

JESUS CHRIST: THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER
Hebrews 13:8-14

On this resurrection morning, let us turn to our text for the day. And as things would be, it looks like we can continue in our study of the book of Hebrews AND preach on the resurrection at the same time...

Hebrews 13:8-14

I don't know about you, but in all the reporting about the fire at the Notre Dame Cathedral, I noticed that among those who were praying and singing as the famed building burned, were **a great number of young people**. Indeed, I would say the **majority** of those pictured were under the age of 30.

The religious skeptic must certainly be troubled by this. For we have been told that it is the irreligious, the unchurched, indeed the agnostics and atheists that are on the rise. And that among those who are younger, religion holds little interest to them. Yet there they were: singing and praying.

My take on this is that it is little different from what happened following glasnost and the opening up of the former Soviet Union to greater freedom and wider dissemination of information. Once initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, the turn back to religion – particularly by those who were younger – was phenomenal. Within 10 years, over 40 Bible colleges were founded in Moscow alone. A top Russian film came out at this time in which, in the final scene, a man is seen walking down a road towards a town. He stops along the way to inquire from a woman if the road he is on is the one that leads to the church. She responds by saying, "Yes, it is. For what good is **any road** that does not lead to the church?"

All this to say that when it says in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God has "put eternity in men's hearts" it means that there is, within each of us, a longing for – a desire for – that which is eternal. And that while there may be a great infatuation with those things that are material, sensual, or briefly enticing, there is still a desire for that which is unchanging and eternal.

And here, in Hebrews 13:8 we are reminded of that which is exactly that: Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

In our time, many churches have felt the compulsion or need to **update**: to update their look, update their music and update their message, but I think what they fail to consider is how, within just a very few short years, that which they have "updated" will be "outdated." It's like colors...

In the 1970's browns and oranges were big

The 80's and 90's brought back primary colors

But since then it has been the achromatic colors – the blacks, whites and grays – that have dominated.

In similar fashion, music that is guitar dominated has been the trend now for nearly 50 years. This is true in popular music even as it is true in Christian music. Little do any now know it but it is only a matter of time before the trombone will come to its rightful place of dominating the music scene.

Okay, my only point is that **trends and fads come and go**, but there is a deep desire for that which is unchanging.

An orthodox friend of mine has pressed this point to me in a very clear way. He asked me one day, "Tell me, what will Burning Hearts Community Church look like 100 years from now? How will it be organized? What will a morning service look like? What will the music be? What will the convictions of the people be? What will be being taught from the pulpit, assuming you even have a pulpit?"

I said to him, "I can't tell you that for sure. Hopefully, the church will still be solid and still preaching the Word of God, but I can't say for sure."

He, in response then said to me, "Well I can tell you EXACTLY what the Orthodox Church will look like and what it will be teaching."

His point was well made. Orthodoxy – meaning the Greek Orthodox, or the Russian Orthodox Church is **unchanging**. Their message doesn't change, their structure doesn't change and even the music they sing – most of it at least – is many, many centuries old. What the world is doing, or what the world is interested in, or what "turns on" people is of no interest in the Orthodox Church.

And, interestingly, if I have my stats correct, the Orthodox church is one of the few non-Catholic churches, that is showing steady GROWTH...among young people!

So before a church decides to throw the baby out with the bath water (the practice of more than a few Protestant bodies that having rejected the New Testament's teaching on church leadership and human sexuality have now gone so far as to reject the deity of Christ, his resurrection from the dead or his coming again), they should consider that **the Bible teaches the UNCHANGING CHARACTER of our Savior, Jesus Christ.**

At Burning Hearts we believe in that unchanging Savior, even as we believe in the unchanging Word of God, the Bible. And so here, at least, we stand upon these unchanging things and **hope** that those in future generation will have the sense to believe even as their forefathers – meaning us – believed.

Now, from this text on this Easter Sunday morning...

1. Jesus Christ is unchanging. That's what verse 9 in effect says with its words "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

Now that is an interesting thing to say, for if Easter Sunday morning teaches us anything it teaches us that **Jesus changed!**

Luke 24:13-35

To me – and I know I am not the only seeing it this way – to me this passage in Luke 24 only makes sense if Jesus was somehow **PHYSICALLY CHANGED**. Now we know, from Luke 24:40 and John 20:27, that following his resurrection, Jesus **still had in his hands and side the marks of the cross and the spear**. But his **overall visage** was apparently changed.

The case has often been made regarding children that die that come the resurrection they will be made new in adult bodies. So an infant will not for all eternity remain an infant. Likewise, the 94 year old man will not for all eternity appear as a 94 year old man.

(Someone joked to me a few weeks ago that the posters we have up regarding Kirk Wolfe coming to put on a martial arts demonstration for men and boys this coming Saturday is a bit misleading. For to look at his picture on the poster, one would think Kirk is probably about 25 years old, when in fact he is now several decades older). But isn't that how we all would like to be remembered: like when we were 20 or 25?

I had a funeral awhile back for an old woman and as is often done at funerals, the family had put up a bunch of photos of her from earlier in life. Looking at the photos I **was stunned at the beauty** of this woman when she was in her late teens or early 20s, for I had known her only late in life.

So if the old will be younger and the little children will be adults, then isn't it more than merely possible that our Savior – whose entire life, as John Calvin put it, was a "continual cross" – isn't it possible – likely even – that in his resurrection he no longer looked like a 33 year old man who had been beaten down for years, but more like a 20 year old: bright eyed and optimistic about the future?

And if that IS the case, then he changed.

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 and 35-53

Beyond making the point that Jesus was indeed resurrected from the dead, this text emphasizes that our resurrected bodies will be **UNLIKE** our current bodies. That's the point. Once in awhile one may run across someone stressing how our resurrected bodies will be **LIKE** our current bodies, but that goes against what this text is stressing. And if that is the case – that our resurrected bodies will be **DIFFERENT** or **CHANGED** from what they are currently – then it follows that Jesus' body was also changed.

Revelation 1:12-16.

This picture of Jesus in his glory is reminiscent of what Peter, James and John all witnessed on the so-called "Mount of Transfiguration" when Jesus was "metamorphosized" before them (Luke 9:28-36 gives the fullest account of this). And if you are **REALLY FAMILIAR** with the scriptures you might recall that on the night before Jesus went to the cross, in his prayer in John 17 he prayed that His heavenly Father would restore him to his place of **GLORY** – the same glory that he had with the Father before the world was created (John 17:5).

So, if Jesus changed following the resurrection...if that IS the case (and it is) ...then why would the writer speak of "Jesus Christ, **THE SAME** yesterday, today and forever?"

Well the answer would have to be that the author of Hebrews wasn't talking about his physical body but rather about his character or nature. The **REAL** Jesus was unchanged.

And I think we understand that even in this life wherein we don't get to yet see resurrected bodies. It's like a friend of mine – a fellow named Dave Petty. He's a great guy. I've known him for 40 years.

I only see him once every 3 or 4 years. And every time I see him I am immediately struck with how old he looks (as if **he has changed** while **I have not!**). But within only seconds, it is as if those years of absence are erased and we are right back where we were when we first met. It is because for all the physical change (Dave now has no hair...I mean NO hair), the person in his or her **essence is unchanged**.

And our Savior is ETERNAL. He is eternally good, eternally kind, eternally self-sacrificing, and eternally our Lord and Master. Amen? And if people fell down before him 2,000 years ago, I'm telling you we will do the same when we see him as well.

And it is in that unchanging DYING AND THEN RISING Savior that we put our trust. For no one else died for us.

It's like that old Bob Dylan song "Shine Your Light" with its lyrics...

Sister, Let me tell you about a vision that I saw
You were drawing water for your husband,
You were suffering under the law
You were telling him about Buddha,
You were telling him about Mohammed in the same breath
You never mentioned one time the Man who came
and died a criminal's death

Yeah, no one else died for you or me.

That's what Jesus did and nothing will ever take that away...neither yesterday, nor today, nor ever. There was a time when the eternal Son of God was in His glory. And then that eternal Son became a baby, born in Bethlehem...and eventually that baby became a young boy and then a man, and then a man of sorrow (what a name, for the son of God who came, ruined sinners to reclaim, Hallelujah, what a Savior!). And they whipped him, and beat him, and pulled out his beard, and crucified him, and put nails through his hands and feet and then a spear into his already dead body. But that body was resurrected...made new...changed...and today he is at the right hand of the Father on high. So his visage has changed, from time to time, but who he is...in his essence...is the same as it has always been and always will be.

2. (from this text) Christ died for us outside the city of Jerusalem.

Under the old covenant in Israel, when animal sacrifices were made, the bodies of what were to be burned were cut up, the blood was thrown at the base of the altar and the various portions of the animal were burned (though apparently sometimes also cooked and eaten). The waste parts of the animal were taken outside the city and burned there: not as an offering to God but as waste. You can read about this in Exodus 29:14.

So what was offered at the altar was offered as a sin offering, but what was taken outside the camp was waste.

But our Savior...the king of glory...the king of righteousness and peace...the SAVIOR OF THE WORLD!...this Jesus was taken OUTSIDE the city...outside the camp to be crucified. The author of Hebrews uses the word "reproach" to describe this. That is, there was no honor in his death. "Take

him out! Crucify him! Get rid of him!" That's what the people were crying. "Let him die a criminal's death!"

Jerusalem existed by God's divine plan.

Jerusalem was established as the place for God's special presence.

Jerusalem was the city in which the temple of God – the special place of God's habitation – was erected. It was in Jerusalem and in that temple that God's presence was sometimes seen. Isaiah the prophet saw the Lord in that place.

But when the eternal Son of God came into that city, it was the determination of that city's residents to kick him out. And so they sent him out, carrying his own cross, to be crucified OUTSIDE the city, between two thieves, naked.

Hebrews 12:2

What was the shame?

The shame was to be despised, rejected, humiliated, stripped of his clothes, and nailed to a cross like a common criminal that Rome decided to make as an example to other malefactors.

That was the shame.

And it all took place OUTSIDE the city of God's choosing.

3. Well, we join this shamed unchanging Savior when we associate with Him and His church.

Every time we come together we are saying to the world "We have an interest in MORE than what is around us."

For, as verse 14 puts it, "**here** we have no lasting city." That is, on earth we are never going to find that which is unchanging...that which truly satisfies us.

I got the word this past week that my 91-year old father finally sold his pick-up truck. Actually, he traded it in...on a white 2-seat Chrysler Crossfire convertible. 91 years old and he buys a car I should be driving! I wrote my kids about it suggesting it isn't every day that you hear about a 91-year old buying a sports car.

On the one hand it made me kind of proud: he's still kicking!

On the other hand it seemed like a bit of a joke: who is he kidding? The clock is ticking and it is ticking **really fast**.

Well, thank God my dad understands very well that this life is not going to last...nor are the things of this world going to last. So be it 5 years or 5 days, his relationship with that car will soon be coming to an end.

But our relationship with Jesus will go on just as long as HE goes on. And how long is HE going on? Well, he's the same: yesterday, today and FOREVER! And FOREVER is a very long time.

Tell me, church attender on this Easter Sunday morning, is Jesus YOUR Savior and YOUR Lord?

Are you willing to be associated with him? He died a shameful death...it was nothing to brag about. While on the cross, those opposed to him mocked him and made fun of him. Are you

willing to be associated with him now...even to be mocked and made fun of because of him?
When it comes that day that you appear before him, and bow before him, will he acknowledge you, hug you, and welcome you...or, in the words of Matthew 7 will he say, "I never knew you; depart from me"?

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was God the Father's way of saying, "Regardless of what others thought of my Son, He did my will...He taught and did as I directed. And if you are willing to accept Him the way I have accepted him, then in the same way I raised my son from the dead I will raise you as well."

For as the scriptures teach in John 3:36,

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."