

## God Changes His Mind?

Jonah 3:1-10

September 13, 2020

Have you ever changed your mind after deciding to do something? I am sure we all have done that. When it involves just you, it is not a big problem. But when you have decided to do something with other people, it is difficult to backout on that. Especially when you and your partners have already done some ground work. Yet if you still decide to pull yourself out, you cannot help but to feel bad and even guilty. After you and your partners have laid all the groundwork, pulling yourself out not only affects you but everyone involved.

So, changing your mind or plan can be a serious matter in some situations. The short sentence, “I have changed my mind,” can generate a lot of feeling. It communicates a message that had you been smarter, better-informed, or more prepared, you would not have started this or pursued in this direction.

When people hear you say, “I have changed my mind,” they may feel that you are a flip-flopper, a flake, a person they cannot trust. Changing one’s mind can be seen as an undesirable behavior or unreliable characteristic. But in a positive sense, changing one’s mind can be a wise, brave or courageous thing.

Our world and circumstances are constantly changing. Our responses to them also need to be changed according to the changes we see and face. However, we seem to demand consistency especially from our leaders and politicians, don’t we? If our leaders and politicians change their mind about some issues, they receive scorn and mockery from everywhere. As if changing their mind about an issue or policy is some sort of transgression or violation. Why would anyone expect of another person to hold on to their initial views on any issue, and do not allow them to change their beliefs later? New information is always coming out. New options always come into play.

It seems like we allow people to change their minds only when it benefits us or agrees with us. Otherwise, changing one’s mind seems to suggest uncertainty, weakness of character, lack of leadership, or lack of confidence.

Most of issues, especially controversial ones, can be argued more than one way, even the ones we have concluded “very clear” and “unambiguous.” But our experience reveals to us that best answers often evolve over time. Our understanding is imperfect. Our beliefs and convictions continue to evolve, and sometimes they completely change.

But what about God? Does he change his mind? Does he change his views? The Bible says God does not change his mind. At least some passages say that. Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” In other words, God does not change his mind. God does not backout on his promise. Whatever he speaks, he fulfills it.

1 Samuel 15:29 also says the same thing. It says, “The Glory of Israel will not recant or change his mind; for he is not a mortal, that he should change his mind.” In this passage Samuel was reminding King Saul that God had made up his mind. He had already spoken his judgment upon Saul and nothing could or would change that. God does not change his mind, judgment or plans.

Our hymns confess that our God is unchanging, immutable, and immovable. Martin Luther’s battle hymn of the Reformation states, “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.” A “bulwark” is something that does not move. It is permanent. God is immovable, unchanging, and immutable. That’s the point Luther’s making.

Our Bible and our forefathers proclaim that God is unchanging and his mind unchangeable.

But we read in our passage today that God does change his mind. He changes his plan. He changes his judgment. He backs out on his decision. So, if he changes his mind, changes his plans, changes his decisions occasionally, does that mean he is imperfect or not trustworthy? If he does change his mind occasionally, what make him change his mind?

In Jeremiah 18, the Lord says to Jeremiah to go down to the potter’s house and see what the potter does. So, he goes to the potter’s house to see what he is doing. The potter is making a vessel with clay. But the vessel is spoiled. And the potter, using the same clay, begins to make another vessel. Then the Lord says to Jeremiah, “Can I not do that with you, O house of Israel, just like what this potter has done? Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand...I may declare concerning a nation...that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it. But if that nation turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation

that I will build and plant it. But if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good I had intended to do to it.”<sup>1</sup>

God says that he changes his heart, mind and plan toward us based on how we live and how we respond to him. Even when he wants to and plans to bless us, if we reject him and live in sin and in sinful ways, he will change that plan. Instead of blessing us, he will bring judgment against us. But even when God had decided to bring his judgment upon us because of our wickedness, if we repent and live a new life, he will change his detrimental plan to destroy us and will forgive us.

So, the question is what are the ways in which God changes his mind toward us in a positive way? What can we do so that God would be gracious and merciful toward us?

A few things we may consider. One, God changes his mind when people repent of their sins. People’s repentance changes God’s heart and mind.

Nineveh was a wicked city. They were violent people. To them, God sent Jonah to proclaim his judgment against the city and its people. God said, in forty days he would destroy the entire city because of their wickedness. Then the king of Nineveh heard about this. And he repented. Not only he repented, but he called his entire city to repent. All the people in the city on Nineveh repented and changed their behaviors. They turned away from their evil and violent ways. Even the animals put on sackcloth. So not only human beings repented but all animals joined in that repentance. When God saw that, he changed his heart toward the people of Nineveh. He changed his plan. Instead of destroying them, he spared them. He forgave the people of Nineveh.

The clear message is that when we repent of our sins and turn away from our sinful ways and evil attitudes, God will change his heart toward us. God will forgive our sins and will relent from punishing. And that is a good news. He changes his heart, mind and plan toward us because of his compassion.

Two, God changes his mind when we ask for his mercy. When we pray to God, he listens to our prayers. He is so merciful that he even changes his plan when we implore him.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 18:1-10.

Hezekiah was the 13<sup>th</sup> king of Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel. And he trusted God so sincerely that no king trusted God like he did in Judah's history.<sup>2</sup>

One day, he was very sick. He was at the point of death. Actually, God sent prophet Isaiah and told Hezekiah that he would die. He said, "Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover." That was God's message to Hezekiah. "You are going to die." That was God's plan for Hezekiah. Doesn't that sound so final – "You shall die. You shall not recover"? There was no chance of Hezekiah recovering from his illness. God said so. God told Hezekiah that he would die and he needed to prepare for his death. When Hezekiah heard this, he turned his face to the wall and wept bitterly. He implored God, he begged him for mercy. And God heard his prayer. God saw his agony. And he changed his heart toward Hezekiah. He sent Isaiah back to Hezekiah and told him that God had heard his plea, and that he would give him 15 more years to live. And Hezekiah was healed from his illness and lived 15 more years.

God has mercy for the righteous who suffer. Our misery and our plea for God's mercy is not ignored by God. Amazing thing is that even when something is outside of God's plan, even after God has made up his plan, if we ask for his mercy, he can change the situation for our benefits. God changes his heart, mind and plan because of his compassion.

Three, God changes his heart, mind and plans toward us when someone intercedes for us. Likewise, God changes his heart, mind and plans when we intercede for someone else. Intercessory prayer is powerful. Actually, all our prayers for other people are intercessory prayers. The Greek word which is translated as intercessory is *enteuxis*, which means "coming together" or "to visit" or "to have conversation" or "to make petition."

After Israelites came out of Egypt, they spent about 14 and a half months in the wilderness. And they arrived at verge of the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. Each tribe selected one person to be their representative and to spy out this Land of Promise. So, Moses sent these 12 people to study the land for 40 days. When they came back, ten of them gave their report saying that the inhabitants were so big and strong that there was no way they could conquer the land. Only Caleb and Joshua said "God has given us this land. Let's go and take it." But the Israelites listened to the ten spies who brought the negative report. When Caleb

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 18:5.

and Joshua contradicted them, and insisted that they should go up against the Canaanites, the whole congregation threatened to stone them.

When God saw that, he was furious. He was ready to disown them and destroy them. That is when Moses interceded for the Israelites saying, “Lord, if you do that, the nations (the foreigners, the people who do not know you), will hear about it, and will say you have slaughtered them because you were not able to bring them to the land you have promised...Lord, forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have pardoned this people...until now.” Then the Lord said, “I do forgive, just as you have asked.”<sup>3</sup>

God forgives and changes his heart, mind, and plan toward humanity when someone intercedes for them. God does that because of his endless compassion and boundless love for us.

Let us remember what kind of God we have. He is ever ready to forgive us and always eager to bless us.

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<sup>3</sup> Numbers 14:13-20.