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EVENING SERMON 119.

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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 4 January 1925

MALACHI 3 v 6

"For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore
ye sons of Jacob are not consumed"

A wonderful declaration this, placed, so to speak, as a wondrous light in the midst of the darkness of sin. The context shows us the awful depravity of man, human sin, and, if we may say so, say what appears to be a contradiction, something worse than that, namely the rebellion of children against a good Father. "I have nourished and brought up children, saith the Lord, and they have rebelled against Me." Children with whom God made a covenant, to whom He gave great promises, over whom He cast His protection, to whom He gave daily blessings. And they, on their part, promised to obey Him. They said whatever the Lord commanded them they would do, and yet they went astray constantly, preferred idols, committed adultery with false gods constantly. He said, "If then I be a father where is mine honour, and if I be a master where is my fear?" (Malachi 1 v 6) And in the verse preceding the text He speaks of what He would do to this people. "I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right and fear not Me, saith the LORD of hosts". And why are not these people consumed? Why are they not cut off in their wickedness? The text tells us: "I am the LORD, I change not". I have not dealt with you as you deserve because I am the LORD. I took you into covenant and I will be faithful. These things respect Israel after the flesh. They also respect Israel after the Spirit and God comes near to His people to judge them, to judge them in their consciences in respect of their sins and their wanderings and their backslidings, and He deals with them so solemnly as that it just answers to this: "I will come near to you to judgment". We can be very far off from the Lord and He far from us for a time. So we may walk on in our waywardness without knowing or realising how far from Him we are.

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But when He comes near, when that is fulfilled that is written in Isaiah - They vexed and grieved His Holy Spirit and He was turned to be their enemy and fought against them - then we know what an evil thing it is to depart from the living God, and this is not a strange experience to all here. If God has drawn near to us to judge us, and to bring us to His footstool, convinced of our departures, waywardness, unthankfulness, unholiness, so as that, judging ourselves, we have been amazed at His forbearance and that He has suffered us to live, and then this word comes in as a reason why we are not cut off - "For I am the LORD, I change not". You change, you are traitors, you deal treacherously with Me, you depart from Me, you walk after your own hearts, you fulfil or seek to fulfil the lusts of your mind, and I have drawn near to judge you of these things and to show you how depraved you are, and I will tell you how it is that I have not cut you off, namely because I change not. May we be enabled a little this morning, met together for the first time on a Lord's Day in this New Year, to look at two things; namely, at our sins, then at this blessed Being who here speaks of Himself and says He is immutable, and that the reason we are not cut off is because He changes not.

The first subject is so dismal in itself that naturally we all would dismiss it without a word; it is so dismal a thing to look at our sins - how we have departed from God, how our nature is utterly defiled and depraved. So dismal and gloomy is it, that one never is surprised at professors, mere professors, feeling they do not like to hear of it. But this God will never permit to be in His people for He will bring them to judgment by drawing near to them. And if we look at our past - it is a healthy thing to do and if we have but grace to do it we shall know that - if we look at our past we shall see that whatever God speaks about His people, whatever accusations He brings against them, we are indeed guilty of in spirit if not outwardly, and what a solemn view it is. Take your past, I take my past; let us look back. What have we done? If God says that His people are to do whatsoever they do to the glory of God and we look at how we have lived, at our motives, our inward ways, our secret lives, what can we say? Nothing but sin in respect of our fallen nature, nothing but sin have we done. We have forgotten Him days without number. This is a solemn charge which He brings against His people. "My people have forgotten Me days without number". If we

look at His service, this is chargeable indeed against us, us who make a profession. We have said of His table it is contemptible and of His service, what a weariness is it. The flesh dislikes it, and has manifested its dislike. If we look at the claim of God upon us for thankfulness, is not that true - "Neither were they thankful". I might run through many things. You who are exercised before God and have the Spirit to assist you in the matter, you will find plenty to accuse yourselves of, matter for shame and confusion of face before the Lord; you will find plenty there. It is difficult sometimes when one looks back upon one's past to lift up one's head, very difficult, seeing we have done what we have done. Ezra felt it - I have often felt with him - he said, we are ashamed and blush to lift up our face before Thee, for we are before Thee in our trespasses, and we cannot stand before Thee because of this. So, in this matter we are a poor, guilty people. Individually and collectively we are a guilty people. Now how is it that we are spared? Who has borne with us and with our ill-manners and stiffnecked ways? Why, this great, this gracious God who here speaks. "I am the LORD, I change not".

Let us look at this in the second place. He changes not in His essence; that is the foundation of all else. He never can be other than He is; never more - any addition that you might imagine could be added to Him would prove His imperfection. He never can be less; to take anything from God is to undo His very Being. He is eternal, uncaused, issuing from no-one, no thing; an uncaused glorious Being, with an essence we cannot comprehend, and never have proper conception of without revelation. He changes not. He subsists in Three Persons - God, the Father - "I AM THAT I AM" says God. God the Son - "Before Abraham was I AM". God the Holy Ghost, the eternal Spirit. And these Three are One in essence. They subsist in Three distinct Persons, the essence is one, and God changes not. Anchor here in respect of immutability. There is no immutability if this be not immutable, the very essence of God. And because He changes not in His essence, His Being, so He changes not in anything that He has decreed and purposed. Any love He has ever had to a sinner, any covenant He has entered into with regard to sinners, any promise He has made, any threat He has uttered; He changes not. And when this truth is dropped into a distressed conscience, it brings peace, even by the blood of Christ. "I am the LORD, I change

not" "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". Now with regard to the decrees of God, they are a deep, a great deep, and yet we are all embraced in them. A decree to save, a decree to save whom He will. It is very solemn. In this decree God had no respect to the creature's condition, either good or bad. He saved because He would; not on faith or goodness foreseen; not in respect to any towardness that He might perceive, but simply, and only, and alone, because He would save, and this decree never alters; it is as immutable as God. It extends itself to the beginning and the end of the mortal race of every child of God, and to all parts of His life; every circumstance into which he may come, any trouble that may befall him, any temptation under which he may come and be conquered for the time; everything relating to a child of God is in this eternal purpose of God. There is an awfulness in this; there is a blessedness in this. This covers you, this will go with you through the wilderness - through the 107 Psalm you will see it. Through all changes and difficulties that the people of God experience this will be running with them, and encompassing them, and covering them, and sustaining them; the eternal, immutable purpose of the living God. Now how is this purpose manifested, first of all manifested in the gift of Christ? - the name of every child of God deep sculptured in His wounded heart, as the hymn expresses it. And because of the love of God to these people we read He sent His Son. The gift of Christ is that wondrous gift of all gifts, containing in itself every needful good. Every covenant blessing, every divine promise, all the wisdom of God and the power of God and the faithfulness of God and heaven itself, all are contained in this one wondrous gift, the gift of His dear Son, and Christ changes not. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Now this will bring in these following mercies, namely the kindness and love of God appearing in the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. That comes, and I speak of this at once because it is the beginning of all real religion, and indeed it is the beginning of all true knowledge, both of God and of self, and of sin. Nobody knows God really till he is born again. That mighty work comes unbidden, unwanted, unsought; it comes. "Live" is God's word to a polluted, dead creature. "I said unto thee Live". When God calls a sinner this is the thing He begins. "Having begun a good work in you He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ", and this is an

unchangeable thing. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance". "I knew thee" He said, "that thou wouldest deal very treacherously". Nevertheless for Mine own sake I will pardon your sins. I will blot out your iniquities as a thick cloud. O what a God He is in the beginning of a work of which He will never tire. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged till He hath set judgment in the earth" (Isaiah 42 v 4). So, sinner, this will account for the fact that your religion has not really died out when sin has been threatening to smother it. This will account for the truth of your prayers, your repentance, your little faith, your feeble love, your waning affections; it will account for them all existing against the power, the deadening influence of indwelling sin. Everything is wrapped up in respect of vital religion in the beginning of it in this great act of God, the new birth. "I am the LORD, I change not". I am not tired of this work of grace in the soul. How soon we tire of things; how soon we get discouraged; God, never. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged". "I am the LORD, I change not". And therefore I do not change in My acceptance of you when you draw near to the throne of My heavenly grace. We, some of us, have to go with unspeakable shame and confusion before God from time to time. How you may be feeling this morning, who fear God, I know not, but I know one to whom it is not easy to go to the throne of grace, with a view of the perpetual fallings, failings, ingratitude and every evil thing. Now the Lord's immutability comes in here in this particular, and it says, the throne is the same, the atonement is the same, the Spirit is the same, grace is the same; here is no change. Your indisposition to this, all this I forgive; come unto the throne of grace.

Come needy, come naked,
Come loathsome, come bare,
You can't come too filthy,
Come just as you are

And here let me bring in one or two things. First the drawing near of God to judge a sinner in his conscience. "What hast thou to do" says God to His people, "in the way of Egypt; to drink the waters of Sihor?" He drew near to them, He judged them. Do you know what this word is? As many of you as do will understand the solemnity of it, the penetrating conviction that it brings, the sense of having

been a traitor, and constantly turning aside from a good God. And, as you know this, you know what it is to be chastened of the Lord in your spirit and in your conscience, and this is one of the effects of God drawing near to a sinner to judge him for all his evil things. And another thing that I would bring in is this, the afflictions that He sends. He not only administers solemn rebukes in the conscience, but He sends trouble, trouble that will bring a man to his knees, that will empty him of many things and bring him into a great concern respecting that God whom He has so basely treated. Now take these two things; when they are lodged in a sinner's conscience what is he to do? A legal heart says, you have gone beyond, you have gone beyond all that is hopeful. A legal heart says these innumerable transgressions, they will never be washed out. Now what says the gospel? "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden". "Open your mouth wide". And when the Holy Ghost drops in these kind invitations, these divine encouragements, they prove the immutability of God's grace; they prove that the throne of grace is unalterably good, inviting, attractive to the sinner. They prove to Him that God is above his sins. He tries to count his sins and cannot. Then the Spirit directs his heart to the infinite atonement of Christ, infinite in its value, and this brings the sinner to the throne of God's heavenly grace again. He comes with the pain of conviction, he comes with the pain of trouble, he comes with the shame of his sins, he comes with all these things and he finds a good God ready to receive him; finds what Hezekiah found "The Lord was ready to save me". And if any of you gracious people here are under these two things, conviction in your conscience and trouble in your circumstances, and are feeling the effect or the working of a legal heart, you will find "I change not" to be a word suitable to you. "I am the LORD, I change not". O sinner, convinced of sin, conscious of being wrong, go to this good God, go to the fountain of mercy, go to the fountain of infinite merit, and you will find that though you change constantly, here is an unchangeable One who says, "I will heal their backslidings I will love them freely, for Mine anger is turned away". "I change not".

Now take His promises. If one may say so, His very heart is in the promises; He means everything that the promises say; everything that the promises say, God means. I will add this word.

Everything that a sinner needs out of the promises, God is able and faithful to give, and He never changes. He has never promised anything beyond His ability; He could not; and He has never promised anything of which He will repent; He could not. O we repent of many things, repent of many ways; God repents of nothing that He has said, nothing that He has done, nothing that He has promised to do. When it is said in the Scripture, as occasionally it is: "And the Lord repented Him of the evil" it means that He turned in His dealings with the people and began to deal otherwise with them than He had been dealing, but no repentance in His heart, and so of His promise He will never repent. That is a beautiful word respecting the promises of God. "All the promises of God in Him are yea and in Him amen unto the glory of God by us". You see how the Lord connects His people with Himself - "Unto the glory of God by us". "By us" that is to say, in whom they are fulfilled. And when the promise of forgiveness is fulfilled in you that is to the glory of God. When the promise of sustaining grace is fulfilled in you, that is to the glory of God. So of all the promises the same must be said, every promise fulfilled in a sinner is for the glory of God in that sinner. This is what the Lord says and He is sure to do it. The Psalmist found the stability of this word of God, the promise, and so he goes to the Lord with it and says - "Remember the word upon which Thou hast caused me to hope". And if you have got any little bit of the gospel in you, you may, you have warrant to do so, you may go to Him who put it there and say "Remember the word upon which Thou hast caused me to hope". "I am the LORD, I change not" in respect of My promise, in respect of My blessed word. It is this that sustains faith. Your faith must be sustained. As the body has to be sustained by food, so faith must be sustained by the very word of God, and when the word of God is put under your faith there is sufficient to sustain it, and it will sustain it. Faith thus held up by the word of truth will be for the praise and glory of God in that truth. "I change not" in respect of My promise. Now if we look at providence we shall see many changes. No providence is immutable; God has never said that any providence of His is unchangeable. We make some things necessary, I mean providential changes. A good providence may have to be taken away from us for our waywardness. Kindness may be removed because of our unthankfulness. We are vulnerable when God exposes us to any change and when you get a change in providence you need mercy to enable you

to believe that He who has done this is unchangeable with respect to yourself. Respecting your soul and its salvation He is unchangeable and respecting His wisdom in dealing with you in those untoward providences is also unchangeable, but do not measure, if you can avoid it - though sometimes it seems impossible to avoid it - do not measure God as to His heart, purpose, and promise, by any change in your circumstances. Jacob did it once at least and he made a great mistake. "All these things are against me" Well, it was not so. And you may say, these things are against me, and conscience may say, you deserve that they should be, but now faith, drawn out by the Holy Spirit and fixing on God in His blessed word of promise, will say, He does not, He cannot change; He is the same. Erskine puts it well for us. He says - What thou findest Him at thy best, He's at thy worst the same, and in His love will ever rest. There is no change here. "I change not". Though My providential dealings change and it is good for you that they do, and I bring you the changes for your good, but I, myself, in My love to you and My promise, "I change not". Now as this is received by faith into our hearts, it will be a help and comfort to us. As we receive, by the teaching of the Spirit, the truth that God in His word is unchangeable and that any word that He has given to us is unchangeable, I say it will be a help and comfort to us. Think of what Christ said "Heaven and earth shall pass away but My word shall not pass away", must be fulfilled. O think of it. Now go into your heart and see what you have got there. Plenty of people will be satisfied by going to the Bible - it is a wonderful Book - but they may be deceived. But if you have got some of it in your heart, put there by the eternal Spirit, then you can go ~~go~~ to the Lord as David did. He said - "Do as Thou hast said". A bold word for a sinner to say to God, but warranted. Not too bold, for the Lord had told him what He would do, and he said "Lord do as Thou hast said". Thy servant, reverencing Thy majesty, Thy servant having heard Thy word, hath found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee. So may you find it and I find it, in our hearts, to pray the prayer of faith founded on the blessed, the unchangeable word of the living God in our hearts. "I change not".

Now there is something for us to look forward to here and let me say one or two words on this point in conclusion. I say there is something for us to look forward to here. Look at your

circumstances, fix your attention on them; look at your resources, fix your mind on them; look at your friends, fix your mind on their love and constancy, and what will you do? If you are taught of God you will soon be brought to this - these may soon die. All I have, all I expect, may come to a woeful disappointment. No child of God can properly, for a minute, live on anything outside God. I do, you do, but we live a sort of death then. But when the Lord draws near to us and says, "Behold Me, behold Me" and faith is fixed on Him, then there is something to look forward to. This the Psalmist had when he said - "This God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our Guide even unto death". We have got very little to look forward to; death, sickness comes, adverse circumstances arise, weakness comes. Lastly the hour of death comes, penetrating our mortal being, and we have to die. That is all we have got to look forward to as we are poor sinful men and women. If, as with some here, if life is extended to the 70 years and more, the end is coming. If it comes earlier, it is just the same as to the thing, the natural part of it. Now if we have got no God to look to, if we have no grace, if there be no Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever, what then? But if the Holy Ghost brings this blessed God and makes Him known in our hearts, if we know Jesus Christ by the teaching of the Spirit, if it please God to sprinkle us with the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanseth from all sin, then we have something to look forward to. Paul had; he said "I know there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness"; I know that. What a great thing that is. "I know" he said "whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day". O sinner, if ever you get this, you have got everything that you need. You have in your heart that that will never never be taken away from you, never, for God changes not. His providence does; we change, friends change; He changes not. O may it be our cry then

O Thou that changest not
Abide with me

"I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" Justice did not come out against them to the full, deception was not allowed to ruin them, idolatry and wickedness was not allowed to overcome them entirely, for God drew near to judge

them in their conscience and to redeem them from their sins, and so they were not consumed of sin; they were not consumed by the law, they were not consumed by justice, for a faithful and gracious God stood by them to deliver them from all their sins.

Well may we have this God to look to. I say again, in self and in circumstances, there is nothing to depend on; we know not what a day may bring forth, no, not an hour. But if we can say, "This God is our God for ever and ever" then we have enough. Then we may sing with Toplady "I am rich to all the intents of bliss" and may the Lord help us to say it by the teaching of His good Spirit.

AMEN.