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La D 389

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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham

on Lord's Day evening 23.3.52

Hymns: 283, 281, 339 Reading: Malachi 3, 4 Text: Malachi 3.6

"I am the Lord I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed"

What a mercy it is if we have known that change which only God's grace can work in our souls. All creatures are subject to changes, change being necessarily attendant upon creatureship and unchangeableness pertaining only to the Creator of all. But although change is general with all mankind yet there is a change which is only known by those who fear God and that is a change from death to life, a spiritual quickening by the mighty and effectual power of the Holy Ghost and "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins". It will be healthy for us to examine carefully whether we have actually experienced that vital change which will affect us eternally, that will affect our destiny either for eternal happiness or eternal misery. We have this evening sung two hymns which, while indeed they express an uncertainty as to assurance, certainly convey divine life in the soul. Otherwise those desires so spiritual and heavenly in their nature would never be there. I well remember as a lad being at Hanover chapel, Tunbridge Wells as that first hymn was sung:

"'Tis a point I long to know"

and afterwards Mr. Newton, pastor then, commented upon it and said something to this effect, that no hymn suited his feelings better than that hymn, and the dear old man said, 'What, do you mean to say I have been for years a minister of the Gospel and pastor here and have preached all these years and have not got beyond that language. No, I have not got beyond it and I do not ever expect to get beyond it here for it is as much the language of my poor soul today as it ever was'. It was very confirming to a lad like myself to hear a good and gracious and godly minister speak after that manner. If indeed that hymn is in our heart truly then there is something beyond nature there. Nature itself would never produce spiritual desires and, although indeed there is a complaint in the hymn, there is the breathing of a living soul in earnest and fervent desire to know the Lord and so with the second hymn. What a mercy it is if we have known that great and essential change. David was referring to a people who had never known such changes. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." (Ps. 55.19) Beloved hearers, has there ever been a change in you? Does this poor dying world satisfy your soul or is there an aching void that earth can never fill? Do you think you could say 'Were all the world mine yet the world with all its wealth could not satisfy me', and has the Lord brought thy soul to a point like this?

"Thou, O Christ art all I want;
All in all in thee I find".

If that wonderful change has been wrought in us by divine grace yet even then we shall be subject to many changes which are peculiar to the Lord's people. We are not always in the same frame of mind by a long way and yet still we are in the hands of an unchangeable God,

"Whatever be my frame,
His loving heart is still
Eternally the same."

This is our mercy, all our changes never change Him. Is not that a confirming word? "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Can we not see there the mercy of unchangeableness in God? We change so much in our feelings. O what changes! Changes in our feelings in preaching, changes in our feelings in hearing. Sometimes the Gospel is sweet and the name of Christ precious, at other times all seems as dry as a stick. Sometimes a little brokenness and feeling, at other times as hard as a stone. Sometimes a little lifting up of the light of His countenance, at other times walking in darkness and having no light. Sometimes coming up from the wilderness leaning upon our beloved, at other times torn to pieces with temptations that seem to cover everything over. Yet although good things may be covered over they are not lost. Here is an unchanging God and this is a mercy for us because our preservation is bound up in it and our salvation. "I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed", as though God would say, if it were possible for Me to change I should change toward you but what a mercy it is that

"Whom once he loves he never leaves,
But loves him to the end."

"Once in him, in him for ever;
Thus the eternal covenant stands".

"I change not". Has this ever been attractive to you? Amidst all the changes through which you pass have there been moments when your faith, anchored in divine immutability? Have you seen at times great attraction in that divine attribute? Unchangeableness belongs only to God. It is essentially divine. "I AM THAT I AM". That is the name of God and immutability is wrapped up in it and the eternal safety of all His redeemed people is wrapped up in it. O if we could lay hold of this rightly! I believe there have been moments in my life, that is in my spiritual experience, when divine immutability has been amazingly attractive - an unchanging God! That is when a hope in His mercy can be felt. If divine immutability is on our side then salvation is ours. This promise is bound up in it, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". I am God and "I AM THAT I AM" covers everything else, every other power, every other person is subordinate and changeable. "Heaven and earth shall pass away but My words shall not pass away". (Mark 13.31) This perfection in God is an essential perfection, that is to say, with all reverence, He must be

unchangeable to be God, because changeableness pertains to creatureship. This divine attribute is that which fills Him with majesty and glory.

"Unchangeable His will;
Whatever be my frame"

This is a very attractive attribute, attractive to faith, although it may cost, at times, much inward trembling as to which side we stand on of this divine attribute.

There are several respects in which this unchangeableness applies in relation to God. He is, and ever will be, the same. Years make no difference, generations, ages, changes in the earth, providences, make no difference. His affairs are undisturbed,

"Our lives through various scenes are drawn,
And vexed with trifling cares,
While thy eternal thought moves on
Thy undisturbed affairs."

He alone hath immortality in its full sense, He was from everlasting God and will ever be the same. "Thou art the same and Thy years shall have no end" Each divine Person in the glorious Trinity is unchangeable in nature and essence and will and purpose, the Eternal Father, the Eternal Son and the Eternal Spirit. The blessed, glorious Son of God assumed human flesh but that affected no change in His glorious and eternal Personality, Father, Son and Holy Ghost are one eternal, unchangeable God. Unchangeableness is in every attribute of deity, essentially so, His glorious, omnipotent power never knows a change. His justice and holiness, mercy, grace, power on all these things immutability, unchangeableness is stamped. "I change not"; no creature can say that. As for us it is our mercy if some changes have been wrought in us, changes that will be for our good and for His glory. Here is a glorious, eternal Being who never can change; a God who cannot lie, an immutable Being, O what a consideration this is. What a consideration "I change not" and this is true with respect to His decrees. He never changes in them. Unchangeableness is in His choice of His people. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom.8.29,30) He never went back, never changed His mind and this is our mercy if He has chosen us. His divine decrees were never subject to revision. No ensuing confusion or possible change exists in relation to the decrees of God concerning His people. He deferred His judgments as sometimes He changed the face of providence in answer to prayer, all was fixed in His eternal mind. Does He repent of evil in answer to prayer? That does not infer a change in His purposes or decrees. "I change not". Immutability is in His choice of His people for they are chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world, chosen in Him ere time began. He is unchangeable in His love to His people, for it is a love from which nothing can separate. Not all the changes that take place in us in respect to our love to Him can alter Him in respect of His love

to His people. Are there changes in the manifestation of that love? Yes, but there is no change in His heart, there is no change in that love that was ever toward His people. The Lord hath appeared of old unto me saying, "Yea. I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer.31.3). O there is far more in this than we can see, especially when we realise how we change and how poor often our love is toward Him, so poor, so weak that sometimes we cannot find it and yet still, "having loved His own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13.1). It is a Father's love, so rich and so free, and so sovereign too.

"The love of Christ is rich and free;
Fixed on his own eternally"

"I change not". Has the Lord ever touched your heart with His love? If He has then heaven is yours and I do not say this lightly or in any way to condone indifference with relation to spiritual exercises. It will never do that but it will make you long to love Him more and it will make you feel so ashamed of the poverty of your love. It will make you say, 'O if I could but love Him, I would love Him if I could and yet my faith is so cold and so faint'. Yet even in these complaints of the new-born soul there is that very love, "We love Him because He first loved us". Nothing can change that love, nothing can separate from it. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Can these things separate? They may separate from a profession of religion, they may separate from a mere creed but they will never separate one poor soul from His love, never. "I am persuaded", said the Apostle Paul, not 'I think I must come to this', but I am persuaded that "nothing, nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". No, no, not all our guilty, vile, black sins. How can that be? Why, if He loved us then He did bear our sins away and the curse of them. So that rather than separate us from His love, He did take them upon Himself and did bear them away in His own body on the tree, and if indeed His love is toward thee poor sinner, O how hateful will these sins be that pierced Him and were a contributory cause of His sufferings. Yet what everlasting, unalterable, immutable, love!

"O love of unexampled kind!
That leaves all thought so far behind
Where length, and breadth, and depth, and height
Are lost to my astonished sight."

O what a contemplation it is, what a doctrine, what an experience, what an honour is conferred upon that vessel of mercy, plucked as a brand from the burning, who feels his heart moved in love to Jesus. Some of you have felt this and they have been the sweetest moments in your life have they not?. It is as though when the Lord touches your heart with His love, He says, 'I will never take it away'. This love is everlasting love and if one can be separated from it then it could not be everlasting love toward that one.

"I change not". And then again unchangeableness applies to His will which like Himself is immutable. The will of God is indeed a great mystery, but it is an unchangeable will. All things being decreed by Him in the exercise of that will; it was the motive that moved Him in all His actions, an immutable will and an effectual will. Moreover this applies to all His purposes relating to divine providence. There is no immutability in providence itself but all changing providences were decreed by the unchangeable God.

"His decree who formed the earth
Fixed my first and second birth"

and all the trials and afflictions and changes that come to us in this mortal state were all decreed by Him. We continually come into things, come into changing conditions and yet there is one glorious Being who sees the end from the beginning; every circumstance in our life is exposed to His eye and He ordained it for wise purposes concerning His people.

"I change not". This refers to our ultimate destiny which God has appointed. What a wonderful mercy if He has appointed us to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our destiny! What a tremendous contemplation that is, an eternal state that can never, never cease. This is in the hand of God; an unchanging God will one day seal our destiny either for eternal happiness or eternal misery. All is fixed in His divine purposes. Unbelief may rise against God's decrees and His sovereignty and say, to what purpose is it then to pray if what is to be will be? That is carnal reasoning, God has appointed prayer and has disposed that His people shall seek unto Him for those blessings that He had laid up in His eternal mind for them.

"Prayer was appointed to convey
The blessings God designs to give.
Long as they live should Christians pray;
For only while they pray they live."

Is this attractive? Can you sometimes, by faith, view those blessings in the hand of an exalted Saviour and see unchangeableness in them, unchangeableness in His promise? Every Gospel promise is sealed with blood and in Him yea and amen to the glory of God for us. Will He fail in His promise? Unchangeableness is here, God who cannot lie is here. Here are two immutable things, His oath and His promise to confirm His promise. "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us". O if I could bring before you the wonder of this attribute of God! It is wonderful indeed to consider an eternal Being whose mind was ever fixed and independent of any outside influence. "He has an undisputed right to govern me and mine", and then for such a poor sinner to feel a hope that the thoughts of God were thoughts of peace toward him and not of evil, to give him an expected end. "I change not". O have you ever in the quiet hours of the night, in meditation, found comfort in your soul in an unchangeable God? It can be profoundly sweet, especially when your feeble faith rises and your soul can anchor in the precious

blood and righteousness of a dear Redeemer and you can feel a little sweet hope and persuasion that the Saviour shed His blood for you. "I change not". No provision of His grace can ever be lost here; unchangeableness seals every child of God beyond the reach of a tempting devil. Although he may at times sorely distress the mind of a vessel of mercy, he can never destroy the soul. "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther and here shall thy proud waves be stayed", "I change not". Think of the impossibility of this to changing creatures. O you look at yourself, your feelings, your thoughts or circumstances, your condition in life and your prospects and you see they continually change and it causes you to say, Why, there is no foundation here, there is no foundation in my soul in that which is changeable'. We must build our hopes upon Him who once groaned on Calvary but who is now exalted and enthroned above, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. Poor sinner do you ever feel that you can come and cast your whole weight upon Him? Do you sometimes feel strengthened by a hope in an unchangeable Saviour and in an unchangeable atonement so as to venture, notwithstanding a thousand opposite voices?

"Come, then, repenting sinner, come;
Approach with humble faith;
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death."

An unchangeable Jesus; How attractive to faith! Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today and for ever, and what has He said? "I am with you always even unto the end of the world". Unchangeableness is stamped upon every promise and He will be faithful to them all. But you say, I am tossed this way and tossed that way. Yes, those are changes that come in our feelings, all the more reason why we should anchor in an unchanging God. Is not He sufficient? Is not He able to bring thee through? Is not His power unchangeable as His will? "Fear not", He says, "I will help thee". You look into your poor heart and see a mass of sin and confusion and change and decay and death and you look about your circumstances and afflictions and changes that come in your life and that come in the church and come too in our relationships in life, and you say, what about all this? "All to make us sick of self and fond of Him". O what a mercy it is when we can truly believe in an unchangeable God, and then when a little of His blessed Gospel flows into your poor heart you will bless Him from the very bottom of your heart that He is an unchanging God. How sweet it will make every promise that He gives, every word that He speaks. How attractive it will make the Lord Jesus in His Person and work and blood and righteousness. What can I say about this? May we, poor, changing creatures be enabled by God's grace to put our trust in, and believe in, an unchanging God. We shall prove Him to be this to all eternity when the changing conditions of this life are all left behind, when by His grace we see Him as He is then we shall prove Him in an endless eternity to be an unchanging God. May the Lord bind us up in that bundle of eternal life and strengthen our feeble, withering faith in Him. Amen.
