

Hebrews 13:8

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Date: 04 January 2015

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[0 : 00] This is Hebrews chapter 13 verse 8. And it's always dangerous isn't it to take one verse. Somebody has said that a text without a context becomes a pretext.

! In other words, you pluck a verse out and you can say anything you want from that verse. And I just want to take this verse 8 and preach on it. But if I take this verse out of its context, then I will probably be preaching heresy to you.

So look at it again. Let me read it to you. Hebrews 13 verse 8. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Now that verse, that statement taken out of context, just isn't true. It is not true that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Our entire salvation depends on that not being true.

In some very important ways, Jesus Christ is not the same today as he was yesterday. In his incarnation, which we've just celebrated, he became one of us, didn't he?

[1 : 07] He took on flesh. As Augustine famously said, without ceasing to be what he eternally was, he became what he eternally was not.

He was the same today as he was. He became one of us, didn't he? The word that was with God. The word that was face to face with God.

That word was made flesh. And made his dwelling amongst us. And we have beheld his glory. The glory of the one and only, the Father full of grace and truth.

And after his earthly career, the Lord Jesus, he ascended up into heaven. And so there is now a man in the glory. At the right hand of the majesty on high.

The dust of the earth sits on the throne of the universe. There is a man in heaven this morning. He didn't discard his humanity like a set of clothes when he returned.

[2 : 06] When he returned to his Father's presence. He is there as a human being. At the Lord's Supper, which we'll celebrate tonight. We remember, don't we, his death on the cross. I love those words, until he comes.

And Martin Luther wrote this, he said something like this. I live as though Christ died yesterday. Rose again today. And is coming back tomorrow. That's what you think about when you come to the Lord's Supper.

I live as though Christ died yesterday. Rose again today. And is coming back again tomorrow.

Christ died yesterday. He died. He bled upon the cross.

He suffered abject shame and pain and humiliation. Yesterday he died on the cross. But today he is alive from the dead. And we proclaim him in word and sacrament.

And tomorrow he is coming back. He is coming back with all his holy angels unto salvation. To all who look for him. And so it's not true to say Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

[3 : 10] Clearly you cannot take this verse and just pluck it out of the context. Look at it in isolation. In an unlimited and unqualified kind of way. You can't do that. You can't do that. And so what is it saying to you and I?

I want to try and put this verse into context. Let's say three things. Three things at the start of this year about the unchangeableness of Jesus Christ. What does this verse really mean in the context of Hebrews 13?

And the first thing I want to say is that Jesus Christ is always the same yesterday, today and forever in his own person. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever in his own person.

The context is interesting isn't it? Especially when you look at it. I'm going to verse 7. Remember your leaders and then compare it with verse 17. Obey your leaders.

There the book ends. In verse 7 the Hebrews are told to remember. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God. And then in verse 17 they are told that they are to obey their leaders and

submit to their authority.

[4 : 17] For they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. So the context is really interesting. The context is leadership. It is leadership past and present.

In verse 17 it is their present leaders isn't it? They are told to obey. But in verse 7 it's their past leaders. They are to remember.

So who are they? Well we don't exactly know who they are but they are probably people like Stephen. That first Christian martyr. They are probably James. The brother our Lord and the leader of the Jerusalem church who was beheaded.

Remember those leaders who spoke the word of God to you. And whenever there is a new leader. Whenever there is a change of leadership in a church.

Whenever there is a change in leadership in a church. There is a tendency to compare isn't there? The tendency to romanticise the past. And idealise the heroes of the faith that have gone by.

[5 : 20] And to put those people on pedestals. To venerate their memories. I have used this quote in the past. As I have used nearly all my quotes in the past. But it is a good one.

It is about the pastor. If he visits the flock he is nosy. If he doesn't he is a snob. If he preaches longer than 10 minutes it is too long. If he preaches less than 10 minutes.

Well he cannot have prepared his sermon. If he runs a car he is worldly. If he doesn't he is always late for appointments. If he tells a joke he is flippant. If he doesn't he is far too serious.

If he starts the sermon on time his watch must be fast. If he is a minute late he is keeping the congregation waiting. If he takes a holiday he is never in the parish. If he doesn't he is a stick in the mud.

If he runs a bazaar or a gala he is money mad. If he doesn't there is no social life in this parish. If he has the church painted and decorated he is extravagant. If he doesn't the church is shabby.

[6 : 17] If he is young he is inexperienced. If he is getting old he ought to retire. But when he dies there has never been anyone like him. And that tendency is in all of us isn't it?

We make too much of men and too little of Christ. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you.

Consider the outcome of their way of life. And imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. One of my pet hates at the moment about the UK is the title senior minister.

So it may be that you have a congregation of 10 or 20 people. But the minister is the senior minister. He may only be in his 20s. He has just come out of theological college. And he is in some backwater little village in Wales.

And yet who is he? He is the senior minister. But when we read the Bible. There is only one senior minister isn't there? And that is Jesus Christ. There is only one chief shepherd.

[7 : 22] And that is Christ. He is the chief shepherd of the sheep. And so leadership is really in vogue at the moment isn't it? In the church. You can see there are books.

And there are conferences. About leadership. You can go to a leadership conference. That hires out the Royal Albert Hall for a week. And they get all sorts of the great and the good Christian leaders.

And non-Christian leaders come and speak. And there are more chiefs than Indians around really. And sometimes the more bizarre. And the more eccentric. And the more original.

The more people seem to be prepared to follow it in church life. And yet what I want to say to you this morning. At the start of this year. Is that originality. Originality is not a mark of Christian leadership.

True Christian leaders. Do not strike out by themselves. True Christian leaders. Stay in line with Jesus Christ. They follow the old well-worn paths.

[8 : 28] Of those who have gone before. In as much as they followed Christ. That is what these verses are saying to us. So when we look for elders. And leaders.

We do not look for original minds. And so if you are going to be a leader in Christ's church. And follow a leader. You better make sure that you know where he is going. And you better make sure you know where he is going.

In as much as they follow Jesus Christ. You follow them. You imitate their way of life. And their faith. Jesus Christ. The same. Yesterday. Today.

And forever. Don't follow blindly. Only follow in as much as they are following Jesus Christ. 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. He is always himself.

[9 : 29] Apparently the Greek can be translated like that. Jesus Christ. Always himself. Always himself. That can be very.

That can be very. That can be said. There are very very few people. It can be said of very few of us. As we grow older.

We change. We see that don't we with people. In your workplace. If there is anything like mine. So you have the new young people. Who are full of zeal.

And are idealistic. And then you have the cynical older folk. Who have been through it all. They have been round a bit. And it has got to them. Isn't it? Any new idea.

They just roll their eyes at. There are very few people. Who are always the same. Circumstances change us. Don't they? Life changes us.

[10 : 24] We are affected by the weather. We are affected by all sorts of things. But Jesus Christ. Is always himself. He is always the same. Earth didn't 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 arm of the flesh will fail us. The best of men. And the best of leaders. Are men at best. Aren't they? But they have feet of clay. But Jesus Christ is always himself.

He is always the same. He is unchangeably the same. In his own person. And secondly. He is unchangeably the same. In the message. That we preach. He is unchangeably the same.

In the message that we preach. Just look at the context. Remember your leaders. Who spoke the word. Of God to you. Who spoke to you the word of God. Jesus Christ is the same.

[11 : 24] Yesterday. Today. And forever. Do not be carried away. By all sorts of strange teachings. You see. Jesus Christ is not only the leader. We are to follow. But he is also the message.

That is to be preached. The words that they spoke to you. Was all about him. The message. And that message. Which you shared from your leaders.

Was the same. That message about Jesus. Is the same. Yesterday. Today. And forever. Now error changes. Doesn't it? Look at verse 9. Error there.

You see these diverse. And strange teachings. It is plural. Do you know what it is at? It is singular. The word of God. Which was spoken to you. Singular.

But do not be led away. By diverse. And strange teachings. Which is plural. Of course it is. Because once you move away. From the faith.

[12 : 18] Once entrusted to the saints. You've got to keep. Reinventing the gospel. For every age. Haven't you? One of the hallmarks. Of the God of the Bible. Is that nothing needs changing.

Don't you love that? Nothing needs to be revised. Nothing needs to be adapted. Or rewritten. So take for example. I don't want to. Be controversial. Though I think I probably will be.

I don't want to get into. A debate about evolution. This morning. But take the creation account. Take Genesis 1 and 2. It stands for all time. Does it? Genesis 1 and 2. Can be understood.

In any age. Genesis 1 and 2. Doesn't have to be rewritten. And revised. For the first 21st century. It could be understood. By a caveman. And it could be understood.

By an Oxford dog. That is one of the hallmarks. Of God. Isn't it? But error. Is constantly being rewritten. And revised. And revisited.

[13 : 14] And updated. John Stott. In his book. The Contemporary Christian. Identifies 13 different interpretations. Of Christ. 13 different interpretations.

To fashion him. According to the age. Let me give you the. Jesus the ascetic. The pale Galilean. The cosmic Christ. The teacher of common sense. The clown of Godspell.

The star of Jesus Christ. Superstar. The revolutionary. The socialist. The mystic. The magician. The carpenter. The management consultant. You name it.

People. People. Are trying to adapt Jesus. And reinvent him. For their own age. But he is not. Because Jesus Christ. Is always the same. The message.

Which you hear from them. Is the message. Which you are to preach today. It is the same. Yesterday. Today. And forever. And Jesus. Never needs. Updating.

[14 : 08] Or adapting. He is always new. Not in the sense. Of novelty. But in the sense. Of freshness. Not novel.

But fresh. And relevant. It's quite such a privilege. To be a preacher. To offer Christ. To people. Just look at the direction.

Of this exhortation. I think this is really helpful. Look at the direction. Of this exhortation. It's almost the exact. Opposite way. That things are going today. In church circles.

So it says this. Remember. Your elders. Remember. Your leaders. Who are these leaders? Well they were the apostles. Of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not that. Remember. Your leaders. Who spoke the word of God. To you. Remember them. They first spoke the word. Of God to you. Now we would have to reverse that.

[15:05] Today. Wouldn't we? It's not we. Who remember. What people like. Paul preached. About Jesus. But today. Paul has got to remember.

What we have discovered. Is it? Isn't that right? So take women's ordination. As an issue. It's controversial.

Isn't it? What is that about? What is that issue about? That issue is about. The authority of scripture. Basically. It comes down to this.

Are we going to. To follow. Paul. Are we going to remember. What Paul spoke to us. And what Paul wrote. Or does he have to remember.

What we think today. Does he have to follow. Our view of things. Do we follow Paul. In the first century AD. Or does he have to fit in.

[16:00] With our modern culture. And our political correctness. So that what he wrote. Needs to be reinterpreted. For a new way. For today. It has to be contextualized.

It has to be lifted out. Of its first century setting. And dropped. Into the middle of the 21st century. So that in the end. Paul is made to teach. The exact opposite. Of what he actually said.

That is not what we understand. That's not where we stand. As a denomination. No we stand. Don't we. Under the authority. Of the word of God. We stand.

Under the authority. Of the apostles. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. We remember those. Who spoke the word of God. To us. They don't have to remember. What we think. We have to remember.

What they have spoken. What they have said. And see that kind of. Twisted thinking. Is happening isn't it. And if you go down. That track. If you follow down. That track.

[16:58] It will take the Bible. Away from us all together. So remember. Remember. Remember that the word. That has been spoken to you. Jesus Christ. We are Protestants.

I always used to think. That a Protestant. Was somebody who protests. Isn't it. Ian Peasley. Has kind of ruined. What we imagine. Protestants to be. For us. But the word. Is from the root word. Protestari. Which means. To confess. To attest. To proclaim. To be a Protestant.

Is to proclaim. Jesus Christ. It's the old. Old story. Of Jesus. And his love. He is unchangeably. The same. In his person. He is unchangeably.

The same. In the message. That we preach. And then thirdly. And lastly. And wonderfully. He is unchangeably. The same to his people. He is unchangeably.

[17:52] The same to his people. It's all very well. To look back to the past. Isn't it. To remember. Some of the great heroes. Of the faith. People like Martin Luther. And Wesley.

And Whitfield. And Calvin. And Spurgeon. And Martin Lloyd-Jones. People like that. But that can be. A form of escapism.

I'm a great admirer. Of Martin. Lloyd-Jones. He was a Welsh preacher. In the last century. Lots of people know him. I don't agree. With everything he said.

And he used to often say this. If you read him. He would often say this. I am an 18th century man. You know. Comes up quite a few times. In his writings. I'm an 18th century man.

Now I know what he meant. By that. And I suppose. I don't know about you. If there was any period. In churches. Where you'd like to get in the TARDIS. And go back to. I think it probably would be. To hear. George Whitfield preach.

[18:50] In some field. Somewhere. I think. But there's a real danger. In that isn't it. Because we do not live. In the 18th century. And we live in the 21st century.

And we live in a very different place. And in a very different time. And we have to serve. The Lord Jesus Christ. Here and now. In your workplace. In 21st century. And yes.

There were giants. In the land. In those days. Weren't there. And yes. We are a race of. Of pygmies. By comparison. But don't forget. That those who spoke. The word of God to you. And sealed their confession.

With their blood. They were just flesh and blood. Like you and I are. George Whitfield. Was just a guy like you are. Or. Well. He was. You know what I mean. They were just men and women. It's like you are. Times have changed. But Jesus hasn't. And what he was to them. He will be to you. Jesus Christ is the same.

[19 : 49] The word that is used there. In verse 7. Is a very very interesting word. Remember your leaders. Those who spoke to you. The word of God. Consider the outcome. Of their way of life.

It's an interesting word. Because there's only two places. You find that word. In the New Testament. In verse 7. He talks about these leaders. Who spoke the word of God. Consider their outcome. Of their way of life.

The outcome of their way of life. And the word that is used there. Means a coming out. It's the same word. That Paul uses. In Corinthians. So just flip back with me. To 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

In verse 13. Where Paul is speaking. 1 Corinthians chapter 10. In verse 13. He refers to the wilderness wanderings. And Paul is reminding the Corinthians.

He's reminding the Corinthians. That it was Jesus Christ. Who actually was leading the people. Out of Egypt. And the rock was Christ. And then he says this.

[20 : 47] In 1 Corinthians chapter 10. In verse 13. He says no temptation has overtaken you. That is not common to man.

God is faithful. And he will not let you be tempted. Beyond your ability. But with the temptation. He will also provide. The way of escape. The way out. That you may be able to endure it.

God is faithful. He applies it to the Corinthians. And he says. God. Christ brought them out of Egypt. Christ was that rock. And he says. God is faithful. And he will not allow you to be tempted.

Beyond what you can bear. When you are tempted. When you are tried. When you are like those people in the wilderness. Between a rock and a hard place. As they came out. Do you remember it? Out of Egypt.

Pharaoh's troops. Chasing them down. Rocks either side of them. The sea is in front of them. And they are surrounded by hills and mountains. It is a trap. But there doesn't seem to be any way out.

[21 : 42] And just as Jesus opened up the waters of the Red Sea. And they crossed on dry ground. Paul says. When you are tempted. Corinthians. When you are tried like that.

What will he do? He will provide a way out. An exodus. That is the word. And that is the word that is used in Hebrews 13. Remember what Jesus was to those people at the Red Sea.

When they were entangled in the land. And the Egyptians were in hot pursuit. And they were trapped. And there didn't seem to be any way forward. I don't know whether you find yourself in those situations.

I seem to constantly find myself in those situations. I'm sure we all do. Don't we? Well remember. Jesus Christ is the same.

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 did for them. He can do for you.

[22 : 44] He can provide you with a way up through that challenge that you are facing. And you say. I don't know how I'm going to cope with that. I don't know if I've got the resources to get through that. And he is the same.

He can provide you with a way up through. How else do you explain the New Testament? How do you explain Stephen the martyr? How do you explain the way that he died? With his face like that face of an angel.

As he's pelted with rocks. Do you remember what we're telling him at 7? That as the rocks were raining down on him. He fell on his knees. And he cried out. Lord do not hold this sin against them. And when he said this.

He fell asleep. How do you explain that? How do you explain a man like Peter? When that servant girl comes up to him. He denies his Lord with oaths and curses.

Before a servant girl. I don't know the so and so. How do you explain that man? Who just weeks later on the day of Pentecost. Boldly preaches Christ. And 3,000 people are converted.

[23 : 46] How do you explain that? How do you explain Paul and Silas in prison. Singing hymns at midnight. In that rat infested hole in the ground of a prison.

In the stocks. Which is a Roman instrument of torture. How do you explain that? How do you explain the courage of a Martin Luther. When the whole world is against him.

And he says here am I. Here I stand I can do no other. How do you explain that? Well the only way that you can explain that. Is in terms of our text isn't it? That Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

And what he was for Luther. And what he was for Stephen. And what he was for Peter. And what he was for Paul and Silas. That is what he is for us. And for you.

He is the same. I don't know if you know the story of the man who got a job painting a stripe down the middle of the road. On his first day at work he paints two miles of the road.

[24 : 44] And everyone is amazed. They have never known anyone paints so many stripes in their life. On the second day his production dropped to one and a half miles. Which was still far above average.

But on the third and fourth day it was only one mile. And then the next day it was only half a mile. Apparently his boss went to see him and asked. Why is your production falling off so sharply? And he said.

I'm just getting so far from the bucket. I'll wait. It's a rubbish joke I know. But I'll wait. And that is the trouble of our society isn't it?

And we've drifted so far from our roots. So people want Christian values. They do still want them.

But they don't want Jesus Christ. And you cannot have Christian values without Jesus Christ.

You want a Judeo-Christian ethic. But you don't want Jesus Christ. People want, don't they?

[25 : 46] People want Christian ethics. But they don't want the Lord Jesus. There's no point in that. People need to prosper. And it's the Lord Jesus Christ that they need to hear. And Jesus Christ has not passed his use by date.

And he never will. And he will never be superseded. And Jesus Christ will never be replaced. And kingdoms will come. And kingdoms will go.

And empires will rise. And empires will fall. Herald civilizations will disappear. But Jesus Christ is the same. Yesterday, today, today and forever.

Spurgeon said this. There is the same water in the well still. And if we've not drawn it, it is our own fault.

We've come away from the fire. And that is why we are cold. Let us return to him. And he will receive us gladly. As gladly and as warmly as he did when we first believed.

[26 : 46] There's water in the well. We've come away from the fire. And that is why we're still cold. Return to him. And isn't that why in your Christian life like mine, there's so many ups and downs?

Yesterday you could pray, but today you can't. Today you might know a measure of victory over your temptations, but tomorrow you may be overwhelmed by them. Why? Why?

Because you've taken your eyes off Jesus Christ. And we've turned to men and movements, books, programs, conferences. But it's Jesus Christ we need.

Jesus Christ who is always the same. Who is always himself. Yesterday, today and forever. Here is solid ground. When all around is sinking sand.

On Christ the solid rock. I stand, let's pray.