

Time and the Unchanging God of Covenant

By

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New Year Sermon

Sabbath, 9th January, 2016

Golden Text: Psalm 105:8-10

Time moves on; God remains YHWH!

Time changes because circumstances, in the course of time, change. Time itself as a quantity in minutes, hours, and days, etc. (as the earth turns on its axis) is indifferent. However, the nature of things is such that when time progresses, things change and so time is said to change or bring changes!

But our God remains unchanged. He's unaffected by time. Time has no effect on who He is and what His plans and purposes are:

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Pet. 3:8).

The changes time brings are of no consequence to God:

The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations (Ps 33:11).

This is the God who has shepherded us through twelve calendar months into the Gentile new year (2016). And He is unchanging and unchangeable through all time!

Without His intervention outside of time, from His vantage point of transcendence, all of us are subject to the tyranny of time, for better or for worse!

Time is Predictable, Arbitrary and Unfair!

The power of time over human destiny is best summed up in Eccl. 3:1-8:

¹ *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:*

² *A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted*

³ *A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;*

⁴ *A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

⁵ *A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*

⁶ *A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;*

⁷ *A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*

⁸ *A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace (Eccl.3:1-8).*

But who wouldn't expunge from the list—from his or her life—if we had the power to do so, the events and occasions of death, destruction, mourning and war?

But hey, time is sure to bring into our lives a mix of good and bad things as we pass through life—and we are powerless to successfully challenge it, or *turn back the clock as it were*, if we so wish!

And so time passes, and we grow and age. This is seen as both positive and negative. When a baby grows into a healthy adorable child, it's seen as desirable. Yet when old age catches up with you, you wish you could stop the aging process, renew your youth and remain stuck in youthfulness!

But, inevitably, as time moves forward so you grow older and weaker.

And in maturity. You grow in mind and in social behaviour and responsibility. You have your wits about you. You are no longer a child. The Apostle says in 1 Cor. 13:11: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things”.

Time has brought maturity. You have seen life; you have gained in experience and wisdom. You have gone through the school of life and passed out with some experiential knowledge of what life entails (see Job 12:12, 32:7) and how one can successfully navigate it, having anchored your life in a vital truth or two.

David observed in his old age:

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

That's a life principle on which to build your own life! Righteousness stands a person in good stead both when he's alive or when he's dead. His children will enjoy the fruits of his righteous life even after he exits this life. (See Ps112:1-3; Prov. 20:7).

But adulthood and maturity are not insulated from the ravages of time. Aging and deterioration dog their steps! We advance in years to deteriorate—in physical strength, mental abilities and even in desire for life and the joys it brings.

A wizened old man turned down King David's offer of hospitality with an explanation:

³³ *And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem.*

³⁴ *And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem?*

³⁵ *I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men*

and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? 9 (2 Sam. 19:33-35).

Time is dynamic, and in between young adulthood and old age, time precipitates changes not only in our circumstances of life but also in our relationships and life experiences in an evolving manner. We progress from playmates through various kinds and levels of relationships to marriage. And then we become parents.

Still, God remains constant. He transcends life and yet is actively involved in the lives of true believers with fixity of purpose and commitment. The expectation of the righteous shall not be cut off! (Prov. 23:18).

We serve an unchanging God of Covenant

God's commitment to our welfare and salvation is without question. He has made that clear by a binding agreement – His covenant with us!

And there's no way time can weaken or undermine this covenant. It's guaranteed by God's own faithfulness. He remembers it forever:

⁸ *He hath remembered His covenant for ever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations.*

⁹ *Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac;*

¹⁰ *And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant (Ps 105:8-10).*

Time moved forward. Generations changed. New personalities took the centre stage. But the covenant did not go out of date or lose validity. Yahweh remembered and renewed it with each of the successive heirs to the covenant and in more formalized forms in order of deepening significance as it progressed through time!

The covenant with Abraham—even “the word which He commanded to a thousand generations”—was “His oath to Isaac”, and it was “the same” that He “confirmed” for “a law” unto Jacob and the children of Israel for “an everlasting covenant”.

The *evolving covenantal terminology* is meant to send but one message: *The covenant is inviolable and can only be strengthened!*

And that is an assurance to subsequent heirs to the everlasting Abrahamic covenant, currently you and me:

¹³ *For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself,*

¹⁴ *Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.*

¹⁵ *And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.*

¹⁶ *For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.*

¹⁷ *Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:*

¹⁸ *That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:*

¹⁹ *Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;*

²⁰ *Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 6:13-20).*

God has proven His earnestness in His dealings with His covenant people beyond all doubt! He confirmed His promise to Abraham by an oath to assure heirs of the promise of the unchangeability of His “counsel” (or ‘will’ or ‘purpose’) (be it in the form of a promise or another).

God means business. He guaranteed the promise by an oath to show Himself as sincere and honest to Abraham as He possibly could! He’s serious in His dealings with His people and truth informs all His doings:

For the word of the LORD is right; and all His works are done in truth (Ps 33:4).

Is it the same at your end? Are you as sincere and committed in your relationship with God as He is to you?

You had better be! For God means to make you His child and friend from the bottom of His heart—from the depth of His being! He indicated that by taking an oath on His own name—“Because He could swear by no [one] greater [than Him]!

If so, His oath sworn on His own Person would stand forever, for no one greater exists to annul or modify it. Not the devil and certainly not man! He declares to accomplish and commands to stand firm (Ps 33:9).

And what were the words of the oath? “Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee” (see Gen. 22:17).

He speaks into our lives with the power of His whole being behind it to bless and enlarge us beyond our wildest dreams. The words of blessing are self-fulfilling words. They spring from His divine Self; they represent His will for us, which is irrevocable and unchangeable!

He says in Isaiah 45:23-25:

²³ *I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*

²⁴ *Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.*

²⁵ *In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*

Thus His promise to Abraham (backed by an oath) was not without effect. The promise came true, though not without a waiting period which tested (or proved) Abraham's faith. For scripture says that he obtained the promise "after he had patiently endured".

And Abraham was well able to endure (till the promise was fulfilled) because he was convinced by the method God used to confirm it: An oath was regarded among men as putting a definitive end to all dispute concerning a matter (v. 16).

Yet the certainty of God's promise doesn't take away the continual need to believe and look to Him. It should rather strengthen our faith and encourage us to wait for the time God will choose to fulfill it, for it will certainly not fail to come to pass!

But actually God's intention was not really to convince Abraham by the oath. God's principal reason for the oath was to assure the heirs of the promise that His counsel was not subject to change.

Yahweh takes the long view. He believes in long-term relationships spanning generations, even eternity. As He set His face towards Sodom and Gomorrah to judge those wicked cities, the LORD said within Himself, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;¹⁸ Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?¹⁹ For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:17-19).

These were the future believers God had in mind when He confirmed the promise with an oath. His wish is that all generations of believers relate to Him on the basis of an unshakeable faith—that He keeps covenant and mercy with those who love and keep His commandments (Deut. 7:9; Neh. 1:5; Dan. 9:4; Luke 1:72-74). This year, let your walk of faith and obedience inspire a godly life of faith in your family for generations to come, that your children shall be established before Him (Ps 102:28).

But what exactly did God seek to achieve by the confirming oath?

The double assurance of promise plus oath sworn on His own reputation, neither of which God in His faithfulness could be expected to break, served as convincing testimony that it was "impossible for God to lie"; it precluded all such possibility.

And it's for our practical benefit, that we might have "strong consolation" (or encouragement), who have "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us". This hope, which we should take firm hope of, is "an anchor of the soul" (giving us stability and assurance in a world of uncertainty) and is permanently ensconced in the most holy place where the Father sits on His throne of grace.

The hope will be fulfilled! It's double assurance again. It has gone past the veil, entered the most holy place and appeared before the throne of glory. The hope is out of human hands, beyond man's power and jurisdiction. It's now in the hands of God, "who cannot lie" (Tit.

1:2). And Christ Jesus, now seated on His right hand as our intercessor and advocate, will ensure its fulfilment. He's equally true! Moreover, it's by Him that the Father does all things.

Our hope of salvation, eternal life, healing and every blessing we have been promised and hoped for is secure. "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. 1:20).

He's forever who He is

Yahweh is a covenant-keeping God, and time can't impact negatively on His faithfulness to His covenant people. On the contrary, His faithfulness seems to get better with time—by means of clearer, more pointed definitions.

Ps 89:34-37

³⁴ *My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips.*

³⁵ *Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David.*

³⁶ *His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me.*

³⁷ *It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven.*

Selah.

The basic truth, of course, is that time has no negative effect on His grace, to such an extent that even where satanic activity peaks (evidenced by say sin) His grace abounds. His light shines forth.

Rom. 5:20-21

²⁰ *Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:*

²¹ *That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Isa 9:1-2, 6-8

¹ *Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.*

² *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.*

⁶ *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*

⁷ *Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

⁸ *The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel.*

Why?

His mercy is established where His covenant is established. *He keeps covenant and mercy.* The two always go together. So just as time has no negative impact on His covenant, so the same goes for His mercy. It's always for those who perform His covenant, "even [the] Ten Commandments" (Deut. 4:13).

Ps 103:17-18

¹⁷ But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children;

¹⁸ To such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them.

Luke 1:50

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

He only asks you to keep faith with Him, and you will know that He is YHWH (I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE); He changes not (Mal. 3:6). Amen!