

The God Who Does Not Change

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[0 : 00] Our theme today for a short while together is the unchanging nature of God. That's the second of our studies that we're looking at in the doctrine of character of God.

And it's a really significant, again, might not be that much application today. I'm not sure if it needs that much application. It kind of spills out from thinking about the whole nature of God.

But it's a really interesting thought. It's interesting to consider this. I don't just mean interesting in a kind of disinterested way. I mean, it's interesting in a significantly important way for our Christian lives.

Because in many ways, in reality, all we know is change, isn't it? All we know is change. That's what our day-to-day experience has changed.

Forty years ago, I sat there in that last pew. That was a man's pew when I was a wee boy here.

Forty years has passed, longer.

[1 : 12] And there's been lots of changes just at that very personal level. Changes in ourselves, we're kind of, we're running out.

Things are running out. We're running out. We're getting older. Our relationships change. Our jobs change. Our thinking changes. So much changes in our lives.

And yet at some level, we also crave stability. At least at some level, we crave stability. We look for things that are unchanging to hold on to in our ever-changing world.

It's a bit paradoxical. I know it's a bit ironic because we're always also looking for newness. We crave stability, but we don't like being the same.

And we were discussing, I think it was in the House this week, we were discussing, that it's now a mark of weakness, really, to have been in the same job for 30 or 40 years.

[2 : 12] There was a time when it was a really good thing to do that, to be in that same job, and have that consistency into that work ethic. But now it's seen as being unambitious. You're not pushing yourself. You're not driving.

You're not trying and breaking new horizons. And if you've been the same place for 40 years, you must be dull. So there's that kind of pressure for newness and change and things being different. But yeah, at the same time, where there is change, at least we want to control it. We want to control any change there is in our lives and in our circumstances. And yet the reality is it governs us, change governs us.

You can't turn back the clock of time. You can't have eternal youth. You can't remain the same. You can't keep the same friendships.

Change governs us. We are finite and that is one of the damnable realities that we face in a broken and a fallen world, a world that is running down and running out.

[3 : 17] Nothing stays the same. Nothing stays the same. But God is different. And that's the reason you can come here today and worship Him.

God remains the same. And we mustn't impose our limitations on God. We mustn't just think of Him as kind of like us, but just maybe a bit bigger or a bit better.

He is a God who is at this level and with this characteristic absolutely not like us because He's unchanging. He's an unchanging God. Go to Hebrews chapter 1 where we read together and there's a quotation from Psalm 102 which we will sing at the end of the service today.

And he says, the Psalmist is speaking of God, the Father in his Psalm in Psalm 102. But the writer to Hebrews takes it and applies it to Jesus.

Okay? So we have applied to God what is applied to Jesus. And he says, in the beginning, oh Lord, giving him this great I am name. Remember, we looked at that last Sunday if you were here.

Amazing ever existent God.

[4 : 29] Oh Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment.

You will roll them up like a robe. Like a garment, they will be changed, but you remain the same. And your years will never end. And that expresses what is expressed in a lot of different places in the Bible which we'll come to in a minute, briefly.

It expresses this reality of who God is. And that's a very important reality for us to think about for a few moments this morning. You remain the same. And the Psalmist, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is using creation as an example of something that is impermanent.

Now we can think of, you know, Arthur C. or Ben Nevis or the Appalachians or whatever, Great Mount, is the same as unchanging.

The scene of life is unchanging, the world, the physical world in which we live. But the Psalmist says, you'll roll them up like an old piece of cloth. You'll roll them up just like a rag of clothes of snow.

[5 : 40] And you know, that's what it's like with clothes, isn't it? You get them, and they're great, and they're new, and they're lovely, and they're fashionable. And then you look at them a couple of years down the line and nobody wears it anymore.

And it's kind of all ragged around the edges, so you roll it up and you throw it away. Or you use it for painting or something else. And that's the kind of picture that we were given, like that, you know, like a garment, they'll be changed, you know, we change our clothes all the time, impermanent.

And yet, here is this God who has spoken of here as one who's remaining the same. That's why we worship him. It's not the only reason we worship him, but that's why we worship him.

That's why we come here again and again, week after week, month after month, year after year on a large day on a Sunday, because we worship this unchanging God.

This unchanging God, He's divine, and He's the same. He's the same yesterday, today, and we'll see a little bit more about that in a moment.

[6 : 43] So He's the unchanging God. That's His self-revelation. You know, we take Scripture, we recognise it as His own self-revelation. He's revealing it, He's telling us about Himself.

And we've got the Samus here under the inspiration of Scripture in a situation where the unimaginable has happened, or so most commentators believe in terms of when the Sam was written, was that the temple was going to be destroyed.

The temple, you know, this great, solid Old Testament temple was always going to be there, but it was going to be destroyed. And the people of God, who had been promised a promised land? But through the rebellion, that was going to be taken from them.

They're going to be taken into captivity. Everything was changing. Their whole world was just imploding because they were going to be taken into captivity, into babbling away from their beloved temple and away from their beloved land.

And yet the Samus has given this message that you, God, you never change, you remain the same.

And then it's transposed into Hebrews here where the writer to Hebrews is reminding the people that Jesus isn't just a throwaway figure, He's someone you can just give up, He's less than God, and you can change who you think He is and change your understanding of Him and cease to worship Him.

[8 : 04] Remember, they had a poor concept of who Jesus was at the false teachers. And they were trying to say he was less than God. And even here, the writer is reminding the people that Jesus Christ is supreme.

And he is God. And he is to be worshiped as God. And he has been before all creation. In the beginning, oh Lord, you laid the foundations of that. Do you see that great architectural picture of a God who lays the foundation of this amazingly great world in which we live?

Can I just give you one or two other verses that highlight this? Because it's a slightly different kind of sermon. Usually we'll go through a book or we'll go through a chapter and we'll take a bit of time. But this is thematic preaching.

So we're looking at a particular theme that is mentioned and then we'll maybe pick out some other parts of scripture which also highlight that theme. Sam 90 verse 2.

Just to highlight these things, before the mountains were born, again, mountains. Unchanging. Before the mountains were born, you brought forth the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting.

[9 : 13] You are God. From everlasting to everlasting. You don't change. James 1.17, every good and perfect gift is from above. Coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. Who does not change like shifting shadows?

Who does not change? God says in his own word, I don't change. Malachi 3.6. I the Lord do not change.

He's making that stunningly clear declaration. But I don't change. Do you think your God's getting older? Do you think he's getting more whizzed and frail?

He says he doesn't change. Sam 33.11, but the plans of the Lord, the plans of the Lord stand firm forever. The purposes of his heart through all generations.

Isaiah 46.11, what? Listen to what he says. What I have said, that will I bring about. What I have planned, that I will do. Now you're already thinking of the next application to the sermon, aren't you?

[10 : 13] Because you're all smart at that level. And you're saying that's amazing truth. He says what he has said he will bring about. And he said, what I have planned that I will do.

And your minds are already thinking about what he said about his promises. And about his plans and about what he's revealed. And they will not change because of who he is.

And that's great, isn't it? Hebrews 13, at the end of this book, he says Jesus Christ is same yesterday, today and forever. So we have an unchanging God.

The Bible makes that clear. And we need to just unpack that a little bit this morning and think about that. He's absolutely unchanging in his person or in his essence, if you could say that, in his very being, in his perfection.

I'll say a little bit more about that. In other words, he can't get any more perfect. That's some thought. And he can't get any less perfect. Isn't that some thought? He's just perfect.

[11 : 14] He can't be kind of perfect. He can't be nearly perfect. Either are you aren't. And he is perfect and unchanging in his perfection. Unchanging in his goodness and his purposes, rather, as we've mentioned in some of these verses and in his promises.

So these will all have powerful application to your life because our great temptation is to doubt his promises, doubt his plans, doubt his goodness and doubt his character, isn't it?

And he says, well, look, this is who I am. This is who I am. I don't change. And that's hugely significant. In other words, there's not a first century God and a 21st century God.

Hey, we've got a much better idea now. And we've wanted to change and mold God and make him much more socially acceptable. It's the same God. It's one unchanging God.

There's not a note. And this is a favorite one. There's not an Old Testament God and a New Testament God. It's one God. There's not a Creator God and a Savior God. A kind of strong, big, powerful, harsh God and a nice, gentle, mild and meek Jesus.

[12 : 26] There's one God. There's not a Jesus and a judge. There's one God. And it's an unchanging God in his essence, in his perfection, in his purposes and in his promises.

One unchanging, divine, trinitarian, perfectly good, merciful, just, sovereign, honest, wise God. And so we take the characteristics of God that he reveals in the Bible and we say, there always is.

He doesn't change them. And we'll maybe take a little look at some of the implications of that for us in our thinking about who God is.

First place, time doesn't change God. Okay, time doesn't change him. Now, we talk about the ravages of time. We look in the mirror and we think, oh, the ravages of time have really, well, I look at you, mostly at under 30, it doesn't make any difference.

But for some of us it does. We feel and sense the ravages of time. But time doesn't change God, you know, and that's important to recognise.

[13 : 38] He's eternal and he's infinite. Both of these reflect his unchanging nature, don't they? In other words, he's not bound by time.

A concept we find hard to get our heads round. But he does reveal himself in time and he reveals himself progressively. So we know more about him having read the New Testament than just if we'd read the Old Testament.

But it's not a different God. He just tells us more about himself. He reveals more, but he's nonetheless an unchanging God. And what we can apply to the revelation of God we have in Jesus in the New Testament, we can pull back into the Old Testament because it's the same unchanging character and nature of God.

Certainly he accommodates himself to us in our understanding of time, but he's not bound by that time. He's not like us. He wasn't born.

He didn't have a beginning. He doesn't have an end. But he's unchanging. You know, if you have a beginning, that's a changed circumstance. Even moving from the womb to the world.

[14 : 41] It's a huge change and as obviously is death. But he has no beginning and no end. We struggle to get our, because we're bound by time ourselves and by moments and by sequence.

But God isn't. He's an ever present, although he acts in time. Now I know that I'm, I know it's only quarter to 12 in a Sunday morning. And these are, these are really thoughts that are going to make your brain burn.

But stick with it, okay? Because they're really significant and important also. Because that's what's revealed about God, that a God who doesn't change, he is without beginning or end from everlasting to everlasting.

That's the God who we worship. So he doesn't improve over time. You know, they say a wine matures over time. And that maybe we mature over time ourselves.

God doesn't do, he doesn't become more God-like as he goes on. He doesn't make him a better God in the way that sometimes our lives make us better as we experience more things.

[15 : 45] So he's not, in other words, he's not an evolving God. He's a scientific type of term. He's not evolving into some better, stronger God. And he's not atrophying either.

He's not rotting away. There is no future for him because he is and knows and holds the future within his own purposes in his hands.

Nothing that he will learn in the future will change him, change his plans. You know, he says, my plans are unchanging. Isn't that an amazing thing?

He's eternally unchanging. So time doesn't change him. He's eternal. Eternally unchanging. But also neither does space change him.

I think sometimes the Hebrew false teachers thought that Jesus was a small God because he was confined, because he was a physical body and he couldn't possibly be real God.

[16 : 47] But yet space doesn't change who God is. God is present everywhere and yet is also a personal God. So there's no place that he can go that is a new discovery for him.

There'll be nothing that he will do that will surprise, find a surprise from him. Now that's different from us. We were learning all the time. We sat in the house this week and watched Life Story. David Attenborough's new series, wonderful stuff, fantastic photography, incredible pictures of nature and of things under the water and things above the water and fish that spit out water to shoot their prey to get them into the wonderful stuff that I've never been seen before.

People spending weeks and weeks and weeks filming this new discoveries that we see all the time. And that's a great thing for us. But yet it's all gloriously known to him.

He designed, he created and he takes pleasure in us learning and knowing and discovering who he is. No need for him to discover because if there was things for him to discover, then he would need to worship them because they'd be greater than him if he didn't know about them.

[18 : 01] But he is God and he is sovereign and he is complete. Space doesn't change him, time doesn't change him. But at the same time, it's that kind of almost incomprehensible greatness is that he's also infinitely personal.

Now some of the Greek gods that were around, that were being worshiped around this time, they were kind of a bit like that in terms of being unchanging. Well, at one level anyway, I think.

But they were also, the Greek gods were also very distant. The gods of the Greeks were very apathetic. They weren't interested in humanity. They weren't interested in people. They were a bit capricious at that level.

And I suppose they weren't really unchanging, but they were distant at that level. But God, while he is great, is also incredibly personal, caring and concerned because he has plans for us as we've seen and spoken of and as is revealed in God's word.

And he responds to us in our humanity according to his unchanging nature. You see that? And his nature is one of pity, compassion, justice, holiness, and one who loves and cares for his people.

[19 : 21] That is his unchanging nature. He is not an impassive God. He's not an unemotional God. He's a God who pities, who cares, who acts, who loves, who serves, and who comes into our experience as part of his unchanging nature.

And we see that, separately, don't we? We see that incredible personal reality in his unchanging nature to be redemptive.

You know, some people will talk about redemption and they'll talk about the cross and they'll say, well, you know, that was God's reaction when things went wrong. And so he had to have a plan B when creation didn't really work out as he wanted.

He had to think on his feet and think of a redemptive plan to bring things back from the edge. That's not the God he's revealed in the Bible. The Bible God is a God who is unchanging in his plans and his redemptive plan has been in place since before the foundation of the world.

His purposes for his people, mystery, though that brings into our lives, questions about responsibility and sovereignty, though undoubtedly there is. He has always had this redemptive nature that since before the beginning of time, if you're a believer, has plucked you and has chosen you to be redeemed.

[20 : 47] And yet you stand responsible and you stand as one who needs to choose. Christ is gloriously unchanging and his salvation was always meant to be.

It's not an afterthought. It has always been in his purposes. And we see that in redemption is infinitely personal.

Now, some people have various questions about this and I don't have time to go into these in any depth whatsoever. But some will say, but does it not say in the Bible that in various places that God changed his mind?

Did he not say to Hezekiah that he was to get his house in order because his life was going to end? And Hezekiah repented and God gave him another 15 years. God changed his mind.

It was not the case that God told Jonah, go to the people in the name of God and say, you're going to be destroyed for your sins and for your rebellion and preach to them.

[21 : 47] And did Jonah eventually not do that? And when he did, they repented and wasn't Jonah mad about that? That they repented and did God then not change his mind and not destroy them as he promised?

I think what's important in these situations, there's a couple of things. One is I think God in his word accommodates the human language to help us understand him. And I think what he's doing is that he's responding with his unchanging nature, actually to the changes in the hearts of the people to whom the preaching and the warnings were given.

And his intention was always clear that as people repent and turn to him, he will save them. That's always been his purpose. It's not like he said that it was not a 50-50 gamble, will they turn, will they not?

And well, if they turn, I'll let you change my mind. It's always been in his unchanging nature and was always in his purpose for Nineveh and for Hezekiah as they responded, as they repented, as they turned, that he would show mercy on them.

God is an unchanging God. Now just say a couple of things before we close in the application sort of. First is that he's so unlike us. There's many ways in which we mirror God because we're made in his image, even though that image is a broken image and is being redeemed only as we come to Christ and are beginning to be healed by him in his grace and his mercy.

[23 : 24] But in this characteristic, he really is so unlike us. You know, in his plans, what are we like with plans?

How often do we change them? How often do we say to someone, we'll do something and then we let them down? Because we've changed our plans because our heart knows what our heart wants and it doesn't fit in with the plans that we originally promised to make.

How often do our own plans, our own plans not subject to things outside ourselves? Take the classic Scottish barbecue.

So often we'll plan to have fellowship and friendship at a beautifully warm outdoor time of eating meat and vegetables, barbecued.

And the rain pours down. I remember one in our house in the middle of June when we had friends around that hailstone in the middle of June. And the best plans we have are dependent on outside circumstances so often, aren't they?

[24 : 37] They're dependent on other things and so often our plans are provisional. And there's nothing wrong with that. They're provisional. That's the reality of the life in which we live. But that is not so with God.

His plans are not provisional. He is not dependent on anyone else to fulfil them. He uses other people, but he's utterly independent and his plans will never fail.

And he has said, what I have said, that I will bring about. What I have planned, that I will do. There's no one in the world that can make that claim apart from God.

And we need, if we are Christians, if we're serious Christians, we need to think about his plans, about his plans that are revealed and be comforted, that they will happen.

When he says, I'm ushering in the new heavens and the new earth. When he says, depart from me, I never knew you. Even though you did miracles and even though you did great things. We need to think about that and we need to concern ourselves with what he says.

[25 : 37] Because it means they're hugely significant and important. His plans are good plans. Even when we don't understand, are you struggling today with things? Are things difficult in your life? Are you questioning God's goodness and His love and His grace?

And yet his plans for you, as a believer, he can't reveal any more beauty and love to you than he has in sending his son to die for your sins. And his plans are good and his purposes are good. Even when we don't understand him. Because he said you will suffer. And he said you will be in darkness, but you'll not be alone in darkness. I'll be with you. And in your suffering, I will redeem that and I will use it.

See? See how significant important that is, plans. But as promises and they're linked, aren't they? As plans and as promises are kind of linked together. How often is it really sad when your child says, or you hear a child say to their dad or their mum, but you promised.

But you promised. And you know you've let them down. You made a promise. You said you would do something. But then something much more important has come along that you want to do.

[26 : 51] And you don't do with them and you said, but you promised and we've let them down. So often linked to our selfish will or just life itself just overtaking us.

And yet his promises, he says he will fulfil because he's made his promise. He doesn't make one promise and then will not fulfil it. How hard is that for us to accept in our own sinful, finite, fallen natures, even though we may be redeemed.

It's linked to his word. It's linked to his revelation. It's linked to his character. It's linked to his surity. So don't throw his promises around lightly and say, well he doesn't care about that one.

Or that one isn't being fulfilled. As if we are able somehow to know better than God about his promises. Now I know that requires us to be humble and I know it requires us to fall in our knees. It requires us to worship him because sometimes we simply don't know. But his promises are sure and his promises will have. If God can lie, let's close up now because we'll worship a devil.

[28 : 01] And we have no hope and life is a disaster. If you can't trust God, yes we can all trust God when things are going well for us. But if you can't trust God in the darkness, then he's not trustworthy.

If his promises aren't sure, then none of his word is sure and nothing is sure. He's unchanging. And we need to wrestle and grapple with that and get to terms with that in our lives.

As is his person. He's not volatile. He's not capricious. He's not moody. He's not a people pleaser. He's not unpredictable.

Now I thought of some of these things. There must be something about my age or something. You kind of head backwards and you think of lots. And I was also thinking, sorry for the examples all being a bit personal today.

I was thinking of a classics teacher that I had in school who the first time we had him was fantastic. I was laughing in the class. He was cracking jokes.

[29 : 00] It was one of the things brilliant. The second time we had him, he was like Hitler. It was unbelievable. It's a complete change of character. He was giving people lines. He was keeping people back after school.

He was being abusive. It was just like night and day. He was completely unpredictable. And that happened right through the year. Some days fantastic.

Other days awful, terrible. You were walking on eggshells all the time with him. That's not what God is like. He's not a God that we walk on eggshells with.

He's not a God who will respond to us, according to how he's feeling today. So often we respond, don't we, as people are feeling rough, we can't be bothered with people.

We can't be bothered with helping and serving. Because we feel rough or we feel self-pity or whatever it might be. And so often our lives are like that. God is utterly and completely, predictably perfect and good and holy.

[29 : 59] And he is who he is and he always will be who he will be. He'll always be just. He will always be holy. He will always be loving. He will always be that sovereign, glorious God who's revealed himself that will always hear your prayers.

He's never too tired. He's never disinterested. It will never turn you away because he's made promises and he said things. And we need to come to grips with theology that speaks about these important truths.

Can I remind you, he can't get any better. Are you wanting your God to get better? If you do, then he's not God, is he? And you're worshiping an idol. Are you scared that he's going to get worse? Or you think he can get worse? Well, if he can get worse, we can't worship him either. Because he's a devil if he is prone to imperfection and sin and decreasing imperfections.

He's unchanging. It is we who need to change. So in conclusion, very briefly, trust.

[31 : 05] That's why this truth of Hebrews chapter 1, but you remain the same and your years will never end, is that we trust him. See, he's worth trust. He's dependable.

He's solid. His word is his bond, especially in the dark. Know his promises. When he says you're forgiven, accept that you're forgiven.

When he says I love you, accept that he loves you. Even though every item of your being may scream out, saying God doesn't love me, because things aren't going the way they should be. Believe him when he says I will not let you go. Even as you face the valley of the shadow of death, I will be with you. Hold on to me. Trust me, especially in the storms.

And don't only just trust me. Rejoice. Be joyful. He's worth it. Trust me. Trust my word. Trust its authority.

[32 : 02] You know, we don't need to have conventions and different gatherings to look at the word of God again and say, well, what do we need to get rid of just now?

What do we need to revise? What do we need to update? It's an unchanging word. It doesn't need updated and changed and revised. The translations may, but not the truth behind it.

It's unchanging and we need to recognize that. And our value is not trying to be so influential that we can change God. It's if he needs to be changed, but rather that he loves us as we come to him in grace and in salvation and he takes us into his family.

And he shares in his attributes to some degree, even yet to a degree this unchangingness, which we will experience more in glory, that we will not be able to sin, that we will live eternally with him, and we will be more like him at that level.

So remember that trust. You know, the application doesn't get more deep or more complete really than trust and pray. Go to him. Go to this rock.

[33 : 16] How often the Bible speaks of him as a rock. Reliant him. Seek his wisdom which he promises. Let his unchanging glory change us.

May we be changed as we go to him. Pray not to manipulate him. Lord, you don't understand. Lord, please give me what this is what I need. But submit ourselves to his will. Make a request known to him and make sure that the change that we're asking for from him is to not just to suit us and manipulate him, but rather is to draw us closer to himself.

You know, he's very wise and he's very perfect. We need to stop telling him what to do.

Because he knows and he's good and he loves us. Sam 18 says, For who is God besides the Lord and who is the rock?

Accept our God. Sam 62 says, Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe.

[34 : 26] I hope that we can look to him again and again. Who is the rock? Let's put our heads in prayer briefly. Father God, we ask that you would help us to understand what it means to believe and trust in a God who is unchanging.

We find it a hard, difficult concept because we change all the time. We're so fluid and we're so unpredictable in many ways.

And life is unpredictable. Experience is unpredictable. Every day is something that can be very unstable and un-stabilising.

We thank you that as we trust in you and believe in you for our life and for our salvation, that we have a Christ and a God who is compassionate and loving, who acts on our behalf, as we saw last week, in the most remarkable way in the cross, and for whom that was part of his unchanging plan through eternity.

We believe that the great essence and the promises and the person of God and the plans of God are unchanged in Jesus and that there is this great stability because of him.

[35 : 50] And may we find that more and more. The older we get, the more unpredictable and the more changes that we face in life. May we have this great stability in Jesus. May we not just always be drifting or coming near and then going far away again.

Help us in the storms of life and in the good times of life to have Jesus as our Savior. For we ask it in your precious name. Amen.