

INTRO: Many years ago now, my uncle sent my mother a memorable Christmas card. It had a picture of our planet on the front. 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 this first Sunday of a brand new year. But it’s a precious truth on any day of the year. Years come and go so quickly, don’t they? Change is thrust upon us whether we like it or not. What will 2010 mean for each of us? One thing is certain: all of us will experience change of some kind. The older we grow the realization of how little we have control over grows, too. But Jesus is different. He is indeed the fixed point in your life and mine yesterday, today and forever. That fact is simply and succinctly stated in our text: Hebrews 13:8. It’s found in the last chapter of this book in the Bible and the author is throwing out several final exhortations to his readers. Let’s read Hebrews 13:8-16 to get a sense of the context, but our attention is going to be put solely on v. 8 today.

READ, p. 1194. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Is that good news? Yes, it is very good news on this first Sunday of 2010. It’s very good news that enriches our celebration of the Lord’s Supper in a few moments. But, why is it good news? Well, it underlines two wonderful truths for us as we step into a new year – this brand new chapter in the book being written about your life and mine. Here’s the first one. It provides ...

A REASON FOR SECURITY: JESUS NEVER CHANGES.

God is changeless. One of His essential attributes is the fact that He doesn’t and can’t change. Because the author of Hebrews says here that Jesus doesn’t change, he implies that Jesus is God. By definition, only God does not 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. Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:14 MSG). God’s Name – “Yahweh” or “I am the one who is” or “I will be what I will be” or “I am the one who brings into being” is an expression of God’s changelessness. In the book of Psalms we read this statement about God, “You are always the same. Years cannot change you.” (Psalm 102:27 CEV) In the New Testament letter written by James, he says, “Whatever is good and perfect comes 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) Even the stars in the night sky which burn for billions of years change over that length of time. But God? He never casts a shadow by changing, so to speak.

You might say, “Well, it’s interesting or awesome that Jesus can’t change, but why is it a good thing?” First of all, Jesus is complete – always has been, always will be. He can’t grow or develop. God doesn’t mature or get better. He can’t change for the better because He’s already perfect and He certainly can’t change for the worse because then He wouldn’t be perfect anymore. Secondly, Jesus

exists forever. Before His birth in Bethlehem, He already existed as the Son of God – the second Person of the Trinity - eternally. Jesus will never die or go out of existence. Third, Jesus is permanently 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 Jesus was in the accounts found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, He is today and will be tomorrow.

Fourth, Jesus' character never changes. That's very good news! God describes 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....'" (Exodus 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." (Matthew 11:28-30 CEV)

If Jesus' character never changes, you can be sure God will always tell you the truth and never lie to you about anything. Because He 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 changelessness. The Bible says, "God is no mere human! He doesn't tell lies or change his mind. God always keeps his promises." (Numbers 23:19 CEV) There's more good news in that verse about God's character. You can count on all God's promises found in His Word. You can be sure that what God has planned will not change either. Whatever God does today, it was already something He planned to do even before He created this thing we call "time." All that God planned to do will come true. Everything God has committed to do and promised to do will be done.

Isn't that an incredible contrast to your life and mine? The ending of one year and the beginning of a new one is a timeframe when the fact of change impresses itself upon you like no other time. Change is a fact of life for you and me. Yes, some change is good, to be sure. But change often brings sadness, heartache, turmoil or a sense of loss. For instance, with the passing of years relationships 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 is death itself – the ultimate change in any and every relationship. People struggle to grasp the permanent change that death brings.

ILLUS: *I heard about a letter that was sent by the federal government's Health and Human Services some years ago now to a resident in South Carolina. It said, "Your food stamps will be stopped effective 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 next, 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 the ultimate change. We will pass out of this life into eternity.

So much change! You could say the only thing that doesn't change is the fact of change itself! But, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” People's attitudes towards you can change. People can fall out of love with you, forget about you, lose interest in you or stop caring about you. God never changes His attitude towards you. It's always the same. God always wants to hear your prayers no matter if you're happy or miserable, well satisfied or in desperate need of some kind. God is always there. Aren't you glad that God doesn't have office hours, an answering machine or voice mail? Aren't you glad that God never needs to take a day off or goes on vacation? God's eyes never glaze over in boredom when you talk to Him. God is never moody or depressed. God never has a bad day and tells you to get lost. Yes, God has emotions, to be sure, but they never alter or change His attitude towards you. In His Word, God says, “... ‘I've never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love, and more love!’” (Jeremiah 31:3 MSG)

The Lord's Table is a reminder that Jesus never changes. What He was yesterday, He is today. What He is today, He will be tomorrow. In another place in the book 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 sin 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.” (Hebrews 7:25 NLT) It says there that one of His tasks is to intercede every day of 2010 on your behalf for every sin that needs forgiving, every need that needs answering, every problem that needs fixing and every disaster that requires a miracle. The changelessness of Jesus ought to fill you today with a joyful sense of confidence and security as you step into a new year. As a result, “...let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.” (Hebrews 4:16 NLT)

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” He is the fixed point in a changing world. **ILLUS:** *On their 50th wedding anniversary, a wife complained to her husband, “You never tell me you love me.” The husband said, “I told you I love 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! We all need to be told we're loved – often and regularly. Every time you take the bread and the cup in your hands, God is telling you how much He loves you. That love will not change. That love will not let you go. That 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, He alone deserves to be the foundation – the bedrock – upon which

you build your life. Sink deep into Him in 2010. Build your life upon Him with confidence and security. Now, there's another truth suggested by this verse. It provides ...

A REASON FOR JOY: YOU CAN CHANGE.

Ironically, this wonderful fact about Jesus – that He is 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 be horrible if you could not change? Just imagine being stuck for all eternity the way you are today! I'm profoundly grateful that Jesus is the same yesterday and today and tomorrow. That gives me abundant reason to be safe and secure. But I'm also profoundly grateful that Rick Breusch isn't the same today as he was yesterday or that the way I am today is all that I can be tomorrow. 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 that you have the ability and power to change. That's a gift from God made possible because the Holy Spirit lives within you. Christians like to talk about being born again or getting saved. Well, the ability to change means experiencing fully what it means to be born again or saved. Once you were a spiritual orphan. Now you've become God's child. Once you were God's enemy. Now you're His friend.

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 a follower of Jesus. 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 your culture thinks is important to advancing the Kingdom of God which is all important. The Bible says, "If we claim that we're free of sin, we're only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is errant nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins—make a clean breast of them—he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing. If we claim that we've never sinned, we out-and-out contradict God—make a liar out of him. A claim like that only shows off our ignorance of God." (1 John 1:8-10 MSG) I wonder in what ways God will invite Rick Breusch to change in 2010! How will God invite you to change in this new year? It doesn't happen all at once and you won't reach perfection this side of heaven, but – when the unchanging Jesus lives His life through you – you can and will change.

ILLUS: *A medical study back in 2006 reveals just how difficult change is for people. Roughly 600,000 people have heart bypasses a 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 essence, the*

doctors say, "Change or die." You would think that a near-death experience would be so compelling that the patients would make the appropriate lifestyle alterations. Sadly that's not the case. Apparently, 90% of these heart patients do not change. They remain the same and keep living the status quo. Study after study indicates that two years after heart surgery, these patients haven't altered their behavior. Change is that difficult. The majority of the heart patients choose not to change. They act as if they would rather die.

So let's be honest about change. Some change is easy and effortless. But the process of being gradually and increasingly transformed so that you more and more resemble the character of Jesus can be very painful. It demands you let go of some things that you enjoy but are 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 of relating to God that are just plain wrong. To tell you the truth, changing spiritually can be an unpleasant, exhausting experience at times. I've discovered that God sets the agenda, too. In other words, He decides what needs to change in you and when it needs to change. He schedules it according to His sovereignty. Your job is – like the words of the old hymn – simply to trust and obey. But the joy will come – that joy unspeakable and full of glory – when you surrender to God's plans and purposes for your life come what may.

Yes, the Lord's Table is a reminder that Jesus never changes. But it's also a reminder that you can change. The first step is confession and repentance. What a great way to start 2010! So, as you hold the bread and cup in your hands today, be real with God. Confess and repent. Then, celebrate the incredible fact that by His grace you can change. 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 Corinthians 3:18 NLT) And celebrate the even more incredible fact that Jesus cannot change. He is the fixed point in a changing world. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

ILLUS: *Philosophy professor and Christian author, Dallas Willard, lived in an area of southern Missouri as a child where electricity was available only in the form of lightning. He says they had more of that kind of electricity than they wanted! But in his senior year of high school the REA (Rural Electrification Administration) extended its lines into the area where he lived. Electrical power became available to households and farms. When those electrical lines came by the Willard farm, a very different way of living presented itself. Their relationships to the fundamental stuff of life—daylight and dark, hot and cold, clean and dirty, work and leisure, preparing food and preserving it—could be vastly changed for the better. But they still had to believe in electricity and what it could do for them, understand how to use it and start relying on it by actually using it.*

The power that could make the Willards' lives – and the lives of other farm

families - far better was right there near them. It was now accessible and they could use it. Willard says that, strangely, a few farmers did not accept it. They didn't enter the whole new world of electricity. Some just didn't want to change. Others thought they couldn't afford it.

The kingdom of God is a little like electricity. It's present, real and accessible to those who will enter it through faith in Jesus. Those who participate in God's kingdom avail themselves of God's power and grace in this life. You might think the comparison rather crude, and maybe it is. But those farmers, in effect, heard this invitation: "Repent, for 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 scrubboards because electric washing machines are at hand." Moving into the kingdom of electricity demanded a willingness to change. Moving into the Kingdom of God demands a far more profound willingness to change and to keep on changing.

CONCL: Each day that you live you're invited to live in the Kingdom of God. But, in order to get it, you will need to change. In order to keep it, you will need to keep on changing. God will give you the grace and the power to change if you ask Him. It may well be hard at first, but then He will send the joy. And when you do, you will come face to face with Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever. He, alone, is the fixed point in a changing world.