

In 2001, a magazine named *Mental Floss* began publication. In one of its early issues, *Mental Floss* ran an article titled “Killer Jobs.” It was about the 10 most dangerous jobs in America. Citing Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Mental Floss* reported that ‘timber cutter’ was the most dangerous job in America. It also reported that the next 9 most dangerous jobs were fisherman, pilot, structural metal worker, driver, roofer, electrical power installer, farm worker, construction laborer and truck driver.

As we think about such “killer jobs,” one can imagine Jonah saying *Mental Floss* should add ‘prophet’ to their list. After all, Jonah probably had seen other prophets run out of town by angry mobs. Jonah even may have seen a few killed. So, he probably was less than pleased to hear God say “*go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it.*” And he probably was less than pleased because Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the powerful enemy of Israel. To put what surely must have been his concern into a modern image, it would be like God telling us to fly to Syria and walk through Damascus to call ISIS fighters to repent.

But God cannot be foiled. God created a storm to stop Jonah from fleeing. God had Jonah thrown overboard to get him ready to repent of his disobedience. And God had Jonah swallowed by a sea creature and spewed out on dry land in the direction he had been called to go. And, on that beach God spoke to Jonah again: “*Get up, go to Nineveh.*” This time Jonah decided to do his dangerous job. He went to Nineveh. He walked an entire day into the massive city. And there he proclaimed the message God had given him: “*forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*”

At first glance, this may seem like a strange passage for the Sunday of Labor Day weekend. But every one of us has a job that is dangerous. That job is being a disciple of Jesus and a servant of the Most High God. “*But why would being a servant of God be dangerous?*” someone might ask. “*Isn’t God loving, gracious, and kind?*” we might wonder. Yes, God is loving, gracious, and kind. But God is also holy, just, and seeking to bring about His will “*on earth as in heaven.*” And if we try to serve this God while also trying to hold onto our own agendas, set our own job descriptions, and live by only our own opinions about what ought to get done, we put ourselves in a dangerous situation. We see why in the words of Jesus.

He told those who wanted to work for Him only halfheartedly that “*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father. [For] Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you.'*” According to Jesus, being a servant of God is a dangerous job because our eternal destiny is on the line in how we go about it.

We see this when we look more deeply at the story of Jonah. For rather than just being a story of how a man was saved by a whale (as it is typically told to children in Sunday School), the message of the story is that Jonah had a problem with willful disobedience. And when we willfully disobey God, we run the risk of incurring His wrath. We see this spoken about by Herman Melville in the classic tale *Moby Dick*. In that story, Melville had Father Mapple point out that God speaks in

commands because he knows that what He wants of us is difficult. That is because *“To obey God,”* Father Mapple says, *“we must disobey ourselves, and it is in this disobeying of ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists.”*

Returning to the story of Jonah, we see that he disobeyed God, and it led to him being thrown into the sea and swallowed by a whale. But when Jonah *“disobeyed himself”* by repenting of his disobedience to God, and agreed to do what God wanted him to do, he experienced the joy of life, and was able to share that joy with the people of Nineveh. The problem with obedience to God is not therefore that it is hard to understand. It is usually pretty easy to know what God wants us to do and not do. After all, He tells us such things plainly in the Bible. The problem with obedience to God is that it is a tough sell. We hear the command to be obedient to God’s will and ways, and it sounds like we are being asked to eat our vegetables and exercise.

For while we may know such things are good for us, there is nothing to get us inspired to tackle them, nothing to counter the temptation that (as with Jonah) calls us to journey away from such work. For obeying God is indeed work. This is because we do not find it easy to obey God in our fallen and sinful state, and we find it even less easy to rise up each day to say to God like the prophet Samuel did in the Old Testament: *“speak, for your servant is listening.”* But like good nutrition and exercise, obedience to God and His ways can bring good things into our lives.

We see this when we turn to the Romans 12 passage. In that passage, Paul commanded the Christians of Rome not to *“conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* Paul admonished them not to *“think of yourself more highly than you ought.”* And Paul commanded them to *“offer your bodies as living sacrifices”* to God. Paul wrote those things because it is only when we obediently behave in the ways God calls us to live that we are able to do the kind of work that matters for eternity. But living in such ways is hard for us. And the reason it is hard for is because the danger of living as a disciple of Jesus and a servant of the Most High God scares us.

We know we might get laughed at for following God. We know we might not be liked if we live by God’s ways. And we know that if we follow the command of Jesus to pick up our cross daily, and follow the advice of Paul not to *“conform any longer to the pattern of this world,”* and not to *“think of yourself more highly than you ought,”* and instead *“offer your bodies as living sacrifices,”* we will have to give up some of what WE want in life, some of what WE desire in life, and some of what WE think we are entitled to in life. And that scares us. For we are fallen and sinful creatures, and there is something inside us (despite what we know to be true about God’s ways) that tempts us to head off for our own version of Tarshish.

But before we book our ticket of disobedient away from God and His ways, it might be helpful to remind ourselves that God warns us in the story of Jonah that obeying His calling is the only way to find the joy He wants us to have in life. For while being a Christian is probably the most dangerous job of all, it is also the most rewarding. To see this, I am going to give you a short quiz. You don’t have to write anything down. Just keep track of how many questions you are able to

answer. Here we go.

1. Name the 3 wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name 3 people who have won a Nobel Prize.
3. Name the last 3 Heisman trophy winners.

How did you do? Probably not very good. Now here's another quiz.

1. Name 3 teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name 3 friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name 3 people who made you feel appreciated and special.

How did you do this time? You probably did a lot better.

In fact, you could probably name all nine people, with other people to spare. You even may have had trouble narrowing it down to just three people. That is because we remember the people who make an impact on us. We remember the people who took the risk to love us, care for us, and share God's love with us. But doing such work is dangerous. To love others in the way God loves us, we must put our lives on the line in lots of ways. We must risk being rejected. We must risk failing. And we must risk letting go of all the other gods that tempt us to turn away from the one true God.

We see this when we go back to the book of Samuel in the Old Testament. In chapter 3 of that book, Samuel was still a young boy. He heard God speaking to him, but didn't realize it was God. So Eli told him what to say when God spoke again. The next morning, God did speak again, and Samuel said "*Speak, for your servant is listening.*" The problem that is raised in that passage, however, is that Eli had actually told Samuel to say "*Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.*" And all too often that is where we too make our mistake as a supposed disciple of Jesus and servant of the Most High God. All too often, we back off in our willingness to be a worker for God's kingdom, saying "*Speak, for your servant is listening,*" rather than "*Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.*"

Which may seem like splitting hairs. But when we leave out the word LORD in our prayers (whether literally or figuratively), what we are actually saying to God is not that we want to hear what He has to say so we can obediently do it, but that we want to hear what He has to say so we can decide if we are WILLING to obediently do it. Which is why Jesus said "*many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'*" and that He would say in reply "*I never knew you.*"

It is why Paul not only told the Christians in Rome to use their gifts "*cheerfully,*" but also why he said *love must be sincere.*" And it is why he told them they must "*hate what is evil; cling to what is good. [And] be devoted to one another in brotherly love,*" why they must "*honor one another above themselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep spiritual fervor, serving the Lord,*" and why they must "*be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. [And] practice hospitality.*"

This is because while being a disciple of Jesus and a servant of the Most High God may be a dangerous job in a world that does not know God or love God, there is an even greater danger in choosing to slack off from that work. For when we give in to willful disobedience to God, we miss out on really knowing God. For it is in doing of the work of God that we truly get to know God. This means that there are no killer jobs in the kingdom of God. What kills us spiritually is refusing to do the job of being a disciple of Jesus and a servant of the Most High God. What kills us spiritually is refusing to live as beings fashioned in the image of a Creating God. What kills us spiritually is willfully refusing to let God help us be kind of kingdom worker to whom He one day will say “*well done good and faithful servant.*”