

The Constant God in a Changing World
Psalm 48:1, 9-14

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In Berlin, Germany, after World War II, there stood a church in the center of the city with nothing left but the Gothic arch which framed the main door. Over the arch were these words from Luke:21 *“Heaven and earth will pass away but my words remain forever true.”* I would like to talk about that today.

The author of Psalm 48 was enthralled with the strength and beauty of Jerusalem. Her towers seemed immovable; her citadels appeared immutable; her temple looked like nothing less than something immortal. Yet, in the midst of his rejoicing, the author comes to realize that even holy cities have a life span and great towers crumble with the passing of time. Of course, his foresight was right. Jerusalem has been totally destroyed two times in history and continues today as a hotbed of great religious conflict. So if cities crumble, civilizations fall, things change, and people die, then what is forever? The answer is simple, yet profound.

God is forever! From everlasting to everlasting God is God. On this one solid rock of faith you and I can stand today. God is forever! Come. Let's see what the psalmist discovered that day about the permanence and dependability of God in the midst of the city.

THE LOVE OF GOD IS UNFAILING. *“Within your temple O God, we meditate on your unfailing love”* (Psalm 48:9).

In a personal, powerful, passionate way, God loves you; He really loves you. There is nothing we can do to deserve God's love. There is nothing we can do to demolish God's love because God is love. His love knows no labels, no limits, no language; it lacks nothing.

Saturday after Saturday I read I Corinthians 13 at weddings. In that famous love chapter of the Bible Paul says *“Love is patient and kind; it does not envy; it does not boast; it is not proud. Love is neither rude nor self-seeking; it is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs. It always protects; it always trusts; it always hopes; it always perseveres. Love never fails.”*

I shall never forget one day when the wedding party was gathered at the altar and I was about half way through that reading when the groom fainted— he hit the floor and went out cold as a cucumber. Of course, the whole ceremony stopped while we got a wet cloth, fanned him back to consciousness and with the help of his groomsmen got him back on his feet. As I returned to the service and the scripture reading, the only thing I could think to say was, “And sometimes love is overwhelming.”

If I Corinthians 13 is a criterion of our commitment no wonder the kid fainted. Who wouldn't? We have feet of clay. Our best intentions are sacrificed on the altar of our stubborn wills. The only person who never fails at I Corinthians 13 is God. God is patient and kind; He keeps no record of wrongs; God never fails. God does not love us every now and then; God loves us eternally, world without end. That is the Gospel as I understand it.

If those who should have loved you—didn't
If those who could have loved you—wouldn't
If those who promised to love you—left
If you find it hard to love yourself— come to the fountain that never shall run dry, feast on the love of God with bountiful supply. Dive in, pig out, laugh, cry, shout, until your thirst is quenched and your soul is satisfied. "For love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God, for God is love."

You can't give away what you haven't got. Come to the fountain and drink of his unconditional, everlasting and eternal love. It's what the Psalmist discovered on a simple stroll through his home city one afternoon. The love of God is unfailing.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS UNQUESTIONABLE.

"Your right hand is filled with righteousness" (Psalm 48:10).

As Lewis Smedes tells the story, "Two people are waiting for a bus. The first person in line is a tiny little lady in her eighties carrying her dignity along with a small bag of groceries. The second person is a stout young man maybe eighteen to twenty weighing over two hundred pounds. As the bus arrives, the little lady climbs aboard the bus first and starts down the aisle looking for a seat. She spots the only empty seat on the bus in the back and moves toward it. That's when the young hulk shoves the little lady aside, muscles his way past her, sending lettuce and tomatoes into people's laps as he leaps into the seat ahead of the lady. Then he stares straight ahead as if nothing happened."

Smedes finishes his story and says, "What is wrong with this picture? A ballet teacher on board might say that it is aesthetically wrong, after all the guy was rather clumsy in his act to get to the seat. A lawyer on board the bus might say that there is something legally wrong with this. The guy assaulted the lady on his way to the seat and I think we have a court case here. The psychologist on board says that the kid is a sociopath; we ought to do something about him. He is sick and needs help."

But Smedes then says, "More than aesthetics, legality, and sociology, there is something else wrong here. There is something morally wrong here. The kid did something nobody ought to do to another person. What he did was **morally wrong**. It was morally wrong not just for this crude clod, but for anyone, anywhere, anytime." He then finishes with this comment, "The worst thing we could do for the human family is to leave right and wrong up to everybody's gut

feeling.”

GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS NOT RELATIVISM.

Someone said that if Moses were to come back today with the Ten Commandments he would have to make them the Ten Suggestions from Mount Sinai. I have news for you. There is a core truth written into the very fabric of the universe, a moral law of right and wrong. It is simply there. We cannot decide by majority vote that it's all right to steal and lie anymore than we can decide that winters should be mild or cookies more nourishing than vegetables. It's just not that way. Moral laws are written into the universe. Jesus said, *“Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.”*

I got to thinking about that. What would happen if we hungered and thirsted for rightness in the world? If people put God first and observed a Sabbath—one wonders what difference it would make in the health needs of Americans. If we ended the social segregation of America and actually loved our neighbors as we love ourselves, one wonders what difference it would make in the educational and economic discrepancies of this great country? What if we really believed the earth to be the Lord's and everything that is in it? Would it make a difference what we drive and what we throw away? The Bible is right. There is a basic law of morality that is as fundamental as the law of gravity. As E. Stanley Jones said a long time ago, “We do not break the laws of God, we only get broken upon them again, and again, and again.” *“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people”* (Proverbs 14:34).

There is a Franciscan Blessing that I like to use from time to time. “May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart. May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people so that you may wish for justice, freedom and peace. May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so you can do what others claim cannot be done.” Forever and ever, God is God. His love is unfailing. His righteousness is unquestionable.

THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD ARE UNDISPUTABLE. *“Let Mount Zion be glad! Let the towns of Judah rejoice because of your judgments”* (Psalm 48:11).

God does not have poor judgment. I have poor judgment, but God does not have poor judgment.

The villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments. If you were God for just a day, what would you likely do? Such is the plot of the popular movie, Bruce Almighty. In it, Jim Carrey goes ballistic when he is denied the anchor slot of a Buffalo TV station. His reaction costs Bruce his job and his girlfriend. So Bruce appeals his case to the highest of courts. He calls God to accountability. God, in the person of Morgan Freeman, responds by putting Bruce in charge of the world.

For a while Bruce loves it. He uses his power to embarrass his colleagues. He turns his stunning abilities into personal fame. But the thrill is thin-lived. Bruce soon discovers that being God is no piece of cake. There are prayers galore and people not to be ignored and responsibility beyond belief. Overwhelmed, Bruce learns what all humans need to learn. *Only God can be God.*

The judgments of God are just and fair. Traditionally, Christians have viewed God's final judgment with fear and trembling. As sinners in the hands of an angry God, we have trembled at the thought of God being just. In my own heritage, I can still remember the nightmares from evangelists more determined to scare us out of hell than to invite us to heaven. Now I find myself rejoicing that God will give the final answer.

God knows the whole truth and nothing but the truth. While we see through a glass darkly and make judgments subjectively, God knows all our desires and from Him no secrets are hidden.

God cares—we do not stand before a stranger. We do not stand in the presence of an angry God, but in the face of a loving God, *“who gave his only Son that we should not perish but have everlasting life.”* This is the kind of God that I want to trust in the final moment of life. That's what the Psalmist discovers walking through the streets of Jerusalem, God's judgments are indisputable.

THE GUIDANCE OF GOD IS UNENDING. *“Go through the citadels that you may tell the next generation that this is of God. Our God for ever and ever and He will be our guide, even to the end”* (Psalm 48:14).

How long is forever? I don't know. It is forever. That's how long. God is our guide forever. God leads his dear children along. To discern is more than to decide. To discern is to discover the will of God and then try to follow it. Those with spiritual sensitivity can discover the will of God through consolations and desolations. Then by the power of the Holy Spirit, they can determine to follow the will of God with confidence each step of the way. Do you seek that kind of direction from God in your life?

I keep a portrait of Lincoln at prayer in my office. I have had it for many years. I keep it to remind me of something Abraham Lincoln said a long time ago. “I have been driven to my knees many times by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for the day.” Does that define your life? Spiritual discernment is essential not just in big decisions, but the daily ones, as well. How shall I spend my time, my money, my talents and abilities? By paying attention, we can discover the hopes and desires of God's heart.

It's only a tiny rosebud, a flower of God's design,
But I cannot unfold the petal, with these
clumsy hands of mine.

If I cannot unfold a rosebud, this flower of God's
design,
Then how can I have the wisdom to unfold this
life of mine?
So I'll trust in God for leading each moment
of my day,
I will look to God for guidance, in each step
of my way.
The path that lies before me, only my Lord knows,
I'll trust God to unfold the moments, just as
He unfolds the rose.

Do you walk with him each step of the way?

"Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority forever and ever."

Amen.

