

8/23/26 The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever *Hebrews 13:1-17*
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Good morning. A few Sundays ago, Pastor David made a confession. He confessed his sins to us. And thankfully, as opposed to stoning him like the Pharisees tried to do to the woman caught in adultery, our congregation embraced him and made sure that, in spite of his sin, he knew he was still loved, valued, and welcomed in the family of God. David confessed to us that he is a Packers fan. Yeah.

But seeing David boldly confess his sins to us has inspired me. It's given me courage. It's given me assurance that if I confess my sins to you all now, I am going to be met with the same warmth and the same love. Brothers and sisters, I have committed a sin that is far worse. I am a New York Jets fan. I know, here in Patriot land. In Boston. I'm going to dare root for a New York team. I grew up here. Believe me, I didn't choose this life; it chose me. You can thank my father. There isn't much to celebrate about being a Jets fan, particularly while growing up here. The Jets have been dysfunctional for most of my life, while the Patriots have gone on to win six Super Bowls, eleven AFC titles, and twenty division championships. But there's a simple reason for that: organizational stability.

If you've been part of any company or organization, you know how much more helpful it is to have organizational stability – the same effective leaders who stick around and consistently perform at a high level. When you have organizational stability, it's amazing just how many things you don't have to worry about. There's a sense of ease, and the organization is able to be far more effective. The Patriots have had organizational stability, and the Jets have not – and I envy that so badly. That's the real sin I confess to you. From when the Patriots won their first Super Bowl, in 2001, until Tom Brady took his last snap in a Patriots uniform, in 2019, how many head coaches did the Patriots have? Say it out loud. ONE. Bill Belichick. You know how many the Jets had? Five: Herm Edwards, Eric Mangini, Rex Ryan, Todd Bowles, and Adam Gase. And of course, with the exception of that four-game suspension, for, let's just say, an unfortunate misunderstanding regarding atmospheric pressure, how many starting quarterbacks did the Patriots have? ONE. Tom Brady. The Jets, on the other hand? Any guesses? Seventeen. They are: Vinny Testaverde, Chad Pennington, Brooks Bollinger,

Chad Pennington again, Brett Favre, Mark Sanchez, Greg McElroy, Mark Sanchez again, Geno Smith, Michael Vick, Geno Smith again, Ryan Fitzpatrick, Geno Smith a third time, Ryan Fitzpatrick again, Bryce Petty, Josh McCown, and Sam Darnold. And it's still going, with no end in sight. Organizational stability matters.

As we begin the home stretch of our study of Hebrews, a series we've been working on since the end of April, we are reminded – one more time – of the peace we can feel and the freedom we can have as followers of Jesus, knowing that we serve a God who is unchanging. There is organizational stability in the Kingdom of Heaven, where we can put our hope and find rest, and ultimately remain secure — not because life becomes predictable, or that somehow, by following Jesus, we are signing up for a life that is free from any trouble, but because we know where we're going. Our future is secure. We are journeying to an enduring city that will last forever, and the One leading us there promises to never leave us, nor forsake us. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This is from the concluding chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 13, verses 1-17:

“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?’ 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 and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp,

bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”

Chapter 13 is the author’s closing address. After spending the vast majority of his letter making the case for why these Jewish Christians should continue to remain faithful to Christ and not become sluggish or fall away, the author now turns to providing some very practical insight about what faithfulness to Jesus looks like in everyday life. If you remember from last week, Pastor Doug talked about holy living and the need to pursue peace. The author of Hebrews now presents to us just a little bit of practical wisdom of what faithful living and the pursuit of peace looks like – how we actually do it. And he talks about a lot of things: showing hospitality to strangers, keeping the marriage bed pure, sexual immorality, greed, not being caught up in “strange teachings,” and submitting to the authority of leaders. But in the middle of all that, the author makes a profound and significant claim about Jesus that binds all these teachings together in a way that makes sense: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (*Hebrews 13:8*).

In a culture that’s constantly changing, when we live in a dog-eat-dog world that in order to get ahead and feel safe it almost always comes at the expense of putting others down, holy living and pursuing peace doesn’t make sense, does it? It doesn’t. What does showing hospitality to strangers afford me, when I can’t reasonably trust them not to take what I own? What does fleeing from the love of money benefit me, when the entire world runs on it? Virtually everything I need to do to prosper in this world requires money, so it makes sense why I would want to love it. And why should I submit to the authority of leaders when I want to be the one that has all the power, myself? Holy living and pursuing peace don’t make sense, according to the world’s standards of what it means to be secure. The world doesn’t have “organizational stability”; it’s fast-moving, constantly changing, and hardly anything is ever really guaranteed.

What the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is urging us to do doesn't make sense unless there's a greater and altogether different kind of security that exists out there, where we can place our hope. As the world changes around us, and new news cycles every day reinforce the idea that our sense of control over our lives is threatened and is slowly being torn apart at the seams, the Scriptures tell us that our safety doesn't have to come from our own ability to trust ourselves. Instead, it comes from the unchanging nature of God, who promises to never leave us, nor forsake us, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

With God's help, we need never be afraid. There is organizational stability in the kingdom of heaven, and we know we're going there one day, if we believe. So, if you're a believer in Jesus, you can all just breathe one big sigh of relief with me. Let's do it. Deep breath in, and deep breath out. Now, if you turn your head and look outside the window right now, is the world still scary? It can be. Is it still dangerous? Yes. Will trouble still continue to come our way? Most definitely. But our future remains secure, does it not? It is only when we truly start believing that Jesus Christ and our inheritance in the kingdom of heaven **remain**, that holiness and righteous living that pursues peace is even possible. Once I know that I have no reason to fear for my *own safety*, something incredible happens – I begin to look towards the needs of others, and begin to be an instrument of peace.

There are four ways *Hebrews 13* shows us what this kind of secure, free, and faithful kind of living looks like once we really start to take to heart the organizational stability we have of the kingdom of heaven.

First, **because we know that Jesus Christ remains the same, we don't have to grasp**. If you've ever met an insecure person, they often feel the need to grab hold of things. They grab tighter and tighter, and they dig their heels in and refuse to let go. They become attached to things that they convince themselves they need, or else they will never be safe, whole, happy, or complete.

The Jesuit priest and spiritual writer, Anthony de Mello, once said, "If you look carefully, you will see there is one thing and only one thing that causes unhappiness. The name of that thing is attachment. What is attachment? An emotional state of clinging caused by the belief that without some particular thing or some person you cannot be happy." I think the author of Hebrews is trying to say something similar.

When we start to believe that we need something other than God, in order to feel safe and secure, whole and complete, we inevitably begin grasping at that thing, hoping it will provide us the safety and security and love and belonging we're longing to find. And the more insecure we become, the tighter we hold onto it. That's why the author of Hebrews says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (*Hebrews 13:5*).

Notice what he's doing here. The author isn't simply telling us that money is bad, or that it's always wrong to want nice things. Instead, he's reminding us that there's no need to grab hold of – and grasp too tightly – money or worldly possessions, when we know that we serve a God who will never leave us, who promises to always be on our side. People cling to money and worldly possessions because they're afraid that they don't have enough. But the God who created the entire universe is on our side, and that same God promises to give us an eternal inheritance that is far more valuable than the riches of this world could ever provide. When we rest our security in God and in His promised future for us, as opposed to trying to manufacture that security on our own, we find that our need to cling tighter to our attachments starts to lessen. We find that we can be happy, resting safe and secure in the hope of God.

And this isn't just about money. We can see this same principle throughout these opening verses. We can show hospitality to strangers because we don't have to live as though everyone around us is a threat. We can remember those who are suffering because we don't have to spend all our energy protecting ourselves. And we can honor the covenant of marriage because we don't have to grasp for sexual pleasure or intimacy to make ourselves feel whole. *When we know that Christ is our security, we can loosen our grip. We don't have to grasp.*

But some of us aren't fighters; we're runners. Instead of digging our heels in and fighting harder to keep a grip on those attachments, when we feel threatened or afraid, we run. Our instinct is to retreat, hide, and find somewhere else to go, where we think we can feel safer and more at peace. But it's the same problem – the other side of the same coin. By hiding and finding comfort and safety through other means, we're still trying to manufacture security on our own, when it can really only come from God.

Hebrews has something to say about this too: **because Christ remains the same, we don't have to be carried away.**

The author speaks of “new and strange teachings,” and urges the believers to remember their former leaders and imitate their faith, so as to protect them from letting these strange ideas come in and distort their thinking. These foreign ideas apart from the gospel cloud our thinking and lead us into a false sense of security in only the things of this world. And it's important to understand, because there are all kinds of crazy ideas out there in the world that promise to offer us things they can't actually provide. This goes all the way back to Genesis, when the Serpent said, “Surely you will not die.” Every day, we're being told, in one way or another, what we should believe, what or who we need to fear, who we need to trust, and what we must do in order to protect ourselves from any threat. And when we're afraid, when we feel like the world around us is becoming less and less predictable, it can become incredibly tempting to grab onto whatever idea or ideology or political movement or cultural worldview that's new and hip for the time, and follow it because it promises to provide us a better future than what we have. But it can't.

Again, brothers and sisters, our eternal future is already secure. We already know where we're going, and it's far more glorious – and far more safe – than whatever empty hope the latest fad or idea or promise can bring us in this world. *Because Christ remains the same, we don't have to be carried away.* We can follow Him wherever He goes.

And this leads us to our third point: **because Christ remains the same, we can follow him into the unknown.** The author tells us exactly where Jesus has gone. He says that Jesus “suffered outside the city gate”, and then, he says, “Let us, then, go to him outside the camp bearing the disgrace he bore” (*Hebrews 13:13*). The city of Jerusalem was the place of familiarity and security for the people of Israel. It was the center of their worship, their temple, and their religious identity. The city represented the established religious order God's people had known for generations. But Jesus was taken outside the city, and bore the suffering and disgrace of the cross from outside the city's walls. And the author of Hebrews tells us to *follow* Jesus there, *into that place*.

In other words, to go with Jesus to where the safeties and securities of this world cannot expect to be found. Sometimes – often, even – this leads to suffering and rejection, because we're not playing by the world's rules. The world's rules tell us to

protect ourselves, look out for only ourselves, and do whatever we have to do, in order to stay on top. But Jesus calls us to a different way, and sometimes following that way will put us outside the places where the world tells us we're safe, where we want to be accepted and belong. And it will cost us. And sometimes, it will even mean we have to go to places we never would have chosen to go.

But brothers and sisters, it's important to remember that *Jesus is still there*, and He promises to never leave us. He is our forerunner, who has gone first into the unknown, so we can rest assured He's already on the other side. *We follow* Him there because we know that our future is secure. There *is stability* in God's Kingdom, and so we know where the road will ultimately lead, even if we don't yet know everything that's in store. *Our security doesn't need to be found in what comes next in this perilous journey of life; it needs to be found in what comes last*, the glorious hope of the kingdom of heaven. We know where we're going, we know our future, so we need not be afraid or lose hope. *Because Christ remains the same, we follow him into the unknown.*

And when we know where we're ultimately going, and we know who's leading us there, the way we live changes. There is no anxiety or fear. We love God and we love our neighbor because we are no longer living for ourselves. That's what the assurance of heaven provides us – an *outward* life, where we can finally stop worrying about ourselves, and actually invest time in making this world a better place – the kind we envision our children and grandchildren someday living in, and feel good about.

Because Christ remains the same, we can live with open hands. We can give because we know we have enough. We can serve because we know we're secure. We can let go because we know that what's coming to us cannot be taken away. And we can love because we know we're loved, and long for others to know they are loved, too. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Rest secure in that truth.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, You are the same yesterday and today and forever. We thank you that you remain. And because you remain, let us, with boldness and assurance, leave behind selfish ways, to live and embrace holy living and the pursuit of peace. May we find security in your unshakable promises of heaven that frees us for a life of service and honor and praise of you. May we let go of the attachments we're clinging to, and walk away from the foreign ideas we're entertaining. May we follow you into the unknown, and live with open hands for whatever you have in store for us. Come what may, we know where we're going. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Pastor Nate began his sermon talking about "organizational stability". In your past professional or volunteer experiences, can you relate to the emotional contrast of being part of an organization that is stable versus not? How did that feel?
2. When you hear the phrase "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever", how does that make you feel, and what potential following questions does it raise for you? How do you comprehend the unchanging and eternal nature of God?
3. **Because Christ Remains the Same, We Don't Have to Grasp.** What may you be grasping for because you're afraid that what you have or who you are isn't enough?
4. **Because Christ Remains the Same, We Don't Have to Be Carried Away.** What voices, pressures, or promises in this world do you think are the most capable of pulling you away from your confidence in Christ?
5. **Because Christ Remains the Same, We Can Follow Him into the Unknown.** Where might Jesus be calling you to follow him even though you cannot see where the path leads?
6. **Because Christ Remains the Same, We Can Live with Open Hands.** What would you be willing to release, give, share with others, if you truly trusted that Christ was enough and will never leave you?