

## Jonah 1:7-16 – Confirmed vs. Transformed Identity – Lesson Summary

We identify with celebrities, our jobs, relationships, finances, successes, failures, and the list goes on and on. The opportunities to connect ourselves to someone or something to find our purpose and meaning are endless. In this passage, Jonah's heart, where he finds his identity, will be confirmed through his answers to the sailors' questions and his interactions with them. However, the sailors' identities will be transformed.

Having exhausted their options and crying out to their "gods," the sailors ask Jonah "on whose account this evil has come upon us?". They'd determined the storm to be a supernatural event inflicted by a god, and now ask Jonah, whose are you? To which god do you belong? They quickly follow that up with questions about occupation, nationality, and finally his heritage. Jonah begins answering the sailors' questions backwards. His first response to their "interrogation" is that he's a Hebrew. He immediately identifies ethnically rather than religiously. Only after being a Hebrew does Jonah identify with the LORD. He never answers their question about his occupation. Jonah, called to be a prophet, a mouthpiece of the one true God, fails to inform the sailors of this high calling upon his life. Instead of speaking the words of God, we see him run from Him in silence. It appears that Jonah is more concerned with being a Hebrew who serves God on his own terms, rather than surrendering to the LORD.

I think it's beneficial to consider the sailors in light of the questions they asked Jonah. Who is their god? What do they do? Who do they associate with ethnically? We know that the sailors are religiously diverse because they "each cried out to his god". Obviously, they are sailors, but at the moment they are failed sailors who've exhausted all options. They are doomed without the intervention of a supernatural power. The sailors are both a religiously and ethnically diverse group of men collected from port to port. You might say that their current identity appears to be pagan sailors whose god's and skillsets have failed them.

Behaviors often confirm our identities. They are a visible display of where we find our worth, our hope, and our purpose. When considering Jonah's behavior, we see a Hebrew prophet only concerned about himself. Jonah's solution to the storm is to have the sailors throw him into the waters. He never takes that burden upon himself. He never repents. He doesn't jump in or tell them to turn around so he can obey the LORD. In fact, he never cries out to his God like they'd asked him to. Jonah doesn't even help them row harder when they try to avoid killing him! Jonah identifies with his heritage and a god of his own making.

But, in one of the most beautiful pictures of transformation in Scripture, we see the sailors' identities transformed. Rather than throw Jonah overboard to his certain death, the sailors try to preserve his life by rowing harder. When this is ineffective, they "call upon the LORD" to forgive them for taking his life. Throwing him in, the sea stops raging and they "feared the LORD, offered sacrifices, and made vows". Once pagan sailors, they now identify with the LORD in worship. Amazingly, the sailors make vows after deliverance, not to ensure it. They didn't make promises to follow God if He delivered them, but instead, made promises because He delivered them. While God will continue to deliver Jonah time and time again in this story, he never responds in the worship of His deliverer and fails to truly identify with Him. Have you? Do you identify with Christ, your deliverer? Or, like Jonah, do you identify with someone or something else?

### Discussion Questions:

- 1) Despite stating that he is "a Hebrew and he fears the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land", how has Jonah's behavior failed to model this? What are some of the things Jonah should have done to show this truth? Perhaps we could also consider the things he shouldn't have done too.
- 2) If behaviors confirm identities, what do your behaviors say about where you find your identity? What have you done? What are you doing? What are you dedicating your time to? How are you speaking? What are you worshipping? Where are you turning for hope and purpose?
- 3) Throughout the book we will see that Jonah struggles with selfishness and self-centeredness. Where are the areas in your life in which you struggle the same way?