

We would like to see Jesus

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[0 : 00] Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at page 1009, that's at Hebrews 13, and we'll have a moment of prayer. God our Father, how we praise you that you have spoken, that you are speaking.

You have not left us to find our way to you unaided, but you have spoken to us by Christ Jesus, fully, finally, and forever. And in the written word, you have given us faithful and unerring words that will point to him.

And we pray indeed today that you will take my human words, and all their imperfection, that you will use them faithfully to expound the written word, and so lead us to that living word, Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

In some churches in England, I've never actually seen this in Scotland, but in some churches in England, on the pulpit lectern, visible only to the preacher, are written the words from John's Gospel that some Greeks spoke to the disciple Philip.

These words are, Sir, we would like to see Jesus. That's our title today. We would like to see Jesus. It's a reminder to the preacher, he's not there to expound his own ideas.

[1 : 26] He's not there to peddle a line. He is there for one reason, and one reason only, to lead people to the living Christ Jesus himself. Wesley's words, I offered Christ to them, ought to be at the heart of every Christian, as they try to unfold the word to people.

And we are particularly going to be concentrating on verse 8 of this great chapter. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Now, I've heard many a sermon on this great verse, which has simply been taken out of context, and preached as a theological statement. Now, that's fair enough.

But it's much better, indeed, it's absolutely imperative, that when we preach from Scripture, we do not take verses out of context. But we say to ourselves, what was the original author saying in this verse, and what do the original hearers understand by it?

Now, just a quick word about the letter to the Hebrews. Don't worry, I'm not going to take the excuse to expound the entire letter up to this point. Although you'll notice, he somewhat amusingly says in verse 22, I have written to you briefly, I have written to you a short letter.

[2 : 45] I think if we had written a letter as long as the letters of the Hebrews, we would feel we had done justice to our subject. But the subject is so vast. The subject is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

And any letter, any book, is going to be unable to deal with that great subject. But let's look at the context. Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Hebrew Christians probably lived in the city of Rome, probably second and third generation Christians, because we read about them being in danger of falling away, both by external persecution and by internal discouragement.

That's the situation in the letter. And three times in the letter, their leaders are mentioned. All of them in this chapter. First of all, here in verse 7, which is their former leaders, perhaps now gone, certainly no longer in active ministry and leadership.

And in verses 17 and 24, their current leaders. And the apostle is making the point, the leaders come and go, but the leader, Christ Jesus himself, remains.

[4 : 00] That's the first thing I want you to notice. But the point about this letter, it's not just any old Christ. This is the Christ who made the once for all perfect sacrifice.

That's the great theme of the letter. Christ offered once for all a perfect sacrifice, which can never be repeated and to which nothing can be added. This Christ who died is the Christ who has risen and has gone into heaven to be our great high priest.

So these groups of Christians, second and third generation Christians, probably in the city of Rome, this great letter is sent with this great theme, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Now, you don't have to be a tremendously careful reader to see that this verse not only allows but demands a three-point sermon.

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. And that's the way we're going to take it. We're going to look first of all at the Christ of yesterday, the Christ of the past, one of the great themes of this letter.

[5 : 11] Remember, remember, basically says, keep on remembering a generation of early leaders, probably the founders of the church, certainly the early leaders, who are now no longer on the scene.

But what marked those leaders, indeed what made them leaders, they spoke to you the word of God and of course the lifestyle which flowed from it, the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

So these leaders were leaders because they preached the word. They preached the living word, Christ Jesus and the scriptures, which pointed to him. These events are past, these leaders have gone, but their impact has not.

So what does it mean then, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday? Now, the letter to the Hebrews begins with the Christ of creation.

God has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he made the worlds. This is the Christ who is the creator, the Christ who reigns in heaven and in earth, the Lord of the Old Testament, in whose name we are helped because he is the one who made heaven and earth.

[6 : 29] And then as the letter develops, the author takes up the story of the Exodus wanderings, the story of the Israelites in the desert who departed from the Lord and only two of that generation, Caleb and Joshua, made it to the promised land.

And he is saying to his readers and hearers, don't let that happen to you. Don't fall away. So he is showing this is Christ, the Lord of history, the Lord of his people's history, the Lord Jesus Christ yesterday, the Lord of his people.

And you see what he is doing. He is essentially saying we need the whole Bible. Calvin said it needs a whole Bible to present a whole Christ and to produce whole Christians.

That is very important in our own private reading of the Bible. I don't know what method you use to read the Bible. There are many methods. But choose one that will take you through the whole of Scripture and not just your favourite purple passages.

We all have our favourite passages. It is very important. We get the whole Christ of the whole Scripture. And it is very important in preaching as well. That is why in this pulpit there is no such thing as a no-go area in Scripture because all of it presents Christ.

[7 : 46] And God in Scripture is showing us the Christ of yesterday, the Christ of the Old Testament, the Christ of the New Testament, the Christ of Scripture.

So he is the Lord of the past. But he is also the Lord of the Christians' past, both the Hebrews' past and our past. Psalm 139 tells us how far back that past goes.

Before I was in my mother's womb, your eye saw me, and your hand formed me. That is how far back in our past it goes. It also means the way he has led us up to this moment, the way he has guided us through the circumstances of our lives, the way he has brought us to where we are. And take this fellowship, the way this fellowship has been guided for many, many decades by the faithful preaching of the Word. And indeed, that's why he says, remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God.

I mean, a church like this is enormously privileged to have had so, so many decades of being presented with the whole Bible, presenting the whole Christ. So the Christ of the past, not the Christ who is strapped in the past, not that we live in the past, but we thank God for the past through which he has, first of all, led the whole of creation, led all his people, and then in our own personal past.

[9 : 14] This God is our God. Jacob says at the end of his life, as he's dying, he says to his sons, God who has been my shepherd all my life until now.

And each of us who belong to him can say that. The Lord who has been the shepherd of my life until now. Nourished faithfully by Christ and his Word.

So, the Christ of yesterday, the Christ of the past. But he is also the Christ of today. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today.

He remains. The leaders have gone. His sacrifice has happened, but it is powerful in the present. And in the context series, particularly going on to talk about that sacrifice, do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings.

We have an altar in the bodies of the animals. Verse 11. Verse 12. Jesus also suffered outside the gate. As he thinks of the Christ of the present, what he's saying is, look, Christians today, in his day, and in our day, that Christ who meets us today is that same Christ who led his people through the desert, that same Christ who made heaven and earth, that same Christ who has been with you all your lives up till now.

[10:33] He is the Christ who meets you today. And first of all, his sacrifice, to use a phrase that Hebrews is fond of, is once for all. We need no new sacrifice.

When we meet around the Lord's table, there is no sense that we are reenacting the sacrifice of Christ because that sacrifice has happened once.

His benefits remain. But we do need to open our lives to it every day. And we must remember that. That sacrifice, once for all, has saved us, but we need to experience its benefits every day.

And verse 15 is interesting. That shows us the ways in which this happens. Through him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

That is the fruit of lips, which acknowledge his name. We don't need to be offering burnt offerings. That's God, because they pointed to Calvary, which summed them up and brought them to completion.

[11:35] But there are sacrifices. The sacrifice of praise. Offering our hearts and our lives as we sing our hymns. The words which we sing being built into our actions, being built into our attitudes, being built into our lives.

And then in verse 16, do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. These are the sacrifices. After all, that's what Paul calls living sacrifices, doesn't he, in Romans 12.

Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. And that's what the author of Hebrews is saying here. And this, notice, this is linked with obeying your leaders and submitting to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

Now you see, once again, you can see how they belong together. In the past, your early leaders preached the word of God to you. You responded to that word and you were saved.

Now, that same word is still being preached to you by your present leaders. Honor them for it. Obey them because they are bringing the living word of God.

[12:51] It's not the authority that comes from hierarchy. It's the authority that comes from Scripture. They bring Christ to you as they unfold Scripture to you.

So the Christ of the present is the Christ of the once for all sacrifice. And also, he is the Christ who will save us from the false teachings in the present. Verse 9, Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings.

Now, right from the very beginning, indeed long before that, right back in the Old Testament, there were always false prophets and false teachers.

All the New Testament letters, all the Old Testament prophets are continually warning against false teaching. Now, on the whole, we obviously don't have time to go into each of these phrases, each of which could be expounded in themselves, but on the whole, false teaching in the New Testament take either, adds to Christ, Christ plus, which is the way of legalism, or takes away from Christ, Christ minus, which is the way of liberalism.

And one way or another, nearly all the false teachings come into one or other, and sometimes even into both categories, either taking from Christ or adding to Christ.

[14:11] And that, and whether we take away or whether we add, we are actually denying the total sufficiency of Christ for our salvation. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

If that sacrifice is effective, nothing needs to be added to it. And you see, when legalism adds to it, legalism tells us things that we must do, adding them to salvation.

Liberalism takes away from it. Both of them end up with the same result. Christ is not enough. And that's what, that's what the author is warning us.

And that's why, after all, he ends the letter with grace, be with you all. That's not just an conventional signing off phrase. He is reminding those Christians then and reminding us now that everything flows from grace.

Every blessing we have had yesterday, every blessing we enjoy today, every blessing we will enjoy tomorrow comes from Christ and from Christ alone.

[15:13] So, in our preaching, in our teaching, in our living and in our thinking, let's be certain that we do not add and we do not subtract.

Now, it's very interesting, the author mentions here, mentions here, an altar, verse 10, the bodies of animals, the holy places, the priests, and the sacrifices.

Many Roman writers called the Christians atheists because they didn't appear to have any, all the things that religion needed. After all, religion needs temples, needs buildings.

Religion needs altars. Religion needs priests. Religion needs vestments. All these sort of things which were regarded as essential. That's why they were called atheists. What our author is doing, is saying we have all these things.

We have an altar. That altar was reared at Calvary. We have a priest, but he's a great high priest who has gone into heaven. And that's the great point that's being made.

[16:14] The Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever. The Christ to whom the Old Testament sacrifice is pointed. The Christ who sacrificed himself once for all.

The Christ who will return in glory on the last day. That is that we have everything that we need in Christ. Peter says that in his second letter.

We have everything we need for life and godliness. In the 17th century when Charles I sent Archbishop Laud up to Scotland to try and as he saw it introduce more beautiful and more ornate or ornate religion into the churches.

Archbishop Laud wrote back Sire, the benighted people appear to have no religion because he because the very things that Laud thought were so absolutely necessary colourful vestments and all the rest of it just were not to be found.

And this was something that Christianity has been contending with right from the beginning. We have all these things. We don't need to invent them. We don't need to we don't need substitutes for them because we have them all.

[17:27] And what we need to remember is in the new in the the last days and when the author speaks of the last days he means the whole time between the comings.

In these last days we have an altar. We have a great high priest who has gone into heaven and we have a sacrifice but that sacrifice is never to be repeated. So the Christ of the past both the past of the universe and the past of our own lives.

The Christ of the present who sacrificed once at Calvary he suffered under Pontius Pilate once and that that cast its benefits into the present and indeed back into the past.

When you think about it there's no more reason why the sacrifice at Calvary should not save those who lived thousands of years before and thousands of years after. The great chapter eleven by faith by faith by faith and the very first one by faith Abel offered a better sacrifice.

Now what does the author mean by that? The author means that Abel's sacrifice anticipated that of Christ. Abel and Cain both must have been given revelation by God otherwise Cain could not have been condemned and Abel commended for following that.

[18:46] But you see right from the beginning grace has always been offensive. Cain Cain after all is the patron saint of religion which wants to do things for God and offer things to God rather than receive the grace of God.

But that Christ is the Christ of the future. Interestingly it doesn't say Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and tomorrow. No tomorrow's come and gone tomorrow's soon become yesterday he says he is the same yesterday and today and forever.

In other words there will never come a time when Jesus Christ will not be completely adequate completely completely ready for his people. First of all then in our personal and communal lives in our future during the rest of our lives now the word grace which ends the letter I've mentioned already grace means that he could not love you any more than he does now.

That's what grace means reflect on that when you are feeling particularly guilty and sinful reflect on that he could not love you any more than he does now and he will never love you less.

That's what Jesus Christ forever means in our personal lives. there is no blessing which he has to give which bypasses Christ. We begin with him we continue with him as we journey on towards his full likeness.

[20 : 15] For the rest of the journey in our lives however long or however short that may be the Christ of the one perfect sacrifice was gone into heaven the great high priest will be with us.

But also it refers to our eternal future. Notice how in verse 14 he picks up the words from verse 11 chapter 11 sorry we have no lasting city but we seek the city that is to come and this is what's said particularly of Abraham in chapter 11 back in chapter 11 verse 14 he says people who speak thus that speak as exiles make it clear they are seeking a homeland if they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out they would have had the opportunity to return but as it is they desire a better country that is a heavenly one therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city and as we travel through the shadow lands as C.S.

Lewis calls it we are looking for that city which is to come remember the point of Abraham's story Abraham left the city of this world it is no accident that in the book of Genesis the building of the tower of Babel man's ultimate desire to be self contained and self sufficient another attempt to be like God we will build a tower whose top will reach to heaven and a city shall give us a name and in that far off day Abraham is called to leave the city of this world to strike into the unknown and travel to the city whose builder and ruler is God as we travel through the shadow lands very often God gives us glimpses of that city and nowhere better is this expressed than in the last chapter of the last battle at the end of the Narnia stories where everything that has been beautiful and worthwhile and of God in this world is carried over into the homeland you see we will never discover anything in heaven that will contradict the Christ we have met in scripture

I think that's important to remember that is why Jesus said heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away this Christ his once for all sacrifice will remain to all eternity true and valid and that's why all preaching all teaching all sharing of the Bible ultimately is to bring us to Christ it's not just teaching the Bible which is a good thing it is proclaiming Christ as he meets us in the pages of scripture an English merchant travelling in Scotland in the 17th century told of how on three successive Sundays he listened to the famous preachers of the time I think he began his journey down about here he heard David Dixon a prominent churchman of the time and he writes in his journal he showed us the majesty of God and made us tremble

I think he may have been preaching on Isaiah 6 I'm not sure then the second Sunday he reached the middle of Scotland somewhere about Stirling and I can't remember the preacher's name but he said this man showed us the sinfulness of our hearts and led us to repentance then on the final Sunday he went to St. Andrews and he says in St. Andrews we heard a little fair man called Rutherford and he showed us the loveliness of Christ and warmed our hearts now all preaching and teaching needs both we need the majesty of God and we need the sense of our sinfulness but surely both are to lead us to the third to Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever that Christ who bought us who loved us from all eternity loves us now and whose love will never cease remember your leaders says the apostle those who spoke to you the word of

[24 : 34] God consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever amen let's pray oh come let us adore him Christ the Lord father we thank you for all that he has been in the past we thank you more for what he is now but most of all we praise you for all that in his mercy he is yet to be that Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever amen