

A Different Kind of Life
The God of Sea and Land
Jonah 1:5-10

Frank and June have been married for 62 years. She endured two surgeries for cancer 10 and 15 years ago. Then, seven years ago a young lady veered into their lane while texting and the resulting crash placed Frank and June in a rehab hospital for six months. Now both in their 80's, and with children living states away, he is confined to a wheelchair and she uses a walker to get around the house. June played the piano and organ in church for over 30 years and the couple was part of a singing quartet. June struggles to remember songs, often stopping in the middle of one to work hard at remembering the lyrics. Most troubling to June is that she knows she is a Christian but can't remember how or when she trusted Christ. And her Alzheimer's frustrates Frank whose loss of memory isolates them both, not only from the outside world but from each other. It's a different kind of life than Frank and June expected – one they never would have dreamed - when they were married as young, active, full-of-life, twenty-year olds who were once the captains of their own fates and the masters of their own souls.

I think that the vast majority of people in the world end up living a different kind of life than they expected, planned or dreamed. Jonah responded with doubt, eventually obeyed God but ended up angry with God for the life God created for him. How do we respond? With faith? With doubt? With anger? Our response says everything about our God.

Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶ So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." ⁷ And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" ⁹ And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." ¹⁰ Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

First: Three Important Questions. vs 7-8

The sailors ask Jonah 3 questions:

- a) What is your occupation? – What do you do?
- b) Where do you come from? – Where is your home?
- c) What is your country? – Who are your people?

These three things present us all with a sense of identity. These things make us who we are. We may all order them differently, but they make us who we are. And, it is often, the ordering that dictates how we live.

For instance, first generation immigrants feel more strongly about their home country while their second-generation children are more concerned with the country they live in presently.

A parent might work to care for a family while a single person might derive family from work.

What gives us our identity is an important question in life because that is usually the primary motivator for life. What gets you up in the morning? What moves you throughout the day? What is the basis of your decision-making? All of these questions find their answer in our identity.

Second: Whose are you? v 6

The questions of the sailors, however, aren't for reflection on life's meaning. They're not trying to wax philosophically but save their physical lives. They want to know what god or gods Jonah has angered so they can placate the god of the storm.

From the sailor's perspective, your god defined who you were and how you lived. Religion was the first and most fundamental layer of personality.

Christians often make the mistake – and 'unbelievers' also, that people don't believe in any gods. This simply isn't true.

Merriam-Webster: Religion is

- (1) the service and worship of God or the supernatural
- (2): commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance but also
- (3) a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith

Buddhism is classified as a religion but denies the existence of a deity.

Jainism = all souls who have infinite bliss are gods

A person can be Hindu with or without belief in a divine being

Just because a person doesn't believe in a divine being like the Christian God, doesn't mean the person isn't religious, or isn't a believer in anything. Everyone believes in something that is his or her ultimate reason for being.

This is true of individuals and entire states; often states become the reason for being as in Communism or Socialism. In those states, all moral standards and human relationships are sacrificed for the common good which is defined by the State (capital 'S').

These sailors are absolutely right. **Everyone gets their identity from something.**

"I exist because..."

"I'm significant because..."

"I'm acceptable because..."

Everyone has functional gods even if they are self-made and virtual gods.

This is because we are all made in the “image of God” (Gen 1:26-27) and have a God-sized hole/vacuum in us that something will fill.

To be “made in an image” means we reflect something. We are dependent beings who must get our reason for existence from somewhere/something/someone.

These sailors knew one very important thing about their circumstance: We are all saved by something. They needed to know Jonah’s something in order for him and them to be saved.

**We are all saved by something
to which we pledge our allegiance.**

V 6 - Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

There are many things that define our god for us, but crisis is a major definer of who our god is because, in a crisis, we overtly, consciously, seek something to save us.

If your God is not the God of Heaven, it is some other god, perhaps, yourself. But make no mistake about it, we are all believers.

If the Christian God of the Bible, is my God, that changes everything. **For instance**, June can’t answer any of the questions asked by the sailors. She doesn’t remember what she did for a living, where she was born or even who her people are. And she doesn’t have to remember when or how she trusted Christ. Jesus is a trustworthy Savior.

Three: The Christian God of Sea and Land v 9

Vs 6-7 – When the captain asks Jonah to cry out to his god, the prophet remains silent. It is only when the lots identify him that Jonah confesses his God and his identity

“I am a Hebrew and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

To be a Hebrew says everything for Jonah and the sailors. Throughout the OT, even those superstitious nations who did not worship Jehovah had respect for the Hebrew God and the prophets of that God.

In this, Jonah says a lot about himself and his rationale for disobeying God.

“*I am a Hebrew*” is actually the answer to the last question, “*Of what people are you?*” which Jonah answers first.

Being a Hebrew meant he did not want God to rescue the Assyrians and, in this case, his loyalty to Israel outweighed his loyalty to God.

Many American Christians are more American than Christian. We all know this because we act like politics can save us. And we choose friends, create social communities, hire people and attend churches, listen to preachers, etc., based on politics.

But it really isn't politics. It's the comfort of our own life-design. *"This is who I am. This is how I like it. This is how it should always remain. God, you can help with that but don't do anything to change it."*

But again, it is crisis that clearly identifies our god and in Jonah's case, it is Israel. He loves Israel more than God.

- *We love our life plan
- *We love our comfort
- *We love our loved ones

This explains why people who profess Jesus can be mean, greedy, racist, etc. Even Christians regularly place higher value on other things than God and that determines our mindset, emotions and behavior.

We act like nonChristians because we love something more than Jesus.

Jonah is not the only example of this in the Bible. Peter does this also.

John 13:37b-38 - I will lay down my life for you." ³⁸ Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

Matthew 26:33-35 - Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." ³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."³⁵ Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.

Luke 22:54-62 - Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them.⁵⁶ Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸ And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." ⁵⁹ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.

Three different people identified Peter as a friend of Jesus and three times, Peter had the opportunity to keep his word to Jesus, but he denied him.

The one question Jonah did answer was “*Of what people are you?*” The one he didn’t answer was “*What is your occupation?*”

He was no longer, at that moment, a prophet of God.

“Are you a Christian?” It is a simple question with a simple answer.

Matthew 4:19 – “Follow me...”

Are you following Christ? Are you following Christ into the different kind of life you are now living? You know if you have a Jonah heart. Really, who is your god?

ILL – Several centuries after Jonah another Hebrew prophet sailed on a ship and faced a storm in the same sea. But rather than be silent, he confidently stood on the deck of the ship and pronounced

Acts 27:22-25 - Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴ and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ ²⁵ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.

Which prophet does your heart reflect? Jonah or Paul.

Jonah was a runaway long before he was a castaway.

Again, none of us can condemn Peter or Jonah without indicting ourselves.

Can I say something? God is making Jonah a Christian. I don’t doubt that Jonah is a Christian. He is a prophet and God has already spoken through him. But becoming a Christian is also a lifetime process of our profession and our practice becoming one; the distance and difference between what we profess and how we live getting smaller.

GOSPEL: We are Christians by God’s grace which enables our repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and that alone saves us. VBS – “*By grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus alone.*” But living the Christian life requires crisis which enables us to grow in Christ.

Romans 5:1-5 - *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

ILL – Running Illustration. Kristi Sanders is training for her 7th consecutive Marine Corps Marathon.

- a) Justified by faith – *“I believe I can run a marathon.”*
- b) Peace with God – *“I’m going to do it.”*
- c) Access by faith – *“I’m registered.”*
- d) Stand in grace – *“Others have done it. I can too.”*
- e) Rejoice in hope of glory – *“The finish line will be wonderful.”*
- f) Rejoice in sufferings – *“This training hurts.”*
- g) Suffering produces endurance – *“I am running, walking, running.”*
- h) Endurance produces character – *“I am a runner.”*
- i) Character produces hope – *“I can run this race.”*
- j) Hope makes us unashamed – *“I finished the race.”*
- k) God’s Spirit gives us hope and confidence – *“I can run any race.”*

Jonah has no confidence in God. Peter had no confidence in God. Each had confidence in something else. Each preferred something else. In the crisis, each chose a different god.

The different kind of life defines us.
Do we choose (joy, endurance, character, hope, confidence)
the life God creates for us or do we run?

Contrast that confidence with Jonah’s sleep (v 5). The Hebrew indicates he was snoring, and this was the only reason the Captain found him. Jonah was no doubt exhausted from running.

But just like facing a great city with God or a great storm without God so we can respond to God’s voice or we will respond to another voice

V 1 – “Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh...”

V 6 - *So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god!*

At that point, Jonah probably wished he had listened to God. But something – some voice, some circumstance, is going to wake us up and that voice is our functional god.

Conclusion:

If the Christian God is your God, he is the God of land and sea. This is Jonah’s way of saying God is everywhere and in control of everything even the different kind of life you are now living. If this is your God, that makes your storm blow you into God’s will. It may be life in Nineveh, but look what God did there.

Community Groups:

Read the text

- 1 – Answer for yourself, the 3 questions the sailors asked Jonah.
- 2 - What is our identity?
- 3 – How do you think most people form their identity?
- 4 – What have been the major influences in creating your identity?
- 5 – If asked, how would you identify yourself?
- 6 – How is everyone in the world a ‘believer?’
- 7 – What is a functional god?
- 8 – What was Jonah’s functional god?
- 9 – What are some function gods in the lives of people?
- 10 – What are the functional gods on which you have depended?
- 11 – Why did Jonah disobey God?
- 12 – What have been your motivations for disobedience?
- 13 – Luke 22 - Why did Peter deny Jesus?
- 14 – Why have you denied Jesus?
- 15 – Romans 5 - How does suffering as Christians make us Christians?
- 16 – Why do we run from suffering/Nineveh?
- 17 – Retrace Jonah’s steps. What can you learn from what he did wrong to develop a mindset/heart that remains faithful to God in suffering/Nineveh?
- 18 – Read verse 9. Did Jonah fear God?
- 19 – How do we know that he did or did not?
- 20 – How does the storm move Jonah into God’s will?
- 21 – What does the phrase mean, “*the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.*”
- 22 – How might such theology change your mind or heart about your Nineveh?
- 23 – How might storms do that for us?
- 24 – When has a storm/crisis moved you into God’s will?
- 25 – How has time or experience reshaped your thinking about that storm?
- 26 – How does that experience give you hope for future storms?