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Sermon preached by Mr F L Gosden at Shovers Green Chapel, Sussex,  
on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1961

“For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”  
Malachi 3 v. 6.

There is a solemn majesty in this declaration which the Lord makes concerning Himself: ‘I am the Lord, I change not.’ If it was only a declaration of His divine sovereignty and majesty and no more, it would be of no benefit to us, but we have, you see, this declaration of divine sovereignty, and it is always attended with the effects and benefits of it. Therefore it continues, ‘I am the Lord, I change not; *therefore*,’ because I am what I am and who I am, ‘ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.’ And indeed I have felt (and there is such a thing as *feeling* the truth and the majesty of the truth) that there is in this declaration the nature of a change for the comfort of His dear people and for the confusion of all their enemies. And if the Lord should make this declaration by His Spirit in our hearts, we could look then at everything, and this would cover all. As it comes into the mind with respect to the efficacy of Christ's sin-atonement blood, we read in the Hebrews, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9 v. 14) and if that “how much more” should take effect by the Spirit it would cover everything.

Here is the foundation of the hope of His people: ‘For I am the Lord.’ In the first place, it intends the infinite Being of Jehovah Himself. As we heard this morning, that Being is incomprehensible. Well then, have we any right, is it presumptuous in us, to speak of the incomprehensible God? From my little experience, I remember 30 years ago, when this chapel was empty, sitting in the pew down there, when, I trust by the Spirit, I had such a solemnising sense of the infinite Being of Jehovah that I bowed my head in this empty chapel and worshipped. And haven't you been thankful, my friends, that God is what He is? If He could be comprehended by creatures, He would be, at least I can say, of no use whatever to me. And that it is possible that poor dying men and sinners can be and are directly and intimately connected with the infinite God in Christ, in such a way as to be in eternal and indissoluble union with Him, and related to Him, is indeed a wonder. But the Scriptures reveal it, and this is contained in the first place in this great word: “I am the Lord.”

But it was the sovereign will of Jehovah that He should reveal Himself to a creature, and for that reason, and for that reason alone, He created, and created man, a creature created in His own image, and therefore capable of receiving a revelation of God and His purposes and His decrees. A wonderful thing, and a very solemn thing it is, to be a man, because we shall be accountable for that image in which we were created. It is a very great mystery and a mercy, if it comes into your heart to truly believe that the wisdom and goodness of God in Christ has made Him knowable and possessable, and that in taking into union with His divine Person human nature, His people are made to partake of the divine nature. “I am the Lord.”

His Lordship and sovereignty was in the covenant of grace, but the first manifestation of it in the world was in creation. That beautiful first chapter of Genesis repeatedly declares this Lordship: “And God said ... and it was so.” That is all. Nothing between it. God said, and it was so. And even in creation this divine sovereignty of the Lord also manifests His immutability – that while the divine perfections of Jehovah cannot be communicated to a creation, therefore immutability cannot be communicated to a creature;

but the blessing of it is (and it will make Christ precious) that which He bestows, the work of the Holy Ghost in the heart, the grace that He gives. The life that His people have in Christ is immutable in these blessings and in these graces. It makes them what they are.

And so Moses, when the Lord sent him to Pharaoh: Moses said, 'Whom shall I say sent me?' The Lord said, 'Say unto him, I AM THAT I AM' (Ex. 3 v. 14). O my friends, I would not speak of these things without true exercise of soul, but I can in my little experience say that some right conception of this great God, as he is seen and seeable in Christ, has been a comfort to my soul, and the very foundation of my hope. And when you hear this declaration, and look at everything else in these perilous days, days when the very earth is shaking and vile men are waxing worse and worse, and the Lord is allowing science to discover terrible means of destruction, yet nothing can alter this: 'I am the Lord.' It was a comfort to Jeremiah, and we shall prove it in experience by being brought into extremities, and that is the very reason why the Lord brings His dear people into extremities. He teaches them to profit (Is. 48 v. 17), teaches them who He is. I believe that the one great work of the Spirit in carrying on a work of grace in the heart is to give and unfold in the understanding a fuller knowledge of God. And so Peter says "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3 v. 18).

But this is a mighty voice: 'I am the Lord.' It will silence every other voice in the universe, and it will silence all your fears if the Lord should speak it into your heart. Jeremiah trembled – trembled at the sight of the Chaldeans. The destruction of the city was imminent, and the Chaldeans had brought up their artillery, and it caused Jeremiah's heart to tremble. O my friends, do not be afraid to tremble! Be rather afraid of a stout heart! There are many people who think they can brave it out, but when they come to the swellings of Jordan, they will find it very different. And so Jeremiah said "Behold the mounts," and the Lord gave Jeremiah a gracious answer: "Behold," He says, not "the Chaldeans," not "the mounts," but "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is there any thing too hard for Me?" (Jer. 32 v. 24, 27). It is a challenge built upon the basis of divine sovereignty, and it is for His people, the sons of Jacob. It belongs to every individual son of Jacob. Oh, it would enable us to be still, and know that He is God (Ps. 46 v. 10), in the most terrible calamities that may come upon us. It would compose the mind. It will strengthen us with might in the inner man. I say, this voice will silence every voice in the universe. Do you long to hear it? He still speaks.

But not only His divine sovereignty, but His immutability: we speak of divine sovereignty to distinguish it from a natural sovereignty. There is a natural sovereignty, which belongs to monarchs, to our Queen, but it is very limited. It is only a figure-head; she has no power; and not only so, her earthly sovereignty only extends to her own dominions. But this sovereignty of the Lord is absolute: 'I am the Lord, I change not.'

Well, this means something to a poor changing sinner, but although the Lord changes not, yet He changes His attitude and His methods and His dealings with His people in providence. All His works are "uniform, though various" (J Hart; Gadsby's Sel. 315). But 'I change not.' "The same yesterday, today, and for ever" (Heb. 13 v. 8). And it is indeed a mercy, an amazing thing, when one by the Spirit realises it; very blessed too, for we can say, "If this "God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8 v. 31) So that the essential thing is to be united unto God in Christ in all that He is. His people are united to Him and receive the benefits of what He is in His infinite Being. But He has been pleased that all fulness of the Godhead should dwell in the Lord Jesus bodily (Col. 2 v. 9), and therefore it is that the Lord Jesus Christ exercises the benefits of God Himself towards His people. 'I change not.' Not only has it

pleased the Father that in His eternal Son all fulness should dwell, but the Father hath committed the judgment to His Son, and also the government of the Church. The government of His people's salvation is upon His blessed shoulder (Is. 9 v. 6), and the key of the house of David is upon His shoulder (Is. 22 v. 22), and therefore, in a very special way, this refers to the Lord Jesus Christ.

'I change not.' And as His people are connected with the sovereignty of God, so they are involved most blessedly in His immutability; and I do feel that it is not accidental, but purposely, that the creation is a wonderful analogy of the work of grace. There is a kind of immutability stamped upon creation. It is the only thing of the works of God that we can look upon with any pleasure and any real satisfaction; and whereas the world is in a tumult and chaos and everything is changing - the events of the world are changing and passing away - yet the works of God remain exactly as they were when they were created, and so He is carrying on in creation His undisturbed affairs amidst all our disturbances. And even a view of Him in casting our eye over the beautiful creation will at times keep us steady. Oh, how sickening is the artificiality of everything in the whole world today - nothing real, nothing substantial! The only things that we can look at with any pleasure here below are the works of God, and they are unchanging; they remain what they were; the only thing with respect to creation is, it must end. And therefore it will bring us to feel our need, and to seek for those blessings which are irreversible.

Oh how terrible was the case of Balaam! It must be a terrible position for a man to have the influence of the Holy Spirit on his external faculties. We cannot believe for a moment that Balaam was graciously acquainted with God, and when God met him He had a purpose in it, and one great purpose was to declare and to demonstrate to His people His immutability. And Balaam was forced to go back and make a declaration that he would not have done if he could have helped it. He would have cursed God's people if he could (Num. ch. 22-4). "God is not a man" - have you ever felt the blessedness of it? "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Num. 23 v. 19) Oh, what a strength and comfort that would be in a poor troubled sinner's heart, either respecting your soul's salvation and the conflicts and the horrid temptations of the devil, or together with the united trials of your pathway! I cannot speak - I have not the ability to speak - of this text, but the Lord knows I feel at this moment a little of His divine majesty, and that voice which reverberates through the whole universe: 'I am the Lord, I change not.' And nothing *can* change Him: not only does He not change, but He is unchangeable. Do you feel a little rest come into your weary, heavy-laden soul because this is the very Lord, the same God, who gives that gracious invitation, "Come unto Me"? 'I am the Lord, I change not.' I am the God of all flesh; is there any thing too hard for Me?" (Jer. 32 v. 27) "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mat. 11 v. 28). And therefore His people are partakers of the benefits of His sovereignty and His immutability. As we said, immutability cannot be communicated, but immutable blessings can, that have immutability in them. Grace is immutable, unlosable. Everything that God gives, and all the Gospel, and salvation itself, is immutable and unchangeable. It can never decay, or fade, or die. Oh, what a portion! It does indeed make the fine gold of this world look dim. It makes faith in the heart willing, and ready, and anxious, ready to join with Jeremiah: "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him" (Lam. 3 v. 24).

'For I am the Lord, I change not.' We may think He changes, because He does change His attitude toward His people - "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself" (Is. 45 v. 15) -

and therefore we shall know changes in our souls. And our providences change; at one time we may be rich, but riches may take to themselves wings, and we may become poor. We may now be in health and strength, but next month we may be in the hospital. Providence is mutable, but the immutability of God runs through providence and through grace. It comes to the mind (and I just speak as it comes): this is a terrible word for the wicked. 'I am the Lord, I change not.' 'My holy just law changes not in its demands.' "God," out of Christ "is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12 v. 29); His perfections are a consuming fire. And I feel warranted soberly to say this, that if the wicked think of God at all - and they do - they wish He were not what He is. Can we look honestly in our hearts, and look up to the Lord, and thank Him that He is what He is, the Lord unchanging? There may be many things you cannot say, feel you dare not say; but there are some things that you can honestly say, and that may be one of them: that you thank God that He is eternal, incomprehensible, because His love is an everlasting love, because His covenant is an everlasting covenant - nothing can alter it, nothing can change it. Paul felt this when he said "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8 v. 38-9). Now what was his confidence based upon? Well, it was based upon the text. And therefore His dear people are involved, and connected, and sheltered by His divine sovereignty, His immutability and faithfulness. My friends, we are in a troubled world, and some of us perhaps have trouble, but I do believe, if the Spirit brings us inside this text, we can rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, whatever our circumstances.

'For I am the Lord, I change not.' "The same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." He does not change now He is exalted in heaven, and that is a comfort. He still is the Lord, immutably the same in heaven, because those offices which He condescended to occupy for His dear people are immutable, and so are the relationships that He entered into with His people; nothing can dissolve them. Oh to be made a partaker of Christ! That is what it means, to be made a partaker of Christ; and we are going on to eternity. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Rev. 14 v. 13) Paul, writing to the Romans, having declared unto them the doctrine of Christ and of justification, says this: "What shall we say then to these things?" We will say this, that "if" this "God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8 v. 31)

'Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' And that is the only reason why. But what a mercy it is to have any evidence of being a son of Jacob! "Jacob have I loved; Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9 v. 13), and we are either spiritually a son of Jacob or a son of Esau. We cannot take it for granted because we are Strict Baptists and attend a certain ministry, and know all about the doctrines of Christ. It won't make us sons of Jacob. "But he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (1 John 5 v. 10).

How many things would consume us! One thing - speaking for myself, I am persuaded that I should have consumed myself long ago. And therefore "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3 v. 22) - not because of mercies, but the Lord's sovereign *immutable* mercies, irreversible mercies, that 'ye are not consumed.' You look back over your life; can you with thankfulness bow before the Lord and confess that before Him? If nothing else, I myself would have consumed myself; but oh, says the Lord concerning Ephraim, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" (Hos. 11 v. 8) He could not give Ephraim up because of the covenant of grace, and therefore He lays this immutability as a ground for "strong consolation" in writing to the Hebrews: "God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation" (Heb. 6 v. 17). Now these two immutable things were Himself and His Word. Nothing can alter either, for

*"The written and the incarnate Word  
In all things are the same."*

*(J Hart; Gadsby's 878)*

And the strength of that consolation is the infinite God Himself. And I feel that in all the rugged pathway of life, and all the fiery temptations through which we pass, together with a body of sin and death, we shall by the Spirit be brought back from time to time just to that one point: "Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever" (Lam. 5 v. 19). So there is consolation in Christ, strong consolation. There is strong consolation in the immutability of Christ, because in His Person, His sacred humanity, and all His work that He accomplished, all had immutability in it, and it was all created for sinners. Oh, what a portion Christ is!

'For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore' – there is the ground of it – 'therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' Why, the world would have consumed us; our sorrows would have consumed some of us; the devil would have consumed us!

'Ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' It should cause, and it would be a good thing if it does, much searching of heart, seeking a testimony from the Lord that we are sons of Jacob. I do feel that there is a kindness and compassion in the way that it is put here. It might have said, 'therefore ye sons of Abraham' – the same thing – or 'therefore ye sons of David.' But then Abraham was a man eminent in faith; David was a mighty man of exploits; but this speaks to poor "worm Jacob" (Is. 41 v. 14), for the comfort of His dear people who feel to be less than the least of all saints, and the chief of sinners.

'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' And hell won't consume them. When you come to consider the Lord Jesus in all that He condescended to become – matchless condescension – to become what He became was immutable. He has not vacated one office or dissolved any relationship with His people.

*"That human heart He still retains,  
Though throned in highest bliss."*

*(J Hart; Gadsby's 23)*

I cannot speak of Him, but He is precious, and I wouldn't wish Him less. Oh that He would fill our hearts, fill our lives, and fill our sorrows, and remember us at the swellings of Jordan! It would hold good. The voice of the Lord at the end will be exceedingly precious, for the Holy Spirit to whisper in a dying sinner's ear 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye are not consumed.'

Amen.