

‘Jesus, the same today’

We’re continuing in our mini sermon series on **Hebrews 13:8** where the Hebrew writer tells us that **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”** Last week we looked at how **Jesus is the same yesterday**. We looked at **John 1:1-3** and **Genesis 1** to show that Jesus was the Word before He became Jesus as we now know Him in the flesh.

We looked at how as the Word, He existed before creation existed and how He spoke creation into existence as the Word. And finally, we looked at how He was Deity and still is Deity and will be Deity forever more. Next week we’ll look at how **Jesus is the same forever**, but today I want us to focus on how **Jesus is the same today**.

A student was taking his final exam at university. He takes his seat in the exam room and just stares at the exam paper. Then in a fit of inspiration, he takes off his shoes and throws them out of the window and then removes his clothes, including his trousers and socks. The teacher became alarmed and said to him, **‘what on earth are you doing?’** he said, **‘I’m only following the instructions on the exam paper, it says to answer the questions in brief!’**

We can all think of times like that when we totally misunderstand the instructions. I think men are more prone to that than women are. Men have got this habit of thinking they know how to build anything, so we don’t need to follow the instruction booklet. It’s kind of like building a computer desk, only to find you have extra parts left over because you didn’t follow the instructions properly.

I think the instructions that Jesus gave are often misunderstood and so people either ignored them all together or they are left with some parts of the Scripture which they can’t fit into their theology. You see loved ones, Jesus is the same today because **His message is still the same today**. **And what is His message?** It’s good news.

The word Gospel means **‘good news,’** which is the message of forgiveness for sin through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us exactly what the Gospel is in **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** **“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel, you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”**.

In a lot of sermons today you’ll hear about how **‘Jesus died on a cross and died for you’** but very rarely will you hear someone say, **‘Jesus died on that cross and died for because you are a sinner.’** And that’s because that word **‘sinner’** which is **‘hamartolos,’** is seen as politically incorrect and offensive to some people these days. But anyone who has voluntarily or deliberately violated God’s laws, or neglected the requirements of God’s law is a sinner, that’s what the word **‘sinner’** means.

And if you find that offensive, let me tell, you don’t see it nearly as offensive as God does. He hates it and He hates it with a passion because He knows what the ultimate consequences are. **Isaiah 59:2** **“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”** God is a holy God and He hates sin because it opposes His very holy nature and separates us from Him.

You see Jesus lived a perfect life and because of that, He was the only one who was qualified to substitute His own sinless life, for our sinful life on the cross. He went to the cross to pay the debt that we owe to God for our sin. But thankfully He rose again and His resurrection is the proof of the power of God.

Now loved ones Christianity, and your faith has its foundations on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It’s central to everything we believe as Christians, which is what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:2** **“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”** In other words, if Jesus didn’t die, if He wasn’t buried and if He didn’t rise from the grave, we may as well just go home, because there would be no point.

There would be no point or purpose to this life and there would be no hope for an afterlife. **1 Corinthians 15:19** **“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”**

There is a story about how Satan once summoned his top demonic aides to plan a strategy against the church. Satan stood at the blackboard lecturing and illustrating the latest strategies in demonic warfare. At the end of this session Satan said, **‘Now get out there and give your best possible effort to keep believers from winning the lost.’**

As the demonic hierarchy headed for the door, Satan hollered out, 'By the way, be careful, if those Christians ever begin to really believe and act on what they have in the word of God, then hell help us all, heaven's going to break loose!'

Loved ones, we need live like we believe Jesus died, was buried and rose again. We need preach, teach and talk like we believe Jesus died, was buried and rose again. We need to act and behave and treat other people, like we believe Jesus died, was buried and rose again. Because remember a lot of people don't read the Bible, they read you and your life. And they will judge our Christianity on how we go about our daily life. In other words, we're a walking, talking advertise of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

So not only is His message still the same today but Jesus is the same today, because **the way He taught us to love is the same today**. You see, the Gospel is a message of love, the Bible is really a love letter from God to all of mankind. Jesus dealt with many aspects of human life but one topic He really pushed, was the topic of love. But this was no-ordinary love, this was a radical new way to love.

When Jesus taught about love He didn't just focus on our love for our friends and family, oh no, He taught about a love even more radical than that. He taught about a love that was much more challenging, a love that tests every fibre of our bodies. **Matthew 5:43+44 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."**

Now the kind of love Jesus is speaking about here is a kind of social love, it's the Greek word, 'agapao' which means to love in the moral sense. It's the kind of love that asks us to love those who we want to hate, love those who already hate us. And it's radical because it goes against everything we've been taught for years by society about love.

Because let's be honest, it's the easiest thing in the world to hate someone, **isn't it?** It's the easiest thing in the world to try and revenge our wrongs, to get even with those who hate us. It's easy to go to the 'no blame, no claim' courts, it's easy to go to the, 'had an accident in the last five years, that wasn't your fault' solicitors. Jesus says the love He wants us to put into practice, isn't revengeful, it's way more powerful than that. This kind of love doesn't hold grudges, it forgives, it doesn't create bitterness, it brings us to our knees in prayer.

John 13:34+35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Now what so new about this command of love? Well, what's new about this love is found in the phrase, 'as I have loved you'. All the way through Jesus' life, He demonstrated a radically new way to love. And it's interesting that Jesus uses the Greek word we looked at earlier, 'agapao' which is used in the social and moral sense. But when He says, 'if you love one another', He uses the Greek word, 'agape' which means the highest form of love, the love God has for us and the love we should have for God and each other.

In other words, it's a sacrificial kind of love, the kind of love that Jesus speaks about in **John 15. John 15:12+13 "This is my command: that you keep on loving each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than a person who lays down his life for his friends."** It's the kind of love Paul talks about in **Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."** And so, Jesus is the same today because He still expects us to love everyone as He loved everyone today.

But not only that, Jesus is the same today because **He still offers forgiveness today**. You see, for Jesus it was important not only that we try to reach His standard of love but also that we realise there are going to be times when we don't reach His standard of love. And really, that's what the cross is all about, it not only shows us the consequences of sin but it shows His great love for mankind. But we can never understand the cross as something done for us, until we understand that it was something done by us.

In other words, we need to realise that we are all sinners and have fallen short of God's glory as **Romans 3:23** tells us. Because we can't ask for forgiveness for something, if you don't think you've done anything wrong. **Would you expect a man to say sorry for beating someone up, if he hadn't done it? Would you expect a woman to say sorry for stealing from a shop, if she hadn't stolen anything?**

I remember when I was a teenager, I used to wear a balaclava. And one time I was at my friend's house playing games all day, when suddenly there was a knock at the door and it was my dad. He looked really angry and dragged me out of my friend's house and took me home.

Now I was confused and didn't have a clue what was going on, and when we got home my day literally hit me on the face. You see earlier that day he saw some youths at the corner shop giving abuse to some elderly people and because the youths were wearing balaclavas, he automatically thought I was one of them, but I wasn't even there, I was in my friend's house all day. It wasn't until my mum told him that it couldn't have been me, because my balaclava was in the washing, that my dad realised he had made a mistake and said sorry to me. And from that day on my father never raised his hand against me ever again.

You see loved ones, I couldn't ask for forgiveness for something I hadn't done. But when my dad realised he punished me for something I hadn't done, he could ask for forgiveness. John says in **1 John 2:2** "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." John the baptiser stood on the banks of the River Jordan and saw Jesus coming towards him and says in **John 1:29** "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Notice he uses the word 'sin' not 'sins' and that's because Jesus came to deal with sin, as a whole.

When Jesus' friend Lazarus died, the Bible says in **John 11:35** that "Jesus wept". Why's He crying? Well, it's certainly not because Lazarus is dead, after all He's going to bring him back to life. No! He's crying because in Lazarus' death, He saw the full consequence of sin. Now you may think that my sins are bigger than your sins, so you don't need as much forgiveness, wrong!

Have you ever lied to someone or stolen something? You've sinned and you need forgiveness. Have you ever had a bad thought or murdered someone? You've sinned and You need forgiveness. **1 John 5:17** "All wrongdoing is sin." It doesn't matter if you've committed what you think is a 'small' sin or if you've committed what you think is a 'huge' sin, the point is, we all need forgiveness. God wouldn't offer forgiveness if we didn't need it.

Now let me ask you, have you ever wondered why Jesus died at Passover time and not Pentecost? **Hebrews 7:27** "Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." You see, in **Exodus 12** where God 'passed over' the first born of Egypt, that was a day that God would never repeat, it was a one-off event, done by God. The Day of Pentecost was a festival that was to be repeated every year.

And so, He died on Passover because this too, was a one-off event, a once for all sacrifice. **Hebrews 9:22** "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." He died because of us and for us, so that He could offer us a way to receive forgiveness.

However, the price of our forgiveness was paid in a remarkable, symbolic way when Jesus suffered and died in our place. That's why we partake of the Lord's Supper every week, Jesus took the simple symbols of bread and wine and used them as symbols of His body and blood. **Matthew 26:26-28** "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Now please notice that Jesus didn't ask the Father to bless us as we partake of the bread and wine, He blessed God, He thanked God for providing the bread and wine.

There was a church who were getting ready to partake in the Lord's Supper and the preacher suggested that as they passed the bread and cup they whisper, 'The body of Christ, sacrificed for you.' 'The blood of Christ, shed for you.' As the emblems were being passed around, one man in the congregation was reluctant to partake and so a six-year-old girl said to him softly, 'It's ok, take it. It's for sinners.'

You see, she understood that she couldn't partake of it because she was a child, but she was old enough to understand what the Supper was all about, it's for saved sinners. You see, we don't partake of the Supper to receive the forgiveness of our sins, we partake of the Supper because our sins have been forgiven. Because it's during the Supper, that the great price which was made for us to receive the forgiveness of our sins, is realised.

And when we realise how much forgiveness we need, then just like Paul, we can whisper the words he said to his young friend Timothy. **1 Timothy 1:15** "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." Now I don't know about you, but when I read those words, the 'I am the worst' part, reminds me of me.

And so, not only do we need forgiveness, we need to be willing to forgive others too.

Over and over again the Bible not only reminds us of our need for forgiveness but it reminds us of our need to forgive others too. Now this again is a radical new practice, it's a radical new way of thinking. Jesus says in **Matthew 6:14+15** "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

What Jesus is saying is that if we claim to be followers of Christ, we must reflect God's nature. And since God's nature includes the ability to forgive, then we too must forgive anyone who wrongs us, because if don't, we can't claim to belong to Christ. But a command is a command loved ones and it's simple, if you don't forgive them, then God won't forgive you.

And remember Jesus told us earlier that we are to love and pray for our enemies, **but why pray for them? Are we praying that those who hurt us will change?** Well yes, but it's more than that. We're also praying that our attitudes towards them will change. You might not be able to change their attitude towards you, but through prayer, you will help you change your attitude towards them.

Now I understand that forgiving people isn't something that comes easy to us. But loved, do you really believe that it was easy for Jesus to say in **Luke 23:34** "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." When Jesus says, 'forgive them', He's not just talking about the Roman soldiers who were carrying out the death sentence. He's talking about the whole of the human race, He's talking about every sinner who has ever lived before the cross and every sinner who has lived and will live after the cross.

So, don't tell me you can't forgive someone, tell me won't you, because you follow a man who was willing to forgive the world for all it's wrong doing against Him. Paul says in **Ephesians 4:32** "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." The point is, Jesus is the same today because He knows we need to forgive others because we need forgiveness so much ourselves, and He still offers it today.

So, let me ask you before we finish, **do you believe everything I've said this morning? Do you understand how much He loved us and wants us to love others the same? Do you see your need for forgiveness and the need to forgive others who wrong you? Do you believe that Jesus died, was buried and rose again? If you do, then what are you waiting for?**

You can receive all these things I've spoken about this morning, today. You simply have to do spiritually, what Jesus did physically. Paul puts it so simply in **Romans 6:3-8** "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."

That's straightforward, **isn't it?** In baptism, we're simply doing spiritually what Christ did physically. In baptism, we die like He died, in baptism, we are buried like He was buried and in baptism, we are raised to a new life, like He was raised to a new life.

Peter said to those listening on the day of Pentecost that they could be forgiven for killing the Messiah, and he told them what they needed to do, to receive this forgiveness. He said in **Acts 2:38** "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Jesus is the same today because the way we receive forgiveness for our sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, is still the same today. And so, if you're not a Christian this morning, let me leave you with the words of the apostle Paul to think about. **2 Corinthians 6:2** "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation."