

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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LESSONS IN CHANGE: JONAH'S CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE

Jonah 1:4-2:1

August 27, 2022

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There are three points to today's sermon:

1. Jonah's circumstances changed.
2. Jonah was not alone.
3. Jonah called out to God

**INTRODUCTION:** Last week, we began a series of sermons on change. We are examining the changes that took place in the life of Jonah, how he handled those changes, and what we can learn from his story.

Jonah was a prophet. He delivered messages for God, but one day God changed Jonah's assignment. Instead of proclaiming a message to the Jewish people or authorities, God told Jonah to take a message to the enemy nation, Nineveh. After receiving that assignment, Jonah changed his mind about obeying God. He hopped on a ship and set sail for Tarshish. This week, we pick up the story with Jonah and his shipmates in the middle of a storm.

## 1-JONAH'S CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGED

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 1:4-5a

*Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup>All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.*

**EXPLANATION:** Jonah was no longer safe on dry land. He was aboard a ship in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Do not mistake this for a luxury cruise liner. This was a cargo ship, and these were experienced sailors. This was also no ordinary storm. The original Hebrew word indicates that the great wind was a

whirlwind, and the storm was of hurricane force. The sailors recognized that they were in trouble and began to throw their valuable cargo overboard to lighten their load and help keep their ship afloat. As a result of Jonah's disobedience, his circumstances, and the sailors' circumstances had drastically changed.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Our lives are not static. From the day we are conceived until the day we die, our bodies are changing. The first and second laws of thermodynamics explain how energy is constantly changing from one form to another and how that change results in disorder.

For example, Ana and Jacob have served as missionaries in Honduras for most of their married life. They have struggled through many hard times, not the least of which was COVID, which caused severe limitations and food shortages. In the past year, everything began looking up. Ana and Jacob's ministry hit its stride. Ana's parents even bought a house near Ana and Jacob so that family could visit frequently and be active in their children and grandchildren's lives. Then, something unusual happened. Like Jonah, Ana and Jacob began to feel God calling them to something different. They did not understand. After all, everything was going so well. After many years of hardship, they were enjoying the fruits of their labor. But the calling did not go away. Through a series of events, God called them to work with high-risk and troubled teens in an urban city in California. It was the last place they would have imagined, and they actually said no the first time it was offered. When they were approached a second time, they began to realize that God's hand was in the change.

**APPLICATION:** Like Jonah, we sometimes experience a drastic change in our circumstances. One day everything may be smooth sailing, and the next day, we may feel as if we are caught in the middle of a violent storm. Sometimes, those changes are a result of our own bad decisions. If Jonah had obeyed the Lord, he would not have been on a boat headed to Tarshish. He would not have been in the middle of a storm. In our lives, we are often quick to question why God allows bad things to happen, but we are slow to examine how we might be reaping the consequences of our own actions.

Of course, not every hard circumstance is a result of disobedience or sin. We live in a fallen world. Tornadoes tear apart the houses of the righteous and the unrighteous. Sinners and saints are both diagnosed with cancer. Like Ana and Jacob, sometimes change is an inevitable part of obedience. Even those who love and follow the Lord faithfully experience changing circumstances, and many times those changing circumstances are difficult, dangerous, and heart-breaking. Change is an inevitable part of life.

1. Jonah's circumstances changed.

## 2-JONAH WAS NOT ALONE

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 1:5b-8

*But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. <sup>6</sup> The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish." <sup>7</sup> Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup> So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"*

**EXPLANATION:** Somehow, Jonah was initially oblivious to the storm. He took false comfort in his rebellious state. He thought he was in control. He had made the decision to run from God. He made the arrangements, paid the fare, and settled in, but God was not finished with Jonah.

**APPLICATION:** Very rarely do we experience change in a vacuum. When a change occurs in our lives, it usually affects the people around us as well. When our circumstances go from good to bad or from bad to worse, it's easy to feel alone in our misery. Jonah was not alone. Jonah's changing circumstances did not only affect him. Jonah's bad decision endangered a whole boatload of people. Jonah ran from the Lord, but he could not outrun God's presence. In the same way, we are never alone. We can find comfort in knowing that other people are with us and that other people have lived through similar struggles.

1. Jonah's circumstances changed.
2. Jonah was not alone.

### 3-JONAH CALLED OUT TO GOD

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 1:9-12-1:15-2:1

*He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” <sup>10</sup> This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.) <sup>11</sup> The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” <sup>12</sup> “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.” ... <sup>15</sup> Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. <sup>16</sup> At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. <sup>17</sup> Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. 2 <sup>1</sup> From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.*

**EXPLANATION:** The sailors’ efforts to save their ship failed. They knew the culprit, but they did not want to sacrifice Jonah. Jonah understood what was happening, and he knew the remedy. If he had been alone on this ship, I wonder if he would have been as quick to give in, but he knew that his mistakes were threatening the lives of innocent people.

I want to point out here that Jonah chose to die rather than repent. Jonah could have repented, but drowning in the sea seemed like a better option. Pride has a way of controlling us, doesn’t it? Pride affects some more than others.

As soon as sailors threw him overboard, the storm stopped. Their circumstances got better, but Jonah’s did not. Jonah went from land, to a boat in a storm, to drowning in the sea, to being swallowed by a great fish! His world was changing so fast, it probably gave him whiplash! It also gave him time to think.

As Jonah sunk deeper into the water, he felt the life seeping from him. When he awoke in the belly of a fish, he was forced to face what he had done. He was alone with God and himself. He called out to the Lord in praise and worship, and the Lord heard his cries.

Jonah's world was turned upside down. He had gone from a prophet on land - to a prisoner in the sea, from someone who was in favor with the Lord - to the recipient of God's wrath, but in the end, God had not changed, and God's word to Jonah had not changed.

1. Jonah's circumstances changed.
2. Jonah was not alone.
3. Jonah called out to God.

**ILLUSTRATION:** How do you handle change? Ana and Jacob did not understand why God wanted to take them from a thriving ministry where they and their children were settled, content, and productive to a dangerous area with high costs and more concerns. They followed God anyway, and they stood in awe as he opened doors to provide for their needs. They soon realized they were the answer to someone else's prayers. What first appeared as a negative change for them was actually a positive change for the people who were praying for ministry partners, for the parents praying for someone to help keep their children out of trouble, for the Californian families calling out to God for help.

- Abraham experienced change when he was called from his home to a country he did not know.
- Moses experienced change when God told him to head back to Egypt to face off with Pharaoh.
- Ruth experienced change when she left Moab with her mother-in-law Naomi.
- Esther experienced change when she approached the King and asked him to dinner.
- David experienced change when he was promoted from shepherd to king.
- Mary the mother of Jesus experienced change when she found out she was pregnant.
- Jesus experienced change when he left the throne of glory to be born as a human infant.
- The disciples experienced change when the Holy Ghost fell on them at Pentecost.

Growth requires change. Progress requires change. Living active, obedient, God-glorifying lives will result in change. 1 Corinthians 7:17 says, “*Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.*”

**APPLICATION:** So, what do you do when the rug is pulled from beneath you, and you find yourself in the middle of change? Do you react in obedience, like Ana and Jacob, or do you run like Jonah? Do you commit yourself to following God’s will even when you do not understand? Or do you rebel and try to force your way?

You can be sullen and alienate yourself from God and even others. You can pretend like you are in control. But the chances are good, that will not get you anywhere.

I recognize that change is not easy, and I think, the older we get, the harder it is. So, in conclusion, I want us to consider a few lessons from Jonah’s story that can help us adapt.

1. When you are faced with unexpected changes, ask God if anything that is happening is a result of sin in your life. If God reveals something to you, confess it and repent.
2. Remember, you cannot outrun God. If you are afraid of obeying God, think of Jonah’s story. God’s word is not going to change. Disobedience is not a way to get your own way. It’s a way to bring more trouble and heartache to your life and to the lives of those around you.
3. Take time to reflect. Jonah had to sink into the sea before he took a minute. Do not be like Jonah. Stop, and consider what is happening. It’s OK to grieve what you must leave behind, but then put your eyes on Jesus. Ask him to help you see opportunities in your current circumstances.
4. Maintain some sense of normalcy. In the belly of a fish, Jonah did what he was very accustomed to doing. He prayed! When life throws you a curveball, look for ways that you can keep swinging.

**INVITATION:** In the midst of a changing world, we can cling to the promise of Hebrews 13:8, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” He will never leave us nor forsake us. No matter what you are going through today, or what you may face tomorrow, Jesus is with you.

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