How do you view the ability to change? Generally, we think it's positive don't we? We see our ability to mature and grow up and develop as a good thing. And if you heard someone say about their colleague, 'He is so inflexible. He just won't budge, he's just not open to change' you would take a negative view of the person they're describing, wouldn't you?

But if you think about it, doesn't it depend on the type of change you're talking about? Because if that person complaining about their colleague's inflexibility was actually describing his refusal to compromise on honesty, then you'd probably have a very different reaction. 'He's so inflexible, he just won't budge, he refuses to change' takes on a whole new meaning when what they're really saying is, 'he's so inflexible, he refuses to sell this dodgy product, or spin this line to the customers, he just won't budge – he thinks it's dishonest.' Then our opinion of him changes. He moves from being a dinosaur to a person of integrity.

Because there are some things that we desperately don't want to see change in others. If 'He's so inflexible' sounds negative, hearing 'she is such a rock, in all these years I've known her she has never let me down' sounds very different, doesn't it? We admire, we trust, we love our friends who are faithful and constant and always there for us. And when someone we love or trust changes, we don't like it. In marriage prep with young couples, more than once there has been that moment when the implication that marriage is for life sinks in. And one of the couple will ask, 'but what if he/she changes?'

But think about if God could change. You see, if God could change, then like us, he would change either for the better or the worse. But the Bible tells us that God is wholly good, it tells us that he is the perfection of love. So if God could change, it would have to be for the worse, and then he would become less than good, he would become less than love. He would become less than trustworthy. His promises for this life and the next would become less than cast iron. And imagine a God who was both limitless in his power but who was untrustworthy, and not the perfection of love. In fact, if God could change the whole basis for faith begins to unravel, and you realise that you have nowhere solid to put your feet.

But the Bible presents a very different picture of God. It tells us that he never changes. That in his nature, his character, his purposes and his promises, he is absolutely unchanging. Theologians call it his *immutability*. And it is because he never changes that he is infinitely worthy of your trust.

And that's what I want us to look at today.

The Everlasting Rock

Now if you were to think of the most lasting, or enduring thing you could imagine, what would you think of? You couldn't do much better than the Alps could you? They just *are*. They are massive, they are immovable, they have been there for millennia before you and I ever saw them and they will be standing there long after you and I have returned to the dust.

But listen to what the Psalmist says in Ps 102: 'Of old you [God] laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end' (Ps 102:25-7).

You see, even the Alps, or anything else you could imagine, had a beginning and they will have an end, and in-between, over time, their contours change. So the very things we think of as being permanent and unchanging – the earth, or the stars in the heavens that for centuries men have navigated by, aren't permanent at all.

But, if they are subject to change, what about us? Now, I know that when we're young we think we'll go on forever, that we'll never run out of steam. But just like the rest of creation, we had a beginning and we will have an end. And, just like creation, in-between those two end points, we change. We grow, we mature, we age. Our health varies, our circumstances change, the world about us alters and alters us.

But God never changes. As Paul writes to Timothy, he is 'the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, who *alone* has immortality' (1 Tim 6:15-16). Everyone and everything else is subject to change and decay, but not God. Without beginning or end, he is always the same. He never grows older. He cannot become stronger or weaker. He never runs out of steam, or grows weary or tired. He can never grow in his knowledge, or lose his knowledge. He can never become wiser with time, because no one can teach him anything. So, whilst you and I can improve with time, you cannot improve God.

In fact, Herman Bavinck, the Dutch theologian, wrote that the difference between us and God is the difference between *being* and *becoming*. It's the difference between the creator and us creatures. You and I are always becoming, becoming something different from what we are now, we are always changing and subject to change, we're always seeking rest or satisfaction, or striving for something. But God is never becoming, he is all being.

And that is why you and I will only ever find true rest and satisfaction in God. It's why David wrote, 'The Lord is my rock and my fortress… in whom I take refuge' (Ps 18:2). It's why the prophet Jeremiah, in the midst of incredible social upheaval and suffering wrote: 'But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God and the *everlasting* king' (Jer 10:10). You see, when everything else is shifting, or you feel in a storm of circumstances, or your life is changing in ways you can't control, then you need a constant, you need something everlasting, a Rock that never changes, and God is that rock.

But it's not just that God never changes in his being. What he is *like* never changes.

His Unchanging Character

Now think about yourself for a moment. Can your character change? Over time, can you become more grumpy, or grow more cynical, or become more bitter? And the sad truth is, yes you can. But it also works the other way, doesn't it? You can become more patient, or more forbearing, or more loving.

But God's character can never change, because he can never be improved upon. When Moses encounters God at the burning bush and God tells Moses he's got to go back to Egypt and lead the people of Israel, Moses says he can't possibly go back without knowing the name of the God who's sent him. To which God replies "I AM WHO I AM. Say to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you…. This is my name forever" (Ex 3:14-15).

Now today, we pick names that we like for our children. But in the Bible someone's name meant something. And with God it means everything. So when God says his name is I AM WHO I AM, he is telling us something about his character. He simply *is*. And he could never become less or more than he is. He could never become less loving, or more truthful, or less faithful, or more just. And so when later in Exodus 34, he appears to Moses again, we're told that, 'The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD [and that name *the LORD* is the abbreviated form of I AM WHO I AM]. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD [I AM], the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty"' (Ex 34:5-7).

So God's mercy, and grace, and slowness to anger, and steadfast love, and faithfulness, and forgiveness, and justice never change: I AM WHO I AM. Which means that when you're his child, you never need worry that one day he might love you less. That somehow his supplies of love for you have run dry, that now instead of loving you he is tired of you. That will never happen. And you will never wake up one morning and find that God is less willing to forgive you. In fact, if you're a Christian and you're trusting in Jesus and not in yourself, though you know you constantly fall short and need to change, it is precisely because his mercy and grace to us never change that you don't need to fear. As God says through Malachi, "I do not change; therefore you… are not consumed' (Mal 3:6).

And it is because of his unchanging character that God is infinitely worthy of your trust. You see, everything else you might be tempted to put your ultimate trust in: family, money, reputation, success, they are all subject to change. But the one who gives these things to you isn't. Listen to what James writes: 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change' (James 1:17). All these other things, his gracious gifts to you, are subject to variation and change, but he never changes, which is why you can put your trust in him, rather than his gifts. And that is true both when he gives you these things, and when he takes them away. Because you know that in both cases, when life seems great and when life seems very hard, his love for you and his faithfulness to you have not changed, they are absolutely certain.

His Unchanging Truth

Now, I know it's dangerous to enter American politics, so I tread carefully here, but do you remember the time when Hillary Clinton was describing how she flew into Bosnia during the civil war? She said that her plane landed under gunfire, and that she had to duck and run to her waiting vehicle. Which all sounds very dramatic. Until video evidence showed that in actual fact she stepped down from her aircraft with a smile and a wave, and walked across the tarmac to be greeted, not by gunfire, but by a little girl who read her a poem.

Now, when the mismatch between what Mrs. Clinton said happened and what actually happened became clear, the commentators had a field day, and in admitting that mismatch she said, 'I did *misspeak* the other day.' Now when I heard that I thought, 'o yuk! Another example of the Americans mangling the English language – what kind of a word is misspeak? She's just made that up.' But I discovered that the verb *to misspeak* probably dates back to the 11th century. Which was kind of humbling to realise that an American knew more English than I did.

Now, of course, we can question *why* Mrs. Clinton said what she said, and felt the need to misspeak in the first place. But have you ever had to eat your own words – because now you know you were wrong? Or have you ever said something in the past that you wouldn't say now, because now you know more than you did back then, or because your view or your position on this issue has changed? Or, have you ever had to apologise for something you've said, and regretted you said it?

All of us would say yes to at least some of those, wouldn't we? But that is never the case with God. Listen to Numbers 23:19, where Balaam says, 'God is not a man that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?'

You see whilst you and I change; and whilst society around us shifts, and what once was considered unthinkable, like same-sex marriage for example, is now considered normal, God's opinion on something never changes. It never develops, because he already knows all there is to know about it. So he never finds himself in the position of having to go back on what he said, or admit he misspoke, or change his views because times have changed. He never has to take back any of his words. As Isaiah 40 says, 'The grass withers, the flower fades [everything else decays], but the word of our God will stand forever' (Isaiah 40:8).

And so in a culture that is constantly shifting and changing, and you wonder, 'what should I think about this or that?' the first place to start is with God's unchanging word. That never shifts.

But of course, the fact that God's word on something never changes, isn't just a help when you're perplexed, it also means he never has to withdraw any of his promises. So what you hear or read him say to you in his word, he still means. All his promises, all his words of comfort and love to you, every offer of help, every

promise of his presence, none of that has changed, it never has a sell-by date, because his truth never changes. It really is the truth your soul can cling to when everything else is shifting.

But there's one final thing I want us to look at.

His Unchanging Purposes:
Now I suspect that I'm not the only parent who's experienced this, or failed at this, but my girls hate it when I'm inconsistent. I mean, if I say I'm going to do something, but I don't do it, or my actions don't match my words, there is trouble coming, and rightly so. And they don't forget. Only last week one of my girls was reminding me how I still hadn't made a wooden crossbow for her. Now, you might think that's no big deal, except I'd promised to make it 10 years ago, and she still hasn't forgotten, she's still waiting!

But if God's word never fails, neither do his actions. You hear of someone who does something, and you say, 'hmm, that was out of character'. But you could never say that of God. He never acts out of character, or against his word. His *purposes* never change. In Psalm 33 the Psalmist says, 'The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations' (Ps 33:11). And in Isaiah 46, God says of himself, 'I am God, and there is none like me…. My council shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose… I have spoken and I will bring it to pass, I have purposed and I will do it' (Is 46:9-11).

You see, because God knows everything, there is no new information that can come along and cause him to rethink his plans. Because he has all wisdom, he cannot learn something new that makes him reconsider his purposes. Because he has all the power, nothing can thwart him, so he never needs to come up with a plan B. So his plans and his purposes for you, and for the world, never change.

But when you think about all this, it's deeply challenging isn't it? You see, if God is the unchanging Rock on which we can stand, if his character never changes, if his promises are ever true, if his purposes for his people have not altered, then he is the same God that Abraham and Moses and Deborah and Ruth and David and Isaiah and Nehemiah and Esther and all the others with them, encountered and worshipped and trusted and served and glorified.

But how does your faith compare to theirs? Do you trust him and walk with him, like they did? And if we don't, then could it be that we simply don't know him like they did? Because it's not God who has changed, is it? But when you realise how far short of some of these great saints you fall, it's easy to slip into despair. Or when you look at your life and you see how inconsistent you are in your faith, and you're on a high one moment, and the next you're down in the dumps, you can feel dejected. But you shouldn't. And I'll tell you why.

You see, it is not just that God does not change, his Son does not change either. The writer to the Hebrews writes, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever' (Heb 13:8). Christ's love for you, his desire to be in personal relationship with you, and his purpose for your life, are as unchanging as the rest of God. And

we may go up and down like a yo-yo, but Christ never does. And his unfailing purpose in your life is to slowly change and transform you to become more like himself. As Paul says, 'we… are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor 3:18). The changeless one is changing you.

And as we close, just think how Jesus does that; how he demonstrates his love for you, how he shows grace to us who don't deserve it, and intervenes in your life to change you for the better. The unchanging Son of God does it by entering our world and becoming subject to change. The eternal one is born as a baby, grows and matures into a man, and suffers the ultimate change of death on a cross. In the words of the hymn, ''Tis mystery all, *the immortal* dies.' And he who had known unending loving relationship with his Father, endured the terrible change of alienation from him as he bore your sins on the cross. And he did it all, that you might know the never-ending, never-changing, never-faltering, but also life-transforming love and forgiveness of God our Father.