

Jesus Christ is the Same Yesterday and Today and Forever

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone, I'm Ian and if I haven't met you already, a very happy new year to everybody. 2022, what a year that was. I think if we hadn't lived through 2020, most of us would be saying that we witnessed more change in 2022 than in any other year of our lives.

There was the death of the Queen, Queen Elizabeth II, someone who had been a constant for many of us all our lives and a shining example of integrity and of faith.

So we now have a new king, Charles III. During the year we had three prime ministers and four chancellors of the Exchequer. We faced soaring inflation and a cost of living crisis that for many people is really just beginning to bite fully now.

And we had war in Ukraine. Terrible for the people who are living there. And even for us who are a long way away, it has had an impact on our lives, probably more so than any conflict since the Second World War.

A year of great change in our nation. Good changes as well, of course, because we're now roughly free of COVID restrictions, though it hasn't gone away completely.

[1 : 24] Then in our church, it was also a year of change. Last year we had seven funerals in this building. Now I can remember not that long ago when we went several years consecutively without any funerals.

But seven people connected with this church, many of them long-established members, passed away last year. And as we look back, we can think that for many of them they were marked by humble and faithful service.

That a good number of them suffered greatly, but did it with endurance and with patience and trust in the Lord Jesus.

And they left us an example of how we should live as Christians. But we miss them. They're no longer with us. We also, as we go into 2023, we have a number of members who are moving on. Moving largely to churches a bit closer to where they live. And again, they will be greatly missed. Graham mentioned Alistair and Sabina in his prayer moving to Fernie Hill as Alistair takes up the reins of being pastor there.

[2 : 36] But there are quite a number of others, too, who have moved on from the church. And I think that gives opportunities for those of us who are here to step up and to become more involved in service for the Lord Jesus.

And in the church, of course, we have welcomed new people. We're delighted to have a number of new people who have joined us in the last year and to have had baptisms and sources of rejoicing. But it has been a year of change and things will be a bit different in 2023. And then in our personal lives, all our experiences are different.

But again, many people have seen changes in the last year. A lot of bereavement, not just thinking about the church members who've died, but many have lost family members and close friends.

And those who have been with them for many years are no longer there. Quite a number of church members are suffering from illness, some of them life-changing illnesses.

[3 : 36] And for them, things have very much changed over the last year. And more positively, we've had weddings, we've had babies, and there have been causes for rejoicing as well.

But a lot of change in 2022, and no doubt there will be lots of change too in this year. And as we face change, it's good for us to have things that are constant.

What are sometimes called life anchors. Things that don't change that we can depend on as we cope with the changes in our lives.

And this morning, we want to look at the greatest anchor for our lives. And we're going to focus on one verse, although we'll talk around other parts of the passage. But this one verse, if you remember nothing else I say this morning, please remember this verse.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Whatever happens in our circumstances, however things change in our country, in our church, in our personal lives, the Lord Jesus doesn't change.

[4 : 51] He has the same love and care for us all through our lives, the same love that took him to die for us on the cross at Calvary.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. I need to be a little bit careful about not taking a verse out of context and building too much on it.

So let's give ourselves a bit of context at this point. We're at the end of the book of Hebrews, the last chapter of this letter. And like a lot of letters in the New Testament, the latter chapters are very much the practical part of what is written.

In the earlier parts of the book, you have the teaching, the doctrine being presented, particularly about the Lord Jesus. And then there are the practical implications that we're reminded of at the end.

And so as we look at the book of Hebrews, in many ways it's quite a difficult book, but it's a wonderful book that presents to us the Lord Jesus. In particular says the Lord Jesus is superior to everyone else.

[6 : 02] Jesus is superior to the angels. He's superior to Moses. He's superior to Aaron and all the high priests of Israel. Some of us earlier this morning at the 10 o'clock service were thinking of the new covenant that the Lord Jesus brought in.

He's the mediator of the new covenant. And that's a great theme of Hebrews as well. That Jesus Christ became the sacrifice for us. And his blood is the blood of the new covenant.

And as we go through the books, I think we can see something of the yesterday, today, and forever that the writer is presenting to us here.

Right at the start, the writer of the book of Hebrews says that the universe was made through Jesus. That God spoke to us through his son.

That he suffered and became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. That's the yesterday. Jesus, the one who was eternally with God before the world was created, who was this source of creation, became a man, became a baby initially, grew up as a man, lived among us, died for us, and rose again.

[7 : 23] And then there's today. The writer says that Jesus is the great high priest. The one who understands our weaknesses and our situations, and who intercedes for us at God's right hand, and who today meets our needs.

The Jesus of yesterday is the Jesus of today as well. And what about forever? Well, the writer says he will appear a second time to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

And in another passage, his throne will last forever. That's the tomorrow. Jesus is coming back, and he is coming back to reign, and to reign forever.

Yesterday, today, forever. Now, you might look at that and think, well, Jesus isn't the same as he in these. He took on human form.

That was a change. That was something different. He died, and he rose again and ascended to heaven. That again was something different. Well, yes, in a sense, his circumstances changed.

[8 : 31] But his essential essence as divine God with us, the Son of God, that has never changed. And his love and concern for us has never changed.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. And that has some consequences for us, and we're going to look at the earlier verses that Aaron read to us and try to learn just a few lessons from what the writer says to us.

So the first thing he says is that we must love each other. That's in the first three verses of Hebrews chapter 13. Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

The greatest command in the Bible is to love. First to love God with all our hearts, to love Jesus because he first loved us.

But then also to love one another. To show real concern and support for everyone in our fellowship, for all those we come into contact with, to show them the love of the Lord Jesus.

[9 : 44] That love that is unchanging. And the writer to Hebrews gives us two examples. I think they are just examples, and we think of lots of other situations, but these are quite helpful as being representative.

The first thing he says, do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

I won't get into too much detail about the hospitality to angels, but the key thing is here that we should show hospitality. We should show love to everyone, even to those we don't know.

One of the great things about being a Christian is you can go to a church in a city which is unknown to you, and where no one knows you or has seen you before, and you can experience from them the welcome and the love that Jesus gives.

And I hope that those who come to this church and are visiting experience something of that. And perhaps there's a reminder to all of us that we should be willing to show hospitality and to care even for those who are visiting us.

[10 : 54] Then the second thing the writer to Hebrews talks about is people who are in prison and those who are being ill-treated. And we should treat them and love them as if we ourselves were suffering.

Now in our country, there aren't that many people who are suffering greatly for their faith in the Lord Jesus. Around the world, there are many, many millions who are persecuted for their faith.

But I think we can widen what this verse says to us. And anyone who is going through difficult times, times which would test their faith and which they really struggle with, we should show the love of Christ to them.

Sometimes we can do that directly, as possibly the people, the writer was writing to, talking about people who were being ill-treated, well perhaps the Christians in the church could go and could help them.

Some we may not have contact with. I imagine that those who were in prison wouldn't have much contact with Christians, but we can pray for them. And I think that is the way that the Hebrew writer was talking about expressing love.

[12 : 01] But our command, our requirement, is to love each other. And in doing that, we are doing what the Lord Jesus does, because he loves us.

He loved us enough to go to the cross and die for us. He's loved us throughout our life. He still loves us. And if we are willing, then we can experience his presence and his help in all our circumstances.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. But as we move through this passage in verses 4 to 6, we've talked about loving one another.

Verses 4 to 6, I would suggest, are about living holy lives. Living lives that are different from the society round about us. Being counter-cultural.

And the kind of issues that affect us there are not that different from those the writer to the Hebrews was addressing. In the first century, marriage was under threat.

[13 : 05] People were saying, well, why should we be bound by the restrictions of marriage? One man and one woman, exclusive relationship for intimacy. Why should we be bound by that? Let's do the things that make us feel good.

Is that not our society today? People without real moral feelings in these matters, without any concern for what is really right and what is wrong, if it feels right for you, just do it.

Well, the writer to the Hebrews reminds us of the importance of marriage. Marriage should be honoured by all and the marriage bed kept pure. So we need to be very careful in our relationships, not to fall into sin, not to go against the instructions of the Bible.

Right back at the beginning of Genesis, we have marriage instituted by God between man and woman. The Lord Jesus in his teaching reinforced that, the value and importance of marriage.

And Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, forever. And our society's standards may change, our laws may change, but God's standards are constant.

[14 : 19] And then the writer moves on to perhaps for some of us even a more difficult area of the love of money. We live in a very materialistic society.

And it is really easy for Christians to get sucked into that, to always be wanting more. A bigger house, a flashier car, all the newest gadgets.

If we've not got them, we may want them and be willing to spend our money on them. Well, the writer here says, the right attitude is to be content with what God has given you.

Don't always be looking for more. Instead, trust in God. Trust that he will never leave you or forsake you. Trust that he is your helper through all situations in life.

C.S. Lewis said, he who has God and everything has no more than he who has God alone. Let me repeat that because it may be difficult to pick a first time.

[15 : 26] He who has God and everything, all that this world could give, has no more than he who has God alone. Much better to be in poor circumstances, to be living humbly and simply, and to have God and a living relationship with him, than to have all that this world can give, and our relationship with God to slip.

We need to live lives that are holy, that are different, that are distinct. Because that is the standard that Jesus Christ set for us, that is the standard that he modeled for us.

And so we need to follow it. We need to live holy lives. So we need to love one another. We need to live holy lives.

And then the third thing the writer says is we need to learn from our leaders. That's in verse 7 of the passage. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you.

Now our leader, our great leader and our teacher is the Lord Jesus, of course. And we seek to follow his example. But many of us can look back and we can see leaders who set great examples for us.

[16 : 45] And they did what the writer describes here. They spoke the word of God to us. They taught us the Bible and taught us what it means and the importance of following the scriptures.

They had a way of life that was an example to us. They lived lives that were set apart for Christ and were devoted to him. And they had a faith that is worth imitating.

A trust in the Lord Jesus that we too can have. Now again, many of us will have different memories on this. I can look back to my younger years and I remember men like Matthew Shearer who was my first Sunday school superintendent.

That's Maggie's father for those who know her. And Mr. Shearer was someone who throughout my youth had a constant interest not just in me and all the young people who would talk to us, who would ask about our spiritual welfare, who was really concerned for us.

Others, Jim McDowell, Margo's father, who was my Bible class leader, who week in, week out, met with us. Taught us the Bible, took us into his home, he and Margo, and showed real concern for us.

[17 : 58] Oh, and there was a young man, there was Willie Matthews who must have seen something in me of leadership potential and gave me real encouragement and help in those years.

Now your examples will be different. But I'm sure many of us who have been Christians for a long time can look back and we can see people who have been our leaders in the past and we can give thanks to God for them.

Of course, we don't need to look back very far. In the last years at church, we've lost two of our leaders. At the start of the year, Archie Naismith, my father, who'd been an elder for over 40 years before he retired a few years ago.

And one of the things that really struck, I think, all the family is a number of people who look to Dad for wisdom and for help and encouragement. And then at the end of the year, Alistair Chalmers, as we've already mentioned, has moved to be pastor at Fernie Hill.

And over the last five years, we've benefited enormously from Alistair's care for everybody, for his leadership of the church, from his pastoral heart and his wholehearted commitment.

[19 : 06] And we'll miss him. We miss the leaders who have gone on. But actually, it is not the leaders who make the church. This is the church of Jesus Christ.

And as we move on, and as there are people who are no longer with us, if we are looking to the Lord Jesus, then we will know as a church that we will continue to be blessed spiritually, that we will continue to know his presence.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Leaders come, leaders go. We give thanks for them. We learn from them.

We follow their example. But ultimately, it is the Lord Jesus who we need to look to. He is the one who is constantly with us, who will never leave us or forsake us.

And then finally, we've thought about loving one another. We've thought about living holy lives. We've thought about learning from leaders. And finally, we need to learn to look to Jesus.

[20 : 14] And that's the verse eight. That's our key verse here. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Early in the book, in chapter 11, the writer of Hebrews goes through a long list of great followers of God in the past.

Noah, Abraham, Moses, lots more. And then in chapter 12, he says, yes, remember these people run the race with perseverance looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Jesus is the one who we, as a church, look towards, want to glorify, want to live for. He is the one whose love for us is constant, who we know we can rely on through the good times and the bad times.

We can always learn from him. We can always be confident in him. And as we enter 2023, we need to look to Jesus and to trust him as the one who is the same yesterday and today and forever.

What would that look like? Well, for some people, it may be looking to Jesus for the first time.

Recognizing that your life has been lived for yourself and that you need the forgiveness that can only come through Jesus.

[21 : 42] Trusting him through his death on the cross to take the punishment for our sins because his saving power is the same as it's always been. If you're not already trusting in Jesus, I would urge you to consider him the one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The one who died for your sins. Or perhaps there are some here this morning and as we've been talking, as we've been thinking about what God looks for from us, you recognize that although you're a Christian, although you're trusting in the Lord Jesus, your life has been far from what it should be.

Graham mentioned earlier about new resolutions and the best resolution is to follow Christ more devotedly. Do you need to think about your relationships?

Do you need to think about your lifestyle? Do you need changes to your desires and your priorities?

Do you need to be more wholeheartedly committed to the Lord Jesus this year?

And perhaps part of that will be becoming more involved in serving in the church. The expectations that Jesus has of those who follow him haven't changed.

[22 : 58] He looks for and expects wholehearted devotion to him. Can we give that this year? Can we come to the Christ who died for us, recognize he's the same yesterday, today, and forever, and commit ourselves wholly to him?

Or perhaps some people are looking forward to this year, actually not looking forward to this year.

As they look forward it's with a sense of trepidation, facing uncertain times, not sure what is going to happen for them and their family.

The writer of Hebrews would say, in times of uncertainty, the one thing we can cling on to is the unflinching love of the Lord Jesus. He loved us enough to give his life for us.

He loves us still today, and whatever circumstances we may face, we can look to him for confidence, with confidence for comfort and for strength in our circumstances.

If you're dreading the coming year, look to Jesus and trust in him and know that he is able to be with you every step of the way, however easy or hard it may be.

[24 : 17] All of us, let's go into the year with this verse in our minds. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for your word to us. We thank you for this wonderful truth about your unchanging son, that the love he showed when he was in this world to so many people, the love he showed supremely when he died on the cross, is the same love that he has for us today.

All may change, but Jesus never. Glory to his name. Help us this year to cling on to that, to understand that in all the circumstances of life, Jesus is with us.

And to rededicate ourselves to him or perhaps to trust him for the first time, knowing him as saviour, as Lord, as our friend. We thank you for this time we've had together this morning.

Thank you for the privilege of being able to worship together and to learn from your words. And we commit ourselves to you now in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.