

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty There's nothing my God cannot do. The mountains are His, the rivers are His. The stars are His handiwork too My God is so big, so strong and so mighty There's nothing my God cannot do. An action song popular at Sunday School when our daughters were young. Painting a picture of the God who made and owns everything. A sovereign powerful God who will achieve what he sets out to achieve. *God can change His mind. When God realizes He has made an error in judgment or that things did not unfold as He supposed, He can change His mind.* The words of a bible scholar. Depicting a God who changes his mind when he gets it wrong the first time. The author of each set of words claim biblical backing for their understanding of the character and ways of God. The first set of words fill me with joy. I love joining in that song. And doing the actions. The second set of words leave me uncomfortable and uncertain. Casting doubt on the perfection of God. Raising questions about contradictions in the Bible. I have confidence in the authority of the Bible. Believing what the Bible says about matters of faith and Christian practice to be wholly useful and true. Believing the Bible is completely trustworthy as a guide to salvation and the life of faith. Believing the Bible will not fail to accomplish its purpose. Taking seriously the Bible includes grappling with apparent contradictions. If, and when they appear. We heard one this morning at the end of **Jonah 3**. In reference to the repentance of the Ninevites. *'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.'* **v10** According to the writer, God relented. In some versions the verse says God repented. The LORD who threatened destruction on Nineveh, did not carry out his threat. He changed his mind. When I change my mind, I decide my first decision is wrong, inadequate, unhelpful. My change of mind reflects something true about me. I am not perfect. I make mistakes. Errors of judgement. Does God's change of mind put him in the same category as me? Less than perfect. Prone to error of judgement. Not in possession of all the facts before he takes a particular course of action? The bible scholar I quoted earlier suggest that. You get the drift sisters and brothers. The question raised in Jonah has big implications for Christian faith and practice. For confidence in the character and ways of God. For establishing sure and certain foundations for life in a complex, uncertain world. Can we confidently put our lives in the hands of the God revealed in the Bible? Is he a perfectly consistent and trustworthy God? This morning, we take a

short detour in the story of Jonah. To respond to this vital question. On the one hand, we have clear and emphatic teaching of the Bible. God never lies or changes his mind. Three verses. The prophet Balaam speaking the very words the LORD put in his mouth, *'God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?'* **Numbers 23:19** The prophet Samuel speaking to King Saul on the LORD's behalf, *'He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.'* **1 Samuel 15:29** In the context of encouraging struggling Christians to hang on to the sufficiency of Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews says, *'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.'* **13:8** On the other hand we have **Jonah 3:10**. There is a way forward that is faithful to the Bible and upholds the perfect character of God. Confirms the integrity and consistency of Scripture. **First**, the original language uses different words to describe human repentance and God's relenting or repenting. Human repentance is 'a turning away from'. The Ninevites turn away from their wicked ways. God's relenting is captured best as 'change of mind'. **Second**, God's change of mind takes place within the boundaries of his unchanging nature and purposes. Not the arbitrary, unpredictable changing of mind flowing from flawed human beings. The God of the Bible does not change. Utterly consistent in the unfolding revelation of his character. Supremely captured in Jesus Christ. The *'radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.'* Absolute, unchanging truth established through God's perfect words. No deviation from his purpose of bringing everything under the Lordship of Jesus. In Jonah, God's movement from wrath to compassion with regard to Nineveh consistent with his character. As the perfectly just judge of all. As the God of kindness, slow to anger and abounding in love **Third**, God's change of mind comes from his interaction and engagement with his creation. God active in his world. Fulfilling his eternal purpose for his world and its people. By divine revelation, the Christian recognises the change in their relationship with God. From objects of God's wrath to beneficiaries of his grace. Initiated by the unchanging God. Who changes his mind. No longer treating the Christian as a sinner deserving judgement. But as a forgiven child of God. In response to the impact of his engagement. People choosing to turn from their wicked ways. Like the Ninevites. We live with an element of mystery in this engagement and its fruit. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways not our ways. **Fourth**, God's change of mind impacts God's heart. Treading on holy ground in seeking to

do justice to the heart of God. **Genesis 6:6** *'The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.'* The word translated 'regretted' same Hebrew word used of God relenting, repenting. God sees universal wickedness and is deeply troubled about his decision to create human beings made in his image. God grieves the wickedness of the Ninevites. Look at the Cross, brothers and sisters. The pain and grief of the unchanging God experiencing the agonising death of his beloved Son. In all of this our Sovereign God knew in advance he would change his mind. Forgiving the Ninevites. Offering salvation to universally sinful humanity. Because he is a compassionate God. His love and compassion for sinful humanity culminating in the Cross. Where his perfect justice and mercy meet in the death of his Son. Sisters and brothers, the conclusion of the Bible. God changing his mind as the expression of his character. Does not compromise the integrity of the God of the Bible. He is the God who does not lie and does not change his mind as we humans do. God does not second guess himself. Covering his tracks of errors of judgement or human decisions taking him by surprise. Be confident in the perfect character and ways of our Sovereign God. Rejoice in his consistency of character and purpose. Build your life on the absolute trustworthiness of God. Ponder deeply the grief and pain God bears in his heart because of us. Celebrate the delight in the Lord's heart because of our repentance. Be thankful his change of mind is about not punishing us as we deserve but pouring out his grace upon us. Rejoice in the gift of his engagement with us. Enabling us to draw near to him, pray to him, come to his throne of grace to find the help we need. Sing in your hearts with me. *My God is so big, so strong and so mighty There's nothing my God cannot do. The mountains are His, the rivers are His. The stars are His handiwork too My God is so big, so strong and so mighty There's nothing my God cannot do.*