

Jesus Christ is always the same Hebrews 13:1-8

¹ Continue to show brotherly love. ² Do not fail to show love to strangers, for by doing this some have welcomed angels without realizing it. ³ Remember those in prison, as if you were fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated, as if you yourselves were also suffering bodily. ⁴ Marriage is to be held in honor by all, and the marriage bed is to be kept undefiled, for God will judge sexually immoral people and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have. For God has said: I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you. ⁶ So then we say with confidence: The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What will man do to me? ⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Carefully consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The original audience of this epistle is identified by the title of the book. The Hebrews are Jewish Christians. They are tempted to return to Judaism because Christianity is subject to persecution at this point in history. It wasn't always that way. Christianity was considered a sect of Judaism. Judaism of course was a legal religion in the Roman empire. But when the emperor needed a scapegoat to blame for the fire that burned much of the capital city of Rome, Emperor Nero in 64 A.D. blamed Christians. To avoid any loss of property or undue punishment because of their association with Christ, many were tempted to return to the safe life of Judaism. But the inspired author of this letter wants his Jewish readers to know this would be a tragic mistake. He urges them not to give up their faith in Christ. He urges them to persevere in the faith.

As we look at the specific verses before us, we see the reason for the instruction he offers in the first seven verses is what he states in the very last verse of the text. The author reminds us that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*. He doesn't change. He remains the same Savior for all mankind. He's the object of your trust. He's the motive for your service. That Jesus Christ is always the same will lead us to follow him through time and into eternity.

These Jewish Christians were first introduced to Christ by some important leaders. The writer tells them, "*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Carefully consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*" In chapter eleven the author had listed a number of Old Testament examples of faith. These "heroes of faith" and their lives were taught by spiritual leaders. The most important hero of faith they taught them was the Lord Jesus himself. He was the one that all those Old Testaments believers looked ahead to in faith. When mankind first brought sin into the world God first promised a Savior. And he made sure the world's history was shaped so that the Savior could arrive at the right time and place. And what a perfect Savior he was. Tempted in every way to sin just as we are, the author assures his Hebrew readers, that he never gave into sin once. He was the perfect high priest. Unlike those Old Testament who spent their whole ministry making sacrifice after sacrifice first for themselves, for their own sin. Then for the sins of the people. But this high priest made just one sacrifice. He sacrificed himself for all sin. And with his one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being saved. What an awful mistake it would for these Jewish believers to abandon their Savior to choose a safer route.

Do we ever choose the safe path, when opportunities arise for us to confess our faith in Christ? What causes us to clam up? Is it fear? Are we afraid of being persecuted by others? Are we

afraid that we might say something wrong when we witness our Savior? So we decide it's just safer to keep Jesus to ourselves. You know our Savior never chose the safe route. He faced his enemies head on. He defeated every one of them including death. He won the victory for all. And the only thing left for us to do is share his good news with the people in our lives. He told us to acknowledge him before men. He will acknowledge us before God in heaven. But what happens when we disown him? What happened to Peter when he denied even knowing Jesus. He went away into the dark night ridden with guilt and wept bitterly. Surely, we are all guilty of missing opportunities to share Jesus with people. Thankfully our Lord never did. He faithfully praised his Father's name by sharing good news of salvation to crowds of people as well as to individuals. It didn't matter whether they believed in him or not. He certainly gave everyone opportunity to follow him. And when he left this world to return to heaven, his disciples went out in his name with the same message of the one who remains the same Savior yesterday, today, and forever. Once Pentecost came his followers were filled with the Holy Spirit. His saving message rang out throughout the world. It continued until a group of Jewish people got to hear the true word of God from some faith-filled leaders. And through their faithful testimony these Jewish people came to faith and trusted in Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The author of this letter not only wanted his first readers to remain in their faith in Christ. He wanted them to display their faith with lives of service. In the opening verses of this chapter, the author lists a number of ways for them to serve to show faith in Jesus, who remains the same always.

He urges them, "*Continue to show brotherly love.*" Their love for others should never grow cold. That would happen if they gave up on Christ and returned to Judaism. So the flame of brotherly love must not go out. If persecution should strike it's important to keep it lit. The author urges them to stretch past those close to them. *Do not fail to show love to strangers, for by doing this some have welcomed angels without realizing it. Remember those in prison, as if you were fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated, as if you yourselves were also suffering bodily.* We know of two occasions in Genesis 18 and 19 when believers showed love to strangers not realizing they were entertaining angels. Abraham and his nephew Lot did that. This was an exceptional case. We too will be blessed in showing love to strangers. Our Lord points out that what we do for others we do for him. In Matthew 25 when he identifies believers' faith by the fruits of faith they produce, he says, "*Just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did it for me*" (25:40). How easy it is to shut our eyes to the needs of others. The world doesn't need more priests and Levites who lovelessly pass by on the other side to avoid the one in need. Remember how your Savior helped you with your greatest need. Then you and I can reflect such love to others, even strangers. The author mentions prisoners, probably imprisoned because of their faith. We are to feel their imprisonment as if it were our own. Though we may be unable to effect their release, we can pray for them the way early Christians did for Peter in Act 12, which led to his release. We are susceptible to the same suffering because we share the same Savior.

One item which the author mentions next takes us all the way back to creation. God established marriage on the sixth day and has blessed mankind since then through it. *Marriage is to be held in honor by all, and the marriage bed is to be kept undefiled, for God will judge sexually immoral people and adulterers.* God's will for marriage has remained the same since he brought humanity life. God's gift of sex brings blessing only in the marriage bed. Anything outside the marriage bed is immoral and falls under God's judgment.

As the author addresses the six commandment with his proof passage of marriage. So he also has something to say about the next command protecting our possessions. *Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have.* A covetous person pays little attention to anyone else's well-being. He selfishly pursues his own goals. Paul warns Timothy, *"Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs"* (1 Timothy 6:10). We want no part of anything that would cause us to wander from our faith in Christ. The antidote to such temptation is being content with what you have. God knows what is best for us. What we have comes from him. To go beyond that invites sinful worry or ungodly greed. The key to being content is remembering God's promise. *For God has said: I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you.* Having God with you what more do you need. God's promise is better than any bank note from any financial institution. They may have to retract their pledge. God never does.

And since God keeps all promises, we say with the psalmist: *The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?* While persecution was on the rise among Christians, it brought lasting comfort to have the Lord as my helper. He is my refuge and my strength. It doesn't matter what man does to me. God is for me. He helps me in times of need. He will never forsake me. Even if the whole world is against me, I cannot lose. My God has prepared a heavenly home for me and all believers. It will be glorious. I'll be completely free from all of sin's problems. Since my Savior never changes and all his promises are trustworthy, I have nothing to fear, not from man, not from anyone.

Persecution was on the rise for Jewish Christians who first read this Scripture. Temptation was real to take a safer path without Christ. It may have led to an easier life. But it would be disastrous in the next life. Everyone needs Christ Jesus. That need was the same in Bible times, today and forever. We can't expect an easy life by following Jesus. In fact, life will probably get worse. There will be crosses to bear. Your Savior bore one for you. His included God's punishment for all sin. And he willingly went there. He took the guilt for us all. It cost him his life. But he didn't stay dead. He took up his life again. What does that mean? It means we are forgiven completely, and loved entirely. It means heaven is our home. And that doesn't not change. Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. May we treasure and trust that same Savior. And may we serve him wholeheartedly. By loving brothers and sisters and strangers, by honoring marriage, and by staying content because God will never leave you. Since God is my helper, I will never be afraid. What can man do to me when I have Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.