

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

LESSONS IN CHANGE: WHAT DOESN'T CHANGE

Jonah 3:10-4:1-11

September 11, 2022

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There are three points to today's message:

1. God gave the Ninevites a second chance.
2. Jonah revealed his heart.
3. God taught Jonah a lesson.

**INTRODUCTION:** Today is the last week in our miniseries on change. We have examined 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.
- One day, God changed Jonah's assignment. 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.
- God sent a great storm that threatened to kill Jonah and his shipmates.
- At Jonah's insistence, the sailors threw him overboard, and he was swallowed by a great fish.
- Jonah once again called out to God.
- God commanded the great fish to spit Jonah out and gave Jonah a second chance to obey.
- Jonah went to Nineveh and spread the message God had given him.
- The Ninevites believed God and repented.

**1-GOD GAVE THE NINEVITES A SECOND CHANCE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 3:10

*When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

**EXPLANATION:** Jonah proclaimed the message God had given him, and the Ninevites repented of their sins. As a result of their repentance, we see something extraordinary. God relented. The original Hebrew word here is *nacham* (naw-kham'). It means to be sorry, to console oneself, or to change one's mind.

Now, for those of you who know your Bible, this may raise some questions because there are other places in scripture where God says he never changes his mind. Yet, here, in the midst of Jonah's story and elsewhere in scripture, we see instances where God seemingly changes his mind. We know that God's word does not contradict itself. So, how do we explain that?

When the Bible says that God never changes his mind, it is saying that God cannot change his character. He cannot change who he is. In the passages, such as this one, where God relents, it is not a changing of who he is. God is always merciful and kind. His ultimate goal for all of mankind is always salvation. God's decision to postpone the destruction of Nineveh was very much in step with his character.

When scripture gives us these examples of God relenting, it is always a changing of events based on human response. Every time God relents, it is a result of his mercy.

Psalm 86:15 says, *"But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."*

God did not relent from the destruction of Nineveh because his original plans were wrong. He was not sorry that he planned to destroy them for their wickedness. He relented because he is a merciful and gracious God who does not desire for anyone to suffer eternal condemnation. He is a God of second chances. He gave Jonah a second chance, and

1. God gave the Ninevites a second chance.

## **2-JONAH REVEALED HIS HEART**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 4:1-4

*But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I*

*tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”<sup>4</sup> But the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”*

**EXPLANATION:** It might seem to us that Jonah should have been happy. After all, his message was heard and received. But this message was delivered to Ninevites, people who were enemies of Israel. Jonah’s reaction may have been a result of his own hatred and prejudice towards them, but he may have had another reason to be angry.

Jonah was a prophet. Being a prophet was not only a calling; it was his profession. If Jonah gave the people a message, people believed the message was from God. If the message, however, turned out not to be true, Jonah’s trustworthiness might be doubted, and his livelihood might be at stake.

Regardless of why Jonah behaved the way he did, Jonah’s reaction to God’s mercy gives us a clearer picture of his heart. Obedience is doing what you are told, when you are told, with the right attitude. Jonah failed two of those tests. He did what he was told, but only after God forced his hand, and he never adjusted his attitude to reflect the spirit of the Lord.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Have you ever seen a child who is forced to apologize to his sibling? He might cross his fingers behind his back as he says, “I’m sorry I hit you.” She might stick out her tongue after her mom forces her to hug her brother. True repentance is not found solely in what we say or do. True repentance involves a change of heart, attitude, and action.

**APPLICATION:** Jonah ran from the Lord’s assignment because he did not want to take a message to the Ninevites. He may have been afraid, but his disobedience was more likely rooted in his hatred for the Ninevites and his desire for self-preservation. Simply put, Jonah wanted what Jonah wanted, not what God wanted. While he eventually obeyed God’s command, he never truly repented. His wants never changed. He wanted to be safe from God’s wrath, but he had no desire to see the Ninevites saved. He wanted to maintain his reputation as a prophet of God, but he wanted no part in helping an enemy nation come to know the Lord.

For those of us who grew up in church, who gave our hearts to the Lord early in life, it is easy to deceive ourselves. We often have all the trappings of a Godly life. As the old saying goes, “We don’t drink, smoke or chew or hang around with people that do.” We go to church on Sunday morning. We say the right things and look the part. But, make no mistake, we do not fool God with external obedience.

Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*

If we truly want to serve God, we must address the issues of our heart and mind. We must strive to love the things God loves and think the way God thinks.

1. God gave the Ninevites a second chance.
2. Jonah revealed his heart.

### **3-GOD TAUGHT JONAH A LESSON**

**SCRIPTURE:** Jonah 4:5-11

*Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. <sup>7</sup> But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.” But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” “It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.” <sup>10</sup> But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. <sup>11</sup> And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”*

**EXPLANATION:** The salvation of Nineveh should have been an encouragement for Jonah. A whole city had turned to the Lord. What an exciting time it could have

been for the prophet. Surely, there was work to be done. Those people who had previously worshipped a fish god needed to hear more about the true God. They needed a preacher and a teacher to help them draw nearer to the Lord and to learn more about him, but Jonah could not accept the change in plans. He was angry. So, he went on a hillside to pout, and God, in his goodness, provided a shady place for him to do it.

Experts tells us that one of the things we can do to better handle change is to create a little comfort in our new circumstances. If you have moved to a new community, it helps to quickly find a group of like-minded individuals. If you have started a new job, you might like to bring an old photograph for your desk. If you are sick, you probably want to wear your favorite pajamas or curl up in your comfortable bed. God helped Jonah find comfort under the shade of a large plant and that made Jonah happy.

However, the same God that provided the leafy plant also provided the worm that killed the plant and the blazing sun and scorching heat that made Jonah miserable.

Jonah was angry that God chose to save thousands of people, but he was happy because he had a little shade. He grieved the loss of a plant but was mad at God because he spared lives. Jonah's skewed reasoning is not as unfamiliar to us as we might think.

**ILLUSTRATION:** We live in a world where we are concerned with the death of endangered species, but we pursue the right to kill the unborn. We fret about whether we can buy a new car but do not worry about whether our neighbor has enough to eat. We complain about the church service going over but do not think about the person in our pew who needs Christ.

**APPLICATION:** Like Jonah, we are content to live in the status quo. We do not want a new assignment from God. We do not want to give up the comfortable. If we are honest, we are more concerned with ourselves than anyone else. We may look out for the interests of those we love, but we are reluctant to put ourselves out for anyone else. And when change inevitably comes to our doorstep, we protest. It does not feel good. It is scary when we are forced into the unknown.

- Sometimes the changes that we experience are a direct result of our own disobedience. Should a diagnosis of lung cancer be a surprise to someone who has smoked his entire life? Should someone who is sexually promiscuous be shocked when she gets an STD?
- Sometimes God may be giving us a second chance. Maybe a new job offers the opportunity to prove yourself a better employee or a new relationship the opportunity to be a better friend.
- And sometimes God orchestrates a change for the sole purpose of teaching us a lesson or providing us with a new opportunity to draw closer to him.

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**CONCLUSION:** Water without movement quickly becomes stagnant and is no longer fit to drink. A blockage in the heart inhibits blood flow and can cause death. A child's lack of growth is a cause for concern not celebration. Life itself results from change. Something that does not grow is in essence dying.

Yet change is so often a struggle. Psychologists today give several recommendations for how to handle change. Let's look at these in light of faith.

1. Instead of running, we can seek God's wisdom and plan ahead.
2. Instead of thinking negatively, we can reframe our thinking according to God's word.
3. In the midst of difficult emotions, we can take time to reflect on God's faithfulness and how he is working.
4. Regardless of what is happening, we can try to maintain some sense of normalcy.
5. During the hardest times, we can look for ways that God comforts.
6. And most of all, we can count our blessings

Change is inevitable, but when change comes, we do well to look for that which is unchanging. Do not be like Jonah. Recognize God's presence, and look for God's mercy, love and kindness. Thank him for the blessings he provides regardless of the changes you experience. Remember, man changes. Circumstances change. But God never changes. The altar is open if you want to come forward today.

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Thanks to Jennifer Anderson for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA