

# No Other Gods (8): The God of Me

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(Jonah)

## I. Introduction

- A. You can't just believe old fish stories; Dad and I had a great one years ago crappie fishing
1. Dad hit a snag and was working to free it when it started moving... quickly
    - a. He started fighting a fish so big that it was pulling our 12 foot jon boat backwards!
      - 1) We had bright idea to maneuver into shallows, but line broke before we saw it!
      - 2) It was probably a big turtle or an even a big catfish—certainly wasn't a crappie
    - b. Like Captain Ahab, we went back to that same spot many, many times with no luck
  2. In fish stories, big one *always* gets away and *always* gets bigger each time you tell it
    - a. So you always have to be a bit skeptical anytime anyone tells you a fish story
    - b. Like the one-armed fisherman who claimed to catch one "*That was this long.*"
- B. What about Jonah's fish story? We ask wrong questions, "*What was this big fish?*"
1. Or we want to know, "*Is it really possible to be swallowed by a giant fish and live?*"
    - a. There is the widely distributed story of a sailor named James Bartley in 1891
    - b. He was swallowed by sperm whale and freed alive after it was harpooned
  2. **Irony:** Fish is probably the least important detail in the story of a reluctant prophet
    - a. Story is about what we are to do when called to a task that we don't want to do
    - b. Story is about God's love and concern for people for which we have little of either
- C. We continue today with our look at *No Other Gods*, and we come to the real idol god
1. We've been looking at the idols, the false gods that war within for control of our lives
    - a. Kyle Idleman suggests that you can boil all of these false idol gods down to one:  
*All these gods at war within me really represent one god... me. It is really the Lord God or the god of myself that I must choose between. Ultimately, that is the choice we must make every day. Will I worship God or will I worship me?*
    - b. He's right—right? We have to decide if we do what God wants or what we want
    - c. For God to really be on the throne of our lives, then we have to decide to get off it!
  2. Jonah was cool being a prophet until God have him words he didn't want to preach
    - a. When gave Jonah a message he didn't want to preach, Jonah decided to be God
      - 1) And that's when Jonah's story got fishy—and it isn't really about a big fish
      - 2) The story is really about what happens when we make ourselves God
    - b. Let's look at this familiar story once again from perhaps a not so familiar angle

## II. The God's of Me: Jonah and the Fish

- A. Jonah enjoyed his job— when he agreed with what God was doing ([2 Kings 14:25](#))
1. Jeroboam II was to expand the borders of Israel almost to the extent of Solomon
    - a. That was on the basis of Jonah's preaching; Jonah was all for expanding Israel
    - b. Jeroboam was large and in charge, and Jonah was Nathan to his King David
  2. God told him to preach to Assyria, moral enemy of Jonah's homeland ([Jonah 1:1-2](#))
    - a. The pagan Assyrians were known for aggression, atrocities, constant expansion
    - b. And sooner or later, Assyria would set her sights on Jonah's beloved Israel
  3. God was offended by Assyria's sinfulness. Good enough... so was Jonah
    - a. But preach to them? Last thing Jonah wanted was preach to heathen Gentile sinners
    - b. Well, that wasn't the last thing; the last thing he wanted was for them to repent!
- B. So Jonah runs to Joppa and jumps a ship heading to Tarshish ([Jonah 1:3](#))
1. God's forgiveness isn't only thing as far east and west. *So is Tarshish and Nineveh!*
    - a. We aren't exactly sure where Tarshish was, but it was in the opposite direction
    - b. God said, "Go west young man." Jonah went just about as far east as he could go
    - c. He is so focused on doing what HE WANTS that he decided to run from God!
  2. You might assume as a prophet, Jonah would be familiar with his Old Testament
    - a. Like the story of Jacob wrestling with God? When you do that, you lose, right?
    - b. What David does say about trying to run away from God's presence ([Psa 139:7-10](#))
- C. **Question:** Why did Jonah run? He hated those pagan Gentiles more than he loved God
1. Jonah was a prophet of God—but here he was really serving "the God of Me."
    - a. He hated those old Assyrians as his enemies more than he loved God, right?
    - b. He couldn't stand that God loves everyone—red and yellow, black and white.
      - 1) He was sure the only reason God made Gentiles for fuel to burn in hell (*rabbis*)
      - 2) He wanted grace for people that looked like him and hell for everyone else.
  2. So he ran. Well, as the expression goes, you can't hide from God ([Jonah 1:4-6](#))
    - a. God sends a storm that threatens them all; they cast and determine Jonah is to blame
    - b. Of all Jonah's faults in this story, you have to give him credit for being honest here
      - 1) Jonah had already told them that he is running away from God ([Jonah 1:10](#))
      - 2) He tells them how they can save ship; I'm not sure I would have! ([Jonah 1:12](#))
  3. So they threw him overboard to eaten by a huge fish... *just like the one Dad hooked*

### III. The God of Me: You and Me Today

- A. **Review:** Jonah hated non-Jews in general and particularly Assyrians so much he ran
1. Think about that—he hated non-Jews so much that he chose to not to love God
    - a. He was so sure that he was right in hating them he never considered reconsidering
    - b. He was God’s man as long as the message was, “*Expand the borders of Israel*”
    - c. When God called him to preach, “*And I love Assyrians too...*” he was out of there!
  2. **Point:** Jonah was serving “the God of me” all along— we just didn’t notice it at first
    - a. At first, what God told him matched what Jonah wanted, so everything was A-OK
    - b. When God called him to love people different from himself— *time to hit the bricks*
    - c. He was too busy serving the “*God of me*” to see his whole worldview was squirrely
- B. The same thing can happen with apostles as well as with prophets (**Gal 2**)
1. The issue was Jews and Gentiles, an issue Jerusalem had only faced long-distance
    - a. They were all Jews; they never worked through the messy business of integration
    - b. Twenty years later, Jerusalem church still had folks “*zealous for law*” (**Acts 21:20**)
    - c. Gentiles were OK long distance; equality is OK as long it is “*separate but equal.*”
  2. Peter baptized Cornelius, right? Peter comes to visit “*integrated*” work at Antioch
    - a. Some prominent folks from Jerusalem also visit... with enough juice to worry him
    - b. Peter is afraid of what they might think, and he pulled back from Gentile Christians
      - 1) This must have been subtle; he didn’t write a blurb in the church bulletin!
      - 2) He stops accepting invitations, gives a cold shoulder, seems a bit standoffish...
    - c. Well, Paul was about as subtle here as a screen door on a submarine! (**Gal 2:11-13**)
      - 1) “*You’re being hypocritical!*” Contradicts what Peter told Cornelius in **Acts 10**
      - 2) “*You’re a bad influence!*” His example was impacts others— even Barnabas
      - 3) “*Hurting the faith of newbies!*” Was devastating to the faith of new Christians
  3. Worse than that! This hypocritical racist prejudice denied the gospel itself (**Gal 2:14**)
    - a. To make distinctions based on ethnicity and race denies all that Christ died for
    - b. Paul says racial prejudice is a repudiation of salvation by grace (**Gal 2:15-16**)
      - 1) *7 Deadly Virtues*, Gerald Mann tells of getting called out after sermon on race
      - 2) Deacon got in face, “*If I ain’t better than black man, who am I better than?*”
      - 3) Without knowing it, he just put his finger in the middle of the theological pie!

## IV. Conclusion

- A. Jonah and Peter are completely different, but they do share something here in common
1. Jonah completely refused to preach to non-Jews to the point of running away
    - a. Jonah never really changed his mind after his 3-day fish belly sabbatical
    - b. He had success like no other prophet—but he was mad about it (**Jonah 4:1-3**)
  2. Peter would have denied that he was prejudiced (“*some of my best friends are Gentiles*”)
  3. Both Jonah and Peter worshiped the god of me; it kept them from seeing God.
- B. Our country seems more racially divided today than it has been in a generation
1. Some stories don’t have but one side— “*White Lives Matter*” rallies in Tennessee
    - a. Seemed to have fizzled (*two small towns looked like expected zombie apocalypse*)
    - b. This isn’t the other side or equal time. BLM was always “*Black Lives Matter too*”
    - c. The message of white supremacist hate groups is “only white lives matter.”
  2. Most stories have multiple sides! We must be better at seeing other people’s stories
    - a. Today, many of us will go home watch NFL football— some players will kneel
    - b. Some will be infuriated that millionaire athletes are allowed to disrespect the flag
    - c. Some we be more upset that we focus on form of the protest than what is protested
  3. **Point:** We see race differently depending on perspective. Need to look at others story
- C. If we wear the name of Christ, then our big story is very clear— the story of the cross
1. It is a story big and bold enough to include every single person (**Rom 10:12-13**)
    - a. Jews and Gentiles are included in one story and brought into one church
      - 1) Paul doesn’t pretend that Jews and Gentiles are same, because they are not
      - 2) Paul notices differences— he tries hard to “*become all things to all people*”
    - b. There were and are racial and ethnic differences—differences make no difference
    - c. “*There is no difference*” actually becomes part of the gospel! (**Gal 3:28**)
  2. Our ability to live this out on earth reflects the truth of heaven itself (**Rev 7:9-10**)
    - a. I want to be part of that heavenly church one day, to sing with that praise team
    - b. Part of the deal is to live out that church here— and it’s not about the singing
  3. It won’t take an act of congress to change but an act of God’s Spirit living in us!
    - a. The church must lead the way; we must be the solution and not part of the problem
    - b. Black lives matter, blue lives matter—it must start with “*Holy Spirit lives matter*”
    - c. We must be filled with the Spirit of the living God and leave behind the God of me