

THE FIXED POINT IN A CHANGING WORLD**HEBREWS 13:8**

Many years ago now, my uncle sent my mother a memorable Christmas card. It had a picture of our planet on the front taken from outer space. The inside message was simple, direct, and true. It said, “Jesus is the fixed point in a changing world.” That’s an important reminder on any day of the year, but particularly on the first Sunday of a brand new year – 2022. Years come and go so quickly, don’t they? Change is thrust upon us whether we like it or not, want it or not, or anticipate it or not. What will 2022 mean for you and me? It promises to be a year of great change for Cheryl and me. Sometime this year we will move off into retirement. We’ll be living in a new state by the end of 2022. It will be a year of great change for this wonderful church. You will call and install a new pastor. You personally and your family may go through big changes as well. One thing is certain. All of us will experience change of some kind in 2022. The older I grow, the more I realize the inevitability of change and – along with it – how little control I have over many of the changes in life.

But Jesus is different. He is indeed the fixed point in your life and mine yesterday, today, and forever. That fact is succinctly stated in our text today: Hebrews 13:8. That statement is found in the last chapter of Hebrews where the author seemed to throw out several final exhortations to his readers. Let’s read Hebrews 13:8-16 to get more of a sense of the context, but our attention is going to be put solely on v. 8 today. Again, v. 8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Is that good news? Indeed, it is. It’s very good news on this first Sunday of 2022. It will enrich our celebration of the Lord’s Supper in a few moments as well. But why is that one verse and the message it provides such good news? Because it underlines two wonderful truths for us as we step into a brand new year. First of all, the fact Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever gives you and me...

A REASON TO FEEL SECURE: JESUS NEVER CHANGES.

God is changeless. One of His essential attributes is the fact He doesn’t and can’t change. Because the author of Hebrews said here that Jesus doesn’t change, he implied Jesus is God. By definition, only God doesn’t and can’t change; therefore, Jesus is God. The Bible is full of the teaching that God is changeless. When God appeared to Moses in the desert and revealed His Name, He said, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” (Ex. 13:4 NLT) God’s Name is actually an expression of His changelessness. “I am who I am” comes out as “Yahweh” in Hebrew. It literally means, “I am the One who is” or “I will be who I will be.” Later, the psalmist made this statement about God, “You are always the same. Years cannot change you.” (Ps. 102:27 CEV). In the New Testament letter of James, we read the following, “Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.” (James 1:17 NLT) James meant even the stars in the night sky – the lights - which burn for billions of years change over that length of time. But God? He Himself never casts any kind of shadow by going through change, so to speak.

You might say, “Well, that’s interesting and even awesome Jesus doesn’t change, but why is it a good thing?” It means Jesus is complete. He always has been and always will be. Jesus doesn’t grow or develop. God doesn’t mature or get better. He can’t change for the better because He’s already perfect. He certainly can’t change for the worse because then He wouldn’t be perfect anymore. It also means Jesus exists forever. Before His birth in Bethlehem, Jesus already existed as the Son of God – the second Person of the Trinity. Yes, Jesus, the human being, had a beginning, but He never had a beginning as the Son of God. Jesus, as the Son of God, will never die or go out of existence. He is eternal. It means Jesus is permanently and forever the way He is today. He doesn’t gain new abilities or somehow lose the ones He has now. He doesn’t get older or wiser. He will never get stronger or weaker than He is right now. What God was in the Old Testament, He was also in the New Testament. What we read and learn about Jesus in the accounts found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is exactly the same way He is today and will be tomorrow.

When we say Jesus never changes, it also means Jesus’ character never changes. That’s incredibly good news! God has described His own character like this, “I am the Lord God. I am merciful and very patient with my people. I show great love, and I can be trusted. I keep my promises to my people forever, but I also punish anyone who sins.” (Ex. 34:6-7 CEV) Jesus made many marvelous statements about His own character. Here’s one of my favorites. “If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest. Take the yoke I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest. This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light.” (Mt 11:28-30 CEV)

If God’s character never changes, you can be very sure Jesus will always tell you the truth and never lie to you about anything. Because He already knows all things past, present, and future, whatever God says is always true and it’s always true forever. God’s truthfulness never changes because it’s an aspect of His being changeless. The Bible says, “God is no mere human! He doesn’t tell lies or change his mind. God always keeps his promises.” (Num 23:19 CEV) That means you can count on and believe all of God’s promises found in His Word. You can be sure what God has promised and planned for the future will never change. Whatever God does today was already something He planned to do even before He created this thing we call “time.” All God planned to do will come true. Everything God has committed to do and promised to do will be done.

When we reflect on how changeless God is, we realize how changeful our own lives happen to be. The ending of one year and the beginning of a new one is one of those times when the fact of change comes home to us significantly. We tend to stop and take stock of our lives when the calendar changes from December to January. Let’s face it – change is a fact of life for you, me, and everyone. Sure, some change is good and we can look forward to it. But change can also bring sadness, heartache, turmoil, and a sense of loss. For instance, with the passing of years, relationships inevitably change. You lose touch with childhood or college friends. Close friends move away. Marriages can become dull and lifeless. Parents and kids can drift apart. And then, of

course, there's the experience of someone close to you dying. That's the ultimate and permanent change to any and every human relationship.

Did you hear about the letter that was sent by the federal government's Health and Human Services Department some years ago now to someone living in South Carolina? The letter read, "Your food stamps will be stopped effective on such and such a date because we received notice that you passed away. You may reapply if your circumstances change." Whether this year or next, your relationships will change. Whether this year or next, your economic situation will change. Whether this year or not, your job will change. Whether this year or next, your health will change. Whether this year or next or at some point some years from now, each of us will face that ultimate change. We will die. We will pass out of this life into eternity. And when that happens – contrary to some in the government who think differently - we won't be able to reapply somewhere to change our circumstances!

Change is inevitable. You could say, I suppose, that the only thing that doesn't change is the fact of change itself! But, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Other people's attitudes toward you can change. People can forget you, lose interest in you, stop caring about you, and even cease loving you. But God? He never changes His attitude toward or about you. Never. It's always the same. God always wants to hear your prayers no matter how happy or miserable you are or how content or desperately in need you might be. God is always there. God doesn't have office hours, an answering machine, or voice mail. God never goes on vacation or even takes a day off. God's eyes never glaze over in boredom when you talk to Him. God is never moody or depressed. God never needs a little space from you. God never has a bad day and tells you to get lost. Yes, God has emotions just like you and me, but they never alter or affect His attitude toward you. In His Word, God says, "'I've never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love, and more love!'" (Jer. 31:3 MSG)

The Lord's Table today is a reminder Jesus never changes. What He was yesterday, He is today. What He is today, He will be tomorrow. In another part of Hebrews, we're reminded that the One who died on the cross and then rose from the dead to pay the penalty for our sins now lives in Heaven. "Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf." (Heb 7:25 NLT) One of Jesus' tasks is to intercede every day of 2022 on our behalf for every sin that needs forgiving, every request that needs answering, every problem that needs fixing, and every disaster that needs a miracle. The fact Jesus never changes ought to fill you up today with a joyful sense of confidence and security as you step into the new year of 2022. As a result, "Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." (Heb. 4:16 NLT)

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." He is the fixed point in the changing world. On their 50th wedding anniversary, a wife complained to her husband, "You never tell me you love me." The husband replied, "I told you I loved you on our wedding day, didn't I? If I ever change my mind, I'll let you know." That's one very

dumb man! Because the fact is we all need to be told we're loved – told often and told regularly. Every time you take the bread and the cup in your hands, God is telling you how much He loved you and still loves you. His love will not change. His love will never let you go. His love will not fail. He will always be gracious, truthful, and kind. Jesus can't be harsh, deceitful, or thoughtless. And because God never changes, Jesus alone deserves to be the foundation upon which you build your life. Sink deeper into Jesus in 2022. Build your life into Him and upon Him with even more confidence than you did in 2021.. Now, I see another wonderful truth suggested by this one verse. The fact Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever gives you and me...

A REASON TO HAVE JOY: I CAN CHANGE.

Ironically, this wonderful fact about Jesus – He's the same yesterday and today and forever – would be terrible and tragic if it was true of you or me. Think about it! Wouldn't it be horrible if you could not change? Just imagine being stuck for all eternity the way you are today! I'm profoundly grateful Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever. That gives me abundant reason to feel safe and secure. But I'm also profoundly grateful that Rick Breusch isn't the same today as he was yesterday. I'm also very glad that the way I am today will not be the way I will be forever. By the grace of God, I can change. By the grace of God, I will change. That's a reason for great joy!

As we begin a new year, let me encourage you to thank God you have the ability and power to change spiritually. That's a gift of God's grace made possible because the Holy Spirit lives within you. We Christians like to talk about being born again or getting saved. Well, the ability to change means to experience fully all that comes with being born again or saved. Once, we were locked into sin's degradation. Now we can experience the Holy Spirit's transformation. Once, we were God's enemies, now we're His friends. Once, we were spiritual orphans. Now we're God's children.

The willingness and ability to change is what the Bible means by repentance. Through the Holy Spirit, you become a different person than you used to be. You move from unbelief to faith. You move from being a skeptic about Jesus to being His follower. You move from telling lies to telling the truth. You move from being proud to being humble. You move from promiscuity to purity. You move from being self-focused to being outwardly focused. You move from being dominated by what our culture thinks is important to advancing the Kingdom of God which really is important.

Change and repentance go together. The Bible says, "If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts." (1 Jo 1:8-10 NLT) Every time we partake of the Lord's Supper – as we will do again today – it's a good time to be open to the changes God wants to make in our lives by confessing our sins. In other words, repenting. I wonder in what ways God will invite me, Rick Breusch, to change in 2022! How will God invite you to change in this new year? Spiritual change doesn't happen all at once and we never

reach perfection this side of Heaven, but – when the unchanging Jesus lives His life through you and me – we can change, we will change, and we must change.

A medical study some years ago revealed just how difficult change is for human beings. Roughly 600,000 people have heart bypass surgery every year in our country. These people are told after their bypasses that they must change their lifestyle. The heart bypass is a temporary fix. They must change their diet. They must quit smoking and drinking. They must exercise and reduce stress in their lives. In essence, the doctors say, “Change or die.” You would think a near-death experience would be so compelling to these patients that they would make all the appropriate lifestyle alterations and then some. Sadly, that’s just not the way it is. According to this study, 90% of heart patients do not change. Their lifestyles stay pretty much the same and they keep on living their lives as they did prior to their surgery. Study after study indicates that two years after heart bypass surgery, most patients haven’t altered their behavior. The majority of heart bypass patients choose not to change. They act as if they would rather die than change. Change is that difficult for us human beings.

So, let’s be honest about change. Sure, some change is easy, effortless, and we enjoy it. But the process of being gradually and increasingly transformed so that we resemble more and more the character of Jesus can be very challenging. It demands you let go of some things that you might enjoy, but they’re killing you spiritually. It demands admitting some negative things about yourself and asking God to help you change. It demands you get rid of some ways you relate to God – or don’t relate to Him – that are just plain wrong. To tell you the truth, changing spiritually can be a difficult, exhausting experience at times. I’ve discovered, too, that God sets the agenda. In other words, He decides what needs to change in you and me and when it needs to change. He schedules change moments according to His sovereignty. Our job is – like the words of the old hymn – simply to trust and obey. The Bible says, “So all of us... can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.” (2 Cor. 3:18 NLT) But it’s not all hard, painful stuff. The joy will certainly come – joy unspeakable and full of glory – as we surrender to God’s plans and purposes for our lives come what may.

Yes, the Lord’s Table is a reminder that Jesus never changes. But it’s also a reminder that you and I can change. The first step is confession and repentance. What a great way to start 2022! So, as you hold the bread and cup in your hands today, be real with God. Confess whatever He reveals to you and repent of it. But, also, celebrate the incredible fact that by His grace you can change. And also celebrate the even more incredible fact that Jesus cannot and will not change. He is the fixed point in a changing world. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

The late Dallas Willard was a philosophy professor and also wrote some great books on what it means to follow Jesus well. He grew up in an area of southern Missouri where electricity was available only in the form of lightning. He said they had more of that kind of electricity than they wanted or needed! But in his senior year of high school the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) extended electric lines into the rural area where he

lived. For the first time, electrical power became available to homes and farms. When those electrical lines were made available to the Willard farm, a very different way of life and living presented itself. The fundamental stuff of life – daylight and dark, hot and cold, clean and dirty, work and leisure, preparing food and preserving it – could now be vastly changed for the better. But the Willard family still had to believe in electricity, accept what it could do for them, understand how to use it, and start relying on it by actually accessing it.

The power that could make the lives of the Willard family members – as well as the lives of other farm families – far better was right there near to them. It was now accessible and they could use it. Willard observed that – strange as it may sound – a few farmers did not accept it. They never did enter the whole world of electricity. Some just didn't want to change. Others thought they couldn't afford it so they never accessed it.

The coming of the kingdom of God is a little like the coming of electricity. It's here, it's real, and it's accessible to anyone who will enter into it through faith in Jesus. Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." It's right here. We can partake of God's power and grace even in this life. It's available and accessible to us. Now, here's the analogy. Those farmers in southern Missouri who rejected electricity heard the following invitation, so to speak. "Repent, for the kingdom of electricity is at hand. Repent from your kerosene lamps and lanterns, because electric lights are at hand. Repent from your iceboxes, because electric refrigerators are at hand. Repent from your scrub boards, because electric washing machines are at hand." Moving into the kingdom of electricity demanded a willingness to change. Why do it? Because the end result was a better life. Moving into the kingdom of God demands a far more profound willingness to change and to keep on changing. Why do it? Because the end result is a better life and eternal life.

Each day you and I live, we're invited to live in the kingdom of God. But, in order to get it, we will need to change. And in order to keep it, we will need to keep on changing. If you ask Him, God will give you the grace and the power to change. It may well be difficult and challenging at first, but then God will give you great joy. You will experience Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever. He is – and always will be – the fixed point in a changing world.