

THE UNCHANGING CHRIST

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Hebrews 13:8.

This epistle was written some thirty-five years after the crucifixion, almost at the climax of a time of change, when the author's fellow-Hebrews were scattered and disheartened. Their religious atmosphere was charged with doubt and disappointment and loneliness. Persecution was raging on every hand, and the gravest dangers were confronting them. As he recalled memories of the first disciples, it was quite evident that the flux of time and the ravages of persecution had done their work in removing many of the illustrious band. Many believers had been dismayed and discouraged and therefore it was necessary to emphasize that, though men may come and men may go, the cause of Christ is immortal. This thought is expressed in glowing words of lofty exultation in the text -- "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

In nature nothing abides as it is; there is constant movement and change. In persons we observe the same fact of change. One's outer life is an ever-changing set of circumstances, and one's inner life is an ever-flowing stream of thoughts and feelings. No one is ever quite the same two days in succession. Something has been added to his experience, and the happenings of life have made him different. He is carried to and fro by the sweeping and the swirling of the tide. Generations come and go as rapidly and as transiently as the forest leaves are swept by the autumn breeze.

This perpetual change was quite evident in the church. The Jewish Christians had seen their leaders taken away. Some, like Stephen and James, had won a martyr's crown. The writer exhorts them to remember their guides and leaders who had preached unto them the Word of God. Let them remember, said he, this grand and blessed truth: ministers and religious teachers may die or be removed, but Jesus Christ, who is the object of their faith and the subject of their preaching, "is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

Our world today is a bewildered world. It is a world of chaos and confusion. It is a world of appalling problems. It is a world of startling changes. Vast changes occur over night. No one knows what a day will bring forth. There are revolutions, upheavals, changes in governments, changes in economic systems, changes in educational systems, and changes in religious institutions.

Time changes us. Your portrait taken years ago contrasted with your present self is proof of this. But there is even a greater difference between your mental portraits than your physical ones. Opinions alter. Even moods change us. Likewise, circumstances change us. Some men, who in poverty and obscurity have been accessible and genial, become haughty when idolized for their genius and fawned on for their wealth. New friends, new spheres, and new surroundings alter men marvelously.

All around us are changes, grand, stupendous, unimaginable. But in the midst of all these changes stands the unchanging Christ, Who "is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Jesus is the same to all generations of men. He is the unchanging object of stable faith. He is our highest and holiest example. He satisfies every demand of life, not alone as the object of faith itself, but as a sufficient inspiration to the demands that faith makes upon life in the heroism of its struggle, in the sacrifices of its service, and in the sufficiency of its reward.

1. He is the Christ of history.

With what divine impression He has marched down these twenty centuries! But there is nothing about Him which would make us leave Him to the past. The past cannot hold Him. He is untrammelled by the ages. He is ours today.

2. He is the Christ of today.

Great that He was in all those wonderful days of old; divine that He was in His impressive goings about Galilee; tender that He was in His marvelous ministry of loving kindness; firm that He was in driving out of the temple the false bargainers;

yet, this Christ is the Christ of today, where deity, tenderness, firmness are just as much needed as they ever were. Yesterday is history and today is experience. We match our Christ against everything today can be. Whatever your circumstance or situation, whether it be bane or blessing, pain or pleasure, life's problems or perplexities upon the highways of its perpetual struggles, Jesus Christ is the unchanging heart's ease of humanity for its present experiences and the only hope for what lies beyond its mortal ken.

3. He is the Christ of tomorrow.

History has already convinced us. We live now amid experiences that cannot be questioned. We raise our eyes unto tomorrow with a hope undeniable. Jesus Christ will be sufficient. The whole purpose of my message will be missed unless I succeed in getting to you the fact of the living presence of the living Christ being the only inspiration to holy living, heroic endeavor, and high achievement. This wonderful Christ is able to strengthen your courage, brighten your hope, illumine your faith, and warm your hearts. To meet your needs, I call upon you to get a new view of Christ, a new knowledge of Christ, and a new grip on Christ. He is a living, breathing, throbbing, thrilling, pulsating personality. He redeems, regenerates, and restores.

His gospel now has the greatest opportunity it has ever had, and it should have the most vigorous application and propagation by those who believe it. We stand upon the threshold of the most challenging hour that Christianity has ever known. Christianity is not a fair-weather religion, never has been, and never can be. It started on a cross. It moved forward through a grave. The blood of the martyrs has always been the seed of the church, and it is still true that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." Times like these always give the prophets of God their greatest opportunity.

I. Jesus Christ Is The Same In His Person.

In His person there are two beings in unity, the Son of God and the Son of Man. As men looked on Him they saw the incarnation of God Himself. We change perpetually; the bloom of youth gives place to the strength of manhood, and the maturity of manhood fades away into the weakness of old age. We are one day strong, and the next day weak; one day resolved, and the next day wavering; one hour constant, and the next hour unstable as water. But our Master is ever the same; pure, and never spotted; firm and never changing -- everlastingly omnipotent, unchangeably omniscient. Christ's person never changes. He is ever the same in His great attributes -- His eternity, spirituality, omniscient, and omnipotence. He is the same in His perfect and blessed character -- in His righteousness and faithfulness, His love and mercy, His forbearance and tenderness. He is sublimely unchangeable, eternally and infinitely perfect. It is grand that there is one person who is the same. It is well that there is one stable rock amidst the changing billows of the sea of life; for how many and how grievous are the changes of these days! Should Jesus come to earth again, as surely He will, we should find Him to be the same Jesus; as loving, as approachable, as generous, as kind and though arrayed in nobler garments than He wore when first He visited this earth, yet He would be the same person, unchanged by all His glories, His triumphs, and His joys.

II. Jesus Christ Is The Same In His Purpose.

How changeable is man in his purposes! We leave him today thinking we know his line of procedure; but on the morrow we discover he has changed his mind. Man's shortsightedness has much to do with the mutability of his purposes. But Christ changes not. It is still His purpose to: --

1. Reveal God to man.

He said, "I and My Father are one. He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." He was God manifest in the flesh. He revealed the love of God for the sinner and His hatred of sin.

2. Redeem man from sin.

The only hope of redemption from sin is in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.

3. Reconcile man to God.

This is the most urgent and vital need of mankind today. This experience is the most momentous transaction in the life of any man.

III. Jesus Christ Is The Same In His Power.

The great beasts become feeble with age; the large trees that have held their ground for long years against the might of tempests become smitten with decay and fall as the gale sweeps by. Man, hearty and strong in youth, becomes weak and tottering with age. Intellect loses its strength and the orator his power to sway the multitude. But Jesus Christ is not subject to change. His power is ever the same.

There was power in His presence, for when He appeared, demons fled away and were glad enough to drown themselves in the waters of the sea. There was power in His voice. The waves were rocking the boat and even the trained fishermen were afraid; but at the sound of the Master's voice the waves were hushed, the storm was over, and the sea was calm. There was power in His hand. He had but to touch sightless eyes with His fingers and lay His hand upon the pain-racked body and stretch forth His arms to a wicked and gainsaying world to bring peace to those in distress. Indeed He was and is powerful in every way.

The world has had teachers whose names will continue to be renowned to the end of time. But the greatest of all teachers was Jesus Christ. Of Him the people said, "Never man spake like this man." He was original in His teachings and was His own authority for his utterances. The teachings of Christ never can be other than they are. To the end of time He shall speak to men just as He did when He lived among them -- the very same glorious truths. The world can never outgrow the teachings of Jesus. For example, He said: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." In this He was speaking to the twentieth century as well as to the first. His teachings were not for the age and land in which they were spoken only, but for all ages and for all lands. Nothing can be substituted for them until it ceases to be a fact that regeneration is the great need of the sinner; that faith in Jesus Christ is necessary to salvation; that true happiness depends on the spiritual condition and that supreme love to God should be possessed by every man. His teachings, like His personality, continue and change not. More than nineteen centuries have passed away since His words were uttered, but they have lost none of their clearness or freshness or force. They are still the great fountains of religious light, life, and liberty to our race.

Another fact to be stated that should cause us to rejoice is that Jesus Christ is as able to save as He was nineteen centuries ago. In the days of His flesh, with what ease He said, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." With equal ease He can say the same today to any penitent soul. He is in no way affected by the march of the centuries. The cross upon which He gave Himself in death for us has lost none of its ancient power. By His glorious gospel and the Holy Spirit, He is still convincing men of sin, drawing them to Himself, and imparting to them pardon and peace, liberty, and joy. He gives humanity new life, transforms man's heart, changes His will and His life.

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As the helper of His people Jesus Christ is ever the same. He is always available for our needs. Although friends may desert us, true Christians can say with Paul, "The Lord stood with me." We can honestly bear our solemn testimony that He has been true to us in all our exigencies and has never failed us once. He has not failed; He does not fail today; He will not fail tomorrow. What a tonic for our faith such words are! He is the same in His work yesterday, in His grace today, and in His glory tomorrow.

"Change and decay in all around I see:
O Thou who changest not, abide with me!"