

When have you been at your lowest place? When where you filled with the most despair? Maybe it was after the death of a loved one. A spouse. A family member. A child. Maybe it was after the end of a relationship like a divorce. A child cutting you off. Or a betrayal Maybe it was after an illness or a diagnosis like a stroke, cancer, or a chronic disease the doctors can't find a solution for. Maybe it was after losing a job. You found yourself with no idea of where to go next and no idea how you would provide. I want you to think of where you have been at your lowest. When you were at the end of your rope. When you were caught in despair and didn't know if you could see a way out.

In Jonah 2, we will see Jonah at his lowest place. He is literally at the bottom of the ocean stuck in the belly of the fish. This is the most dire circumstances he has ever been in. He feels like he is dying and he is very close to death. And at his lowest place, he finally cries out to God.

As we study this story together, I want us to see three reasons that we can cry out to God, even at our lowest place.

Point 1: You can cry out to God at your lowest place because He always listens (v. 1-2).

Jonah cries out to out God from the lowest literal place that he could be. He calls out to God at the bottom of the ocean.

Let's actually start back in verse 17 of chapter 1.

"And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

Jonah is in a bad spot.

He is a renegade prophet who ran from God.

He abandoned his duties and disobeyed.

He was caught by a storm and cast into the sea.

He begged God for death.

But God did not let Jonah drown.

Instead, Jonah has been kept alive by God's grace.

But he has been sitting in the belly of a whale.

For three days.

That is a long time.

How do you think that felt?

What do you think he experienced there?

It cannot have been comfortable.

I don't think it was like in the cartoon movie Pinocchio, where Geppetto and his cat Figaro have a nice place to sit and walk around.

It was probably wet.

I can't imagine it smelled good.

It would have been dark and maybe impossible to see.

He might have been bouncing around constantly as the fish swam and changed directions.

Jonah probably thought that he was going to die.

He went into the sea expecting death.

He probably hoped it would have been faster than this.

Can you imagine being in that belly for three days?

For hours and hours.

I would have begged for God to kill me and end it.

Just to make the suffering stop.

So this is the background.

This is the place that Jonah is.

He is at his lowest place.

It cannot get much lower than it is now.

So when you read this prayer.

Don't picture somewhere nice.

Instead, think of this as a prayer from the darkest most desperate place.

Think of yourself when you have been at your lowest.

Because that is where Jonah is when he begins to pray.

Verse 1, **"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,"**

Seems like it takes Jonah three days before he is willing to pray.

Three days that he was hoping he would just die.

Three days of holding onto his anger, hate, and despair.

Three days of sinking further and further into the deep.

Three days before he was willing to admit that he had no where else to go.

Because Jonah, like some of us is stubborn.

We might not like to admit our desperation right away.

We want to keep struggling over and over and over on our own.

For Jonah it took three days.

For some of us it might take longer.

We will not call out to God until we are at our breaking point.

Because we have to be willing to admit that we need God.

We have to be willing to admit our sin and failure.

To admit that trying life our way is not working.

We have to confess our sin and then cry out to God.

Until we are willing to do that, God won't act.

Jonah isn't leaving this fish's belly until he cries out to God.

Verse 2, **"I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and He answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice."**

Jonah's prayer makes up for his silence.

He calls out to the Lord.

He does what the sailors and captain begged him to do.

He does what every prophet should do.

He does what every follower of God should constantly do.

He calls out to God.

It is a cry for help.

And the cry comes **"out of my distress."**

He cries out of his pain and desperation.

He cries because this is the end of his rope.

"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried."

Sheol is the grave and the place of death.

It is as far from God as you can get.

It is as low as you can go.

And from that place Jonah cries.

But the beauty is **"He answered me," "you heard my voice."**

God hears your cries church.

When you call out to Him, He listens.

He can hear even if you do not put it into words.

We don't even know if this prayer was verbal.

Maybe there is so much water and junk in the fish's belly that Jonah cannot audibly speak.

And he is forced to cry out to God with groans and screams in his mind.

Even if that is the case, God hears.

He knows your voice.

And when you cry out to God, He will answer you.

Not all of our prayers get answered.

They don't always get answered in the way that we want.

But there are some prayers that God always says yes to.

And if you cry out to God in your lowest place.

If you cry out to Him to Him for help, He will hear you,

Then God says yes.

Because He is always listening.

You are never too far away.

You are never too far gone.

You have not sinned too much.

You are not too broken and unloved.

If you are in the depths right now.

Call out to Jesus.

Because He is listening.

He hears your voice.
And He will answer you.

We can cry out to God at our lowest place because He listens.

We can always cry out to God at our lowest place **because there is always grace (v. 3-9).**

There is grace available for those who are at their lowest place.
And no matter how much you have sinned, there is grace for you.
Because there is grace for Jonah.

Verse 3, **"For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me."**

This is not Jonah blaming God for his suffering.
This is Jonah admitting that He is facing God's wrath.
The waves, the storm, and being cast into the sea are the consequences of Jonah's sin.
Jonah is acknowledging that his sin has led him here.
His refusal to preach to Ninevah,
His running away from God,
His rejection of his call as a prophet has led to judgement.
Because sin always has consequences.

And before you can receive grace we have to admit that we need it.
We have to confess our sins.
We have to acknowledge that we have nowhere else to go.

Verse 4, **"Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'**

Jonah is saying that even though I am as far away from you as I can get.
Even though I feel like I have run from your sight.
Even though I have run away from you God.
I will look back to you.

When he says that he is looking again on the Holy Temple,
he means that he's praying.

Jonah means that instead of looking to himself, or instead of turning his eyes away from God, now he will look towards the temple where God manifests his presence among his people.

He will look towards the Ark of the Covenant and The Mercy Seat.

He will look to where God is for Grace.

The Jews were supposed to pray at least three times a day.

And as they prayed they were supposed to look towards the temple and to pray towards it.

You're supposed to be a physical reminder that they are praying to God.

A physical act to make sure that their hearts are focused on the true God.

And so Jonah says that he is turning to pray to God.

And when he says again he doesn't just mean that he's praying now like it used to pray before.

It's supposed to be a picture of Jonah praying again and again and again and again.

He probably did not pray this prayer just once.

It seems like he prayed it over and over and over and over again.

He continually repeats it and prays and prays and prays until God hears him.

If you have ever been at your lowest place and find yourself praying,
then you know what that's like.

The repeated begging of God please don't let this be true please don't let this be true.

God please heal them please heal them please heal them.

Jesus help Jesus help Jesus help.

That's how I prayed and the doctors told us that Grant had leukemia.

That's how I've prayed when we miscarried the baby the day after telling her family we were pregnant.

And that is how I've prayed many many other times in my darkest moments.

And that is how Jonah prays now.

Verse 5, **"The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me, weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever;"**

This is the moment of desperation.

He paints a picture of being at the very end.

It seems as if he is at the very moment of death.

He cannot even tell if he is still alive or not.

The prayer comes when Jonah thinks it might be too late.

He may already be descending into the grave.

He may be passing into hell and the bars will shut him forever with no hope of escape.

That is the place he prays from.

The lowest you can be.

When all hope is gone.

When it seems like it is too late for God to do anything.

Maybe when you look back at parts of your life you wonder if there is grace.

You think of relationships that you destroyed.

Mistakes you made with your children and grandchildren.

You can look at your addictions.

All the choices it led you to in search of satisfying your craving.

Maybe you just look at the sins you are ashamed of.

The things you wish no one knew and you would never share.

The things that the enemy whispers in your ear God could never forgive.

That no true Christian would do what you have done.

Maybe you feel it is too late for you.
Your life is filled with so much brokenness and sin that God could never forgive it all.
You might feel that you are too far from God's grace.

Listen to me.
The story of Jonah is for you.
Jonah was at the very edge of life.
He was at his lowest place.
He is dying.
He is drowning.
He is heading not towards the light, but the dark and dungeon of hell.
But with his last breathe he cries out to God for mercy.
He asks for mercy on his death bed with nothing to offer God.
And how does God respond?

"Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God."

God responds with grace.
God saves him.
God brings Jonah out of the pit of death.

Verse 7, **"When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple."**

When you are fainting,
When you feel your life fainting away,
When you think that you are too far from grace,
Remember the Lord.
Remember the story of Jonah.
Remember that there is always grace for sinners.
Jonah's prayer goes from the belly of the fish from the bottom of the ocean up passed away all the way back to Jerusalem into the temple of God and in God's ears.
God hears it.
And God answers it.

No matter how far away you think that you are.
God is waiting and listening like a parent with a baby monitor.
His grace and his forgiveness is waiting for you.

The grace of God is always there.
His mercies are new every single morning.
You cannot outrun His presence and you cannot outsin His grace.

When Jesus sacrificed Himself to die on the cross in your place,
How much sin do you think that forgave?
Do you think that the blood of Jesus only has power to forgive some sins
but not others?
Do you think that the gift of eternal life with the completely perfect and
Triune God is something that some rebellious sinners can get but others
can't if they go too far past the line?
The message of the Gospel is that every single sinner is welcome.

This is one of the things that the Pharisees and the religious leaders hated
about Jesus.

Because Jesus kept showing grace to the Gentiles, to the Romans, to the
prostitutes, to the poor and the Beggars, to the tax collectors, to the
oppressors, and to all of the most wicked sinners they could find.

All of them found grace and salvation in Jesus.

You will not find a single person in this entire book who is too far from
God's grace.

There is not a single story of a sinner coming to God asking for forgiveness
and Grace and God saying no.

The Book of Jonah is about of the evil and despicable Assyrians are going
to get a chance to find God's grace.

The thief on the cross finds God's grace even though he only has minutes
left to live.

And Jonah finds Grace.

There is always Grace for those who call out to God cast for salvation and forgiveness.

Whether it is the first time you have ever called on his name or the millionth, there is grace for those who cry out to God.

Verse 8, **"those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love."**

There is only one way to have no hope of grace.

The only way you will not find grace is if you don't look to Jesus.

An idol is a false god.

It is something we look to for salvation or satisfaction.

Jonah calls them vain as in they are vaporous.

They are pointless and cannot help.

They make great promises but have no power.

The world promises us many gods.

Our post-modern world will tell us that there are many ways to find salvation and truth.

It will tell you to choose any religion you want and you can find salvation and fulfillment there.

It will tell you to forget religion and just find salvation in yourself.

But the problem is that all of those are options have no power.

You might as well find a rock in your backyard, bring inside and pray to it.

That rock has as much power to forgive your sins and you or any other god does.

And when we chase those gods and idols,

When we ignore the God of the Bible,

We forsake our hope.

Because God offers us a steadfast hope.

It is a faithful hope.

It does not waver with the wind and the waves.

It does not change with the culture or the time.

It does not depend on God's mood or how much you have sinned today. God's salvation and grace is steadfast.

Verse 9, **"but I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"**

Jonah responds to the grace of God with a shout of praise. And he makes vows to God in response to that grace. The sailors already made vows to God back in chapter 1. But now Jonah will join them in their faith.

How should we respond when God shows us grace? We should shout out praise with thanksgiving. This is one of the reasons we sing each Sunday. We should sing in thanksgiving and praise to God. The grace that we have been given should make us shout.

And our singing should not depend on the songs selected this week. It shouldn't depend on how much we like the tempo. It shouldn't depend on if we like the sound of it today. Our praises should be loud every week even if we are singing your least favorite song. They should be loud because the grace we have been given is so wonderful. We can cry out to God from our lowest place because there is always grace.

Something I want to mention though. What do you notice that is not in this prayer? Jonah does not make an explicit mention of his sin. He does not name exactly his faults. It certainly sounds different than David's Psalm of confession in Psalm 51. And this lack has led some scholars to wonder if Jonah really was repentant at all. But I think this is meant to show us something different.

Jonah receives God's grace and is saved even though theology professors would give his prayer a bad grade.

Even though we might say this isn't the best prayer of confessing sin.

Yet, there is always grace.

There is grace even for imperfect prayers.

I think this should give us comfort.

Grace does not require perfect prayers.

You don't have to have all the right words.

You don't need to have the most righteous heart.

You just have to cry out to God.

Because there is always grace.

Point 3: We can cry out to God from our lowest place **because there is always resurrection (1:17, 2:10).**

For those who cry out to God for mercy in faith, there is always resurrection.

Most people might believe in second chances.

That when someone apologizes you should give them a second chance and wipe the slate clean so they can try again.

Others might believe that once people who you who they are, you should believe them.

Maybe you can forgive them, but don't give them a second chance cast them off.

Well, our God has way more grace than we are capable of.

He does not just ignore our sin and look past it.

He does not act like everything is fine even though our lives are a disaster.

God does not just give our a second chance as long as we don't promise to mess up again.

He does not expect us to try harder to not sin as if if we just had another chance then we might be able to avoid sin.

God does not just cut us off either.
He does not cast us into hell and judgement after our first offense.
He does not discard Christians the moment they become hypocrites or fail.
He does not forgive us but hold our past sins over our heads as soon as we mess up again.
No, God's grace offers something beyond our dreams and hopes.
He offers us more than a second chance.
He offers us resurrection.

Verse 10, **"And the LORD spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land."**

I love the image this gives.
It's gross and it is supposed to be.
God speaks to the fish, you have to wonder exactly what God said.
And the fish vomits Jonah up on the dry land.

Jonah does not get spit out into the middle of the ocean.
He does not just get send out into the sea and now he has to swim back.
The fish delivers Jonah back to where he should have been.
But it isn't smooth and clean.
It's gross.
Jonah is vomited back up.
He had to smell and look terrible.

There are a couple of things at play here.
The first reason I think Jonah is vomited out is to humble him.
God gives us grace when we repent.
He will forgive us the eternal judgement of our sins,
But He does not always remove the immediately consequences of our sin.
So Jonah has to wade through whale puke.
The second reason is that I think this is meant to give us an image of resurrection and new birth.
Birth is a messy process.
And so Jonah emerges from the whale having been born again.

Verse 17, **"And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."**

In case the image of resurrection is lost to you.

This is a clear foreshadowing of the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus Himself, in Luke 11, tells the Pharisees he will give them the sign of Jonah.

What Jonah experienced figuratively, Jesus experiences literally.

Jonah seems to be born again and given new life.

Jesus actually will be resurrected.

Jonah was thought dead and at the end of life.

Jesus will be actually dead and in the grave for three days.

Some people struggle to believe that the story of Jonah in the fish alive for three days is true.

They think it must be a metaphor because this miracle couldn't happen.

I don't have a problem with believing Jonah was in the whale because I believe Jesus was in the grave.

And if Jesus could defeat death and be raised from the dead, then God can do anything.

And if Jesus was not raised, then our entire faith is a waste of time anyway and we are a people to be most pitied.

But Jesus was raised.

And Jesus brings resurrection.

Even for renegade prophets.

Verse 6, **"Yet you brought up my life from the pit,"**

Is another place that points to resurrection.

It is the image that Jonah is falling into the pit of death.

He is crying in verse 2 **"out of the belly of Sheol."**

Both of these places are talking about death.

But Jesus can bring His people back from the dead.
He brings Jonah back from death.
And He can bring us back from the dead.

I've been thinking a lot about Resurrection lately.
I've the opportunity to preach at a number of funerals.
I think getting to preach at a funeral is a sacred duty of being a pastor but it is always challenging.
It's hard to know what to say.
They're a lot of things about Christianity that matter there's a lot of parts of theology that are significant and important and worth devoting your life to studying and understanding.
But when you are standing at the grave of the dead most of that other stuff fades away.
What you thought was so important and so significant doesn't really seem to matter anymore.
And in the cemetery the only question that matters.
The question that's on everyone's minds even if they don't know how to articulate it.
The question is can the dead live again?
Is there really resurrection?
Is there hope for us when we go to the grave?

And what the story of Jonah teaches us,
What Jesus teaches us,
What all of the scriptures point us towards is the truth of the Resurrection.
So all I know how to do it a funeral is to point to the resurrection because that's our only hope.
And the resurrection only comes through Jesus because He's the only one who's done it.
Jesus is our only hope of getting to live again.

But the promise that we have.

The promise that we must hold on to with every fiber of our being is that there is resurrection for the Dead.

There is hope not just for life somewhere else beyond this physical world. Our hope is that Jesus will bring those who have put their faith in him back to life.

That we will be given glorified and resurrected bodies.

That all sin and death and suffering will pass away from this world.

That every sad thing will come untrue.

And this Resurrection it's not just for the Saints.

It's not just for the popes and for the heroes of the faith and the religious elite.

The hope of Resurrection is not just for those with perfect Church attendance and who have the Bible memorized.

The hope of Resurrection is for any sinner who calls on the name of Jesus. Even if you call with your dying breath in your last words.

Even if you call out to Jesus with hands covered in blood and wickedness. Even if you call out to Jesus with nothing to offer him except your sins and your past.

There is always resurrection for those who call in Jesus for salvation.

So call on him.

You can cry out to God at your lowest because He always listens, there is always grace, and there is always resurrection.

I cried out to God at my lowest place and He heard me. I cried out to Him in the depths of my depression when I wanted to die and couldn't see a reason to keep living. I couldn't imagine staying alive another day. I didn't want to because it hurt so much. From the depths of my lowest place, I cried out to God. It was a rather pathetic prayer. But God heard it and redeemed my life from the pit. He wants to do the same for you. Cry out to Him. He hears you, there is always grace, and there is hope of life again.