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August 28, 2022

Hebrews 13:8:

**“Forever and Without Change”**

- I. On Our Own.
- II. The Warning.
- III. The Comfort.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 N. Oakland Avenue  
Decatur Illinois 62526

Hebrews 13:8

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our text from Hebrews 13:8 is probably familiar to most everyone here: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." He is the same, immutable, without change. Dr. Francis Pieper wrote:

The Psalmist brings into sharpest possible contrast the change and decay to which all creatures are heir and the immutability of God when he says: "They shall perish, but Thou shall endure; yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment...but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end": (Ps. 102:26-27). God is unchangeable in His essence. (Francis Pieper, D. D., Christian Dogmatics, Vol. I, CPH, St. Louis, 1950, p.440.)

In his "Summary of Christian Dogmatics," Edward W. A. Koehler wrote,

"There can be no development or evolution, neither improvement nor deterioration, neither growth nor decline, no change whatever in God. He is what He is, what He always was, and what he will ever be... God is not fickle like man." (CPH, St. Louis, p.24)

This morning . . .

## FOREVER AND WITHOUT CHANGE

### I. On Our Own.

So, let's start with the obvious; these words from our post sermon hymn: "Change and decay in all around I see." Have you ever traveled through your family history starting with pictures of your infant to school years, then from teen to adult years?

Have you ever experienced an older family member showing you a picture from the past, and you asked, "Who is that?" And the person told you it was a family member from years ago, now mostly forgotten. And if you have entered into the closing years, do you find yourself reluctant to travel through your pictorial history? There is reality to the words: "Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away."

And let me ask you this: If we've been around awhile, has everything turned out mostly the way you planned it? Are you happy with where things are? Are you looking forward to the "what's to come"? Can you sing it with a big grin? "It's a Wonderful World!" Let's face it, sooner or later, one way or another, everything changes and goes away.

William Saroyan was a highly successful novelist, playwright, and short story writer. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1940, and the Academy Award in 1942. He died in 1991 in New York City of cancer. I can't cite the original source, but here's the story:

"One evening, as Saroyan reflected on his condition and what the future held for him, he placed a phone call to the Associated Press. After identifying himself to the reporter who answered his call, he posed a question that revealed the honest, searching sensitivity that had characterized his career. It was a final statement to be used after his death.

"He said, 'Everybody has got to die. But I have always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?' And then he hung up the phone."

Pieper wrote, "Bodily death is nothing less than a tearing asunder of man, the separation of the soul from the body, the unnatural disruption of the union of soul and body which have been created by God to be one." (Pieper, Vol. I, p.536) It is, of course, as Scriptures say, "The wages of sin... (Rm.

6:23).” And this: “The soul that sins shall die (Ez. 18:20).” No matter how we look at it, no matter the length of time, the words are penetrating: “Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day, Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away.”

That brings us to the question: “Where do we go from here?” Recall the statement from Koehler, “God is not fickle like men.” He went on to say, “His judgments and His promises stand. This should be a warning and a comfort.” As God said, “For I the Lord do not change (Mal. 6:1a).” and, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Pieper states it in these words: “Scripture draws a twofold lesson from God’s immutability: 1) To warn the wicked, because God’s wrath is unchangeable (Mark 9:44); 2) to comfort the pious (believers), because God’s grace can never depart.” (Vol. 1, p. 440)

## II. The Warning.

First, the warning in three Scriptures that state the same truth in different ways. “...whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (Jn. 3:18).” Then this: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn. 14:5).” And this: “...apart from me you can do nothing (Jn. 15:5b).”

More than likely, most everyone here is familiar with Jesus’ words from St. Matthew 25 concerning The Final Judgment. In the second part of the Judgment He addresses all who reject His taking away their sin; all unwilling to trust in Him. In verse 46 He pronounces the final judgment: “...these will go away into eternal punishment.” He also described Hell as “the outer darkness (and)...that place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 8:30)”. We recall the words of the man who cried out from Hell: “I am in anguish in this flame (Lk. 18:24).”

Brothers and sisters, every statement from Scripture you have just heard regarding the warning is immutable. They will never change or weaken or fade in what they say, or the consequences they bring. Even Balaam, God’s enemy, was forced to say, by the hand of God, “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind (Num. 23:19).” And, again, as God said through the prophet Malachi, “For I the Lord do not change...(Mal. 3:6a).”

We would be wise to keep in our hearts these words the only true and immutable God speaks to those who think He doesn’t see, or know or doesn’t care - these words: “Why do you say O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God (That is to say, “God is ignoring what I want and what I demand!”)?’ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable (Is. 40:27,28).” He sees who and what we are 24/7.

## III. The Comfort.

And then, as Pieper noted, the other lesson from God’s immutability is “to comfort the pious (those who see their sin and trust in Christ for forgiveness), because God’s grace can never depart (Is. 54:10).” More than likely, for many there’s that moment of, what I call, the ugly questions: “Will God go on loving me? Will he go on forgiving me for the same sins that make their ugly appearance? Have I crossed the line??”

God’s love for the heart broken by the on-going struggle with sin and guilt, the heart that cries out to the Lord Jesus - God’s love for such is immutable. As He has promised through Isaiah, “I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins (Is. 43:25).” The Lord promised through John: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I Jn. 1:9b).” He is faithful and just. He is always there for the repentant heart. That will never change.

I'm thankful for the following words of Martin Luther that appear in his Lectures on Galatians. They were given to me by my son. I referred to them some years ago. I have read them many times.

Christ was given over to death, not for our righteousness or holiness but for our sins, which are real sins - great, many, in fact infinite and invincible. Therefore you must not think of them as minor or suppose that your own works can remove them. Nor must you despair on account of their gravity if you feel them oppressing you either in life or in death. But you must learn from Paul here to believe that Christ was given, not for sham or counterfeit sins, nor yet for small sins, but for great or huge sins; not for one or two sins but for all sins; not for sins that have been overcome - for neither man nor angel is able to overcome even the tiniest sin - but for invincible sins. (Luther's Works, Vol. 26, Jaroslav Pelikan, Editor and Walter A. Hansen, Associate Editor, CPH, St. Louis, p. 35.)

The words make their plea: "Come not in terrors, as the King of kings, But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings; Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea. Come, Friend of sinners, thus abide with me." God's promise of His love for us in Christ is immutable, as set forth in the Holy Scripture: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." And this from Isaiah: "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed says the Lord, who has compassion on you." (Is. 54:10) That's *Forever and Without Change*.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott