

Devotion for December 31, 2016 – New Year’s Eve

Hebrews 13:8 (NIV84)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Theme: Seek refuge in God’s unchangeable Son.

- 1) Jesus is the same Savior who lived, died and rose again for our salvation.
- 2) He is the Christ, who rules over all for the benefit of His Church.

2016 has certainly been a year of change. Who would have thought that the Cubs would win the World Series?

Sadly, a lot of the change that has happened over the past year has not been good. The idea of having a “civil discourse” in our country seems like a thing of the past. People are more minded to insult than listen - leading to mistrust, division and, in some cases, violence. Lifestyles that used to be considered shameful are now celebrated. Materialism is running rampant and there is palpable selfishness in our society, where even acts of charity are primarily done to make people “feel good” about themselves.

How are Christians to face all these changes around us? Does God want us to change with the world and adapt to its morality - as some unfaithful church bodies are doing? Or does he want us to do the opposite and be like hate filled people who protest military funerals – chanting curses on America and its people?

God wants us to do neither. Rather, he wants us to **seek refuge in His unchangeable Son.** *1) Jesus is the same Savior who lived, died and rose again for our salvation. 2) He is the Christ, who rules over all for the benefit of His Church.*

Part One: *Jesus is the same Savior who lived, died and rose again for our salvation.*

Our devotion text is part of the final instruction with which the author of Hebrews completes his epistle. It is sandwiched between an exhortation to follow the example of faithful leaders and an encouragement to stay away from “strange teachings”, which are any teachings that try to entice us away from the Gospel of God’s grace.

Why is our devotion text sandwiched between these two exhortations? It’s there to remind us that, even though the world is constantly telling us to believe new things and live in new ways, the Gospel of Christ never changes. We don’t have to be like so many on this earth: confused by all the different religions and denominations, wondering what’s true and who to believe. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* Our Savior God never changes. And what a comfort this is for us who live in a world that is constantly searching for meaning and peace, but never finding it.

And why will the world never find peace in the unchanging Gospel of Christ? Because it doesn't want to believe that it needs a savior. The world does not want to acknowledge that its selfish desires and passions are evil. It doesn't want to admit that it's subject to God. All people in this world have inherited from Adam and Eve the same sinful desire with which they fell into sin: the desire to be their own god and master of their own fate – subject to no one but themselves.

And our society is driven by this sinful rebellion against God. It makes one's "feelings" king. This is why "right and wrong" are never discussed on the basis of what God's Word says, but on how a person "feels."

"Follow your heart. Do what you think is best. Don't let anyone keep you from doing what you want to do." – this is the religion of our society, a religion that constantly changes with the whims of the human heart. The world condemns us for making it feel bad when we witness the truth. It calls us unloving, intolerant, hateful and inhibiting human progress with our archaic views. The world says that we should be more understanding and accepting, and embrace everyone's feelings and ideas.

But what the world fails to realize is that human nature is utterly corrupt. The feelings and passions people naturally pursue are not godly and right. They are sinful and wrong. Jesus once said: *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'.* (Matthew 15:19-20 NIV84) Listen also to God's assessment of the human heart: *The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.* (Genesis 6:5 NIV84).

Thankfully our LORD saw our lost condition and decided to have mercy on us and to save us from our own wickedness. And how would he accomplish this? By taking on human flesh and blood so that he could win the righteousness we need by living a life of perfect obedience to His law. Having accomplished that, he then suffered and died for the sins of the whole world. He did this so that whoever looks to him in repentance and faith might be forgiven of all sin and have eternal life.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Just as God's holy law stands unchanged in its condemnation of sin, so also Christ's redeeming work that paid for the sins of the world stands firm forever. By means of the Holy Spirit working through his Word, the LORD shows us our sins that we might repent of them. More importantly, he shows us what he did to save us from the hell we had earned. There is not a single sin he didn't atone for. He will keep his promise to watch over believers throughout their earthly life until he delivers them home to heaven.

Therefore, in a world that is constantly changing its ideas of right and wrong to suit the passions of its sinful heart, how are we Christians to react? First of all by seeking refuge ourselves in the changeless love of Christ – for we too have a corrupt heart and constantly need his forgiveness. And then, we can share His changeless Gospel with the world – speaking the truth in love.

And what will that look like – speaking the truth in love? Well, it certainly doesn't look like those false Christians who espouse hate in protests with signs saying: "God damn America" and cheer whenever something bad happens to the homosexual community. But it also is not staying silent when people are pursuing any kind of life style that the Bible calls sinful.

Rather, speaking the truth in love is just that: lovingly pointing out what the Bible says about sin and our need for salvation, and then directing people to the same Savior that we ourselves need – encouraging them to repent of their sin and turn to him in faith. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* He continues to be the same Savior who lived, died and rose for the forgiveness of all sin - lovingly calling people to repentance and faith through our witness of him. He also continues to be the Christ who rules over everything for the benefit of his Church.

Part Two: *He is the Christ, who rules over all for the benefit of His Church.*

Sadly, some of the people we witness to will not accept our message. Influenced by the unbelieving world they will either ignore our loving call to repent or they will get mad at us for making them feel guilty. And, as the godlessness of our world continues to increase, we will feel even more pressure to either keep quiet or give up our faith. Already now we sometimes feel so helpless and alone. We feel like we are under attack – fighting a losing battle.

But we are not fighting a losing battle. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* He is the same God who rescued the Israelites from their slavery to Egypt, cast out demons during his ministry on earth, conquered the devil by means of his cross and showed his victory over the grave by rising from the dead. Jesus is the Christ who ascended into heaven to rule over all things for the benefit of his Church.

I know, with all the evil that goes on in the world – especially towards Christians – it might seem like the devil is more in control than the LORD. But God's Word reassures us that Jesus is working in all things for the benefit of those who love him. During his earthly ministry, Jesus even prophesied about the various persecutions and pressures we would face as Christians – especially as the day of his return approached. "*In this world you will have trouble,*" Jesus once told his disciples, "*But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33 NIV84)

Yes, Jesus has overcome the world. He sits in heaven with the same authority by which He created the World. He watches over us with the same love that moved him to suffer and die for our sins. And he will come again to give us the deliverance and justice he constantly promised to bring throughout the centuries.

Even though our world can seem like a chaotic mess, know that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* His justice, power, love and mercy have not changed. He will continue doing everything he promised. Take refuge in him knowing that, no matter how scary the future may look for Christians, our loving Savior is still in control. Amen.