

## INTRODUCTION

I'm so glad you are here today. You're in the right place. A businessman from Minnesota flew down to Key West for a business meeting. His wife was going to fly down to join him in a few days. When he was checking in at the hotel he noticed they had some public computers in the lobby so he sat down to email his wife. But he got one letter wrong in the email address. So instead of going to his wife, his email accidentally went to a preacher's wife who had recently lost her husband. When she read the email, the preacher's widow screamed and fainted.

To: My loving wife.  
Subject: I've arrived.

You're probably surprised to hear from me, but they have computers down here now. I see that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then!

P.S. It sure is hot down here!

On this Easter Sunday we are going to focus on Jesus. I've been preaching through the book of Hebrews for the past eighteen months. And today, we have arrived at one of the greatest statements about Jesus in the Bible.

Hebrews 13:7-9 (CSB). "Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Don't be led astray by various kinds of strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be established by grace and not by food regulations, since those who observe them have not benefited."

Well, it's Easter Sunday and it is April Fool's Day. That's an interesting combination. But I assure you I won't be fooling you today. Jesus is really alive and that's no joke. In this message I want us to examine the truth about who Jesus was, who He is, and who He will be forever. Then we will make a personal application about what that means for us.

### I. JESUS REMAINS THE SAME IN A CHANGING WORLD

Our key verse says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Would you agree that our world is changing? Bob Dylan sang, "The times they are a changing." The Little River Band sang, "It's time for a cool change." The world is changing and it's changing faster than it ever has before. A hundred years ago, the average life expectancy of a man in the U.S. was about 37 years; today it is 76.

Those of us who lived in the 1960s remember the space race with the Soviet Union. Within ten years NASA went from putting a man in space to putting a man on the moon. That was a decade of tremendous advancement in space travel. In 1968 Stanley Kubrick extrapolated that trend to make a movie called "2001 a Space Odyssey," in which he predicted that by 2001 we

would be sending men to other planets and that there would be artificial intelligence, talking computers. Do you remember HAL? Do you know how HAL got his name? In the sixties, there was only one computer company, IBM, and those letters couldn't be used, so they just took each letter before IBM and the result was HAL. Well, 2001 has come and gone and there is no interplanetary travel. But today we do have artificial intelligence. Apple introduced Siri in 2011 and now Amazon has Alexa and you can Ask Google.

For instance, I have an iPhone. Let me ask Siri a question. Hey Siri, who is Jesus Christ? "Seriously? Jesus Christ came to planet earth to show God's love to all people. He died on the cross and God raised Him from the dead. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He will be alive long after every iPhone has turned to dust. It makes me wish I could be a human entity so I could be saved. Seriously." Thank you, Siri. So let's take a look at Jesus—past, present, and forever.

### **A. YESTERDAY Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead!**

Jesus took on human flesh at Bethlehem, but He existed long before then. He is co-existent and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus didn't come to planet earth to teach or He would have started a university. He didn't come to heal, or He would have established a hospital. He came to die.

The Apostle Paul summarized the Gospel message in 1 Corinthians 15, one of the passages we read last Tuesday as we are reading through the Bible together. He wrote, "For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4 CSB)

We are all sinners and sin has separated us from a Holy God. Think of it this way: We all owed a sin debt to God that was too big for any of us to pay, so Jesus stepped up to the cross to pay our debt.

Can you imagine getting a bill you could never pay? That actually happened to Mary Horomanski last fall. She went online to check her electric bill and discovered that she owed, \$284 billion. That's more money than Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, and Jeff Bezos have combined. She took her glasses off and polished them to make sure she wasn't seeing things. The company admitted there was a computer error and she only owed \$284.

But when it comes to paying the sin bill, it might as well be \$284 billion, because we could never pay it. But thankfully, "Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, but He washed it white as snow."

But the death of Jesus is only part the Gospel. He was buried and God raised Him from the dead. Christmas and Easter are the two biggest Christian holidays, but think about it: If there had been no Easter, there would never have been a Christmas celebration.

This earth is pockmarked with millions of graves containing the decaying remains of people who have died. Some of the greatest structures in the world are nothing but fancy graves. The great pyramids in Egypt are tombs. The Taj Mahal in India is a mausoleum. And in China the Ming Dynasty Emperors are buried in huge tombs each one covering over 100 acres. You can find the tombs of the dead bodies other religious leaders. But there is an empty tomb in Jerusalem. And as I heard a man shout there a few years ago, "I got GOOD NEWS. He ain't in dere!"

## **B. TODAY Jesus is living in me giving me real life!**

Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. He remained on planet earth for forty days and was seen by over 500 eyewitnesses. And then He ascended back to heaven. He had told the disciples. I must go to my Father. But when I do I will send you a Helper, the Holy Spirit. But Jesus pointed out a very important distinction. He said, "I have been WITH you, but He shall be IN you." And ten days later on the Day of Pentecost, God send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus to fill the lives of the disciples. And suddenly these people who had earlier been hiding behind closed doors, were filled with a Holy boldness to proclaim that Jesus has risen from the dead.

Let me give you a test. Ready? Where is Jesus Christ right now? If you answered, "In heaven, seated at the right hand of God" you're correct, but that's not the best answer. If you answered, "Jesus is here. He promised that where two or three are gathered in His name that He would be in our midst." Good answer. But not the best answer. If you answered, "He's living in my heart." That's the best answer.

I didn't make up the test. Read it for yourself in the Bible. "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test." (2 Corinthians 13:5 CSB)

The greatest discovery I ever made was that the Christian life is not a religion where I try to imitate the morality of Jesus Christ. It is a personal relationship with God in which I surrender to the will of Jesus Christ who lives in me. Then He produces his personality through me. The personality of Jesus is described as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. Jesus is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. My job isn't to try to imitate those character traits; my job is to allow Jesus to produce them in my life.

Let me illustrate this in a simple way. In many ways we're like this glove. We want to do good things but we fail. I could preach at this glove and say, "Pick up that Bible!" But when I put my hand in the glove it's no problem. Sometimes we say, "Lord I just can't love that difficult person." Jesus says, "Let me love that person through you." Lord, I can't forgive that person." Jesus says, "Let me forgive that person through you."

If you allow Jesus to live and rule in your life, today will always be an exciting adventure. So here's the Bible test. Are you aware that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is living in you and changing you to be more like Him every day? If you don't then the Bible says you fail the test.

## **C. FOREVER Jesus reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!**

When George Fredrick Handel was composing the beautiful Hallelujah Chorus in the Messiah, he was fascinated by that phrase from Revelation 11 that says, "And he shall reign forever and ever!" He repeats it ten times in that tremendous song of worship and praise. The Messiah was first performed in London in 1843. It is said that when the Hallelujah chorus began, King George II stood to his feet. And when the king stands, everyone stands. Whether that is true or not, it is true that to this day whenever that song is sung, everyone stands to their feet to honor the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who will reign forever.

The Bible says in Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you shall be saved." Belief is an inner function, confession is an outward function. Have you every truly confessed that Jesus is your Lord? I'm not just talking about repeating the words. But saying it in a way in which you mean: "Jesus is my boss, my leader, my ruler, He is in full control of my life, my family, my job, my wallet, my thought life, and my work life."

The Bible teaches that one day, everyone will acknowledge this truth. "For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow - in heaven and on earth and under the earth - and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11 CSB)

One day every earthly king will confess, "Jesus is Lord." One day Confucius, Buddha, and Mohammed will bow and confess, "Jesus is Lord." Adolph Hitler and Osama ben Laden will bow and confess, "Jesus is Lord."

So there's the truth: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But what does this mean to us?

## **II. JESUS REVEALS THE POWER OF SAME**

We live in such a changing culture that we tend to celebrate the "new" or the "next" and we give the word "same" a negative connotation. We are always looking for the next new big thing but when we talk about "same" we say things like "Same old same old." Or we say, "Same stuff; different day." Same has gotten a bad rap. But Jesus shows us the power of sacred sameness. So let me give you two practical principles about the sacredness of same.

### **A. If you resist the monotonous you may miss the miraculous**

Sometimes a monotonous process can seem unappealing, but it can lead to great success. I love the story of Joshua in the Old Testament. Joshua was ready to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. But their first test was one of the most heavily fortified cities of the ancient world. Massive walls surrounded Jericho. So God told them to walk around the city without saying a word every day for six days. Now, that could have gotten pretty boring. Same old same old. But on the seventh day, God gave them another plan. The Bible says, "Early on the seventh

day, they started at dawn and marched around the city seven times in the same way. That was the only day they marched around the city seven times." (Joshua 6:15 CSB) Did you notice the phrase "the same way?" When they finished the seventh circle around the city, the people shouted and the walls came a tumblin' down. I imagine there were quite a few hyped-up Israeli commandos who griped about doing the same thing every day for six days. They were armed to the teeth and they were ready to attack but God had them do the same thing. If they hadn't kept up that pattern they would have missed the miracle.

Many things we attribute to luck or good fortune are just monotonous things we do over and over again. It's true in sports. A few years ago Giants wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. made an amazing one-hand catch over his head—sadly it was against the Cowboys. People say, "What a lucky catch!" Or "that was a miracle!" Not really Odell Beckham Jr. practices catching the football with one hand hundreds of times. It's part of his pregame warm up. He is doing the same thing over and over again so when it happens it looks like a miracle catch.

Last summer, one of my favorite golfers, Jordan Speith, holed out a sixty-foot bunker shot to win the Traveler's Championship. Some people call it a miracle shot, but that's not true. Jordan practices thousands of bunker shots. He does the same thing over and over again. It may get monotonous, but it leads to victories like that.

Now, because I don't practice sand shot very much if I holed out a sand shot, it really WOULD be a miracle!

### **B. If you are committed to consistency you'll receive a rich reward**

We live in a culture that seems to be allergic to consistency. People join a gym and then quit when they haven't lost forty pounds in three weeks. But if ever decide to stick with it, you will see a reward—that's called consistency—another word for "same."

I often tell our staff team that we don't have to come up with a lot of new ideas each year—we just have to keep doing the same things with excellence: worship, evangelism, discipleship, and ministry. Those are the same things the early church did.

It's good to stay at the same task for a long time. I performed the funeral of a godly man this week. Glenn Uzzell died at age 96. He worked for Tyler Pipe for 42 years. He retired as executive vice president.

I have always had a dream of pastoring a church where I could plant my life and I am experiencing the tremendous joy of pastoring the same church for the last 27 years. And I want to pastor this same church until I retire or the Lord calls me home.

We celebrate marriages of men and women who stay married to same mate for fifty or more years. Don't ever discount the power of same.

The Bible talks about this: "Now we desire each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the full assurance of your hope until the end, so that you won't become lazy but will be imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance." (Hebrews 6:11-12 CSB)

Many of you are dissatisfied spiritually because there is no consistency in your walk with God. For you, God is just a weekend habit, or maybe a habit for Christmas an Easter. You will never experience the joy, peace, and purpose for living if you don't spend consistent time with God.

For example, we are reading through the Bible together this year. Those of you who follow the same pattern and read it or listen to it six days a week are going to receive a rich reward. But it takes consistency—don't quit. If you stick with the same pattern of reading God's Word and praying every day, you will find yourself growing closer and closer to God.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the past sixty days, two very famous, influential people have died. On March 14, Stephen Hawking died. He was one of the most brilliant physicists of all time. His book, *A Brief History of Time*, sold over ten million copies.

He was diagnosed with ALS when he was twenty-one years old and told he might live for two more years. He lived with ALS for over fifty years and was 76 years old when he died.

Stephen Hawking was a gentle atheist. That means he didn't bear any hostility toward believers.

Hawking wrote: "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken-down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark." So, was Stephen Hawking correct? Did his brain just stop and then there was nothing? Is the idea of an afterlife only a fairy tale?

On February 21, four weeks before Stephen Hawking died, another famous person also died. His name was Billy Graham. He died at age 99 after struggling with Parkinson's disease for the past twenty-five years. Billy Graham said this about death: "Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God."

Now, who was right? For the sake of comparison, let's put Stephen Hawking over here and Billy Graham over here. Is death the end and there is no afterlife as Dr. Hawking claimed? Or as Dr. Graham said, is there an afterlife where we may spend eternity with God in a place called heaven? Both of them cannot be correct. And the most important decision in your short life is to decide which position is correct.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century there was a French Philosopher and mathematician by the name of Blaise Pascal. He was a Christian and he presented what is called the Pascal Wager, like making a bet.

It is the proposition that each person must wager whether God exists or not. Possibility #1: A person like Billy Graham believes in God and lives a Christian life and then they die and they are wrong—there is no afterlife. What has Billy Graham lost? Pascal reasoned that he lost relatively little. Even if he has no afterlife, at least he lived a life and meaningful life filled with hope and a desire to show love to others.

Possibility #2: Let's say a person like Stephen Hawking chooses not to believe in God or the afterlife. He could still live a full and purposeful life here. But what if Hawking was wrong and there is a God and an afterlife? Pascal reasoned that his loss would be catastrophic—an eternity separated from a God he didn't believe in.

Pascal's wager has been criticized, because the Christian life isn't about hedging your bets to avoid going to hell. I believe in Jesus Christ not because it is a reasonable choice. I'm a Christian because I responded to God's offer of love. And God wants to have a loving relationship with you. If you accept His free gift of eternal life, you can live a full now and an even fuller life in eternity.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So either this claim about the eternal Jesus is either true or false. God will let you decide. But let me warn you. If you decide it is true, then you can't just put it in your pocket or on a shelf for a later time. It demands to be the central focus of your life.

Another brilliant man, C.S. Lewis, wrote this about Christianity: "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important."

Our world is changing every day. It will keep on changing, so I challenge you to connect your life to the only One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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