

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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LESSONS IN CHANGE: JONAH CHANGES HIS MIND

Jonah 1:1-3

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There are three points to today's message:

1. Jonah was a servant of God, comfortable in his work.
2. God gave Jonah an uncomfortable assignment.
3. Jonah attempted to stay in his comfort zone.

**1 – JONAH WAS A SERVANT OF GOD, COMFORTABLE IN HIS WORK**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 1:1

*The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai:*

**EXPLANATION:** Jonah was a prophet. He was a servant of the Lord. Similar to our modern-day mailmen, Jonah was a middleman between God and the people with whom he communicated. God gave Jonah a message and told him who needed to hear it. That was his job. For example, in 1 Kings, God wanted certain boundaries of Israel to be restored and Jonah delivered that message from God to the evil King Jeroboam.

Jonah lived in Gath-hepher, an area near Nazareth. Of course, we recognize Nazareth because it is the town where Mary lived and where Jesus was raised. While the book of Jonah tells this man's story, Jonah himself did not author the book. We do not know who did, but it's easy to understand why Jonah did not. This story was probably not one he wanted to share.

Being in a comfortable place is a great place to be. Life is predictable. We look around and we are proud of our accomplishments. And let me be clear... I believe it's okay to be comfortable. I'll hear comments quite often about how important it is get out of our comfort zones – well, maybe or maybe not. King Solomon talks a lot about enjoying life and that it is a good thing to enjoy life.

There are times, however, that God may call us out of our lives of comfort.

## **2 - GOD GAVE JONAH AN UNCOMFORTABLE ASSIGNMENT**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 1:2

*“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”*

**EXPLANATION:** When Jonah woke up on this particular day, I’m sure he did not realize how dramatically his life was going to change. Jonah was the same man he had always been. He was a prophet. He lived in the same place he’d always lived. In one respect, Jonah’s purpose did not change. He had always been called to do God’s will, but God gave Jonah a new assignment. We might say that God broadened Jonah’s job description. Previously, Jonah had relayed messages to God’s people, to Israel, and to its rulers. Now, God told him to go to a foreign country, and not just any foreign country.

Nineveh was an important city in Assyria that was located about 500 miles northeast of Israel. Nineveh would later become the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The prophet Nahum described Nineveh as a wicked place whose people plotted against God, exploited the helpless, and participated in idolatry, prostitution, and witchcraft. The Assyrians were a particularly brutal people who tormented their enemies physically and psychologically. They impaled, flayed, and performed amputations on prisoners of war and documented their brutality in writing and art.

God told Jonah to take a message to people Jonah hated. Did God know how Jonah felt? Of course, he did. Could he have asked another prophet? Of course, he could have. But God did not want someone else to go. God wanted Jonah.

1. Jonah was a servant of God, comfortable in his work.
2. God gave Jonah an uncomfortable assignment.

## **3-JONAH ATTEMPTED TO STAY IN HIS COMFORT ZONE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 1:3

*But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.*

**EXPLANATION:** While Jonah’s story carries many applications and lessons for us today, it was primarily a story about God’s love and forgiveness of all people. Jonah’s name means dove. In Christianity, the dove has traditionally been a symbol of peace, and in Judaism, it is a symbol of rebirth. Both meanings convey an important principle of Jonah’s story. Israel was God’s chosen people, but God’s plan of salvation was for all people. Even as early as the days of Jonah, God wanted his people to understand that he loved and cared for everyone. Jonah, like Israel, was supposed to be a messenger of peace and rebirth through a relationship with God. As wicked as they were, God wanted the people of Nineveh to know and love Him too. He wanted to extend his blessings to them as well as to the Israelites. Jonah had no desire to be a part of that plan.

It's easy to understand why. At first glance, it may seem that Jonah was afraid. I would be! But his reasoning was much deeper. Jonah, a man of God, was well aware of God’s love and mercy. As we will discover from later verses, Jonah’s refusal to obey God most likely sprang from his deep prejudice and hatred for the people of Nineveh.

The little word at the beginning of verse 3 is “but.” That word indicates that a decision had been made. Jonah had dedicated himself to do the will of the Lord, but in the span of three verses, Jonah changed his mind. God said, “Get up.” Jonah got up. God said “Go.” Jonah went, but where did Jonah go? Not to the great city of Nineveh, not to announce God’s judgment or call them to repentance. Jonah went in the opposite direction. He caught the first ship going the other way. Nineveh was in the east. Jonah headed west.

Did Jonah have a choice in the circumstances? Not really. God did not ask him whether he wanted the assignment. He did not give him a choice between this assignment and another. Did Jonah have a choice in how he responded? Absolutely. He could have chosen obedience. He could have chosen trust. He chose to rebel. As most of you already know, and as we will talk about in coming weeks, that was not a good decision on his part.

Jonah was a servant of God, but when God gave him a new assignment, he rebelled.

**APPLICATION:** Jonah’s response demonstrates how important our mindset is when dealing with change. A lot of circumstances in our lives are out of our control. What we can control is our response to those circumstances.

Jonah was set in one way of thinking. As a prophet, God told him what to tell people, and he did just that. Perhaps not everything God told him to say was comfortable for him, but he did it anyway. This particular assignment was outside of the job description. “No way, I am not doing that, and I’ll show God. I’ll go entirely in the opposite direction. Then he’ll only task me to do what I’m already familiar with doing.”

In the book *Telling Yourself the Truth*, the authors explain that adapting to change requires unlearning old ways of thinking. They say that you must “realize that joy comes from your relationship to God and His unchanging faithfulness”, not from our circumstances. We must address our own misbeliefs and replace them with the truth. I want you to consider the phrase “unlearning old ways of thinking”.

Jonah hated the Ninevites. He knew they were wicked people. He did not want to share God’s message with them because he did not want them to have the opportunity to repent. He wanted them to be destroyed. He did not want to risk his life to share God’s message because he did not think they were deserving of a second chance.

Jonah mistakenly believed that he was better than the people of Nineveh. Jonah did not understand that their sin was no greater than his own. He thought that he was saving his own life by running from the Lord. We know that was not true!

Psychologists tell us that when dealing with change, it is important to reframe our negative thinking. A mother I know used to tell her children, “Obedience is doing what you are told, when you are told, with the right attitude.” If Jonah had gone to Nineveh instead of getting on that boat, his obedience would not have been sincere if his attitude did not change. (We will learn more about this later in the story.) True obedience is done with the right attitude. In order to be obedient, Jonah needed to willingly go to Nineveh with a heart to see the Ninevites hear and obey the message of God.

Like Jonah, we often view the circumstances and changes in our lives incorrectly. As we discussed in the previous series on fear, we see things through tainted lenses. One of the first steps we can take when trying to cope with change is to evaluate our thoughts regarding the change.

- Evaluation criteria 1: Is the change truly as bad as we think? If so, why?
- Evaluation criteria 2: What's the worst-case scenario that might result from the change?
- Evaluation criteria 3: Most importantly, we should explore what God says about what's happening in our lives and what he wants us to do about it.

When unexpected change occurs, we need to step back and make a plan. Instead of running from God, Jonah could have clarified God's will. He could have asked,

- When do you want me to go to Nineveh?
- How do you want me to travel there?
- When I get there, where and how should I deliver the message?
- Exactly what would you have me say, Lord?

Making a plan helps us to gain assurance and confidence in the path forward. It gives us actionable steps on how to go about living in the changed circumstance.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Darren is a 26-year-old man with a wife and young daughter. He recently discovered he has leukemia. Until this diagnosis, Darren had always been fit and athletic. Barring a miracle, Darren will be on medicine for the rest of his life. The medication itself brings a host of dangers. Medical bills will be a constant source of concern. Darren and his wife will not be able to have more children. Of course, Darren's diagnosis was devastating. It was not the plan he had for himself or his family. His life has changed. How did Darren cope with these changes?

The first item in their action plan was to seek God in the middle of their distress. His family prayed for miraculous healing but submitted to God's authority regardless of the circumstances.

The second item in their action plan was consulting with medical professionals to make a plan for his treatment.

The third item in their action plan was addressing their negative thinking. Instead of thinking of the diagnosis as a death sentence, they decided to see it for what it was—a new way of living.

**CONCLUSION:** There's an old saying, "The only things that are sure are death and taxes." It is a way of saying that life is full of change. It is inevitable. As humans, we are creatures of habit. Routines provide a sense of security and control. Change is frightening. The more we are set in our ways, the harder it is to adapt to new circumstances, but adaptation is vital if we are going to be effective servants of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, "*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.*"

God did not put Jonah on earth to live safely or to do what Jonah wanted. God created Jonah with a purpose and a plan for his life. He had a job for him to do. The same is true for you and me.

**INVITATION:** In my previous messages on fear, I believe one of the greatest fears is the fear of change. Change is inevitable in this life. We can't stop it.

I was looking at old photos of dream homes through the years. There has been a lot of change in what people value in their homes. The same can be said about cars. We can hold on for so long and then we realize that change is inevitable, and we have to update.

Life changes are tough. Maybe you haven't faced what Jonah faced, but you have faced your version of it. I do believe we have a God who wants us to trust him. We have the biblical record of those who God pushed. I spent many months speaking on the life of Joseph. I spent several weeks speaking about fear and how God wants us to trust him. Now I am speaking about change and how God wants us to trust him.

If you do not know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, I am suggesting to you that you make the greatest change in your life right now, today. Jesus will give your life new meaning, but in order to have him, you must ask for his forgiveness of your sin and believe that God raised him from the dead.

The altar is open. Maybe you are going through a change in your life, or maybe God is calling you to change. Submit to his authority. Change the way you think, and plan to obey. Come forward today if you want to pray about it.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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