

Our Unchanging God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 December 2018

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of the prophet Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, Malachi chapter 3, and if we take as our text the words of verse 6.

Malachi chapter 3 and verse 6, for I the Lord do not change. Therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

For I the Lord do not change. As we draw to the close of yet another year in our lives, it's at this time of year that we often look back and we often think about all that's taken place in the past year. We look back and we reflect upon all that we've seen, all that we've experienced, all that we've been through in the year that's gone by. And without a doubt, the year has gone by very, very quickly, just like a tale that is told.

And you know, the media often seeks to take advantage of what you could describe as our nostalgic mood. They take advantage of our mood this time of year with programmes and articles on, I don't know, the best moments or the worst moments or the unforgettable moments, the biggest moments, the funniest moments that took place in 2018.

[1 : 35] Where the media, they recap on the year that's now coming to an end. And they bring us up to the threshold of a new year. And the media highlights, it also highlights what's happened throughout the months of 2018, both locally, nationally and internationally.

And you could say that a lot has happened in 2018 on many different levels, whether socially or economically or even politically. A lot has happened. There have been many changes in the past year.

Even Our Royal Highness, the Queen, she spoke in her Christmas Day speech, I don't know if you watched it, she alluded to all the changes that have taken place in our nation and even in her own family circumstances.

But the Queen also highlighted that this year has been a year of centenaries. There was the 100th anniversary of the Royal Air Force. There was the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice Treaty from November.

The 11th, 1918. And for us locally, there's 100 years since the Islayer disaster. This year, you could say, it's seen a lot of change. But these changes, they've not only taken place locally, nationally and internationally.

[2 : 52] These changes have also taken place personally. And in many cases, the changes that have taken place in the last year, well, personally, some of them have been positive.

Maybe, in your own experience, there's been a birth or an engagement or a wedding or building a new house or moving to a new house or starting a new job.

I'm sure there are many positive things that have taken place in the past year. But in the same token, I'm sure there are many difficult things that have taken place in the last year.

And for many people, maybe even for you here today, 2018 was a difficult year. It's been a difficult year because it was the year you could say that you lost a loved one.

It was the year you were diagnosed with an illness. It was the year your health or the health of someone you love deteriorated. 2018 was the year everything changed.

[3 : 52] And in many ways, I suppose you wouldn't want to relive 2018. Because when you consider the prospect of what 2019 holds, it just fills you with fears and worries and doubts.

And maybe even thoughts of loneliness. Yes. And yet, you know, as we come to the end of another year, the Word of God is reminding us that even though all our situations and all our circumstances are continually changing, the God we worship is an unchanging God.

And that unchanging God is still speaking into our ever-changing world. And today, our unchanging God is speaking to us.

And he's saying to us, as we have in the words of our text, I, the Lord, do not change. Therefore, O children of Jacob, you are not consumed.

My friend, despite our ever-changing world, we have an unchanging God. And in our passage this morning, Malachi reminds us about three features of our unchanging God.

[5 : 04] Because he describes our unchanging God, he describes his unchanging covenant, his unchanging character, and his unchanging compassion. Those three things.

His unchanging covenant, his unchanging character, and his unchanging compassion. So if we look first of all at his unchanging covenant. His unchanging covenant.

We'll read the words of our text. I want you to leave with these words in your mind and your heart today. I, the Lord, do not change. Therefore, you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

Now, the book of the prophet Malachi, it not only concludes the Old Testament as the last book in the Old Testament canon of Scripture, but Malachi also concludes a section near the end of the Old Testament called the Minor Prophets.

And there are 12 Minor Prophets. There is Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and this book Malachi.

[6 : 10] But these books are known as the Minor Prophets, not because their ministry was minor or insignificant in any way. They're known as the Minor Prophets simply because of the length of their book.

The length of their book is short in comparison to the long books of the major prophets, who were Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. But, you know, as the last Minor Prophet and the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, you could say, he stands as this bridge, the bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

He says, Malachi is the bridge between the two. And as one commentator states, he says, He says, He says, And that's what the book of Malachi is all about.

It's about self-evaluation. Evaluating the depth of your commitment, the sincerity of your worship, and the direction of your life. And, you know, it's interesting because the name Malachi, it means, my messenger.

The name Malachi means, my messenger. And the message which the Lord's messenger, Malachi, the message that he has for the Lord's people, is that they must be faithful, sincere, and committed to their covenant God.

[7 : 45] Because what Malachi makes clear, is that the Lord is faithful, sincere, and committed to his covenant people. The Lord is committed to his people, and his covenant relationship with his people.

Because the Lord's relationship with his people, it's very important to him. And they're his covenant people, they're his treasured possession. But, you know, the reality was that by the time Malachi came to deliver the Lord's message, the church was in chaos.

Because after the Israelites had returned from exile in Babylon, they had been exiled into Babylon because of their sin, their idolatry, their continual disobedience.

But when they returned from exile, from Babylon, they rebuilt the temple, that was under the ministry of Haggai. But then by the time Malachi comes along, by the time Malachi's prophetic ministry begins, there is this air of religious disillusionment.

They're all discontent in their religion. They were in, you could say, an age of religious cynicism, where they were just going through the motions. And because of this, the people became very relaxed in their approach and very relaxed in their attitude towards their covenant Lord.

[9 : 10] And you could say that everything became more of a ritual and a religion than a relationship with responsibility. Everything became more of a ritual and religion than a relationship with responsibility.

In fact, the people of Israel, they went as far as to blame the Lord for what had happened. They claimed that because the glory cloud in the temple never came back after they had rebuilt the temple, they said it was the Lord who was not committed to them.

The Lord wasn't committed to them and kept his side of the covenant. But the Lord's messenger, Malachi, he is very quick here to remind the Lord's covenant people that the Lord hasn't changed.

Neither has his commitment to his covenant and his commitment to his people. None of that has changed, he says. Because through his messenger, the Lord says in verse 6, I, the Lord, do not change.

Therefore, you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. And you know, this statement, it should have emphasized to the Lord's people and to us that the Lord is faithful and the Lord is committed to his covenant and his covenant people.

[10:31] And you know, we should have assurance of this by the name and title that the Lord uses to describe himself. He says, I am the Lord. I do not change. And let's not forget that whenever we see the title Lord in capital letters, whenever we see that in the Bible, it's referring to the covenant king.

It's the title of the covenant king and that his covenant is from everlasting to everlasting. His covenant is an unchanging promise. In fact, the title Lord, it means the one who keeps covenant. The one who keeps covenant. And the covenant that we're referring to is the covenant promise that the Lord made with Abraham way back in Genesis 12, where Abraham, he received the covenant promise and he didn't receive it by any merit of his own, but he received it by faith.

And in that covenant, the Lord promised to Abraham and all his descendants, to Isaac, to Jacob, to all the children of Israel, he promised that he would be their God and they would be his people. The Lord entered into this covenant relationship with Abraham and all his descendants. But the wonder of it is, is that the Lord promised that even if they were wayward, if they were disobedient, if they were unfaithful to the covenant, he would remain faithful.

[11:59] That's why we call it a covenant of grace. Because it's all an act of grace towards us. We're God in his love and out of his own good pleasure.

He chose to make this covenant, this binding promise. He chose to enter into a relationship with his people. And the beauty of the covenant of grace is that there's nothing that can break this covenant. Because the God of the Bible, this covenant Lord, he has graciously bound himself to his people. He bound himself to his people in covenant relationship.

And you know, that's what we were singing about earlier in Psalm 105. That the Lord is faithful to his covenant promise. And as we sang, he remembers his covenant forever.

The word which he commanded for a thousand generations. My friend, the Lord is the one who keeps covenant. And his faithfulness and his commitment to his covenant relationship with his people.

[13:04] It never changes. Therefore, when it comes to the Lord, and this is the important part. When it comes to the Lord, it's not about your rituals.

It's not about your religion. Because it's all about your relationship and your responsibility to the Lord and his covenant. When it comes to the Lord, it's not about our rituals or our religion.

It's all about our relationship and our responsibility to the Lord and his covenant. And you know, this reminder that the Lord is a faithful and committed God who's faithful and committed to his covenant and his covenant people.

It would have been a great comfort to the Israelites. And it ought to be a great comfort to us too. Because when we consider the history of the Israelites, there was nothing but waywardness. Disobedience. There was moaning and murmuring throughout those wilderness journey years. There was repeated sin. There was idolatry. There was even chastisement in exile.

[14:11] And yet, despite all the times that they failed to uphold the covenant, the Lord remained faithful to his covenant and to his covenant people. And that's something we need to remember in our ever-changing lives.

that despite all that you go through and all that you experience and all that affects your relationship with the Lord, he never changes.

And his covenant with you never changes. And you know, that's where your assurance lies. Your assurance lies in the fact that if you are committed to the Lord, he is committed to you.

And even when you feel that you're not as committed as you should be, or you're nowhere near as faithful as you want to be, or you can't be as sincere as you'd like to be, and yet the Lord knows your heart.

The Lord knows your motive. The Lord knows your desire. And where we faint and fail, our covenant God doth fail us never.

[15 : 15] He's faithful. He's committed to his relationship with you. And he'll never change. My friend, you may feel that your relationship with the Lord changes so often because of your situations or your circumstances or even how you feel in yourself.

And without doubt, there are times when you feel close to the Lord. There are times when you feel far away from the Lord. There are times when you feel he's speaking to you so tenderly and so personally.

And there are times where you feel he's just silent. He's not saying anything at all. But you know that you can't go on feelings. That's what Martin Luther, the German reformer, discovered when he wrote that little poem.

It's in your intimations. Feelings come and feelings go. Feelings are deceiving. My warrant is the word of God, not else is worth believing. Though all my heart should feel condemned for want of some sweet token, there is one greater than my heart whose word cannot be broken.

I'll trust in God's unchanging word till soul and body sever. For though all things shall pass away, his word shall stand forever. And you know, my friend, that's it.

[16 : 34] That's it. That despite all the changing circumstances and situations in our lives, we're to trust in the Lord, the covenant king. were to trust in him because of his unchanging covenant.

His unchanging covenant. But connected to his unchanging covenant, we see the Lord's unchanging character. His unchanging character.

He says in our text, I, the Lord, do not change. I do not change. And you know, in this beautiful statement, the Lord is not only drawing our attention to his unchanging covenant, he's drawing and emphasizing to us, he's drawing our attention to his unchanging character.

And you know, what we have to notice is that the Lord reveals his character. He reveals his attributes to us in order that we will praise him. The Lord reveals himself to us so that we will praise him.

He reveals his character so that we will ascribe and attribute praise, honour and glory to who he is and for what he has done. And you know, this is why many of the Psalms, they draw attention to the unchanging character of God.

[17 : 54] Because they're seeking to praise the Lord. They're praising the Lord for his unchanging character in an ever-changing world. That's what we were singing about in Psalm 90.

That's the oldest Psalm in the Psalter. It's three and a half thousand years old. And yet even though Psalm 90 is old, and the world is completely different to when Moses penned Psalm 90, even though the world has changed, the Lord hasn't changed.

And his truth hasn't changed. And that's why Moses, he began Psalm 90 by saying, Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in generations all, before thou ever hadst brought forth the mountains great or small, erever thou hadst formed the earth and all the world abroad, even thou from everlasting art to everlasting God.

Moses knew that even though the world would change, the Lord and his word would never change. And you'll remember in Psalm 90 that Moses, he went on to make this solemn contrast between the unchanging God and our ever-changing lives.

Moses said that in comparison to this God who is from everlasting to everlasting, he says, our lives are like a tale that is told.

[19 : 18] He says, for in thine anger all our days they pass unto an end, and as a tale that hath been told, so we are years to spend. Three score and ten years do sum up our days and years we see, or if by reason of more strength, in some four score they be.

You know, my friend, we are to praise the Lord for his unchanging character in an ever-changing world. And there are many Psalms that emphasize the unchanging character of God.

Psalm 102 was another. Again, Psalm 102, it makes the solemn contrast between our unchanging God and our ever-changing character.

He says in verse 26 of Psalm 102, who they perish shall as garments do, but thou shalt evermore endure. As vestures, thou shalt change them so, and they shall all be changed doer.

But from all changes thou art free, thy endless years do last foray, thy servants and their seed who be, established shall before thee stay. My friend, we're to praise the Lord for his unchanging character in an ever-changing world.

[20 : 34] And you know, that's why the Psalms often use the metaphor of the Lord as a rock. Because as you know, you look at the rocks outside, they've been there since the beginning of time.

And time has changed. Things have changed. We're in a different generation, a different day. Circumstances are different and yet the rock never changes. The rock is still the same. And that's why the Psalms, they use the metaphor of the Lord as our rock. They say he's our strong rock. He's our mighty rock. He's the rock of our salvation.

But you know, the Psalms, they always make it more personal than that. Because they say about the Lord, he is my rock. He is my rock.

Was that not the great confession of the Christian in Psalm 62? He only my salvation is. And my strong rock is he. He only is my sure defence.

[21 : 35] I shall not move to be. My friend, we're to praise the Lord for his unchanging character in an ever-changing world. Because despite all the changes in our lives and all our emotions that ebb and flow and our feelings that just go up and down and our situations and circumstances that seem so fluid and so flexible and yet the only constant that we have in our lives is the Lord.

And that's how we need to look to him. That's why we need to trust in him. That's why we need to lean upon him. That's why we need to cast all our cares into his hands because he is our rock.

He is our rock. rock. And you know this message, it was certainly relevant for the people of Israel who were living during this prophetic ministry of Malachi.

As we said, Malachi, he's the last book in the Old Testament. It would be another 400 years before Matthew would be written. And in that 400 year period between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, there were going to be many changes.

many, many changes. There were going to be changes for Israel politically, changes economically, changes socially. But during that 400 year period, the one person who would never change is the Lord.

[23 : 05] And you know, this is what the New Testament affirms to us again and again. That despite the passing of time, despite it being a different day and a different generation, the Lord has never changed.

In fact, that New Testament letter, the letter of James, James, he talks about the wonder of salvation. And he says that every good and perfect gift, it comes down to us from above.

It comes to us, he says, from the Father of lights. And how does he describe the Father of lights? In whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Therefore, he says, the gifts we receive from the Lord, the blessings we experience at his hand are all because despite our ever-changing lives, he never changes.

He never changes. He has an unchanging character. He has an unchanging character. And you know, it's hard to describe an unchanging character, isn't it?

It's hard to describe something that's un, or someone that's unchanging. That was the struggle the Westminster Assembly had in the 17th century.

[24 : 24] I'm sure I've told you this before, that when they were writing the Shorter Catechism, and as you know, the Shorter Catechism, well, I'm sure you were brought up with it, it's based upon all the teachings of the Bible.

the Shorter Catechism, as you probably learned, it's in the form of questions and answers to help us teach, help teach us theology. But when these 400 plus ministers gathered at Westminster in London to produce the Catechism, they came to the question, question four, what is God?

What is God? And, well, they didn't have a clue how to write that down. How do you, how can you answer the question, what is God, in only one sentence? And the Westminster Assembly, they spent some time discussing various answers, but they came up with nothing.

So they decided, well, let's stop. Let's pray about this. So they prayed about an appropriate answer for the Catechism. And it said that they asked one of the ministers to lead in prayer.

And he stood up, and in the course of his prayer, the minister said, God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

[25 : 40] And that's what they wrote down. What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. In his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

And one of the key characteristics that the Catechism draws upon is the unchanging character of God. For God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

And he's unchangeable, they say, in his being. He's unchangeable in his wisdom. He's unchangeable in his power. He's unchangeable in his holiness. He's unchangeable in his justice.

He's unchangeable in his goodness. And he's unchangeable in his truth. My friend, the God of the Bible is our unchanging God. He's our unchanging God.

And the Bible says to us that we are to ascribe and attribute and adore him because of his unchanging character. His unchanging character.

[26 : 43] We're to praise him for his unchanging covenant. We're to praise him for his unchanging character. But lastly, we're to praise the Lord for his unchanging compassion.

His unchanging compassion. read verse one of chapter three. It says, Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

We said earlier that the name Malachi means my messenger. But what we see there from verse one is that Malachi is not the only messenger of the Lord, because the Lord says, Behold, I send my messenger.

Another Malachi, you could say. Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And we know that this verse doesn't speak about Malachi, because it's quoted in the New Testament, only in chapter four of Matthew's Gospel.

[27 : 50] It's quoted in the New Testament in relation to John the Baptist. because John the Baptist, he was the messenger of the Lord, who would prepare the way for the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist was the forerunner, you could say, of the Christ. He was the promised messenger who would come before the day of the Lord, before this covenant king would arrive.

John the Baptist would be there, and he would be preaching. And what message was John the Baptist to preach? but a message of repentance. A message of repentance, where he called the people to turn away from their sin, and turn from their sinful ways, and turn to the Lord, and seek his forgiveness, and his salvation.

The message which John the Baptist preached was an unchanging message from an unchanging Messiah. The message John the Baptist preached was an unchanging message from an unchanging Messiah.

Because you know the message of repentance, the message of turning away from sin, and turning to the Lord for salvation, the message of seeking forgiveness and cleansing, that message of repentance, it has been the same message since Adam was driven out of the Garden of Eden.

[29 : 17] It's an unchanging message from an unchanging Messiah. And the unchanging message of the need to repent and turn to the Lord, it's all because this unchanging Messiah has an unchanging compassion.

An unchanging compassion. He says in verse 6, I the Lord do not change. Therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

My friend, it was because of his unchanging covenant, and his unchanging character, and his unchanging compassion, that the Lord didn't and doesn't cast us off forever.

It's because of his unchanging character, compassion, and even covenant, that the Lord bids us to come and repent. Do you know, that's why Jeremiah could say in his book of Lamentations, this I call to mind because I have hope that the Lord's mercies, they are new each morning.

And it's because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. And you know what he says, great is thy faithfulness. My unconverted friend, this is what you need to hear.

[30 : 38] This is what you need to hear because the unchanging message, of the unchanging Messiah, it is repent and believe in the gospel.

Repent and believe in the gospel. And this message is given to you because the Lord Jesus Christ, the covenant king, he is revealing to you his unchanging compassion.

It's because of his love that you are not consumed. It's because of his love that you're still on mercy's ground. It's because his love endures forever.

And his love, it's a covenant love. It's his unchanging covenant love. And his love, it's characteristic of his person. Because he is God.

God is love. And because God is love, his unchanging character of love never changes. He still loves. Jesus. Therefore, when you look at Jesus, when you see Jesus today in the Bible, his unchanging covenant and his unchanging character and his unchanging compassion, it's all presented to you so that you will come and repent.

[31 : 57] You know, my friend, it's no wonder the Bible tells us in the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus Christ, he is the same yesterday, today and forever. He's the same yesterday, today and forever.

Because in an ever changing world, with ever changing circumstances, who can you turn to? Who can you look to? Who can you come to? Who can you trust in?

But this Jesus, this Jesus who never changes, he never changes. His unchanging covenant and his unchanging character is the reason for his unchanging compassion.

And the wonderful thing is this Jesus, he moves with compassion. He moves with compassion and he loves. He loves sinners with an everlasting and an unchanging love.

And you know, at the close of another year, another year of change, who better for you to turn to?

[33 : 02] Who better for you to look to? Who better for you to come and trust in than this Jesus?

This Jesus, because my friend, in your ever changing world, you need to begin a new year by coming and committing your life to this unchanging saviour, Jesus Christ.

You need to come to him because he is saying to you today, I the Lord do not change. Therefore, you are not consumed.

My friend, you come to him and you find out what wonderful salvation he promises to you in the gospel. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee that all that we come to a God who never changes, his love towards us is always the same, his compassion it fails not, his goodness is from everlasting to everlasting, and we thank thee, O Lord, and we praise thee that despite our changing mind and our changing heart and our changing lives, all that we can come to thee and cast every care upon thee.

Lord, hear us, we ask. Lord, take us up in thine arm that we would realise that thou hast an arm that's full of power and thine hand is great in might. Keep us, we pray, as we go towards another year, that whatever is before us help us ever to look to Jesus, the author, and the finisher of our faith.

[34 : 47] Take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We shall bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 62.

Psalm 62, that's on page 294. We're singing from verse 5 down to the verse marked 8.

As we said, this is the confession of the Christian. And this is actually David, the psalmist. This is his testimony. And he's testifying to us in these verses that we're singing.

He says, my soul wait thou with patience. Upon thy God alone, on him dependeth all my hope and expectation. And David says, he only my salvation is, and my strong rock is he.

He only is my sure defense, I shall not moved be. In God my glory placed is, and my salvation sure. In God the rock is of my strength, my refuge most secure.

[35 : 55] then David turns it, and he tells everyone else around him, he says, you people, place your confidence in him continually. Before him pour ye out your heart.

God is our refuge high. So Psalm 62 from verse 5 down to the verse marked 8. We'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise. Amen. My soul wait thou with patience upon thy God the Lord.

On him dependeth all my hope and expectations.

Hear only is my sure defense I shall know who be.

In God my glory blessed is and my salvation sure.

[37 : 35] In God the rock is of my strength, my refuge must secure.

Keep people place your confidence in him continually.

before him pour ye out your heart God is our refuge high.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever more. Amen. Amen.