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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 7 March 1928

Text: Malachi 3 v 6

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

The very nature of God is the security of changelings who are loved and redeemed. It was a strange and blessed answer which God gave to Moses when Moses had said to Him, "When I come to the children of Israel and say that I am sent by God, and they ask me, "What is His Name", what shall I say to them? Say, "I AM, THAT I AM, hath sent me". God makes Himself known in His nature. and in His eternity, as the refuge of His people. Immutability belongs to Him alone. Vicissitude is natural to men; we are all changelings. God changes not. If He could change, He could die. Every change that a person experiences is a sort of death. You may change from health to sickness. You die to health. One may change from wealth to poverty; there is a death. We are constantly changing. Feelings change; bodies change; friendships change; your friends die. There is a perpetual change in nature, but the God of nature, the God of man, the Saviour of sinners, the Eternal God, the I AM THAT I AM is ever the same, and He is in the Man Christ Jesus. When, as always was the case with them, the pharisees were disputing with Him, He said to them on one occasion - "Before Abraham was, I am". Jesus Christ said it. The Apostle Paul in the Hebrews, giving a reason why the churches of Christ should be subject and submit to their Pastors, gives this reason - the end of their conversation is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today and for ever, and therefore consider that and then submit yourselves. Immutability. God Himself is the refuge of changing, fickle people, who are to changes ever prone. What a mercy it is for us that it is so. What a mercy it is that God has revealed this - "Thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose Name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place". Eternity is my habitation. What then? He is so condescending in

His love that He says, with him also, that poor man, who is of a humble and contrite heart, will I dwell. This eternal God. And it will be well for us this evening if it should please the Holy Ghost so to deal with us as to have our hearts gathered up to Him who changes not. How often in a day do some of us change in our minds. Now there is a spirit to pray, then a deadness in prayer; now there is a moving of faith, then it seems to die under the power of unbelief; now there is submission to the will of God, then we want our own way; now we are humble, then we are stalking through the earth in pride. What changes we experience. God does not deal with us according to these changes. He deals with us according to His nature and according to His covenant. We get into great trouble through misjudging Him. A poor tried child of God may judge, or seem to judge the heart of God, by the hand of God. A poor rule; a troublesome rule. If you think you know the heart of God by what He is doing with you today, you may make a very great mistake. His hand is His providence in many cases, and in His providence He deals strangely with people and changes His manner with people. Now He comforts, then He reproveth; now He holds up, then He casts down; now He puts a crown of lovingkindness on the head, and then He casts the crown down to the ground. Sometimes He makes us sit with princes, then He puts us into the dust and turns us to destruction. These are the dealings of His hand. They are not all the language of His heart, that is to say, they do not all express His intention. "I know thee", He said. He knows Himself. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end." An end you do not expect, an end He does expect, because it is in His heart and mind. And what a people He had to deal with. Sons of Jacob, waxing fat and kicking, multiplying altars to themselves as they were in the providence of God; proudly enjoying the fruit trees they did not plant, and having luxuries in the houses they did not build, and eating of the vines they did not grow. What a people He had to deal with. And He sent them into captivity and delivered them. And when He heard their cry, often He regarded their miseries, and when they turned to Him again and again, then He turned to them. And the reason and the root of all is this - He changes not; the same God. And when faith gets hold of this in the

power of the Spirit, then there is a fast hold and a standing. You may say, when you have got hold of your mountain, "I stand strong, I shall never be moved." And then He hides His face, and the mountain goes down. But when faith gets hold of God, that is different. There is a real standing, and yet this unchangeable, glorious I AM THAT I AM, may be a swift witness in some of our consciences often against us because of our ways. Some of you, I do not doubt, will understand what I mean; you have had a witness in your consciences when you have been walking in strange things and ways. He has said to you perhaps, what He has said to me, "What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt to drink the waters of Sihor. What have you to do with this world; I delivered you from it." He may say to you, "Is Israel a home-born slave, why then is He spoiled." He may bring things to you that will cut you, O cut you deeply. A swift witness as He speaks in this book. "I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers. Ah, and when He bears witness to your sins, you cannot dispute. You might dispute with a friend, and the friend might be mistaken who came to you and said you are doing such and such things, and walking in wrong ways. You might properly dispute with him. But when the Lord comes near and enters into matters with you, bringing things against you and setting before you your iniquities, doing what He said by the prophet Isaiah, "I will show unto thee thy works and thy righteousnesses that they shall not profit thee," I say, again, you cannot dispute with Him. With Job, you will put your hand on your mouth and say "I have uttered things I understood not." "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." And a day like that is a day when you can confess your sins, when you understand the spirit of confession; when it is not in word only, but in heart and in feeling and in shame; and then the Lord may bring His unchangeable nature before you and give you a little understanding in the spirit of Ezra who said, confessing his sins, and the sins of the nation, "Thou art righteous and we are escaped; we are before Thee in our trespasses and we cannot stand before Thee because of this." But look at it - "Thou art righteous" and nature will say, therefore we are condemned. But faith says - "Thou art righteous and we

are escaped." Our reckonings are turned upside down, and God's shall and wills stand firmer than the everlasting hills.

"I am the Lord". "I AM THAT I AM". We have to do with this God. I am glad to have the feeling in a measure which Moses was filled with when, as we read this evening, ^{EXODUS CH. 3 v 6} He hid his face for He was afraid to look upon God. There is a majesty, a glory that our nature trembles at; a brightness we cannot bear in this our poor nature and we can a little enter then into the feelings of Israel, fleeing away as they did, from the presence of God as He was showing Himself on Sinai. They said to Moses, "Speak thou with us and we will hear. Let not God speak lest we die." They wanted a Mediator. That Mediator is the Man Christ Jesus who said to His enemies, "Before Abraham was, I am". The God who spake to Moses walked in the flesh here below, and is (in our nature) now in heaven, and His beams are bearable; His glory is bearable, that is in a measure of it, and the highest glory that you will ever see of God in Christ I think I believe you will see on the cross; His glory, in a blaze there, as William Gadsby was wont and pleased to say, His glory in a blaze. There mercy and truth met; there righteousness and peace kissed each other. I am the Lord. And yet this is not said, nor to be taken, absolutely. Luther prayed - "O Lord, keep me from an absolute God". And when I met that, as a young man, the expression struck me and it has stuck to me ever since more or less. "O keep me from an absolute God." Who could live in His sight? "No man shall see Me and live." But God in Christ, O His beams are beautiful and bearable. So this is to be taken in that way "God was in Christ". One of the grandest, one of the most blessed and the most humbling sights that God will ever give to a sinner in this world, is that scripture in the Corinthians - "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." O ragged sinner, O shamed prodigal, when God shows you that truth, then you will bless His holy Name that ever you were born.

"I change not". And in several particulars, as it is

relative, a relative truth here in Christ, I shall try to speak about Him. I am the Lord I change not in the covenant of grace. He speaks by Jeremiah and by Paul of two covenants. He speaks of the new covenant and contrasts it with the old. He says the new covenant is not like the old one. He made that with His ancient people and became a Father to them, but they broke it. These Israelites, these sons of Jacob, they broke it. Then He said, the covenant that I will make with thee in those days is this, "I will put My laws into their mind and in their heart will I write them, and they shall be to Me a people, and I will be to them a God, and they shall no more teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother saying know the Lord, for all shall know Me from the least of them to the greatest of them, for I will forgive their sins and remember their iniquities no more." Does that fit you? An unchangeable God in an unbreakable covenant. Vicissitudes belong to us; we have to experience them. They do not enter into this; no change here. Bound up in the bundle of life, blessed with an interest in the covenant, the Surety of the covenant making it as a will and giving to all, interested in it, part of the inheritance. And He has given it so that it can never be broken, and He administers the blessings of it. O what a covenant, ordered in all things and sure. You might make your will and employ a very skilled Solicitor, and then when it came to be proved, it might be found to have a flaw here and a disputable point there, but O when the blessings of this covenant are opened, there is no flaw, no disputable point. You may dispute your interest, that is another thing. O this covenant. "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have laid help upon one that is mighty", the Head of the covenant, the substance of every blessing in it. Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, and when these in any measure are poured into a sinner's soul, then he part of heaven possesses, and sings perhaps

Beneath His smile my heart has lived
And part of heaven possessed

And this covenant will break every covenant you may make, either with the world or yourself or death or hell. It will break all

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of them, disannul everything, put aside everything and take the place of everything, and fill a man's soul with such goodness that he repents of his sins and is grieved that ever he grieved and broke the heart of the Lord Jesus. This covenant takes into account nothing outside God except this, that God will bless certain people and give them an interest in this covenant. He does not account for a man's sins so as to be offended and put aside. "I will forgive their sins" He says in the covenant. "I will forgive their sins and remember their iniquities no more." When God forgives sins, He puts them away. The conscience cannot retain them, for the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin. When the sins of Israel, being forgiven, are sought for, they are not found. Here you build upon a base that nothing can remove. Change not.

"I am the Lord, I change not" in My work of redemption. It is said of this redemption that it is eternal. Having obtained eternal redemption for us. Eternal in the covenant of grace; eternal in the infinite merit of it; eternal in the blessings of it. Not an end to any good thing it has in it. O what poor creatures we are, and when fresh guilt comes it may so obscure the past mercies and sweet experiences that we are ready to say, we have got nothing. I could not tell you how often that is my own case, and yet when the Lord gives you a fresh touch, the old things come back. They ate the old corn when they got into the land and it was good. And you will find, when some new mercy comes, the old things come back. Eternal redemption; what a redemption. It will cover all time and all your time things and take them away. Every polluting thing it will remove. O it is great to be redeemed. "Having obtained eternal redemption for us." Poor sinner, you will never get to the end of that. You may often get to the end of your enjoyment of it, but never to the end of the thing. "Having obtained eternal redemption for us." And that gives a beauty to some of the things Christ says, yea to all of them, but in my mind just now is this one "Where I am there shall also My servant be". I redeemed him; he must come to be with Me; I redeemed him. Death stands in the way; hell obstructs the way; fears, unbelief, hardness, many changes, these are all against the sinner. But says Christ - where I am

he must be. He is the purchase of My blood. I change not." What a horrible doctrine it is that would make the death of Christ of no effect in the cases of many who have felt the power of it and in the myriads of cases never seeking it. O what a mercy it is that the Lord changes not here.

And one more thing, that is His righteousness. It is called an everlasting righteousness and, if it is an everlasting righteousness, there is no end to it. Our apprehension of it, our enjoyment of it, we may only have occasionally. It is very sweet to have it at all even for a little while, but the thing, the righteousness - "This is the name whereby He shall be called, the Lord our righteousness." And when your faith gets hold of that, in the power of the Holy Ghost, then you say "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength" and your rags and polluted garments are taken away, and you stand in beauty, not your own. Everlasting righteousness. And all this is in I AM THAT I AM. O that God would help us to hold that. It is all in Him. "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory".

"I am the Lord, I change not". My purpose is steadfast; My love is unchangeable, everlasting love. My covenant I will not break. My redemption is eternal; my righteousness is everlasting. And what is the effect of all this? I have only named these few things. Many many more there are not to be named now and never to be fully expressed, but what is the effect of this? It affects wicked changelings; it affects idolators, sorcerers, adulterers, against whom, in their consciences, God bears a swift witness. It affects them; it affects them beautifully, savingly and comfortably, when He tells them of it. It redeems from their wandering; it brings them to His footstool. Let us look at this a little.

"Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed". You deserve to be. I know you will subscribe to that; I know every child of God will subscribe with his heart and hand to that - I deserve to be. And the one most deserving a consumption by God's justice, is speaking to you. "Not consumed". There are several things

that could, and, but for the Lord Himself, would justly consume us, and I shall name them. First of all sin. Sin; who can express the filthiness of it, the power of it. Who can express how often it overflows the soul like a flood covering the land. O this dreadful thing. One of the sweetest things you can have in your hope is that you, one day, will be rid of it. May the Lord help us to thank Him and bless Him that sin is separable from a sinner, that one day we shall be without it. We shall see Him as He is and be like Him. But this thing, sin; this provocation of the eyes of God's glory; this hardening thing which hardens the heart against the fear of the Lord and a suffering Saviour; this daring thing that would brave the anger of God; this filthy thing that separates between God and the soul; this awful thing, sin. I know you wont say I make too much of it, those of you who are exercised about it and with it. You will all say I do not go far enough. I know I do not. I can never express it as I know it for myself. Then how is it, if it be such a thing, if it be so filthy, if it be a fire, if it be a hardening thing, if it is a provocation of the eyes of God's glory, how is it that men live with it in them (bless God, they do not live in it), that men, in this condition and case, are not consumed? The answer is "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin" and that becomes an experience. O I am glad that doctrine becomes an experience, that God makes every doctrine of the gospel a known, an experienced doctrine. And this in particular I am mentioning. What a power, O what a power it has. Forgiveness, what a joyful sound it is. Forgiveness spreading itself over the soul; forgiveness permeating the conscience and pervading every feeling and faculty of the mind. Forgiveness - God's smile; forgiveness, a whiff of His love passing over the soul; part of heaven.

Beneath His smile my heart has lived
And part of heaven possessed

and perhaps some of you are saying, we have never known it. Well, dear friends, that does not say you have not an interest in it, and it does not say it cannot come to you. It does not say the Spirit will never bring it to you. Is there one in heaven,

taken there by divine grace who lived any length of time in the things of God here, who had not such a feeling as you have. But then, this is the thing, supposing you should put a little bit of straw on this little hill near us, and say, now there is nothing that will move it, neither wind nor rain, and there should come a sudden storm and the rain should come sweeping down, where would your straw be? And if you put up some objections, and say my sins, I cannot think they will ever be forgiven, why, where would they be, if the love of God, like a sweet sentence, should come down, a sweet sentence of pardon. Who would set the briars and thorns against Me in battle? Why, poor sinner, all that is needed is forgiveness, not betterment, not getting rid of this lust and that sin, that is not the gospel; it is the forgiveness of sins. Sin, that fire in the bones, does not consume a sinner and son of Jacob, because of the atonement.

The second thing to name is the devil. He drives, he dangles temptations before us; he floods us with temptations sometimes, innumerable, horrible, but he does not consume. O but I am driven to idolatry. Ah, says the Lord, "I will bring you again, I will bring you again, and the offering of Judah shall be pleasant. I will send you into captivity to deliver you. A strange thing, but true, and glorifying to God who does it. He showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs, good and evil, and He said the good figs represented the good people, the people, that is the people of God, who were to go into captivity to be delivered. And Israel saw plenty of gods of wood and of stone when they were in captivity, and then the Lord God brought them back, and Ezra said they builded the altar and they began to sacrifice. You will find it so; the devil will not hold and devour and consume a poor child of God. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation. He takes out of the mouth of the lion a piece of a leg and an ear; so nearly gone you may be, but so sure is the covenant, so sure is the love, so sure is the redemption of God that He says - I will take out of the mouth of the lion a piece of a leg and an ear. O what a God we have to do with.

And the third evil to name is the world lying in wickedness. What a mercy to be separated from it. They are not of the world,

even as I am not of the world. And yet some of us, so mad have we been, have gone in the spirit into the world and there we should have lived and died and been consumed, but for God's good goodness.

"Ye are not consumed" And it is just this, because the Lord wont let these things that I have named, consume. He wont let the persons of His own people be overcome, carried away and destroyed by these enemies. I will bring them again, He said. When 70 years were accomplished then even the heathen king was stirred up. The Lord stirred the spirit of Cyrus and he made a proclamation that all the Jews that were in captivity and were willing to return, should have liberty to do so. And the day comes when the captivity of a child of God expires. The Lord stirs up his spirit and he says, prodigal-like, I will arise and go to my father; nearly consumed, nearly dead, I will arise and go to my father. I am ashamed of the life I have lived, of the rags that cover me, of the hunger that is procured by me, but I will go. I will arise and go to my father. One of the best resolutions you ever will be led to make will be to arise when you are in a poor condition, a backsliding state, a worldly mind; a resolution to arise and go to God and say, "I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight". There are three remarkable scriptures in three books of the Bible. There is the ninth chapter of Ezra, the ninth chapter of Nehemiah, and the ninth chapter of Daniel, and these three chapters deal with several singular things. Each man enters upon a confession of sin; each man was led to lay hold of God in His righteousness and mercies; and each man was enabled to make a full confession. And if the Lord leads you to look at those passages, and brings the spirit and the power of them into your souls, you will love those good men, and you will love those chapters, and they may be with you at times, leading you, as it were, taking you by the hand and saying, "Now let us go to the Lord." Do not make excuses. He has spared you, He has not let things consume you as you deserve to be consumed; He has kept you when you did not think of Him; He has blessed you when you did not ask Him. Now let us go to Him; let us take our sins and confess them; let us lay hold, as we can, of His faithfulness and put Him in mind of it; let us

remind Him of the covenant that He made. And if it be so, you will say in your heart, I am thankful those three chapters are in the Bible. The whole of the Bible is like them, that is to say, the gospel is in the scriptures. But some of the scriptures are prominent in this, that they bring matters together which appear to be absolutely severed, and for ever severed. No, grace and sin, a faithless wretch and a faithful God, a weak worm and an Almighty Saviour, these are brought together prominently; they are set before us and may we be enabled to look at them and say, we are not consumed because a faithful God has dealt with us: an unchangeable God has looked after us; His eye has been on us when we have forgotten Him altogether, and He has been out of sight, out of mind. His eye has been on us. "I remember thee". O we have forgotten Him, but He remembers us. And when we are enabled to go to Him, then He gives faith to say to Him "Remember the covenant" and to come closer, perhaps, "Remember the promise, Thy holy promise, the holy promise given to me" you may say; it revives, it comforts, it strengthens. And so this comes to pass in experience, "I am the Lord". I am glorified in Israel; I am the Lord. I am glorified by forgiving sin: I am the Lord.

Now my brethren, I hope my just bringing this great matter before you may be for edification. The knowledge of God is edifying to all to whom it is given. The knowledge of God lifts the soul up, carries the heart and mind and thoughts heavenward. It gives enlargement of understanding; it brings settlement into the mind; it says to a sinner, though you are always changing, live on Him who changes not. Though you are subject to many difficulties and troubles and afflictions, look to Him who says - "Look unto Me all ye ends of the earth and be ye saved, for I am God and beside Me there is no Saviour."

I wish I knew more of God, I wish you did, all of you who do know Him a little. O what there is in Him, What will be our case in heaven when eternity in all the greatness of it, as God is eternal; when love, without beginning or end; when righteousness wrought out by the Saviour; when the blood of Christ in all its efficacy, and the faithfulness of God in all its glory shall fill the soul with everlasting bliss? What will

it be? Do you try to think of it sometimes? Do you think of that blessed place you are going to, as you hope; where you wont be troubled with sin, nor perplexed by darkness, nor weakened by pain, nor bitten by hunger, nor consumed by thirst, but there you will see, know, feel, love and enjoy this great God. The Trinity, the covenant, everything that will conduce to bliss, and maintain bliss in the soul, will be enjoyed.

May the Lord speak to us about these things and gather us up in our hearts, thoughts, faith, hope and love to Himself, and the glory shall be His.

AMEN.