

Yesterday, Today, Forever

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Introduction.

- A. As just about all of us know, these days, we live in uncertain times. It seems like every day brings more economic bad news. We have absolutely no idea yet what's going to come of our new national leadership and its attempts to solve the nation's problems. That means that many of us live in personal economic uncertainty. We can't be sure whether the job we thought we'd have forever will last through next week.
- B. In such trying times, it's even more important for us to turn to the only One who is completely certain, the only One we can truly rely on. We see Him described in Hebrews 13:8. Our jobs might not be here next week, but Jesus will. Our friends might all vanish or move away, but Jesus will always be with us. Even our lives might end before we expect them to, but Jesus will be the same, through all the bright ages of eternity.
- C. Now, all that's very exciting. We sing a lot of hymns that express those sentiments, but what does it mean? What does it matter to us that Jesus is always going to be the same? The unchanging nature of Christ isn't going to have the same effect on everyone. In many ways, the nature of our Lord is its own law, just like the laws of nature that He helped set up. For instance, the law of gravity functions exactly the same everywhere on earth. For some men, that law causes them to fall to their deaths. For other men, their understanding of the law of gravity and what it will and will not do enables them to build airplanes that fly.
- D. In the same way, our understanding of the sameness of Jesus is what determines whether He will save us or condemn us. The rules haven't changed since the gospel was first preached, and they won't change until the end of time. Let's look this morning at what it means that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

I. The Purpose of Jesus.

- A. One of the ways that Jesus has not ever changed is that He has **THE SAME GOAL**. He expresses this goal perhaps most succinctly in Luke 19:10. You want to know what Jesus is about? This is what Jesus is about: saving lost people. This teaches us some important lessons. It shows us that there is such a thing in the eyes of Jesus as lost people, as people who aren't right with God and really aren't going to like eternity if they continue on in the same direction. There are two groups of people who need to listen to this. On the one hand, we don't have any trouble meeting folks in the world around us who think that they're just fine and that they don't need Jesus. That's not true. Friends, Jesus isn't just a nice guy or a good moral teacher. He's the difference between life and death. Outside of Him, we are lost. Without Him, we cannot be saved.
- B. Second, this is something that a lot of Christians need to understand, too. There's a terrible temptation for us, just because we don't drink and dance and smoke and swear, to believe that really, we're good folks. We're people who pretty well succeed in pleasing God on our own. Not so. We are saved only through Jesus. If we were to live exactly as we do now, coming to church three times a week and everything, but did that outside of Christ, we would be lost. The only reason why we don't need to fear judgment is that Jesus loved us, came looking for us, and found us. His desire for everyone is to find them and save them in just the same way.
- C. In pursuit of this goal, we must understand that Jesus wields **THE SAME AUTHORITY** that He did on the day He ascended to the Father. He describes this authority in very plain terms in Matthew 28:18. Basically, if it's authority, Jesus has it. This idea has some very profound implications for us today. Like the centurion whom Jesus healed, we understand what authority means on an everyday level. When our boss says, "Come," we cometh, and when he says, "Go," we goeth. If we don't, we can expect to get fired-eth. And yet, people don't seem to get that about Jesus. They don't seem to understand that when Jesus commands us to do something, He's not leaving obedience up to our discretion. He's not presenting the way of the Lord as a potential lifestyle choice. Instead, He expects us to do it, and He expects our obedience to be swift and complete.
- D. Sometimes, despite our best intentions, we fall short of that. We try to do what we know is right, but we end up sinning. Jesus isn't thrilled with our sin, exactly, but He is compassionate to forgive, and His grace is sufficient to cleanse us from our sin. Sometimes, however, our problem isn't that we want to obey, but fail. Sometimes, our problem is that we know what Jesus requires, but we just refuse to do it. That's open rebellion, and when Jesus sees behavior like that, He is NOT sympathetic. If we live lives with that kind of defiance in them, we can expect on the day of judgment to have the authority of Jesus come down on us.
- E. The reason why Jesus is able to make such demands of us is that we are governed by **THE SAME STANDARD**. The nature of this standard is presented in John 12:48. On the last day, everyone from every age is going to be measured by the standard of the word of God. Contrary to what many in the world believe, the standard hasn't changed since God first committed it to mankind, and it isn't going to change. That's important, because it means that we can rely on the word. If God were whimsical and inconstant in His expectations for us, it would be impossible to plan for the day of judgment. I wouldn't know whether God expected me to abstain from alcohol, or if He was fine with me being a rip-roaring drunk. I could have the

best heart in the world, but my uncertainty about what God wanted would paralyze me. In reality, though, we can be completely, totally certain. If we simply base our lives on obedience to His word, we can be sure that we will meet with the reward the Bible promises. We can rely on that same eternal standard.

- F. Of course, the standard of the word of God is brutally demanding. In order to obey every command perfectly, we would essentially have to be Jesus. Thankfully, along with that standard, Jesus proclaims **THE SAME MESSAGE** of hope. It appears in Matthew 11:28-30. The promise that Jesus makes to the weary isn't any different than it was 2000 years ago. We can be staggering beneath the burden of our sins, but Jesus will give us rest from it. We can be sick of evil, sick of pain, and sick of life under the sun, but Jesus promises us healing. Our Lord's not a harsh master; He's a kindly one. He won't tolerate rebellion from us, but neither will He ask more from us than we can give. When our lives become trying, this is the message of Jesus that we most need to remember. Rest isn't found in the psychobabble of the talk-show expert. Rest isn't found in human religions. Rest isn't found in the bottom of a bottle. Rest is only found in Jesus.

II. The Tools of Jesus.

- A. One of the things that makes Jesus such a kindly master is that He didn't consider Himself above our toils and our sufferings. Instead, He was willing to come to earth to live and die among us, and in His life, we have **THE SAME EXAMPLE** that Christians had 2000 years ago. Look at how He is presented in Hebrews 12:1-2. This reminds me of something I've learned in my studies of history about great military commanders. Great commanders don't watch the battle from a hilltop miles out of danger. They don't wait out the conflict from a heavily fortified command post far behind the fighting. Instead, great commanders are right there in the front lines where the dangers are, encouraging and inspiring their men, leading them on to victory. That's the kind of commander we have in Jesus. When we look at His life, we see that the devil shot just as many arrows at Him as at us. We see that He faced His trials and His fears. However, we also see that Jesus won through all of those things and claimed the prize that God had set in front of Him. Friends, our struggle is just the same as Jesus' struggle in every important way. Let's use His example as our inspiration to win the victory too.
- B. Of course, when we falter in our obedience to Christ, or when we just encounter a hard time, we can be sure of receiving **THE SAME HELP** from Him that Christians did long ago. Along these lines, consider the promise of Hebrews 4:15-16. Essentially, friends, whatever we need from Jesus to get us over the top, we can be sure that He will provide. I can testify to that. In my life, I've seen some good times, and I've seen some times that weren't so good, but I've never seen a time that Jesus couldn't get me through. As proof of that, here I am today, where without Him, I would never be. On the flip side of that, if we fall away from Christ, there can never be anybody to blame but ourselves. Many Christians who end up leaving the Lord have a list of justifications, circumstances that they say made it impossible for them to be obedient. Brethren, that's simply not true. I guarantee you, in every single case of a Christian who has fallen away, if they'd just kept trying to be faithful, kept trying to please God, they'd have made it, not through themselves, but through Jesus. Their problem was that they didn't truly believe in His help. If we do, though, it is certain to help us.
- C. All of these things make it clear just how powerful and profound Christ and His gospel are. That's why we should expect Jesus to have **THE SAME IMPACT** that He did when He still walked the earth. Look at His prediction in John 15:20. In the first century, there were people who did anything they could to avoid following Jesus, but there were also people who gave up everything they had to follow Him. Jesus was a polarizing figure. Everybody who came in contact with Him either loved Him because of their good hearts, or hated Him because of their wicked hearts. There wasn't any in-between. Brethren, if we are truly serving God, there won't be any in-between in our lives either, because true discipleship means being like Jesus. He will shine forth so powerfully in our words and in our lives that He will force everybody to make a choice. Some people will despise us for it; that's not really our problem. Some people will love us for it, but that's not really to our credit. Instead, it will only magnify our Master, because it's a reflection of His light.
- D. Finally, though, perhaps the most important way in which Jesus is the same is that He offers **THE SAME SALVATION** He offered so long ago. Paul emphasizes the breadth of this salvation in Romans 10:12-13. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Everyone. Sometimes, I think we're so used to the concept of salvation through Christ that we forget how amazing it is. Let's put it like this: We all know about the current housing crisis. Perhaps we're even experiencing its ill effects. Let's say that the government announced a new program. They said, "If somebody shows up at our office tomorrow and asks us to pay their mortgage debt, we will pay it off and give the house to them outright." Folks, I guarantee you that if the government made such an announcement, the line outside that office the next day would stretch for miles. For that matter, we'd probably all be IN the line. And yet, Jesus offers us something that is infinitely better than a paid-off house. He offers us His help throughout our lives, and then an eternity spent with Him and the Father in the bliss of heaven, all free through His grace. That sounds like it's too good to be true, but it isn't. That's the salvation of Jesus, available to every one of us through His mercy and His love. Just as was true of our faithful brethren long ago, if we place our trust only in Him, we will not be disappointed.

Conclusion. If you would like to share in the salvation of Jesus today, don't delay any longer. Come to Him now.