



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Basic Bible Doctrine, Exodus 3:1-15

"The Attributes of God, part II"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the opportunity, again, that is ours to study the word. We thank Thee that it is quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, that it pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and of the spirit, of the joints and the marrow, and as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And we thank Thee that it is with this word that we have to do and we rejoice, Lord, in the revelation granted to us and the illumination that is given by the Holy Spirit. Enable us to understand tonight as we seek to think the thoughts of our great God, that the Spirit would have us think. We commit this hour to Thee and the one that follows. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight is the second in our series of studies on the attributes, and there are just three of these in our general study theme of basic Bible doctrine. And tonight we are going to look at a number of the attributes. I want to repeat again, by way of introduction, the importance of right thoughts about God, and that cannot be overestimated. No nation can rise above their idea of God, nor can any individual rise above his idea of God. You can always tell, in a Christian's life, just what kind of God he

has by the actions that he, himself, performs. They reveal the kind of God that he has, and it's impossible for us to rise above our thoughts about God. Scarcely any error in doctrine or practice is not traceable to unworthy thoughts about God.

I gave you the illustration, one of many, many in the word of God, of the Prophet Isaiah, who at a particular point in his life when he was called to ministry, saw the Lord God high, and lifted up. And in seeing the Lord God immediately came to an understanding, a deeper understanding, of his own unworthiness. The presence of wrong thoughts about God is really, ultimately, idolatry, because it is the thinking of unworthy thoughts about God. It's the thinking of things that are a libel on his character. In effect, when a person thinks wrongly about God says that God is other than he is. So, it is very important, then, that we know something about the attributes of God. They are the perfections of the divine essence and they are set forth in holy Scripture and they are also set forth in his work, such as, his work of creation, his work of providence, his work in history. But, it is preeminently, in the word of God, that we gain an understanding of his attributes.

Now, last week we divided the attributes into two classes, and I put on the board the simple little diagram that I had up here a moment ago of the attributes of God in which we divided them into two classes. Now, there are many classifications of the attributes that have been undertaken, but this is one of the most popular ones. The attributes are divided into incommunicable attributes and communicable attributes. The incommunicable attributes are those attributes of God that bare little analogy to the attributes of human nature. Whereas, the communicable attributes are those that bare considerable analogy to human nature. And you can see in this list what is meant by that, because no human being has self-existence; only God has self-existence. No human being really has simplicity, or unity, or spirituality, infinity, immensity, omnipresence, eternity, immutability. We do not have any of these attributes; they belong to God. Now, we, only in measure, possess these communicable ones. But, we do share, in a measure

at least, these attributes of knowledge, wisdom, veracity, power, will, goodness, holiness, and justice. So, this is just a simple way by which we can remember the attributes of God. They are incommunicable, communicable.

Now, we considered last week, in the first of our three studies on the attributes, the attribute of self-existence, or the independence of God. Theologians are just like other human beings. They are not always satisfied with the terms that others have used and so self-existence has been the most common term used to describe the fact that God is the first cause of all things, and yet he, himself, is uncaused. But some other theologians prefer the word, independence. But self-existence is the common term that is used of God. He is self-existent, and we talked about that from Exodus chapter 3 and showed how some of the names that we associate with the Lord God are names that contain within themselves the idea of self-existence. When he was asked who he was by Moses he said, "I am who I am. Tell them that I am has sent you." There is no way in which God can define himself absolutely; he may define himself, relatively, as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. But as far as his absolute definition is concerned, no one is able to define him. He is I am. He is God and to define him is to limit him; for we must define him by human terms and categories. So, he is the self-existent one. He is the one who exists, and he exists of himself not from anyone else. We exist from him; we exist from others, but he alone has independence.

Then we discussed his simplicity. He is free from compositeness. If he were the result of composition then, of course, something would have existed before he existed. And so he is simple in his being. He possesses simplicity, freedom from composition. We also said that that meant that the attributes and the being of God were not to be distinguished as two separate things. That is, his being and his attributes. We only use terms like that in order to explain what we really cannot, ultimately, completely explain. But his attributes are his being and his being involves his attributes. He possesses simplicity.

Then we discussed his unity, and stressed the fact that he was one God.

Christians believe in the unity of God. It's not simply Mohammedans and Jews who believe in the oneness of God, or the unity of God; Christians do, too. We also believe that God is a tri-unity, or a trinity. But, we worship one God, unity, who subsists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But, because our God subsists in three persons, we, nevertheless, believe that he is one God. So, the oneness of God, or the unity of God, expresses his oneness and also his uniqueness. That is, that there is no one like him. He is the first and the last, and there is no other God that may be classified with him.

Knowledge of the attributes would go a long way to correct the complacency and failure of our Christian church, in particularly, our evangelicals today. The reason that we can go to meetings and hear artificial, superficial, little sermonettes that don't really tell us anything other than give us a few stories and a few laughs, the reason we can do that is because we are not thinking very deep thoughts about our God. The facts are, as Mr. Phillips said in the title of one of his books, "Our God is too small." Now, that, of course, means that he is too small in our mind. He is a great God, and one of the tasks of Bible study is to learn just how great he is, and when we do, then our personal lives will be affected thereby. But, the kind of God that is preached today in many evangelical churches is, as one Bible teacher put it, "a God who can never surprise us, he can never overwhelm us, he can never astonish us, he can never transcend us, because we have reduced him to a little God."

Now, tonight, we want to look at a number of the attributes. It would be nice if we could study all of these separately, and if you are interested in this, you will find in the tape catalogue a series given on the attributes of God. That is just the attributes of about fifteen, hour long messages. I think it probably was about six or seven years ago, but they are still, I believe, up to date so far as the general teaching is concerned. And I suggest if you are interested in these to the extent of wanting to know more about the

individual attributes that you get those tapes and listen to the tapes. They have a good bit more information on them than I will be able to give you tonight. For Scripture reading, I want to turn to a passage in Psalm 139, and read verses 7 through 12. This passage is a passage that has to do with the omnipresence of God, and that will be one of the attributes that we will briefly look at in a moment. Psalm 139, and verse 7 through verse 12. David writes,

"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, And thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, Even the night shall be light about me; Yea the darkness hideth not from Thee, But the night shineth as the day: And the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee."

And then a passage, one verse, in the last book of the Old Testament, the Book of Malachi, chapter 3, and verse 6. This is the normative passage on the immutability of God, the unchangeability of God. And Malachi writes, Malachi 3, verse 6. Page 980 in the Scofield edition of the King James Version, the new Scofield edition of the King James Version, "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

Well let's turn, now, to the attributes that we consider tonight, and they are the attributes of spirituality, first of all. So, since you have your Bibles open, turn on over to John chapter 4, and verse 24. John chapter 4, and verse 24. The Lord Jesus is speaking in the presence of the woman of Samaria and in the midst of his discourse he says, "God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

The spirituality of God, capital A in the outline: what is the sense of the term? The term spirituality, in theological language, refers to an individual subsistence or a

person. So, that when we say that God possesses spirituality, we mean that he is a self-conscious, intelligent, moral agent. So, the spirituality is a term that refers to the personality of God in that sense. He is a person who is a moral agent, an intelligent, moral agent.

The scriptural evidence is this passage right here: "God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Now, the significance of this is that our God is a personal God. Now, when we say that God is a person we do not mean by that what so many Bible teachers do mean and say. They love to say, "We are not so much interested in doctrine, we are interested in a person." Little realize that that very statement itself is a doctrine. That's a theological statement; they've uttered a theological statement. It's the most stupid and foolish thing to make a statement like that, because it is a theological statement to say that theology is not important, but they often do that.

Now, what is meant by this doctrine, really, is that God is not only to be understood by certain sentences and thoughts about him, but we are to realize that when we construct our doctrine of God, we are constructing a doctrine about a person. And we know him as a person, as we have defined him from the words of holy Scripture. So, it is important to realize that God is a person, but the person is only understood, as he should be understood, by the statements of holy Scripture about him. It is by theology, by doctrine, that we come to know a person. Those two should never be separated: person and doctrine. It's by doctrine that we get to know a person. And the person who says, "Doctrine is unimportant, that God is a person and we ought to worship a person. We are interested in a person, not doctrine," you can put it down as always sure that he doesn't know that person.

And, furthermore, he cannot know that person accurately. You can only know that person accurately by doctrine. So, just mark it down when a person makes a statement like that, see I get a little upset over this [Laughter]. Mark it down that that person does not have an adequate concept of God. And I suggest if you want to read

further about it and read some great material on it, go into the book room and order, if they don't have it, *The Shorter Writings of Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield*, and read a couple of his articles that he wrote on theology, and some of the errors that he had to fight fifty, sixty, seventy years ago. They are the same old things that people are talking about today. So, do that.

Now, it is important that we remember, though, that ultimately our doctrine leads us to the worship of a person. I remember a story about Walt Whitman, who said that he was once listening to a lecture on the stars by an astronomer. And he said the hall was rather stuffy and the lecture was not too interesting, in fact, it was very dull. The charts and diagrams that were being put up were also rather dull. And he said, "I just finally got up out of the lecture, walked outside, and looked at the stars themselves."

Now, in our doctrinal study of the Bible, it has never reached its ultimate goal until we actually worship this person. So, when we think about God as possessing spirituality, we don't stop right there and say God is a person, but we take the next step and we get down on our knees and we pray to this person. And we walk, day by day, with this person so that we develop a relationship with this person. And know, not only in our minds, that he possesses spirituality, but we have, in our Christian experience, a knowledge of him as a being possessing spirituality, a person.

Now, the second of the attributes that we want to look at is the infinity of God. Now, it's hard for me to put this so it's straight up here, because it has to be crooked down here. It has to be angled here to be straight there. But number two, Roman two: the infinity of God. And what is the sense of this term? When we think of the infinity of God, we are thinking of the divine essence, that is the divine being, as having no bounds or limits. Infinity means without bounds or without limits. So, when we say God possesses infinity, we mean that his being does not have limits, does not have bounds. He is illimitable with, of course, all defects missing.

Now, the scriptural evidence of this is found often in the word of God. I'm going to turn and read a few verses from Job chapter 11, verses 7 through 10. There are a number of passages, some of which are probably better than this one, but this is one that suggests the fact that God is an infinite being. In verse 7, of Job chapter 11, Job writes, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" And, of course, the answer expected to those questions is no. We cannot by searching find God; he is an infinite being. We cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection; he is without bounds, without limits.

Now, what's the significance of this in the practical sense of how does it apply to our daily lives? Well, now we must remember that these statements that we make about his attributes, they apply to all of his attributes. In other words, when we say that God is an infinite being and then we talk about the love of God, we should remember that that infinite goes with that love. So, that his love is infinite. Or, if we talk about his mercy, it's infinite mercy. Or, if we talk about his justice, it is infinite justice. If we talk about his holiness, it is infinite holiness. So, this infinity of God and this illimitableness of God is something that applies to all of the attributes. So, when we say God is an infinite being and we think about his holiness, he is infinitely holy. When we think about his love, he is infinitely love.

Now, that raises an interesting question. If God is an infinite being and if he is an illimitable being, if he does not have any bounds or limits, is it possible that when we get to heaven, we shall learn of some other attributes of God? In other words, in the Bible we do not have a total revelation of God and when we get to heaven we will never have a full revelation of God, because we would be learning of him throughout all eternity. He is an infinite being. We can never say, throughout all eternity, we have comprehended God. If we were, we would be God. This is one of the reasons that heaven is going to be so interesting. It's going to be progress in knowledge and experience forever. We are not to think of heaven as the Mohammedans think of it, or as others think of it as a time

in which we arrive in heaven and then we just enjoy ourselves in a very lustful way, perhaps, throughout all eternity.

No, God is an infinite God, but if it is true that we will never know the limits of his love, we will never know the limits of his mercy, we will never know the limits of his justice but keep learning, is it possible that we will learn some other things about him that are not found in the Bible. In the awful abyss of the divine being, of which we do not now comprehend very much, are there certain things that we will learn that are not found in holy Scripture? In other words, is God something like the far side of the moon which we know exists, but about which we do not have very much knowledge. The infinite God raises some interesting questions and if your mind is about to burst now, stop thinking about it, because we don't want to have any accidents in the message.

Now, Roman three: the immensity and omnipresence of God. And I have included these together because they are closely related attributes, the immensity and the omnipresence of God. And let me say a few words about the nature of the immensity and the omnipresence of God. What is the immensity of God? First of all, let me define it. Immensity is that perfection of God by which he transcends all spatial limitations. Immensity has to do with spatial limitations. In other words, God is a person who transcends all spatial limitations, and yet he is present everywhere with his whole being. Now, that is something to think about. He is a transcendent being. He transcends all of material reality, but yet, at any one point, he is there, not in part, but in whole. He is immense, so he transcends all spatial limitations. He is omnipresent; he is at every single point. So, this is an aspect of his infinity as it touches space. The aspect of his infinity as it touches time is eternity.

Now, there is a distinction between immensity and omnipresence that we ought to keep in our minds, but otherwise, they are closely related. Immensity stresses the transcendence of God, that is, he transcends all reality. He is beyond everything that is. Omnipresence stresses his immanence. That is, he is abiding in the fullness of his being

at every particular point. All of God is here, all of God is here. There is not any part of this universe in which God is not in the fullness of his being.

Now, he is not equally present and present in the same sense with all of his creatures. He is not in the earth as he is in heaven. He is not in animals as he is in men. He is not in the church as he is in Christ. In heaven, he is in his glory. In hell, he is there in his justice, but he is there in the fullness of his being, though the senses in which he is there may vary.

Now, these doctrines, the immensity and omnipresence of God, have a great deal to do with Pantheism and Deism. Pantheism denies the transcendence of God.

Pantheists limit God to material being. Immensity says he is beyond that. Canon

Holmes once saw a Hindu who was going around in India knocking on trees and saying, "Are you there?" And, of course, he was a person who was afflicted with the era of Pantheism. And Canon Holmes said, "Yes, you could say that God was there." He didn't hear him answer and say, "Yes, I am." But he was there, but he was also transcendent, as well.

Now, the scriptural evidence is the passage we read in Psalm 139, verse 7 through 12, and I won't read it again because it was very plain that David says that wherever he might flee, there God was. So, the God of the Bible is no local deity. He's not like the Baal of Jerusalem, or the Baal of Shechem, or the Baal of some other small place, but he is a God who is a universal God. And if he possesses an infinite essence, he has an infinite presence, so that he is everywhere, and he is everywhere fully.

Now, the immensity and omnipresence of God has some very definite application to us as believers and as unbelievers. The omnipresence of God should strike terror to an evil man, but it strikes a great deal of comfort to the man who is righteous by virtue of what Jesus Christ has done. Because being omnipresent, it means that he is with us in our temptations, he is with us in our afflictions, he is with us in all of the experiences of

life, and just knowing God in this sense is sufficient to comfort the child of God who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the problems that Jonah had was that he hadn't attended our lectures on the attributes of God, and so when he got out of a relationship to God he thought that he could get on that boat and go to Tarshish and escape the presence of God. So, if we'd been standing down there on the dock as he paid his money, we'd say, "Jonah, don't waste your money. Don't buy a ticket to Spain, and think that you can escape God there, because he is omnipresent and also immense. And he'll be there just as much as is here." Jonah, of course, didn't have anybody there to teach him theology, but he had a lot of people standing around the dock saying, "Now the important thing is not doctrine, but to have a personal relationship with the Lord."

Roman four. I'm kind of mean tonight. [Laughter] Roman four: the eternity of God. Can you see that? Eternity. Eternity has some other meanings. That term, for example, when we speak of a person who has died, we sometimes say, that is the world does, we say, "He has passed into the presence of the Lord." But often you will hear people say, "He has passed into eternity." And so, eternity has come to mean the future world, rather than this particular world. But from the theological standpoint, it's an aspect of his infinity and it's his infinity related to time or duration. So, it is the infinity of God related to time: eternity.

Now, when we say that a person is eternal, we mean that he did not have a beginning and he does not have an ending. We don't mean endlessness. Every personal creature of God has endlessness. In that sense, we all possess eternal life. Now, not in the sense of the life in the knowledge of God as our Lord more fully defined it. But all of us shall live forever. Not only the saints of God shall live forever, but those who do not respond to the gospel, they will live forever too. Now, their domicile will not be as attractive as the domicile of the saints, but nevertheless, they will live forever because they have endless existence too. So, everybody, from the moment that we are conceived

and born, has endless existence, but that's not eternity. When we say that God has eternity, we mean he had no beginning. We have a beginning. He has no ending. So, eternity then, is a reference to the fact that God is an infinite being with respect to time.

Now, the scriptural evidence for this is found in passages like Psalm 102, and verse 27. And I'll quickly read this verse, Psalm 102. Well, I may read just verses 25, 26, and 27. These are texts that are cited by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the first chapter of his book, when he is seeking to prove the deity of Christ. He says in verse 25, Psalm 102,

"Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall become old like a garment; like a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed: But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end."

So, the psalmist gives us a picture of the whole creation of God. He thinks of the heavens and the earth. And as you look at the heavens and the earth, you notice that they begin to get old, and finally they are folded up and dispensed with. But, over or against this creation which has had its beginning, and its present, and then shall have its age, and finally shall be done away with; there stands the eternal one who is from the beginning and on out into the endless future having no beginning of days, nor end of life. He is an eternal being.

Now, eternity follows from his self-existence. The very fact that he exists of himself and is not dependent on anyone else means, of course, that he is an eternal being. If there was a time when he had a beginning, then there was a time when he was not self-existent. But since he is self-existent, he is an eternal being. So, eternity flows out of and follows from self-existence. It also follows from his immutability. In a moment, we will talk about his immutability. And the fact that he is a changeless being

means that he could not have had a beginning and he cannot have an ending. If he had a beginning, you cannot say that he is immutable. If he has an ending, you cannot say that he is immutable. So, the attributes of self-existence and immutability necessarily involve the attribute of eternity. Now, I could, if we had time, show you that even the attribute of omnipotence demands eternity. But, I'll ask you to think about that. Maybe you won't sleep tonight trying to figure out why, if he is an omnipotent being, he also is an eternal being?

Now, the significance of this is of great importance for every one of us, because if we are lost individuals having never believed in Jesus Christ, but happened to stray into this auditorium and do not have a personal faith in a redeemer who died for you, shedding blood for sinners that they might be redeemed, you should remember that you stand under the judgment of an eternal God. And his judgment, therefore, is an eternal judgment. That's why the Bible speaks about eternal judgment. If you are guilty before this God, you are guilty before him forever. And, of course, if you are a believer, you too must stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and deal with this same eternal God.

That was a note of providence telling me that it's time to move on to the last of the particular doctrines that we are studying, and I got some cooperation there. This is the immutability of God. This is Roman five: the immutability of God. Now, what is immutability? I remember one time I looked up immutability in the dictionary, I knew what it was because I had studied Latin, and "muto," in Latin, means "to change." But I was interested in what Webster said, and my recollection was he said it's the quality or state of not being mutable, which didn't say anything. [Laughter] Immutable. But immutable means unchanging. *Unveränderlich*, the Germans would say. Unchanging. So, it means, simply, that he is an unchanging being.

What do we think of when we think of unchanging beings? Well, we think of the seasons. They are unchanging. We have winter, we have spring, we have summer, we have fall, and then we have winter, and spring, and summer, and fall. Or we think of the

law of gravity. That seems to be an immutable thing. It always operates. Or we think of Charley Brown's failures. He never wins a baseball game. Every time the baseball season comes around, he loses his games. And he doesn't lose them one to nothing; it's always eighty-seven to nothing, or something like that. Immutable is a wife's nagging, too. Some men might define it by that, of course, I wouldn't, but others might. When we say that God is immutable, we mean immutable, too, in his essence, his being. He is unchanging in his being.

Now, what does that mean from the standpoint of theology? Well, it means he can have no new attributes. Now, when we said, a minute ago, that when we get to heaven we might discover that we are going to learn things about God that we don't know and have not been revealed in the Bible, because the Bible says, "Not everything has been revealed about God." The Bible says, "The secret things belong unto the Lord. The things that are revealed unto us and to our children. There are things that have not been revealed to us. There may be attributes that God possess that are not revealed in the word of God. But we can say this: they will not be new attributes which he will obtain later on after we get to heaven. He is not like a growing person who is growing more attributes. He now has all the attributes that he has ever had or ever will have. So, it means he has no new attributes. It also means that he never makes a mistake, and he will not make a mistake in the future. That all of his promises, therefore, are promises that are just as true millions of years from now, and just as reliable as they are at this very moment, because he is the same person then as he is now.

Why can God not change? Well, if he were to change, you could think of a change as being from immaturity to maturity; that obviously doesn't pertain to God. If a person changes, it's from bad to better. That couldn't be true of God. From better to worse, that couldn't be of God. Those are some of the reasons why he doesn't change, and, furthermore, he has no motive to change. Why should he wish to change? He has everything that is satisfactory to his own being. He is completely self-sufficient of himself.

He has absolutely no motive to change. He is an immutable God, an unchangeable God, because he is self-existent and he is completely sufficient to himself.

The scriptural evidence for it is right here in Psalm 102, again. We read in verse 27, "But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." "Thou art the same." Now the passage in Malachi 3:6 is the one that is usually cited by theologians as the normative text on immutability. And so I'll read it again; it's the one that we read in the Scripture reading. Malachi chapter 3, and verse 6, "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Did you notice the order of those expressions, incidentally? "I am Yahweh." Now, who was Yahweh? Well remember, last time, we said that Yahweh is the name for God that comes from the verb "to be." That means, "He is." And so his name is "He is." And so since he is the one whose name is "I am" or "He is," he doesn't change. And because he does not change, then the sons of Jacob are not consumed, because he has, as the unchanging God, made certain promises concerning the nation Israel, concerning the sons of Jacob. And even though they are sons of Jacob, that is the crooked supplanter, still they are not consumed, because he is the unchanging God who is faithful to his promises. Now, that shows you how important theology is. The faithfulness of God rests upon the attributes of God, upon theology.

Now, in the New Testament in James chapter 1, in verse 17, the immutability of God is also set forth. For the sake of time, I won't turn there. Again, I say, if you are interested in further exposition concerning these attributes, look at or listen to the tapes on them.

Immutability raises a few questions. It raises a question of creation. Can we say that God has created all things and nevertheless has not changed himself? Did not the creation change things? Well, no, the creation is something outside of God. When we speak of the immutability of God, we are talking about his being, his essence, and his attributes. We are not talking about what he does. So, creation is no problem. Well, but what about the incarnation? We worship a triune God, do we not: Father, Son, and

Spirit? And do we not say that the Father is God, and the Son is God just as the Father is God, and the Spirit is God just as the Father and the Son are. And yet Jesus Christ became incarnate.

How can you say, then, that God is immutable if the Son of God became incarnate? Does not the Bible say, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." Does not that, then, say that the second person changes? No, it does not say that the second person changes in the sense in which we use this term. Immutability applies to the divine essence. What happened in the incarnation was that the eternal Son took to himself an additional nature. The divine nature was not transformed; the divine nature was not changed. An additional nature was added to the person of our Lord, so that the person became a person possessed both of divine nature and human nature. But, immutability pertains to the divine essence, so incarnation just does not change the immutability of the second person of the Trinity.

But what about those statements in the Bible that say God repented? For example, in Jonah chapter 3, reference is made there to the fact that God repented. Jonah, remember, preached in Nineveh, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." So, the people of Nineveh believed God. And then we read in verse 9, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not?"

Now, when God repents, does not God change? No, God does not change. That is anthropopathic language. That is, it is language that is adapted to human passions, to human experience. And consequently, that is the form in which this language is given to us. You might illustrate it by a thermometer. A thermometer might be considered to be a very changeable instrument, because one day it reads eighty-four degrees, the next day it reads sixty-eight degrees, the next day it might read thirty-seven degrees. Then you might say that the thermometer is a changeable instrument, but it's not really a changeable instrument because it operates according to a fixed principle. So, it's not changeable at all.

Now, God operates according to certain fixed principles in the spiritual realm. If certain things transpire in man, then the thermometer acts in a different way. Let me read you a passage from Jeremiah chapter 18, verse 7 through 10, which may explain, to some extent, what happens when men change their opinions concerning the Lord God. The Prophet Jeremiah writes,

"At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, with which I had said that I would benefit them."

So, God has set forth a pattern of action in connection with the nations. Consequently, in the case of the people who were living in Nineveh, that had already been set forth in the word of God. That if they repented, his response to them would be along a different line. He did not change; he had already set up the conditionality of their relationship to him. And, Jonah, in his preaching, actually preached the same kind of conditionality. Because when Jonah came to the city of Nineveh, do you remember the message? It was a very simple message. He didn't take any time to deliver it.

Now, you are not to judge how long sermons should be by the sermon that he preached, because as far as we can tell this is all he did. He went up and down the streets of Nineveh saying, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Someone might have said after they had a little theological discussion with Jonah, "Jonah, you believe in the immutability of God, don't you?" "Yes, I believe in the immutability of God, and I believe you ought to study theology, too," he would say. And they would say, "Well, you believe in the immutability of God, but you went up and down these streets here saying that Nineveh was going to be overthrown. You said that's what God said. Nineveh was going to be overthrown."

But the people have repented and Nineveh is not overthrown. So, God changed his mind."

Now, what would Jonah say to that? Well, he would say, "Why you stupid fellow, if you knew something about theology you would realize that in my statement that I was saying, condition was expressed in it." He said, "I said, 'yet forty days.' That itself was the statement of the condition. You had forty days in which to change your mind, forty days in which to repent." So, the repentance was something that God had already said would happen under certain conditions. He didn't change his mind, "yet forty days." And so consequently, God is an unchangeable being and he acts according to certain unchangeable principles, just like the thermometer acts according to the laws of the mercury that is found within it.

Well, how foolish, then, it is to sin against an immutable being, and how foolish it is to pray to an inconstant being. Suppose God were a changeable being, would you want to get down on your knees and pray to him? I wouldn't, because the kind of prayers that I pray today might be the prayers that he wouldn't want to answer tomorrow. He's not like a chameleon, he doesn't keep office hours, he's not moody; he is unchangeable. And consequently, we can always come to him and find him always responsive according to the word of God. What a challenge it is, what a blessing it is to have an immutable God. The promises are always reliable; may God help us to lay hold of them. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the things that holy Scripture says about our great God. Oh Father, help us to know him in his greatness and respond to it properly so that he may be glorified and we may be blessed. For Jesus' sake, Amen...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]