious If he starts the sermon on time his watch must be fast If he's a minute late he's keeping the congregation waiting

If he takes a holiday he's never in the parish If he doesn't he's a stick in the mud If he runs a bazaar or a gala he's money mad If he doesn't there's no social life in this parish If he has the church painted and decorated he's extravagant If he doesn't the church is shabby If he's young he's inexperienced If he's getting old he ought to retire But when he dies Ah there's never been anyone like him Now that tendency is in all of us We make far too much of men and too little of Christ So look at verse 7 again Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you Consider the outcome of their way of life Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today forever You see who is the leader that we really look to?

Who is the leader that we really look to? The leader we look to is the one whose way of life and whose faith is in Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever True Christian leaders do not strike out on their own They don't build a brand for themselves They keep in line with Jesus Christ They follow the well-worn paths of those that have gone before who followed Christ And so this verse is telling us that when you look for leaders in your church when we look for leaders in our church we are not looking for original minds If you are going to be a leader in Christ's church and follow a leader you need to know where he is going and you better make sure that you know where he is going in as much as they follow Christ You follow them imitate their way of life and their faith Don't follow blindly leaders only follow leaders as they follow Jesus because in the end he is the king he is the only head and king of the church he is the only leader who is safe to follow

[6 : 22] He is always himself You can translate it you can translate it verse 8 Jesus Christ always himself That can be said of very few people As we grow older we change We see that don't we You see that in your workplace new young people come in full of zeal and idealistic and then the cynical older folk who have been through it all they have been around the block There are very few of us who are always the same Circumstances change us Life situations change us We are affected by all sorts of things We are affected by the weather aren't we but Jesus Christ is always himself always the same Earth did not change him Heaven hasn't gone to his head He is the same yesterday today and forever He is unchangeably the same He is always himself The best of men The best of leaders are men at best

And every single leader has feet of clay But Jesus Christ is always himself Always the same He is unchangeably the same in his own person But secondly He is unchangeably the same in his message He is unchangeably the same in his message Just look at the context It says Doesn't it Verse 7 Remember the leaders who spoke to you the word of God Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever Don't be carried away by all sorts of strange teachings You see Jesus Christ is not only the leader they are to follow He is the message that is to be preached The words they spoke to you Verse 7 is all about him That message which you heard from your leaders was the same That message about Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever Error changes Now notice in verse 9 The truth there is singular

That is singular Do not be led away by strange and diverse teachings That is plural But can you notice verse 7 The word of God is singular Just notice that verse 7 The word of God is singular But there are diverse and strange teachings Because once you move away from the faith once delivered to the saints you have to keep reinventing a new gospel for every age One of the hallmarks of God in the Bible is that nothing needs changing nothing needs revising or adapted or rewritten So take the example I don't want to enter into the controversy about evolution but take the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 The creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 stands for all time Genesis 1 and 2 can be understood in any age It doesn't have to be written, rewritten It doesn't have to be revised for the 21st century It can be understood by a caveman

It can be understood by an Oxford scientist It's one of the hallmarks of God But error is constantly being rewritten and revised and updated John Stott in his book The Contemporary Christian He says there have been 13 different interpretations of Jesus Christ 13 different attempts to fashion him according to the age So he talks of Jesus the ascetic The Poor Galilean The Cosmic Christ The Teacher of Common Sense The Clown of God's Spell The Star of Jesus Christ Superstar The Revolutionary The Socialist The Mystic The Magician The Carpenter The Management Consultant You name it People are always trying to reinvent who Jesus is But he's not Jesus is always the same The message which you heard from them is the message you need today It's the same yesterday today and forever and Jesus never needs updating or adapting He is always new not in the sense of being novel but in the sense of freshness

It's a very privilege isn't it to preach Jesus Christ that's what I've thought of as I've read this verse but I want you to see that what we do in the church today is actually nearly almost the opposite remember your elders who were these leaders while they were the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you and he says remember what they spoke to you but what we've done in the church today is we would reverse that so it's not we who remember what people like Paul preached about Jesus today Paul has to remember what we've discovered isn't that right so let's take women's ordination let's take homosexuality what is that issue about is it that Paul has to remember how enlightened we are no it's an issue of the authority of scripture isn't it basically it comes down to this will we follow

[11 : 28] Paul are we going to remember what the Bible spoke to us and what Paul wrote or does he have to remember what we think today does he have to have our view on things do we follow Paul in the first century AD or does he have to fit in with modern culture and political correctness so that what he wrote well actually it needs to be reinterpreted for today it has to be contextualised it has to be lifted out of that first century setting and changed for us today so that in the end Paul is made to teach exactly the opposite of what he actually said I want to say to you that is not where we stand as a church we stand under the authority of the word of God and we remember those who spoke the word of God to us the authority of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ and they don't have to remember what we think we have to remember what they spoke do you see that kind of twisted thinking is happening and if you go down that track what happens is the Bible gets taken away from you altogether so remember remember the word that has been spoken to you we are

Protestants I used to think that word meant to protest actually it doesn't it means to confess it means to attest it means to proclaim to be Protestant is to proclaim Jesus Christ and his sufficiency it's the old story of Jesus and his love it's unchangeably the same in his person he's unchangeably the same in his message and then thirdly and lastly he is unchangeably the same to his people it's all very well 500 years from the reformation 500 years from Martin Luther this year it's all very well to look back and romanticise what those men went through we all have heroes don't we we can have heroes we can go back to hear George Whitfield preach in the 18th century we can hear John Wesley and his great sermons Martin Lloyd Jones in the last century but we don't live then we live now and we live don't we in a very different culture and in a very different time and we have pursued

Christ here now in the 21st century there were giants in the land in those days yes and we are a race of pygmies by comparison but don't forget those men spoke the word of God to you and sealed their confession in their own blood but they were just flesh and blood like you and I they were just men and women like you and me times have changed but Jesus hasn't and what he was to them he will be to you that word that is used here in verse 7 is an interesting word there's only two words that two places where you find this word in the new testament he talks about these leaders these leaders who spoke the word of God consider the outcome of their way of life and that word is used it's the same word that's used by Paul in Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13 Paul refers to the wilderness wanderings and he reminds the Corinthians that it was Christ who was actually leading the people out of Egypt and the rock was Christ who they met in the wilderness and he says in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13 he applies it to them he says

God is faithful and he will not allow you to be tempted more than you can bear but when you are tempted when you are tried when you are like those people in the wilderness caught between literally a rock and a hard place as they came out of Egypt and the troops are chasing them down with the Red Sea in front of them they're surrounded by hills and mountains it's a trap there doesn't seem to be anywhere way out and just as Jesus opened up the waters of the Red Sea and they crossed on dry ground Paul says when you're tempted when you're tried like that what will he do he will provide a way out an exodus that's the word verse 7 that's the word that is used here in Hebrews remember what Jesus was to those people at the Red Sea when they're entangled in the land and the Egyptians are in hot pursuit and they're trapped and there doesn't seem to be any way forward now I frequently find myself in those situations don't you

I'm sure we do what do we do in those situations where we are trapped well we remember that Jesus Christ is the sea yesterday today forever the Jesus Christ who opened up the Red Sea and brought his people safely through that Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and what he can do for them he can do for you he can provide you with a way through that challenge that you're facing that you don't know how you're going to cope with you say I don't know if I've got

the resources to get through that well he is the same he can provide you with a way through how else do you explain someone like Stephen the martyr how do you explain the way he died with his face being smashed by rocks a face like an angel remember what we're told in Acts 7 as the rocks are raining down upon him he fell on his knees and he cried out Lord do not hold this sin against them and with that he fell asleep how do you explain a man like Peter a man denied his Lord with oaths and curses before a little servant girl

[17:19] I don't know that so and so he said how do you explain that man only weeks later preaching on the day of Pentecost and 3000 people are converted how do you explain that how do you explain Paul and Silas singing hymns in midnight in prison in a rat infested hole in the ground how do you explain that how do you explain the courage of Martin Luther when the whole world is against him who said here am I here I stand I can do no other how do you explain it well the only way you can explain that is in terms of our text that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever what he was for Luther what he was for Stephen what he was for Peter what he was for Paul and Silas is what he is for you and I I don't know if you know the story of the man who's got a job painting a stripe you know a stripe down the centre of the road in the middle of the road and on his first day at work he paints two miles of a white straight line down the road everyone's amazed boss can't believe it no one's ever painted so much before on the second day's production dropped to one and a half miles which is still far above average on the third day and fourth day it was only one mile and then half a mile and apparently his boss went to him and asked why is it that your production painting this line across the centre of the road has fallen off so sharply and he said well I'm just getting so far from the bucket that's the trouble with our society isn't it we have drifted far from our roots people want

Christian values but they do not want Jesus Christ well the truth is you can't have Christian values without Jesus Christ we want a kind of Judeo-Christian ethic but you won't have that if we just teach Christian ethics all that is moralism and it will just make little Pharisees people need Jesus Christ that's all people need to hear and the great truth for us is this isn't it that Jesus Christ does not pass this cell by date and he never will he will never be superseded he will never be replaced kingdoms will come kingdoms will go empires will rise and empires will fall whole civilizations will disappear but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever and I've told you the story of Lord Reith the first managing director of the BBC he walks into a director's meeting and they're all talking and it goes silent you know it's like when the boss comes into the office it goes silence Lord Reith was a huge man he said what were you talking about directors of the BBC wouldn't tell him so he thundered put his fist on the desk what do you talk about and they said we're planning a programme for the funeral of the church we want to plan a programme on the funeral of the church of Jesus Christ and Lord Reith thunders the church of Jesus Christ will stand at the graveside of the BBC because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever Spurgeon said there is the same water in the well still and if we've not drawn it it's our own fault we've come away from the fire and that is why we're cold let's return to him and he will receive us gladly as gladly and as warmly as he did when we first believe why are there so many ups and downs in your Christian life yesterday you could pray but today you can't today you might know a measure of victory over temptations but tomorrow you may be overwhelmed with them because we've taken our eyes off Jesus we've turned away to men and movements and books and programmes but it's Jesus we need not another book about him but the living Christ who's always the same yesterday today and forever and here is solid ground isn't it when all around is sinking sand on Christ the solid rock I stand remember your leaders 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 let's pray