

# **JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME FOREVER**

## **(Our Great Shepherd)**

Hebrews 13:1-25

Key Verse: 13:8

**“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”**

Through Hebrews we have learned Jesus’ superiority. Jesus is superior to angels, Moses, Levitical priests, and temple sacrifices. Jesus is our Great High Priest, exalted to the right hand of God as Lord of all. Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant with better promises. The author has urged Hebrew believers to hold on to faith in Jesus, overcoming the temptation to shrink back into Judaism to avoid persecution. Now, in closing, he exhorted them to imitate Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. He encouraged them to go to Jesus outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. It was a call to live with a clear Christian identity. Finally he blessed them by the God of peace through the blood of the eternal covenant. In doing so, he describes Jesus as the “great Shepherd of the sheep.”

There are many exhortations in today’s passage. The common factor is that they lead us to imitate Jesus. So Jesus’ name is mentioned throughout this chapter (8,12,13,15,20,21). Imitating Jesus is more than following his example. It is union with him as the source of life. It is following Jesus, our great Shepherd, and learning to be shepherds. This makes a person different, and a blessing to others. Many people studied well and made impressive accomplishments. Often, they are willing to sacrifice others in doing so. This leads to suspicion and mistrust and makes the world cold. People need shepherds who take care of them with genuine love. Jesus is our great Shepherd who laid down his life for us. He wants us to imitate him. He does not want us to be “vampire Christians” who only suck his blood for our own benefit. Let’s learn to imitate Jesus as shepherds for the people of our time.

**First, pastoral exhortations (1-6).** Practical teachings about love, marriage and money are relevant in every culture down through the generations. How a person deals with them determines his happiness. This is true for Christians too. So the author gives practical exhortations regarding them. First, he encouraged them to keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters (1). Loving one another was at the core of Jesus’ teachings. It was the new command that Jesus gave us to obey (Jn 13:34-35). When Christians love one another, people on the outside see Jesus through them. We want to “reach

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out” and bring new people to Jesus. Yet what kind of community are we bringing them into? If we are fighting with one another and blaming each other, no one will want to remain in this community. Loving one another is essential for evangelism. But more than that, it is Jesus’ command. Apostle John said that anyone who does not love his brother is not a child of God, but of the devil (1Jn 3:10). How can we express our love for one another? We need to listen carefully and truly understand others’ problems. Then we should help them prayerfully and practically. Sometimes we feel too busy with our own problems to help others. We are afraid we will sacrifice too much. Yet, when we love others by faith, we find true meaning and joy. Burdens and conflicts disappear. We experience God’s deep grace and his abundant provision (2Co 9:8).

Our love should go beyond our community to embrace strangers (2). Strangers are unknown; it is risky to invite them in. Nevertheless, Christians are to show hospitality to strangers. We are to welcome them, serve them, provide for them, and bless them on their way. Father Abraham and Sarah welcomed strangers and served them generously. In so doing, they once received God himself into their home. Jesus said, “...**whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me**” (Mt 25:40). Practicing hospitality is an important Christian virtue. Many guests come to Chicago from all over the world. We have a great privilege of serving them. Let’s continue to practice hospitality. In addition, we should remember those in prison (3). This seems to be fellow Christians who are persecuted for their faith. Brothers and sisters in hostile environments, like Sudan, the Middle East, China and North Korea come to mind. We should remember them and pray for them as though we suffer with them.

Verse 4 says, “**Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.**” God created male and female. In his wisdom, he unites them into one for his divine purpose of stewarding the world. Marriage is not of human origin; it is a divine institution. So human beings have no right to redefine marriage according to public opinion. Since God designed marriage it should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure. The sexually immoral and adulterers despise God’s purpose in human sexuality and marriage. They provoke God’s wrath and judgment. Honoring marriage and keeping the

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marriage bed pure is the way of happiness and bearing God's blessing. It is the way to be a good influence to our children and society.

Verse 5a says, **“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have....”** This does not mean that Christians are to be like homeless people. It does not prohibit gaining riches. But it warns us to guard our hearts against the love of money. It instructs us to use money wisely as God's stewards. Paul warns us: **“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”** (1Ti 6:10). Instead of loving money we should be content with what we have. Godliness with contentment is great gain (1Ti 6:6). We are free from greed and the stress that it brings. We can enjoy life. How can we do that? By believing God's promise: **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”** (5b). Then we can say with confidence: **“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”** (6)

**Second, imitate Christ as your leaders did (7-25).** In this part, the author guides the Hebrew Christians in church life. First of all, he urges them to imitate the faith of their leaders. Verse 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.”** Here the leaders referred to have finished their race of faith and gone on to be with the Lord. As fallen human beings they were not perfect. But they preached the word of God faithfully and obeyed it in their own lives. Their faith was exemplary. Imitating their faith is a practical way to grow spiritually. Many Christian leaders in history are worthy of being imitated: Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Dwight Moody, Billy Graham, and so on. In the UBF ministry, God raised the late Dr. Samuel Lee as an exemplary shepherd and Bible teacher. Dr. Lee served God's children one by one with the heart of Christ. Jonathan Reese was a talented but spoiled American boy. He grew addicted to soda pop and various kinds of entertainment. He became heavy and could not study well. But Dr. Lee saw him with great hope. He gave him the prayer topic to sing for Christ like a young Pavarotti. He helped Jonathan to diet and exercise, personally supervising him for many hours. Jonathan lost weight and began to look good. Then he left UBF blaming Dr. Lee and others. But Dr. Lee never stopped loving him. He prayed and trusted God's grace. After Dr. Lee's departure, through some painful trials, Jonathan remembered

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the grace of God he received. He came back to Christ and joined UBF ministry. Now he is a missionary in Indonesia, serving many young people as a shepherd. This week he begins an English worship service in Depok chapter. This is a fruit of Dr. Lee's shepherd's heart for one person. There are many other examples. It is good to remember Dr. Lee's example as a shepherd and to imitate his faith.

In imitating the faith of our leaders, the point is to follow Jesus. Jesus is the object of our faith. Let's read verse 8. **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."** Church leaders serve God for a while and pass away. They reflect the character of Christ, but not perfectly. Jesus is perfect and he lives forever. The same Jesus who worked in our leaders also works in us today. Jesus is not just an example, but the living source of all that we need. Leaders are very limited in time, energy, and resources. They cannot embrace all people all the time. But Jesus is not limited: his resources are infinite, his love is unconditional, and his wisdom is unfathomable. Jesus is living, almighty, eternal and changeless. Jesus is always willing to help us.

The world is changing day by day. Value systems, lifestyles, ways of communication, and ideas rapidly change. Usually it is not for the better, but for the worse. We naturally conform to the patterns of this world (Ro 12:2). It is not easy to resist such trends. But in the midst of this change, Jesus is always the same. His truth and grace never change and are always effective for salvation. Jesus said, **"I am the way and the truth and the life"** (Jn 14:6a). **"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life"** (Jn 8:12). When we hold on to Jesus we can resist the trends of the world and grow to be like him. When we imitate Jesus, he strengthens us to run the race of faith to the end. Let's fix our eyes on Jesus and imitate him. I was the last person who could be raised as a shepherd for others. But Jesus, my good Shepherd, has shown me his deep grace. When I was lost in my sins of lust, pride and selfishness, he called me through Mark's gospel study with his servants. His word spoke to me personally, saying, **"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to the call the righteous, but sinners"** (Mk 2:17). Jesus became my spiritual doctor to heal my sinsick soul. He called me to be a shepherd for others and led me to his servant, Dr. Samuel Lee, for training. Dr. Lee labored for me with tears and many prayers. Once, he asked me to take care of a person with many kinds of problems: family problem, language

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problem, school study problem, visa problem, and so on. Instead of serving him, I demanded him to work hard for my fellowship. Dr. Lee kindly instructed me to learn Jesus' compassion and prayed for me. Then the Holy Spirit changed my heart. I began to see him with compassion and to serve him in many ways. Gradually, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I could grow as a shepherd. I am sure that when I hold on to Jesus, who is the same forever, he will continue to guide me for his glory.

In verse 9 the author warns of all kinds of strange teachings which carry us away from faith in Jesus. Specifically, he warns against legalistic dietary restrictions rooted in the Levitical law. Judaizers claimed that eating ceremonial food had power to sanctify. But in truth, it was of no spiritual benefit. Our hearts can be strengthened only by grace, when we simply trust in Jesus and accept his forgiveness and cleansing. Judaizers exulted in their privilege to eat ceremonial food. But Christians have a much greater privilege. It is to come to the altar—which is the cross of Jesus (10). On the Day of Atonement, the high priest carried the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering. But the bodies of the animals were burned outside the camp (11). In a similar way, Jesus suffered outside the city gate, rejected by the Jews. By doing so, he made his people holy through his own blood (12). We can be purified by accepting this blood as we participate in communion with him. In that sense, all Christians have a higher privilege than the high priest of the old covenant.

So the author exhorts us, "Let us go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore" (13). Going to Christ calls for separation from Judaism. This means to leave behind the love of this world and desire for its approval, and rather to embrace the reproach of Christ. In the short run, this may seem costly. But this world is only a temporary dwelling. We are on the way to an eternal city (14). In verses 15-16, the author tells what kind of sacrifices we should offer to God through Jesus. We no longer offer animal sacrifices in the temple. Through Jesus, who is the temple, we can offer sacrifices of praise and good works. The sacrifice of praise is the fruit of lips that openly profess Jesus' name. Sometimes we are afraid to identify as Christians for fear of rejection. But when we openly profess Jesus' name, it is a pleasing sacrifice to God. A Christian's good works are not the way to earn credit for our salvation. They are the fruit of saving grace. When we offer good works with humility and love, God is pleased.

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Verse 17 says, **“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.”** This verse refers to current leaders. Leaders are exposed to everyone. It is easy to see their weak points and criticize them. But we should remember that God called them to be leaders. Criticizing leaders does not please God or benefit those who do it. Rather it hinders us from hearing God’s word and it hinders our prayer. When we see leaders from God’s perspective, have confidence in them and submit to their authority, they are joyful and we can grow spiritually. God holds leaders accountable for the well-being of his people. The author asked, **“Pray for us”** (18a). He was sure that his conscience was clear and desired to act honorably (18b). But he wanted to visit them and restore a pastoral ministry among them (19).

Verses 20-21 are the author’s closing benediction: **“Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”**

Why did the author refer to God as **“the God of peace”**? It is because God really wants us to have peace with him through Jesus. For this, Jesus shed his blood, died and rose again, and brought us into an eternal covenant with God. Through Jesus we now have peace with God (Ro 5:1). And God wants us to have peace with each other too. As God forgave all our sins through Jesus, so we should forgive one another unconditionally. Then the peace of God rules our hearts and our community. The God of peace equips us with everything good for doing his will. He works in us to do what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ.

In the benediction, the author mentioned Jesus as **“that great Shepherd of the sheep.”** Out of his great compassion, Jesus came into the world and served all kinds of sinners. Finally he gave his life for us. As the great Shepherd, Jesus protects us from enemies; Jesus guides us in the way of peace; Jesus feeds us with the living words of God; Jesus brings us to the

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kingdom of God. The words “**great Shepherd**” indicate that he wants us to follow his example and be shepherds under him, so that all may follow him together. When we look at people superficially, they need tutoring to study well, financial support, jobs and marriage candidates. But deep in their souls, they desperately seek a shepherd who can guide them to Jesus with the words of God. They are thirsty for the truth. They are hungry for God’s love. They are wandering, not knowing the meaning and direction of life. They are perishing in their sins. Who can help them? Once we were all in such a pitiful condition. But God had mercy on us through shepherds who sacrificed for us. Now we should be shepherds for God’s flock. Peter encourages us, “**Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be...And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away**” (1Pe 5:2-4). Let’s follow Jesus’ example and be shepherds for God’s flock.

In verse 22 the author urges them to bear with his words of exhortation, for in fact he has written to them quite briefly. The author had a good sense of humor. Then in verses 23-25 he shared final greetings, mentioning various people. He concludes, “**Grace be with you all.**”

Through Hebrews study we have learned that Jesus is our Great High Priest. He opened a new and living way to God through his perfect sacrifice once for all. He is seated at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. He wants us to come to him boldly and with confidence to receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess, fix our eyes on Jesus and imitate Jesus, especially in living as shepherds for those he loves.