

Jeremiah 31:7-9
Hebrews 7:23-28

Forever
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“Things keep changing!” These words were spoken by a clergy colleague as we approached the 21st century. He was concerned about what it would mean to live and minister in the coming days of a new century. All of those present nodded in agreement.

We live in a world of almost constant change. Who would have imagined the growth of the internet? Church web pages and Facebook interfaces? Our worship services can be digitally broadcast all over the world in a matter of seconds. Communications that once took weeks or months are now accomplished in seconds. Change is all around us. Martha Leypoldt wrote, Learning in Change, in 1971. In it she reminds us that as we learn we grow and as we grow we change. How often have we heard, “nothing lasts forever”?

What can be changeless in a changing world? My devotional reading has had me in the book of Leviticus this past week (I would urge you to read it again—it is usually one we like to skip over!). The writer of Leviticus speaks of the sacrifices that needed to be presented before God daily, weekly and yearly. The system was one that had to be repeated day after day, week after week, year after year. Even the High Priest and his family had to make sacrifices for their sins before coming into the presence of God. None stood perfect before the Lord. All entered into the presence of God with fear and trembling, coming humbly before God.

In contrast to this old system the writer of Hebrews announces that Christ came as the one to change, once and for all, the old system. Christ came to replace that which was imperfect – once and for all.

Now being a Mac person I am not up on Vista and Windows, etc. However I know that a new upgrade has come out this past week, Windows 8, to replace and update the old pc operating system. (Yes, I know that Mac recently had an upgrade to its operating system!) As the new system hits the market I am sure that somewhere someone is already working on Windows 9 or Vista 101. Changes are a constant with computers and their operating systems. Computer users long for one that will fix all the problems of the old one!

The writer of Hebrews announces that, “*Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever*” (Heb. 13:8). There is no need for another operating system. God does not have a group of angels off in some cubicle working on a new and better plan. What Jesus accomplished was all that was necessary. Jesus is forever.

We do not understand forever. It is just beyond our comprehension. Some days we have difficulty comprehending tomorrow, let alone eternity. The clear indication of Hebrews is that in Christ, eternity/forever is within our grasp. We are not asked to understand it, we are asked to accept it in faith.

One of my seminary courses was on the Atonement. We spent a semester studying the various theories of the Atonement: What did Christ dead mean? How was our salvation accomplished? The professor spent hours and hours on the various theories and ideas concerning how Atonement worked. He shared his views and asked ours. By the end of the semester our heads were spinning with possibilities. For me the solution was simple: God provided, Christ accomplished and I don’t have to worry about it!

Now this might be too simplistic for some. But is that not what faith is? Believing that in some way all things are possible. Most of us when we leave here this morning will go home and turn on the television or put the radio on in the car. As the Seahawks have the afternoon off we know it won’t be a Seahawks game. But, as you turn the radio or television on are you going to ponder how the signal gets from someplace in the world to your living

room or car? Are you going to spend hours this afternoon trying to discover how television and radio signals work? No, you are going to turn it on and enjoy it. Hebrews says, Christ is forever – We are to enjoy it. There are no other updates needed.

I see in the Jeremiah passage an image of God calling a people home – to a forever place. They have been in exile. This is not where God is. For them God’s presence was still in Jerusalem, in Israel, the nation and place of God. They lamented, “*How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?*” (Ps.137:4 NIV). The promise of Jeremiah is that they will again sing the songs of the Lord in the presence of the Lord. They will return to the place where God has called them. A place where all have easy access, the roads are straight and flat. A place that is for all peoples. A place where the blind, the lame, etc. are welcome. The image is of a people coming home, a forever place.

We long for the image in our own lives. Our God is still calling a people home. We want an unchanging place. The wonderful invitation of Christ is to “all who labor and who are heavy laden.” It is an invitation for all to a place where we can know the one who is changeless in a changing world. Christ stands as the way, God had not changed.

Now the world around us is going to constantly change. Our lives change. We grow older, greyer, etc. However, the one constant is that what Christ accomplished on Calvary was once and for all. The writer of Hebrews put it this way, “*For the law appoints as high priest men who are weak; but the oath, which comes after the law, appointed a Son, who has been made perfect forever.*” (7:28). Our God continually invites a people home.

In A 3rd Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul is a story by Alan Cohen.

In a small town in Spain, a man named Jorge had a bitter argument with his young son Paco. The next day Jorge discovered Paco’s bed was empty—he had run away from home.

Overcome with remorse, Jorge searched his soul and realized his son was more important to him than anything else. He wanted to start over. Jorge went to a well-known store in the center of town and posted a large sign that read, “Paco, come home. I love you. Meet me here tomorrow morning.”

The next morning Jorge went to the store, where he found no less than seven young boys named Paco who had also run away from home. They were all answering the call for love, each hoping it was his dad inviting him home with open arms.

Our God stands forever, with arms open waiting to welcome us home – to a forever place.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989

NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989

Cranfield & Hanson, A 3rd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul, Health Communications, Deerfield Beach, FL, 1996 (p. 78)