Jesus Christ is the Same Forever

Hebrews 13:1-25

Key Verse: 13:8 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

I thank God who helped us study Hebrews thus far for several months during this pandemic and conclude with the final exhortation in the last chapter. All 12 chapters are summarized at the beginning of this letter with the seven characters of Jesus Christ written in 1:2-4. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the appointed heir, the creator of the universe, the radiance of God’s glory, the exact representation of the Father, the sustainer of all things, the provider for purification of our sins. We also learned that Jesus is superior to angels, Moses, and any other high priests because he sacrificed himself once for all for our eternal redemption. Through his death Jesus opened the new and living way for us to come to God with confidence and assurance. Therefore, we must live by faith which pleases God as other ancestors of faith did.

In chapter 13, the author gives us his final exhortation and benediction. He teaches us our life principle as Christians. What are they?

First, keep on loving one another. (1) Look at verse 1. “***Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.***” Love one another. This is Jesus’ command for his disciples. On the night he was arrested, he washed his disciples’ feet and said, “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” (Jn 13:34) Here, loving means forgiving. Jesus commanded them to forgive one another and love them as Jesus loved. If you want to become Jesus’ disciple, forgive your enemies. Forgive their wrongdoings, mistake, and sins as Jesus forgives us. Not just once, but continually. Keep on loving! Continually forgive! Peter asked Jesus, “*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?*” *Jesus answered, “I tell you not seven times, but seventy –seven times.*” (Mt 18:21-22)

People say that God HAS love. But the Bible says that God IS love. 1 John 4:17 says, “*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.*” God’s love is unconditional, sacrificial, and forgiving. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16) We don’t love sinners who sinned against us, but God loves sinners. Jesus died for sinners like us. When we love, we live as children of God and become disciples of Jesus, who is love.

Second, show hospitality (2). Look at verse 2. “***Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it***.” One day, while driving through my neighborhood, I saw a sign in the front yard of a house saying, “*Spread kindness*.” Spread not the virus, but kindness. What an encouraging message! It is the same message as ‘show your hospitality.’ The word ‘hospitality in Greek is ‘*philoxenia*’ which means ‘love of strangers’. In Genesis 18, Abraham showed his hospitality to strangers, who were angels of God. There is a story about a young manger in a motel in a small town. On a dark and stormy night, an old couple visited his motel. They were wet and stranded in the storm. The young manager welcomed them and served them his best. The old couple were moved by his hospitality and professionalism. A few months after they left the motel, the young manager received an invitation to a luxurious hotel in Manhattan, New York. The old couple were multi-billionaires who owned this luxurious hotel. They hired him as a manager for their hotel and later appointed him as president. The young manager served angels.

Third, practice your compassion (3). Look at verse 3. “***Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.***” Our love must not be limited to our brothers and neighbors. Our love must extend to those who are suffering in prison and hospitals and any other shelters. God’s love is unlimited and unfathomable. I am encouraged by Kit West, who visits a shelter downtown and serves them with music and the word of God every Sunday morning. He practices God’s love and compassion. The word ‘compassion’ means to ‘share suffering together’. Jesus rebuked the hypocritical Pharisees, who had the religious form, but didn’t have the love of God in their hearts. Jesus said, “*God desires mercy, not sacrifice*.” *Paul also said, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*” (1 Co 12:26) I thank God for the loving community in our church. Someone said that we are one big family regardless of race or age. Indeed, we are united with Christ’s love. We are one in Christ who share each other’s joys and burdens together. I pray that we may continue to grow as a loving and caring community in this generation. Amen!

Fourth, keep your marriage pure (4) Look at verse 4. “***Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.***” In the beginning marriage was established by God and for God. When Adam was alone, God had compassion on him and made a woman as his suitable helper. So, the first marriage and family were established in the Garden of Eden. A woman is not an object or good for man’s selfish desire. A woman is created as an equal to do the work of God and share God’s blessing with man. A marriage is between a male and a female. This is the biblical principle and creation order. A marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure. Here, marriage bed means sexual relationship. Jesus warned against divorce without any marital default or unfaithfulness. (Mt 5:32) Marriage is sacred because it is done before God. Jesus said, “*What God has joined together, let men not separate.*” (Mk 10:12) God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. The Apostle Paul said that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Co 6:9-11)

Fifth, manage your money (5-7) Look at verses 5-7. “***Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me***?” Money itself is not evil. We need money to serve the Lord and support our families. But the love of money, which is greed, is sin. 1 Timothy 6:10 says, “*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*” Drug trading for money is old news in the media. Human trafficking and the black market sale of human organs are nefarious stories. How can people do such wicked things? Because of greed, men become worse than animals. As for Christians and children of God, we are not exempt from this matter. Jesus warned that we cannot serve two masters. We have to choose between God and Money. (Mt 6:24) Some people worship money and become slaves of money.

 What should we do with money? What kind of attitude should we have toward money? First of all, we must believe that God is our helper. God is our loving Father. He will never leave us or forsake us. We don’t have to be afraid because he is with us in all circumstances. Since God is our helper who takes care of us, we must learn how to trust in God and to be content with what we have now and what we are now. Verse 5 says, “*Be content with what you have.*” Paul also said in Philippians 4:11-13. “*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength*.” This does not mean that we should live poor forever. Not at all! This means that we must be a good manager for our lives and for our money. It is more important to manage than to gain. No matter how much money you make, even a million dollars a year, if you cannot manage your money, you will live poor. You will not be satisfied until you earn more money than you make now. It is very important for Christians to manage money based on Biblical principles. We have to offer to God first, who provides all things for our lives such as family, job, health, and so on. We need to offer the whole tithing as God’s portion. (Mal 3:10) Jesus promised his disciples that when we seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, God will provide all these things – what to eat, what to wear, where to live, how to support – as additional blessings. (Mt 6:33) Then, we have to manage the rest of money with frugal and self-disciplined way. We have to spend within our income. If we spend more than we make, we will suffer from paying credit debts. God wants us to be a good manager for our lives and our money. God wants us to learn how to be content with what we have and what we are.

Sixth, remember your leaders and pray for them. One of the most popular subjects in colleges and companies today is leadership. It shows the lack of leadership in our generation. Verse 7 and 17 teaches us Christian leadership. Look at verse 7. “***Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith***.” According to this verse, a Christian leader should be a messenger of God’s word. Jesus said, “*For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.*” (Mt 12:34) We speak and talk from what we have in our hearts. So, we need to make God’s word richly dwell in us and among us. (Col 3:16) Peter the Apostle said, *“If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God...*” (1Pe 4:11) Leaders should be careful of what they speak and talk. Depending on what they say and how they speak, leaders may save others or kill others. Proverbs 10:11 says, “*The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.*” Paul counselled Timothy, the young pastor of the church in Ephesus, “*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*.” (Eph 4:29) Jesus said a tree is recognized by its fruit. (Mt 12:33) True leadership is not recognized by what they say, but by how to live. “*Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*”

We have to pray for our leaders so that they may speak the very words of God and not fall into temptation. Leaders are also weak and vulnerable human beings. Satan attacks leaders so that their members may be scattered. Satan attacks pastors and priests and leaders of ministries so that the unity of the church of God may be broken. Look at verse17. “***Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you***.” We have confidence in our leaders when we pray for them. When we pray, we acknowledge God’s sovereignty over their leadership. When we pray for leaders, they also keep watch over their members with more affection and responsibility. In verses 19-20. the author also humbly asks prayer support from the readers, “***Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.***”

Jesus is our true leader and good shepherd. He is superior to any other leaders in human history. One of the most required characteristics of a leader is faithfulness. Leaders should be faithful to their family, ministry, company, party, and nation. Look at verse 8. “***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”***. This means that Jesus is faithful. He is faithful to the Father, his people, his mission and his calling. Above all, his love endures forever. He loved us and loves us and will love us forever. In John 13, Jesus loved his disciples to the very end, even though he was going to die soon. (Jn 13:1) He loved his disciples to the end and promised to be with them to the very end of the age. (Mt 28:20) Because of Jesus’ unchanging character and love, we follow him to the point of death. His love and power last forever. We experience his unchanging love and power even today. To this day, when we pray in his name, we experience miracles. The lame walk, the blind see, and the dead rise. His word lasts forever. Jesus said in Matthew 24:35, “*heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*”. As he was loving, compassionate, and holy, so He is the same today. He will be the same in the future, too. Let us read verse 8 together. Let us be a faithful, loving, compassionate, responsible shepherd and steward like Jesus. Amen.