

The Never Changing Jesus • Hebrews 13:8

Author Kenneth Boulding tells about sitting in his seat on a commercial airliner one day, waiting for the engines to start up and the plane to take off. As he looked through the window by his seat, he saw a little bird that had discovered a small opening in the far exterior of the wing. That bird was making a nest.

Since the plane was delayed, the bird continued, somehow, to find twigs and branches and pieces of cotton and paper there at the airport. It kept flying back and forth tucking them into the little opening in the wing and making its new home.

Not long after that, the engines started up, making a terrific roar, and the plane began to make its way down the runway and up into the air. And that little bird was left far behind.

Much of life is like the experience of that little bird. We are busy about the basics of life, constructing our homes, putting our careers together, getting married, raising our children, coping with financial distresses and health problems, and all that makes up life, when along comes the roar of unbelievable change leaving us far behind.

Change is difficult for us all. Ask any salesman who has a customer who cannot make up her mind or his mind how many sales pitches it takes in order to bring about a change in thinking. Ask some smoker who has tried again and again over the years to kick the habit. Ask how easily change comes in that personal habit. Ask a widow or a widower how she or he is getting along adapting to life alone after having spent most of life together with someone whom they dearly loved.

Change is difficult. But, whether we like it or not, whether we accept it or not, we are living in a changing world. Change is inevitable.

As long ago as 513 BC, the Greek philoso-

pher Heraclitus said that everything exists in a constant state of flux. He spoke of fire as the first-principle of all things because the flames of a fire are constantly moving. You can't capture them; you can't hold them still; there's never even an instant when they're the same as they were before.

While change has been around since the beginning of time, it seems to me, and perhaps to you as well, that the speed of change has accelerated, that there is more change and that the change comes faster and faster.

I read recently that there are 35,000 new titles published in the United States every year. If you read 1,000 books a week, it would take you most of the year just to keep up with what is now being published. And what about all the rest that have already been published?

It used to be that, when you watched television, the choices were relatively simple because you had only a half dozen channels to choose from. But now you can have hundreds to choose from, and by the time you finish going through all of them to find out what's on, the program that you want to watch is over.

Marriages have an average or a median duration in the United States of seven years. That means that half of the marriages in our country last longer than seven years and half of the marriages in our country last less than seven years.

Some people resist this change, and some people sort of go with the flow. But the bottom line is that it hardly makes any difference at all because change is inevitable. So what we need is something to fix upon - like the compass that has its magnetic north - some reference point, some anchor, something that doesn't change.

Some years ago, a farmer was trying to teach his son how to plow the fields. In order to explain to him how to plow a straight furrow,

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he took his son out to the back forty and said to him, “If you want to go in a straight line, what you need is some fixed point. Look at a tree or a farmhouse or a rock. Keep your eye on that and you’ll be able to plow in a straight line.”

The father walked away and went up to the top of a hill so he could watch his son try his first shot at plowing. As he got to the top of the hill and looked at what had been done, instead of being a straight line it was something more like a cork screw that went all the way across the field. He went back down the hill and said to his son, “I told you to fix your eyes on something and watch it.”

He said, “I did. I’m watching the cow.”

We laugh at that boy’s naivete, except we often do pretty much the same thing in our own lives and we are repeatedly thrown off course. We try to live life in a straight line, but we foolishly fix our point-of-reference on such grazing cows as emotions or relationships or circumstances.

What are the changes in your life? Perhaps it’s personal emotions. That can be one of the most difficult things of all to get under control. Someone hurts your feelings. They criticize you and you feel unimportant and unappreciated. Anger wills up inside and bursts forth in hostile words and actions. When we fix upon our emotions, it’s difficult to plot a straight line.

If not emotions, maybe it’s employment. In our society, we tend to fix our identity upon our employment. One of the first questions we ask someone is where they work and what they do. That means that when you get a demotion or a promotion, when you’re laid off or when your company goes broke, when you get a new job or lose the old job, the change is often monumental and it’s hard to stay on course.

For others, it’s marriage and family. This is the place where there can be the greatest joy and also the greatest unhappiness. The battleground of life is strewn with casualties of the wars of marital and family change such as unwanted divorces, unexpected illness and death, financial reverses or just plain unhappy mar-

riages. People who are single want to get married, and people who are married want to be single. Sex and responsibility and children and interpersonal relationships all bring constant changes to our lives.

Change associated with aging can be especially difficult to deal with. We live in a society that ill-prepares us to face the changes that come to our bodies as we gain unwanted weight, as we droop where we used to be firm, as we wrinkle where we used to smooth. We fight back against the changes of age by having our mid-life crises, complete with affairs, career changes and jogging.

If change is going to keep coming, and it is, there has to be some anchor point, some stability point. There has to be some solution. And there is. The answer is found in the simple words of Hebrew 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” The good news is that, in this changing world, we can live for the changeless Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever.

When you look at Hebrews 13:8, there is an immediate tendency to pull it out of context and make it stand alone, but don’t do that. It immediately follows verse 7 for a powerful reason. It is looking backward. Hebrews 13:7 says, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

Remember what happened before in the good old days, the preceding times. Remember the leaders who brought you to the point where you are. Hebrews 11 lists such individuals as Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham, Moses and Rahab.

But I think the author of these verses had something even closer in mind. Hebrews 13:7 is not just looking to the distant days of ancient Israel. It is probably referring to those who first brought the gospel to the Hebrew church – apostles, evangelists, missionaries. Remember them! Remember the impact they had on your life. Follow their example. Praise God for them and for everything good that has happened.

But they're gone. They've died or moved on. Their ministry is over. Change has come. So what do Christians do when the days that we would seek to hold on to have disappeared and the people we depended upon have long gone their own way? That is precisely when we must set our "fix" on Jesus Christ who "is the same yesterday and today and forever."

The purpose of this verse is not primarily to teach that Jesus lived and lives and will live. It is to teach his sameness. Do you remember how Jesus used to be? Do you remember his love and his compassion? Do you recall his self-sacrifice? Do you remember the promises he made and kept? He is exactly the same today!

Do you want to know what Jesus Christ will be like tomorrow and next year and into eternity? Then look at the way he is because that's the way he'll be tomorrow: consistent, compassionate, loving, keeping his promises, the same Jesus - just as true, just as helpful, just as real. He absolutely will not change!

What a marvelous revelation! Times may change, but Jesus won't. Your husband or wife may leave you, but Jesus will never leave you or forsake you. You may lose your job, but you can never lose your promise that he will provide your every need. Your health may slip away, but through Jesus Christ you have eternal life.

A while back, Charleen and I had lunch with Dr. Henry Brandt. In the course of that lunch conversation, he began to reflect upon the suffering and death of his first wife. Then he said, "You know, I discovered that all these things that I've been telling people, all this stuff that I've been preaching, everything that I've been reading from the Bible and writing in books all of these years are true! They really work! I know it not just from the Bible, but also from personal experience." Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Several years ago Charleen and I were

caught in a brief civil war in Nairobi, Kenya. We had just arrived in Nairobi from a conference in Rwanda with missionaries from all over Central Africa. During that conference, I had been teaching from the Gospel of John about the peace of Jesus Christ in troubled times that passes all understanding.

It was only a short time later in a neighboring country, with bullets flying and borders closed, with rebels broadcasting over the radio and soldiers coming to our room with machine guns that I discovered from personal experience that . . . it's true! Jesus Christ is the same no matter where you go, no matter who you are, no matter what happens, no matter when it is. He is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Let me challenge you to fix your life on Jesus Christ. Let him be Number One. It comes down to a personal decision of who is going to be the boss, who is going to be the Lord, of your life.

Is he the Lord of your life? If he is, you have a sure anchor to see you through any change. If he isn't, will you decide right now to make him Lord? And tell him that you have made that decision.

In AD 155, in the Roman Empire community of Smyrna, lived an old Christian man named Polycarp. It was a time when anti-Christian feelings and laws were sweeping across the Empire. Polycarp was arrested for being a Christian, and, more specifically, for his unwilling-

ness to worship Caesar.

The sheriff of Smyrna tried to persuade him, saying, "Polycarp, now what harm is there

in saying, 'Lord Caesar' and in offering incense and so on and thus saving thyself?" But Polycarp wouldn't give in.

He was taken to the arena in Smyrna, while thousands of citizens of that community filled the seats. They demanded that he be fed to the wild beasts because he was an atheist. They be-

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lieved that if you couldn't see your God, if you didn't have an idol or you didn't have a shrine or you didn't have a painting or something that you worshipped, then you really didn't worship anyone.

The Roman Proconsul of Smyrna had compassion on this old man. Quieting the crowd with his raised hand, he said to Polycarp, "Curse the Christ, and live."

Polycarp said, "Eighty and six years have I served him and he hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?" And he died. They burned him at the stake. The custom was that a man was to be tied or nailed to the stake before the fires were lighted, but Polycarp declined that. He stood there unbound, unsecured, as the flames burned around him, and he died for Jesus Christ.

Now tell me, who is it that enables a man to so die? Who is it that keeps us strong against opposition? Who is it that keeps us steady through change? Who is it? It is Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever!

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