

THE STILL POINT OF A TURNING WORLD

HEBREWS 13:8

“The still point of a turning world.” That’s a famous line by a famous poet, T.S. Eliot. Scholars debate what exactly Eliot meant by that phrase. I think it’s probably similar to the message found in a Christmas card my uncle sent my mother years ago. It had a picture of our planet on the front. Inside it simply said, “Jesus is the fixed point in a changing world.” No, I don’t think that was T.S. Eliot’s point in his poem. What I mean is that either phrase applied to Jesus is accurate. Jesus is the still point of a turning world. Jesus is also the fixed point in a changing world. That’s an important reminder on this last day of 2017. But it’s a precious truth for any day in the new year that starts tomorrow and beyond. Years come and go so quickly, don’t they? Change is thrust upon us whether we like it or not. What will 2018 mean for each of us? One thing is certain: all of us will experience change of some kind. The older we grow the bigger the realization gets of how little we control, doesn’t it?

But Jesus is different. He is indeed the still point or the fixed point in your life and mine yesterday, today and forever. That fact is simply and succinctly stated in the Bible. Here’s what Hebrews 13:8 (NIV) says: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” That’s God’s Word for us today on the last day of 2017. It’s found in the last chapter of Hebrews where the author is throwing out what sounds like some final, random, but important exhortations. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Is that good news? Yes, it’s very good news on this last day of 2017. 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 TO FEEL SECURE: JESUS NEVER CHANGES.

God is changeless or unchanging. 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 doesn’t or can’t change. Therefore, Jesus is God. The Bible is full of the truth 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.... He never changes.” (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 changes.

You might say, “Well, it’s interesting to hear Jesus can’t change, but why’s that a good thing?” First of all, Jesus is complete – always has been, always will be. He can’t grow or develop. He can’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." (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." (Matt. 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 to pass. 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 time when the fact of change impresses itself upon you and me. We're reminded of how change is a fact of life for all of us. 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 lifeless while others come to an end. Parents and kids can drift apart. And then, of course, there is death itself – the ultimate change in any and every relationship. We struggle to grasp the permanent change that death brings for both ourselves and those we love. 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 on such and such a date because we received notice that you passed away. You may reapply if your circumstances change." Apparently, grasping the kind of change death brings can even be true of our government!

If not in 2018, one year or another your key relationships in life will change. If not in 2018, at some point your economic situation will change. If not in 2018, eventually your

job will change. If not in 2018, down the road your health will change. If not in 2018, in some future year each of us will face the ultimate change. We will pass out of this life into eternity. So much change! The only thing that doesn't change is the fact of change itself! 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. But, "Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever." 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, satisfied with life or in desperate need of some kind. God is always there. Aren't you glad God doesn't have office hours or voice mail? Aren't you glad 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 gets irritated 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 have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself." (Jer. 31:3 NLT)

Some things in this old world still have lasting value. Take basketball courts for example! Basketball was invented by James Naismith way back in 1891. The first game was played on a floor of hard maple. Maple flooring is harder than red oak, black walnut, or cherry flooring, and its tight grain makes it easier to clean and maintain. The maple floor also turned out to be the perfect surface for dribbling a basketball. So it's no surprise that the NCAA still insists on maple flooring for its official courts for both men's and women's March Madness every year – the annual tournament to determine a national championship. And the NBA follows suit. All of the courts are composed of hard maple except of one NBA team. The Boston Celtics, who play on a red-oak parquet floor, are the exceptions. Hard maple offers the most consistent playing surface, but it also provides shock resistance to lessen fatigue on players' knees and ankles. Only a very few things have lasting value. No one has more lasting value than God Himself. He doesn't need to change and He will never change.

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 of what Jesus – does now 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 2018 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's do what the Bible says! "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 still point of a changing world. He is the fixed point in a changing world. 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 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! We all need to be told we're loved

– often and regularly. Every time you read the Bible you can read how much God loves you. That love will not change. That love will never 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 2018. Build your life upon Him with confidence and security. Now, there's another truth implied by this verse. It points to ...

A REASON TO HAVE JOY: YOU CAN CHANGE.

Ironically, this wonderful fact about Jesus – that He's the same yesterday, 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 couldn't change? Just imagine being stuck for all eternity the way you are today! I'm profoundly grateful that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. 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 or that the way I am today is all that I can ever 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, because of His grace, you have the ability and power to change. That's a gift from God made possible because the Holy Spirit lives within you. 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) 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. Once you were headed to eternal damnation. Now, you've been given a wonderful, new eternal destination.

But let's be honest about change. Some change is easy and effortless. But the process of being gradually and increasingly transformed so you more and more resemble the character of Jesus can be very difficult. 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 and other people 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 not your convenience or mine.

A few years ago, a medical study revealed just how difficult change is for people. 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 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. The study revealed 90% of 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 heart patients choose not to change. They act as if they would rather die.

Pastor and author, Tim Keller, writes about something he calls a "life-quake." What's that? He writes, "When a great big truck goes over a tiny little bridge, sometimes there's a bridge-quake, and when a big man goes onto thin ice there's an ice-quake. Whenever Jesus Christ comes down into a person's life, there's a life-quake. Everything is reordered. If he was a guru, if he was a great man, if he was a great teacher, even if he was the genie of the lamp, there would be some limits on his rights over you. If he's God, you cannot relate to him at all and retain anything in your life that's a non-negotiable. Anything ... any view, any conviction, any idea, any behavior, any relationship. He may change it, he may not change it, but at the beginning of the relationship you have to say, 'In everything he must have the supremacy.'"

But joy can and will come eventually if you keep on surrendering to God's plans and purposes for your life in 2018 and beyond. You have to enter into the change He asks of you. The willingness and ability to change is what the Bible means by that word "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. I wonder in what ways God will invite Rick Breusch to change in 2018! 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 in and through you – you can, will, and must change.

Who said you can't turn an old, beat-up car into something beautiful? Back In 2014, a Lithuanian man was tired of his old, beat-up Mercedes-Benz CLK and wanted to transform it into something new and exciting. So he refurbished his old car with expandable foam. Yes, foam. He started by covering the entire exterior of the car with foam. Once it had hardened, he meticulously carved away at it until the lumpy body resembled a sleek sports car. He did the same to the interior, covering the dashboard with a foamy, bubbly mess. After hours of meticulous sculpting, the addition of shiny rims, and a paint job, the rusty-grey junker was transformed into a ruby-red muscle car. If you didn't know the car's back story, you'd probably assume it was the prototype for a new line of vehicles. Because of sin, you and I are like an old beat-up junk car morally and spiritually. If we want to be truly beautiful and perform like God intended, we need a drastic makeover. God is slowly working on each of us to transform our entire being so that one day we will resemble Jesus. True, at this point we might look more like a junker covered with messy foam than a sleek sports car. But the Bible says, "I am

certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” (Ph. 1:6 NLT)

Jesus is the still point of the turning world. He is the fixed point in a changing world. That gives you and me every reason to feel secure. Why? Because Jesus never changes. And that gives you and me every reason to have joy. Why? Because, by the grace of God, you and I can change. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”