

40.day 2020

IN THE LONG RUN

WEEK 6: FINISH LINE

AUGUST 5

ESSENTIAL JESUS

Hebrews 13:8-9 | Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

Who is Jesus? To answer this question, we must first change the verb from present tense to past tense: Who *was* Jesus? It is absolutely essential that we start there. Why? Because who Jesus *was yesterday* is who Jesus is *today*. He does not change. But alas, we try to change him.

An image of Jesus that is not grounded in history will always be rebranded to suit our fancies. Every generation does this to some extent. We form a popular impression of Jesus that is different from the original. Like a fake designer bag. Don't be

taken in by a trendy Jesus created in your generation's image.

Every nation accommodates the Gospel to its own culture. The Greeks made it a philosophy. The Europeans made it a culture. The Americans made it a business (RICHARD HALVERSON). And Singapore? Please *do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings*.

Sadly, however, many have gone astray, yesterday, today, and through the ages. The Sermon on the Mount is not exciting enough. We prefer preachers who entertain us and pander to our passions (2 TIMOTHY 4:3). The conditions of discipleship are not thrilling enough. We'd rather hear teachings on self-esteem and self-advancement and speculations about Israel and the end times. We are too

easily blown away by every wind of doctrine (EPHESIANS 4:14).

This twin problem of rebranding Jesus and diluting his Gospel goes back to the first century. The Apostle Paul warned his readers not to be seduced by *another Jesus* or a *different gospel* (2 CORINTHIANS 11:4). The author of Hebrews was also alert to this same double danger. He mentions one example, some funny ideas about food (13:9). Don't be fooled. Changing your diet won't change your heart. Only the grace of God can do that.

Remember Jesus, the Founder and Finisher of our faith. Consider the outcome of his life. Imitate him. Jesus doesn't need cheerleaders. He never sought to be admired. Only to be obeyed. Alas, admiration is easier than obedience (SØREN KIERKEGAARD). We make better fans than followers.

PRAYER TRACK

■ Don't be ignorant. *Today there is widespread devotion to the idea that nothing, absolutely nothing, can be allowed to remain the same. All things must change, and there is practically no consideration given as to whether the change is good or bad, right or wrong, easy or difficult, necessary or unnecessary* (FRANK CARLSON). Wise up! In this era of senseless shifts and swirling changes, we must devote ourselves totally to the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith: Jesus Christ who *is the same, yesterday, today, and forever*. Confess: *On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand* (EDWARD MOTE).

■ Don't be deceived. In the West, consumer Christianity has *produced several generations of Christians who assume that church is about them, for them, and because of them. So they shop around* (TONY WOLFE). For what? For a church that carries their made-to-order product: a Jesus re-branded in their image and a Gospel watered down to speak their language. Wake

up! The Singapore Church must not fall for this endemic folly. Ask God for a discipleship movement back to the original Jesus as portrayed in the four Gospels and Hebrews. Pray that we will rediscover the humble, human, historical Jesus: Though fully God, he became human like us in every way. He experienced the human condition first-hand. He wrestled with every kind of temptation. He prayed in tears and fear. He was moved with compassion for harassed and helpless *sheep without a shepherd*. He endured hostility from sinners. He learned obedience through suffering. He conformed his entire human life to the will of God from the inside out. He died in utmost humiliation for the sins of all humanity. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His offer of salvation still stands. His call to deny self, take up the cross, and follow him remains unchanged. Pause and ponder. Ask for hunger pangs and childlike wonder to rediscover the original Jesus. Ask for eyes to see him as he really is, as he always was, and always will be. Pray

for faith and courage to imitate him and proclaim him no matter the cost.

■ Don't be seduced. False teachers are often charming and disarming. False teachings will avalanche in the last days. *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths* (2 TIMOTHY 4:3-4). Rise up! Intercede. Sound the alarm: Those who flirt with false teachers commit spiritual fornication (2 CORINTHIANS 11:2-3). Those who listen to false prophets will be punished with them (JEREMIAH 14:16). Renounce every tone and tune of false doctrine humming across Singapore today. In as much as we have fallen for the sensational and promoted bogus teaching from dubious sources, let us repent. Ask God for a mighty move of his Spirit. A genuine revival marked by a return to his Word as the final authority and source of sound doctrine. *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness* (2 TIMOTHY 3:16).