

Calling out to the LORD

Jonah 2:1-10

Chelsey Sullenberger is widely credited with one of the greatest emergency landings of all time.

He was the captain on flight 1549 which took off from LaGuardia Airport in NYC and about two minutes into the flight the plane hit a flock of geese and both engines were disabled.

The plane was high enough to glide for a bit but too low to make it back to an airport and so Sullenberger decided the best shot was to land the plane in the Hudson River.

From what I understand that is an extremely difficult thing to do and he managed to do it keeping the plane intact and all one hundred and fifty five passengers aboard the plane survived.

It is an incredible story with a happy ending, but just think about what it would have been like for the passengers when the engines died.

There was about three and a half minutes to land between the bird strike and the plane landing on the river.

I have to imagine in those few moments the people on board were feeling totally helpless.

I'm guessing there were at least a few people on that plane who were crying out to God in some fashion or another.

What else could they do? They are strapped into their seats inside an airplane that is falling from the sky and their only hope was the skill of a guy they have never met who they could not see.

I am guessing that when the plane came to a stop many of the people were surprised to still be alive.

[That, I think, is how Jonah was feeling as he finds himself where he does at the beginning of **chapter two**. He had been on a boat in the middle of a huge storm on the Mediterranean Sea. Everyone on board knew the storm was from the LORD and that it had come because Jonah was trying to run away from what God had called him to do. Instead of telling the LORD he was willing to obey, Jonah tells the sailors to toss him into the sea and that is what they did. When he goes overboard I am sure he was thinking it was the end of his life, but then the LORD sends a huge fish to swallow him. I'm sure as he went into the belly of the great creature it felt like the end rather than a rescue, but miraculously he continues to live. Being both alive and completely helpless inside the fish, verse 1 of chapter two says that he prayed "to the LORD his God." It is such an act of grace that God puts people in a place that compels them to cry out to Him. That is where Jonah is, that is where we all end up at one time or another and so this passage has some things to say to us about calling out to the LORD. The first lesson we see here from Jonah's example is that...]

Point #1 – God hears those who call out to Him. (Verses 1-4)

The LORD Who knows all things and is present everywhere in the universe can and will respond to those who humble themselves before Him.

Let's listen in together to the prayer of the prophet from inside the fish. (Verse 2)

It is important to note here that Jonah is specific about Who he is praying to.

He says, "I called out to the LORD".

In translations like the ESV when you see the word LORD in all capitals it is indicating God's proper name Yahweh.

His name means 'I am' or 'the existing One'. It communicates His unchanging, eternal, and self-existent nature.

He needs nothing outside of Himself to exist and everything in all creation depends on Him to exist.

He is the God who made the heavens and the earth and has ultimate authority over everything.

That is Who Jonah is calling out to.

We also see why he calls out. It is on account of his 'distress.'

There is nothing like getting swallowed by a massive fish to make a person rethink their priorities.

He certainly expected to die which is why he calls the belly of the fish the belly of 'Sheol' which means the place of death, but the impossible happens and he goes on living inside the fish.

To say that his situation is unpleasant is an understatement and with nowhere else to turn he calls out to the LORD.

He calls out and it says here that the LORD 'answered' and that He 'heard' his 'voice'.

He goes on to acknowledge why he is where he is in **verse 3**.

Jonah confesses here that God has put him where he is, in this place of 'distress.'

It was the sailors who tossed him overboard, but the LORD was in control of that.

When he first goes into the water, the wind and the waves are forcing him under, but these are not random things they belong to God and are under His command.

God put him there to bring him to the place where he would call out and in his distress he realizes this in **verse 4**.

When he says 'I am driven away from your sight' he likely means he was driven from the land of Israel and the place of worship that God had appointed there.

We have to remember that is what he wanted. He was running away from God's command and when he goes overboard and is eaten by a fish he is about as far away from God's dwelling

place as he could imagine and yet he says with confidence ‘I shall again look upon your holy temple’.

Why such confidence? Because the LORD has heard his voice from inside the fish at it swims in the depths of the sea.

[Anyone here ever been trapped in an elevator? The Guinness world record for being trapped in an elevator belongs to a lady that was 76 at the time and she was there for six days. You know when she was first trapped she yelled for help but no one heard her. It wasn’t until firefighters came looking that her cries for help were answered. Can you imagine being trapped like that and feeling like no one can hear you?]

I wonder how often people feel like that emotionally and spiritually speaking?

I wonder how often people feel they are trapped or in distress and they feel like no one hears them.

It is heart breaking to think of people in such a state.

Perhaps you have felt like that. Maybe there are people who are feeling like that right now.

Whether we feel like that or not, we all need the reminder that the LORD hears us when we call.

[Jonah’s being in the belly of the fish is God’s doing. He put Him in a place of distress so that the prophet would call out and when he does he is heard. Matthew Henry say this about Jonah’s situation, he says, “*The belly of the fish was to him a prison, a close and dark dungeon, yet there he had the freedom of access to God.*” The all-present, all-knowing, all-powerful creator of all things takes notice of everything and everyone including you and me even in the darkest of places. Because that is true when we turn to Him we will also find that...]

Point #2 – Calling out to the LORD defeats hopelessness. (Verses 5-7)

Because God orders everything in the universe for His Glory and the good of His people, there is always hope for the one who turns to Him.

The prayer continues in verse five and the first half of verse six.

This is a vivid description of a hopeless situation.

He knew that getting tossed in the sea meant certain death.

It is one thing to intellectually know something, it is a whole other thing to actually experience it.

When he speaks of the water closing in and the deep surrounding him, he is likely describing sinking under the water with no ability to make it back to the surface.

Commentator Trent Butler points out that the language of ‘the deep’ here is the same language used in Genesis 1:2 describing the darkness of creation before God said ‘let there be light’.

That phrase is again used in Genesis 7:11 where the ‘fountains of the deep burst forth’ to flood the earth.

The sense here is that Jonah is feeling the utter darkness and judgement of his situation.

It’s hopeless.

He is wrapped up in sea weed he says ‘at the roots of the mountains’ likely referring to the bottom of the sea.

The reference to ‘the land’ in verse six is another way of talking about a place called ‘Sheol’ (the place of the dead) which he mentioned in verse 2.

He says the bars of that land closed upon him ‘forever’ because the bars of death are permanent.

The picture is as bleak as it can be. **(Verse 6b-7)**

In the most hopeless situation possible hope is found because Jonah ‘remembered the LORD’, because his prayer was heard by the LORD in the darkest of places.

Listen, there is no such thing as hopeless with the LORD!

[Remember Jesus’ disciples after He had died? Those were some dark hours in their lives. They had all abandoned their Master and with His death they were full of fear and discouragement. What changed? How did they go from discouraged cowards to powerful preachers of the gospel? What changed is that Jesus defeated death and that took a hopeless situation and turned it on its head.]

I think that is why Jesus compared His death and resurrection to Jonah being in the fish.

Jonah lived though he was in a place of certain death for three days.

The power of God overcame the power of death in Jonah’s life.

That points us to something much greater.

Jonah was in the fish because of his disobedience, Jesus was in the grave because of His obedience.

On account of His obedience, Jesus’ has the capacity to offer Himself in our place to pay our penalty.

His resurrection proves beyond a doubt that His dying in our place fully satisfied God’s wrath on our behalf and makes those who trust in Him right with the LORD.

[Because Jesus has been raised we can be sure that His promise to raise from the dead everyone who belongs to Him is true. Now if the power of death has been removed from us, then we

always have a reason to have hope. The deepest of waters and the darkest of situations are only for a moment. Nothing can overcome the power of Jesus' resurrection in your life. That brings us to one more lesson from Jonah's prayer. Having realized how dark and desperate his situation was and having experienced being rescued by God he comes to a very logical conclusion. His conclusion is that...]

Point #3 – Only the LORD can truly save. (Verses 8-10)

There is only one God and He alone holds the power of life and death in His hands and so no one else can offer real hope.

In verse 8 Jonah takes a brief moment to reflect on those who turn to false gods.

We see an example of this a bit earlier in the book while Jonah was still on the boat.

In chapter 1:4 it says that "the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea" and the sailors on the boat quickly came to the conclusion that they were in big trouble.

One of the things they do in the face of the terrifying wind and waves is each of them 'cries out to his god' the impression being each of them worshipped a different god, in fact it is likely that each of them worshipped multiple gods.

Now the sense of the scene is that they are all quite sincere, but despite their best efforts the wind and the waves carry on.

Why? Because they are praying to 'vain idols'.

The word 'vain' here can also be translated as 'worthless' or 'useless'.

Why is that? Because gods that don't exist can't do anything good for anyone.

Look again at the consequence of giving regard to 'vain idols'.

It says those who do so 'forsake their hope in steadfast love.'

'Steadfast love' translates the Hebrew word 'hesed' which has the idea of relentless faithfulness.

The only way someone can be relentlessly faithful is if they are unchanging and eternal which is only true of the LORD.

It is impossible to turn away from the LORD and towards a false god and hold on to 'steadfast love'.

That is why Jonah prays this in **verse 9**.

In this moment as he is experiencing God's saving work he understands that worshipping and serving the LORD alone is the only thing that makes sense.

When he says that 'salvation belongs to the LORD' he means the LORD is the only One who can actually save anybody.

I know people in our time struggle with that.

People want to think there are all kinds of ways to eternal life, but the truth of it is only the LORD can truly save.

[Think of it like this. How many of you have heard of the Colosseum? Where is it? It's in Rome. What about the Pyramids? Where are they? In Egypt, very good. Here is one closer to home, what about Niagra Falls? That is right here in Ontario. Now, if someone says to you, "I want to visit the Colosseum where is it?" Are you being narrow minded or mean by telling them they need to go to Rome? Not at all, you are just telling them what is unchangeably true.]

To say that you need to come to Jesus in order to have eternal life is simply telling people what is unchangeably true.

Only Jesus has lived a perfect life, He is the only one who has died in our place, and He is the only One Who can overcome the grave.

No one else has done that and no one else can.

For Jonah, only the LORD can speak to the fish as He does in verse ten and spit him up onto dry land.

In the same way only the command of Christ can break open the graves of all those that belong to Him and bring us into a renewed creation to live with Him forever.

What an amazing God!

The LORD hears us when we call out to Him.

There is no need for a megaphone or a loud speaker, because our LORD hears the faintest of whispers, He hears even the cries of our hearts.

What we need is a heart that is humbled before His throne, a heart that desires to delight in the goodness of His rule.

In doing that we find an astonishing gift. The gift of hope. No matter how dark the days may feel if you belong to Christ you will never be lost because our LORD truly saves every one of His people.

May all of us find rest in the greatness of our God Who hears when we call out to Him.

Let's pray.