

‘Jesus is the same forever.’

And as we enter this last sermon on the theme of **Hebrews 13:8** where the Hebrew writer tells us that “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**” Today, we’re going to look at how **Jesus is the same forever.**

There was a man who was driving a local priest to worship one morning, when all of a sudden, the car in front skidded across the road and killed a hare in the process. The guy was deeply upset because he had killed one of God’s creatures. So, the priest went over the hare, poured something over it and the hare came back to life. The guy was amazed as he saw the hare take off into the field. But as he was watching it run, the hare stopped and waved, he ran another few yards and stopped and waved. The guy said to the priest, ‘**wow, that holy water is amazing!**’ to which the priest replied, ‘**oh this isn’t holy water, it’s hair and wave restorer.**’

What picture comes to your mind, when you think of the word, ‘**priest**’? When it comes to the word ‘**priest**’, most people think about a guy who goes around wearing black garments, has a white dog collar, a cross around his neck and carries nothing but a Bible and a small bottle of holy water.

The very word ‘**priest**’ means one who stands for and mediates for another, one who offers sacrifices. The word ‘**priest**’ is used **725 times** in the Old Testament and **29 times** in the New Testament. And the word carries with it, the idea of one who acts as a bridge to link two parties, in the Bible sense, the two parties are God and man.

In **Hebrews**, the word ‘**priest**’ is used **12 times**, the words, ‘**High priest**’ are used **16 times** and the word ‘**priesthood**’ is used **5 times**. So, with that in mind please turn your Bibles to the **Book of Hebrews**, because this is where we’re going to learn that Jesus is the same **forever, as our High Priest.**

**Hebrews 4:14-16** “**Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**”

The writer declares that Jesus is our High Priest, but notice He isn’t just our High Priest, He is our **great** High Priest, but **what make Him so great?** **Firstly**, Jesus is a great High Priest because ‘**He has ascended into heaven**’. In other words, Jesus is operating as High Priest in the heavenly realms. Jesus is great because He is serving as High Priest in God’s house in the heavenly realms.

**Secondly**, Jesus is a great High Priest because ‘**He is the Son of God**’. In our first sermon in this series we looked at how Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God, which always refers to His divine nature. You see, Jesus wasn’t just a mere person, He is someone who carries great authority and honour, He is the Son of God.

**Thirdly**, Jesus is a great High Priest because ‘**He is able to sympathise with our weaknesses**’. One of the lies that Satan whispers to Christians, especially when they’re going through hard times is that Jesus doesn’t really care or He doesn’t really understand us.

**How many times have you seen two individual Christians going through the exact same trial in their lives but they handle them differently?** One Christian is suffering with severe health problems and you very rarely see them because they’re focusing so much on their problems. And another Christian is suffering with the exact same severe health problems and yet they are still actively involved in church life.

**What’s the difference?** The difference is one is focusing on their problems and the other is focusing on Jesus. The ones who focus on Jesus understand that there’s not an experience they will go through in life that Jesus hasn’t experienced or doesn’t understand.

He was deserted by His disciples, rejected by the religious leaders, He experienced loneliness, hunger and thirst. Jesus was mocked, spat upon, tortured and crucified on a cross. Loves ones, He knows what we are going through, He was tested in every way as we are. He knows what temptations are all about, He Himself was exposed to the onslaught of Satan.

**Why do you think He’s sweating blood in the garden of Gethsemane?** He knows what it’s like to endure great trials.

Fourthly, Jesus is a great High Priest because in the face of all the adversity and all the temptations that came His way, 'He didn't sin'. 1 Peter 2:21-23 "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

You see, when we sin, it's our choice to do so and it's a choice that we all fail miserably at times. But He didn't fail and despite facing everything that we face, He is our great High Priest because He didn't sin. And so, because Jesus is our great High Priest, the writer encourages us to simply do two things.

First, the writer encourages us to 'hold firmly to the faith we profess.' Now remember the **Book of Hebrews** was written to encourage the Jewish Christians not to turn back to Judaism. And if there's an application which is still very relevant today, it's simply this, don't give up, don't go back to the world and its ways.

How many people do you know have given up the faith and went back to the world? How many people do you know who were Christians for years, suddenly give up the faith? I've met lots of people over the years who were once faithful members of the church and they loved God dearly. They were very active in service, some preached, some taught in Sunday school, some taught in Bible school and others were brilliant leaders. But what happened? Why did they fall away?

In my experience, there's always one or two reasons given. They were either involved in a sin that they enjoyed so much, they didn't want to stop. Or there were relationship problems with their brethren and they allowed that one person whom they had fallen out with to stand between them and their salvation.

Now loved ones, I understand struggling with sin and I understand relationship problems within the church. But the real reason we have so many fallen saints is simply because they have 'forgotten'. They've forgotten why they came to Christ in the first place. They've forgotten that the Son of God is in heaven, acting as High Priest waiting for them to speak to Him about their struggles and problems. And so, they end up focusing on the wrong things and just go through the motions of being a Christian before they fall away.

I remember watching a television programme which I enjoyed for years until I married Funmi and whenever this programme came on she would simply get up, leave the room, go upstairs and watch something else until my programme was finished. It wasn't until this happened a few times that I stopped to ask myself the question, why does she leave the room when this programme comes on? I watched the programme once more and suddenly I noticed that it was full of swearing and people using the Lord's Name in vain.

You see the problem was I had become desensitised, I had been watching the programme for so long I didn't even pay attention to everything which was being said. Now the reason I shared that with you is because there are times when I think Christians can become spiritually desensitised.

You've been taking the bread and wine so long, you just take it without any deep thought as to why you're taking it because it's something you've done for years. You've sung the same hymns for years and you know them off by heart, but the words have become just words with no meaning anymore. You've heard thousands of sermons over the years and you're at the point where you think there's nothing new to learn from the Bible, you've heard it all before.

Loved ones, we all can become desensitised, even in matters of faith, if we're not careful. Yes, we struggle with certain sins in our lives, yes, we all struggle to get along with certain members of the Lord's church at times. But we must never forget Jesus will forever be a great High Priest who has nothing but our personal interests at heart and He's longing for you to talk to Him about your struggles and problems.

Speak to Him, don't give up, don't go back to the world, don't let go of the faithful confession you made at the beginning of your walk with God. Whether you've been a Christian for one day or sixty years, don't throw it all away now. 'Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever' and He will never give up on you, so don't give up on Him.

The second thing the writer encourages us to do is recognise our 'ability to approach the throne of grace with confidence'. Have you any idea how blessed we are, to have this access to God today? In the Old Testament, the high priest was the like the supreme religious leader of the Israelites. And because the high priest held the leadership position, one of his roles was overseeing the responsibilities of all the other priests.

The Levitical priests entered their service when they were 25 years old and retired at 50 years old. But on the Day of Atonement, it was only the high priest who could offer a sin offering, not only for the sins of the whole congregation, but also for himself. It was only him who could enter the Most Holy Place behind the veil to stand before God. The people couldn't enter, the normal priest couldn't enter, none of them could enter and seek forgiveness themselves.

The point is that Jesus by being our High priest allows us to access God with confidence. **Hebrews 9:11+12** "But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption."

You see loved ones when we approach God in prayer, there is no need be nervous or fearful. When we're going through difficult times we should have the confidence to know that we will receive what we need most of all. **And what is it we need most of all in our time of need?** We need grace and help in our time of need. He will forever know what we need and He will forever meet that need because Jesus will forever be our High Priest.

**Hebrews 6:19+20** "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." Now when you think of the word 'anchor,' **what comes to mind?**

You would be forgiven for thinking it was a huge metal object that boats use to keep the ship in one place. In some ways that's true but what there's also another meaning to the word. In Biblical times, someone would leave the ship whilst having a rope tied around their waste and when they got to the shore, they would tie that rope around a rock to secure the ship in place. The anchor wasn't the metal object, it was the person who swam to shore with the rope tied around him. Jesus is our anchor but not in the sense to stop us drifting away but in the sense of, we will be secure in the presence of God, if we stay tied to Him.

Now tradition says that when a High Priest went into the Holy of Holies, he would have a rope tied around him just in case he died whilst serving God or God had struck him down. And so, those waiting outside could drag him out if he had died or had been struck down by God. Now whether that's true or not I don't know, but **remember when Zechariah was in the temple and Gabriel spoke to him?** He was in the temple for a while, **wasn't he?** **Luke 1:21** says, "The people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple."

**Now nothing much has changed today, has it?** We still have people who want worship to finish at the exact same time every week. We still have people who only want to sing a certain amount of songs during worship. We still have people who believe that a sermon mustn't be less than ten minutes or over thirty minutes long.

I mean, **why do we grumble about things not happening the way we think they should happen? Why do we grumble when things are running late?** We grumble because we've got places to go and we have to 'see a man about a dog', so to speak. **But haven't we all got busy lives, haven't we all got places to go and people to see?**

**Think about it, what do we tell our non-Christian friends and family when were late? 'Oh, sorry we're late for dinner, the preacher was longwinded!' 'Oh, sorry we can't watch the football this afternoon because the person doing the announcements went on and on'!**

**Why can't we say, 'Oh, I'm sorry for being late for dinner but the preacher's message was brilliant'! Why can't we say, 'Oh, I'm sorry we can't watch the match this afternoon because I wanted to stay for the Bible study!' Why do we never say things like, 'oh I can't come for dinner until later because I know we're focusing more time on the Lord's Supper! or 'I can't watch the game today because I know we will get carried away in worship by singing loads of hymns to the Lord'! Why can't we set the oven to finish cooking the casserole at 3:00 pm instead 1:30 pm?**

Loved ones, **can't you see that the Lord's Day has become the Lord's two hours?** Christians are now investing more time watching the television than they do in God. Christians all over the world are now investing more time at work than they do in God. Christians all over the world are now investing more time chilling out than they do in God.

Now you might be thinking, **is the preacher speaking to me?** Well, yes, I am but I'm speaking to all of us, I'm speaking to myself. I recognise my own personal time management problem and I see the Lord's church and I see that its spreading like some kind of virus throughout the Lord's church.

Just look at how Sunday evening worship doesn't exist anymore in many of our congregations. Look at the attendance to mid-week Bible studies with most of our congregations. Look at the congregations who don't even have a Bible study, they just meet for worship.

Don't these things tell us we're buying into the world's culture? Don't these things show us that we are being influenced by the world? Yes, I understand we have to work, yes, I understand that we want to spend some time with our families and loved ones and enjoy the pleasures God has given us in this life.

I know we need time to rest and sleep, and have fun but loved ones, think about it this way. There are **7 days** in one week, there are **24 hours** in one day and there are **168 hours** in one week. There are **10,080 minutes** in one week and **1,440 minutes** in one day. Now that's a lot of time that God has blessed us with, **isn't it?**

Now I know we worship God every minute, of every day, and every week of our lives. But ask yourself this, **how much time do we as a church, spent together in a normal week?** An **hour and a half** for our worship, an **hour** for our Bible study, one **hour** for our prayer meeting, and an **hour and a half** for our Mid-Week Bible study and **one hour** for our coffee shop Bible study. **Do you know how much time that adds up too, if we attend all these things? 390 minutes.**

God gives us, in His grace **10,080 minutes** every week and the church here, if we attend everything, meets together for a grand total of **390 minutes** of those minutes. I mean, **what are we doing with those other 9,690 minutes of week? What are we doing with those other six and half days?** And if you just attend worship or worship and study, **what are you doing with the other 9,840 minutes of the week?**

Surely, the God of the universe, the God who sent His Son to die for us, deserves more of our time. The God who became flesh, so He could die for us and act as our High Priest. Surely, He deserves more time than the time we offer Him each week.

Now please don't understand what I'm saying here, I'm not saying if you don't attend anything other than worship you're a bad Christian. I'm not saying that you don't pray through the week or study through the week or serve Him in some way through the week.

I'm simply trying to get us all to think about what we're doing with our time, if we can't meet with other Christians except a Sunday morning, **why is that?** Now I can't answer that question for you, because all of us need to stop and ask ourselves that question, every day of our lives. I feel like many of you do at times, when you have those moments when you're really tired and had a busy day at work. And we just can't be bothered to attend the mid-week prayer meeting or attend the Bible class and sometimes we feel like we're dragging ourselves to worship.

But we go, **don't we? And why do we go?** Because there's blessings to be had, there's rich fellowship to enjoy. There's encouragement to give and receive and there's love to share among one another. Maybe some of us have become desensitised to those words, blessing, fellowship, encouragement and love and we've forgotten what they involve and mean. Maybe some of us have forgotten that we're supposed to influence the world.

So, let me ask you, **what's stopping you from being more involved in church life in general? We need to be like the guy who hosts the TV programme on the Food Network channel. The programme called 'restaurant stakeout' where he has hidden cameras. He always says, 'If you can't see the problem, you can't solve the problem.'**

In other words, it's one thing identifying what's getting in the way of our meeting with our brethren outside of worship times but it's another thing to do something about it. **Ephesians 5:15+16 "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."** The **King James Version** uses the words, **'redeeming the time'** which means make the most of your time.

Funmi and I listen to a Gospel singer called **Chris Rice** and he has a song called **'Life means so much.'** Listen to the words to the second stanza and the chorus.

**'Every day is a bank account and time is our currency,  
So, no one's rich, nobody's poor, we get twenty-four hours each.  
So how are you gonna spend,  
Will you invest or squander, try to get ahead, or help someone who's under'**

'Teach us to count the days, teach us to make the days' count.  
Lead us in better ways, somehow our souls forgot.  
Life means so much, life means so much, life means so much'

Have our souls forgotten what life is really all about? Have our souls forgotten there's more to life than work, pleasure and family? Have our souls forgotten that we're only here temporary and our eternal home is heaven? How's your time management? What are we doing with our God given time?

Loved ones, I understand we're not commanded to come together for a Bible study or a prayer meeting any more than we are commanded to meet in an upper room or have fellowship meals. But if coming together to pray with other Christians isn't important to us, we need to understand that it'll never become important to those who are watching us, our children, young Christians or friends. If our neighbours or new and young Christians see that studying the Bible with other Christians isn't important to us, we need to understand that they will never think it's important for them.

The more time we spend together means less time we spend with the world. Coming together as a group of Christians regularly, not just on Sunday mornings, gives us strength. Togetherness gives us strength to stay focused on Jesus, strength to stay faithful another day, strength to help us stop the world from influencing us.

You see 'Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever' because His eye is on us 10,080 minutes a week, He cares for us and sympathises with us 168 hours a week. He gives us His full attention, especially when we need grace and help when we ask Him in prayer. And He will be our High Priest forever, which also means we will be with Him forever.

May God bless us as we seek to serve our great High Priest, as He seeks to forever serve us in God's presence.