

## 2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

### An unchanging God in a changing world

Presented by John Edmondstone

We don't know everything Adam said to Eve as they left the Garden of Eden but one thing he might have said was "My dear, the world is changing."

Consider - it's estimated that 90% of all the items in your supermarket didn't exist ten years ago. More information has been produced in the last thirty years than in the past 5,000 years. It is estimated that 50% of graduates are going into jobs that did not exist when they were born.

I've heard it put this way: 'My great grandfather rode a horse but was afraid of a train. My grandfather rode a train but was afraid of a car. My father rode in a car but was afraid of an aeroplane. I ride in an aeroplane but am afraid of a horse.' That's making a full circle. The dramatic steps made in electronic technology are simply breathtaking. The rate of change is so great today, we begin to ask is there nothing constant, abiding?

Yes, there is - God. In this ever changing world, He is an anchor for the soul. The Bible records these words: "I THE LORD DO NOT CHANGE" (Malachi 3:6 NIV). That's our theme' this morning: the unchanging God in a changing world.

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We noted as we began this morning that in a continually changing world, God does not change. I quoted the great words recorded by the prophet Malachi - "I the Lord do not change." The New Testament records a writer to the Hebrews describing Jesus as "the same yesterday, and today and forever." (Heb.13:8 NIV) Interestingly, both quotations were written in times of change. Old structures were crumbling and new ones were emerging.

Are there any constants in life for us - are there things that do not change? Yes, there are. Let's look at a few this morning.

First, because God does not change, the Christian faith does not change. We often hear it said the message does not change but the methods in presenting the message do. And in that of course there is some truth. But consider, faith is discussed in two ways in the New Testament. In a short letter Jude refers to the 'faith once delivered to the saints'. In this context the word "faith" refers to the whole scope of Christian belief. The word "once" means "once and for all". The revelation of God was full and complete in Jesus Christ. Now that doesn't mean our faith does not need to be re-examined, re-expressed and reapplied. Every generation needs to do that. Our challenge is to have a deeper understanding, a clearer expression, and a deeper application of the faith. But it was and is complete. There is nothing to be added or taken from it.

The second use of the word "faith" refers to our faith in Jesus Christ - or if you like, we can use the word "t - rust." Jesus taught that we must be like children. He meant that we must be trusting like a little child.

Such trust is the basis of our daily living for Christ and with Christ. Some will say, “That’s a bit old fashioned isn’t it?” ‘Well, if it is, so is the sun that warms the earth. So is water, but it still quenches our thirst. And so is soil, but it still produces food.

What can we believe in today’s changing world - what is “the faith once delivered”? It is that Jesus is Lord and Saviour, and all of us can come to God through Him. Strength is available to us all, and one day there will be the consummation of all things in Christ. Yes there is hope. If God never changes neither does the Christian faith. Secondly, if God does not change, ethical precepts do not change. Good remains good and evil remains evil. However much of the change in values has been drastic and disturbing to say the least. There has been no area of life more affected than the moral area, our life values. We sometimes appear to be like a sailor without a compass, a pilot without radar. The result is confusion and inconsistency.

We’ve just heard that 46% of Australians have experimented with drugs. I do not have to catalogue the depressing list of disasters that have become everyday events in our community. Where will we turn? Well, let me suggest there is no better place than the great commandment in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus was asked “Which is the greatest commandment?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment and the second is like it. Love your neighbour as yourself.” Add to that the golden rule and the beatitudes and you have a great set of standards in a changing world.

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We have this morning been talking about the unchanging God in a changing world. We’ve talked about the Christian faith and the moral meltdown.

Let’s turn now to a third unchanging factor. Personal accountability does not change. The attempt to evade personal responsibility for our actions is not new. Even Adam said, “The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit and I ate it” (Gen. 3:12 NIV) And when Eve was confronted, she said, “The serpent deceived me and I ate.” (Gen.3:13) Or, if you like, “The devil made me do it.”

Our age has taken evading personal responsibility to new heights or should we say, to new depths. We have ‘no fault clauses’ in a number of areas. We would like to blame heredity, environment, our parents, our schools, everything but ourselves and we ask, where is life heading? Well, let me tell you the good news.

Jesus said “I have come that they might have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10 NIV) He was not a kill-joy. He gives meaning and purpose to life and if we are ever to find our way out of the moral maze, we must return to God and if God never changes then neither do right or wrong.

There’s another thought I want to mention. Because God does not change our ultimate hope does not change. We need to understand how important hope is in the scheme of things. A doctor friend said to me one day as we were chatting, “John, what do you think is a contributing factor in healing?” Tongue in cheek I replied, “A good doctor.”

He smiled and replied, “Hope.”

I thought about that many times over the years and as a pastor for many years observed how wise his words were. People who lose hope, whether because of illness, a broken relationship or some disappointment, lose the will to live a full life. Often as a result they turn in other directions that end up in misery. It reminds me of the under-secretary of a world organisation who was found one morning dead from an overdose. His life

was one of despair but by his bedside was found a book of Greek tragedies. You can't help feeling how different that might have been had the book by his bedside been the New Testament and he had instead been reading the powerful words of Jesus "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full," or the words of one of the best-known verses in the Bible, again from the gospel of John, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Add to that the words of St Paul at the end of the 'love' chapter (1 Corinthians 13), "And now there remain faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love." Many things may change but these do not. They come from the heart of a loving God who does not change.

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We've been talking about an unchanging God in a changing world and I mentioned the place that hope and love play in a world of change. For a moment let us return to the idea of hope. It is wonderfully illustrated in Tim Costello's book *Streets of Hope* (pp.161-164) Listen to these words:

We took over a drop-in style ministry from a denomination that had closed its operation and reopened it as *The House of Hope*. Its name was chosen after an exhaustive ballot by the street mavericks who staffed it. Hope points to the future. Most of these people were living out of their angry and hurt past. Some had once had money and had been ripped off and had decided to never hold on to it. Others had never got out of debt, drugs, unemployment or just general trouble to even think of a future. ... The welcome sign went up and the doors opened to a unique ministry in St Kilda. ... The House of Hope demonstrated that the rawest boundary experiences of life can be God-filled. ... Life in its extremities was surrendered back to God and hope recharged in the midst of many tears.

Now you may be thinking as you listen this morning, "Why is this man so anti-change? Change is a fact of life. It happens every day and it's happening more quickly each day.

Well, I'm grateful for change and I'm like you the recipient of the benefit of medical progress. I've no desire to go back to the days of travel by horse and cart, except for fun. I readily admit that we live in a world of remarkable technological change with all its benefits in almost every area of life. We've seen the benefit of this in our family. But I wonder sometimes if the speed of change has outstripped our ability to cope with ethical implications. I want to make it abundantly clear that God is the God of every age. He was responsible for creation and if you take, for example, the human eye it focuses automatically, sees in all weather, and normally functions for 70 years plus and has 137 million elements, so you can see the human eye is quite complex (David Watson, *Is Anyone There?*) The questions for many people are:

- Is He a God who understands me?
- Is He a God interested in the problems of my life?
- Will He really listen to me when I pray and more importantly, will He answer?

Interesting isn't it - the question is not often "Does He exist?" – and you will recall an Australia-wide survey shows that 74% of Australians believe in God.

But much more than an intellectual assent is required. It is an action of the will that says I believe in Him and I will commit myself to Him and I'll live for Him, because through His Son Jesus Christ He has touched my heart. In other words being a Christian involves the whole person.

When we began this morning we recalled the words “I the Lord do not change” (Mal 3:6) That is a quotation from the prophet Malachi and we noted a parallel passage in the New Testament where the writer to the Hebrews (13:8) says of Jesus, “He is the same yesterday, and today and forever”. Whatever changes, God remains the same – all powerful, all loving, unchanging.

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I picked up a recent book by a popular writer, Max Lucado. As I generally do and probably you do too, I turned to the outside back cover and this is what I read:

Where did we get this idea that we can't change? From whence come such statements as:

- “It's just my nature to worry.”
- “I'll always be pessimistic – I'm just that way.”
- “I can't help the way I react. I have a bad temper.”

Such thoughts are not from God. He can no more leave a life unchanged than a than a mother can leave a tear untouched. His plan for you is nothing short of a new heart and a new life. Trust Him.

If you were a car, God would want control of your engine. If you were a computer, God would claim the software and the hard drive. If you were an aeroplane, he'd take his seat in the cockpit. But you are a person, so God wants to change your heart.

God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you there. He wants you to have a heart like his. He wants you to be just like Jesus. God is unchanging but He wants to change us. He will if we open our lives to His love expressed in Jesus Christ. We need Him and He will take control of our lives if we turn them over to Him.