

How to Answer God When He Calls

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 July 2021

Preacher: BK Smith

[0 : 00] Please be seated and as you are sitting, please be taking out your Bibles to the book of Jonah. If you are visiting here, welcome. My name is BK. I have the privilege of being one of the pastors here.

And we are in our third week of Jonah. So we're kind of getting into one of the most popular stories that exists in our world, right?

Jonah and the whale. So if you don't have a Bible, you can raise up your hand and we can get you one if you need one. One of the methods that I use for preaching is called the expository preaching methodology, which is beginning in the verses.

I want you to see the points in the text themselves. They're not my made-up points, but they're points that I'm drawing forth from God's Word because that is where I believe the true power is. Amen? I am...my role is just to declare God's Word to you. So, if you remember, we are simply, after two sermons, we are just getting into chapter or verse 7 of chapter 1.

[1 : 18] Just to give you guys a little bit of feedback, the book of Jonah is written by Jonah. Scholars believe it was written around 800 years before the time of Christ.

And Jonah was given an exceptionally different task compared to all other prophets that God had called in the Old Testament. And that difference was he was supposed to take God's message and go into a foreign country and deliver it.

A lot of prophets prophesied against other nations, but they were never charged with actually going over to that nation and talking to them.

So, kind of a stressful moment as we all know. God gives them the command and it's almost as if he just tucks tails and runs. Right? He doesn't want anything to do with it.

So, in verse 3, just the background. After God had given him a command, it says, But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish, which, remember, is on the southernmost part of Spain.

[2 : 22] We believe that would have been on the far side of the Mediterranean. Kind of the farthest known point at that time. There was further trading posts, but there was at least some bit of a civilization.

He could go there and his impetus was he could escape the presence of the Lord. There was no Jewish temple there. Very little Jews would have been there. So, he could kind of get away and kind of get God out of his mind.

And he could go back to doing whatever he wanted to do. So, this morning, I want to continue the theme that we began last week.

And that theme is what happens when we, you and I as believers in Christ, flee the presence of the Lord. I'm not going to sum up all the points, but for some of us, it's physical.

We quit church. We quit hanging around with other friends that are going to hold us accountable. We're no longer going to go to Bible study. We just kind of alienate ourselves. Then there is the spiritual process.

[3 : 25] You're not digging into God's Word as much. Your prayer life becomes very thin. And you kind of check out even when you're here because mom and dad or your husband and wife make you come.

You just kind of check out while you're here. So, God has got this interesting process that we see in the life of Jonah. Jonah that he uses us to call us back to him.

So, the first thing that we talked about is that the downward descent happens when we ignore God's Word to us, right? For us, it is the Bible.

Jonah, God was speaking directly to him. And that's what he was ignoring. So, God gave him a message to take to the great Assyrian city of Nineveh.

Jonah, he was appointed by God to speak the words of God to this very lost and wicked people. And although, like I said before, we don't know exactly how Jonah received those words, whether in a dream or God spoke directly to him.

[4 : 33] We don't know. But he chose to run. And it's important for us to understand that Jonah, at that time, had been an experienced prophet. He had experienced God's blessing of what happens when he proclaims the Word of the Lord.

We read this in 2 Kings. We understand that the word Lord here in the text is Yahweh, God, covenant God, the personal God, the God of his people.

So, he was a believer in God, a worshiper of God, one who was active in his worship in the temple. And yet, he still ran.

For us, God speaks to us in different ways. Psalm 19 tells us that God speaks to us. And the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

That through creation and nature, God reveals his presence to us. And we also learn in Psalm 19, but we learn God's direct message to us through the Bible.

[5 : 41] So, through those two ways, God is communicating with us. And we can either choose to obey or choose to ignore at our own peril.

Following God's Word leads to revived souls, increased wisdom, and joyful living. That is what the Word of God promises.

But God, in his infinite glory, brings a storm around Jonah. God wants Jonah back.

And we see in verse 4, God hurled a great wind. So, this is where we were last week. Sometimes God allows storms in our lives to get our attention.

And many of these storms are self-caused storms. We all know those storms, right? Either through ignorance or willful sin.

[6 : 46] Sometimes life can get pretty stormy. And we also, and we see in Jonah that there's different ways to respond to the storms.

This is the points I brought up last week. If you want details of the ways we respond. But to sum them up, we can despair, give up. We can live in fear.

We can try to work our way out of it, which I call the way of organized religion. We can try to find man's wisdom, what seems best to us.

Or what we often do, as Jonah chose to do, is to ignore the storm and go to sleep. So, today I want to go over the third way God uses to get our attention.

And the final part of the sermon I want to use, how do we get God's attention after he's been trying to get our attention? So, just pray with me shortly here, please, quickly.

[7 : 48] Dear Heavenly Father, we just ask for your power and your words. Father, may you clear out the noise from our lives right now. The things that we might be worrying about.

Perhaps there's people here in the storm. May you give them a calm sea right now so that they may hear your truth, oh Father. Father, we pray for hearts to understand and hearts that desire to have your truth revealed in our lives.

Pray that my words be clear. We ask these things your most holy and precious name. Amen. So, where we left off, we're going to be jumping into verse 6.

But where we left off, the text tells us that this storm is so great that it is tearing the ship apart. So, all the sailors from all the different nations are like, they're just putting up prayers.

They're praying to whatever God, because they know that this is no ordinary storm. This has got to be a storm caused by some deity. And if we can only dial the right combination of the right gods and the right prayers, we'll be saved.

[8 : 59] And what's interesting is the captain of the ship, going to look, he finds Jonah down in below deck. And he simply says to him, verse 6, So the captain came and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper?

Arise, call out to your God. Perhaps the God will give a thought to us that we may not perish. This is a desperate man.

He knows they are doomed unless there is some sort of heavenly intervention on their times. Who doesn't know those times, right?

Desperate times call for desperate prayers. They've already thrown the cargo over, and the prayers aren't working. So we look at verse 7. And they said to one another, Come, let us cast lots that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.

So now, the sailors want to know. So just to give you a little bit of context, lots were like these simple rocks or pebbles that had two sides, kind of like flipping a coin.

[10:16] One rock had a dark side. One had a light side. So you'd take the two lots and you'd throw them. If it was two black, it meant no. If it was one black, one white, it meant throw again.

And two whites would generally mean yes. Now, how it worked then, I don't know. But after reading on equity, that's in antiquity.

That's in some of the countries during those years. That's how we do it. Today, we just have the magic eight ball, right? We've really, no. But that's how they used to do it.

And they would do it in all manner of cases. And in fact, Proverbs 16.33 says, The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

So, Jonah, up until this time, had hoped to keep it quiet, that he was the reason for the storm. Remember, he's watching this crew.

[11:19] They're in panic. There is fear. And he can almost feel his anxiety as those two lots come out white. Every eye in the ship locked on him.

Notice verse eight. Then they said to him, Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from?

What is your country? And of what people are you? When we read the text, we see that it's somewhat calm, right? Excuse me, Mr. Person who was sleeping downstairs.

Your name, please, Jonah. Oh, could you please? No, no. These guys would have just been peppering them with questions. Who are you? What kind of person are you? What kind of evil have you done? Tell us. Where are you from?

And it would have been coming all over the place. What evil have you done? And he said to him, And this is the first time we hear him speak. I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and dry land.

[12:29] You get a declaration right there who God is, right? At the time, Baal, they said, in some religions, if you understand Greek mythology, Poseidon would have ruled the sea.

But he said, No, no, no. My personal God is the one who is over all heaven and all earth. Notice in verse 10, Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, What is this that you have done? For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them. I think it's one thing to have heard the myths out at sea, as many sailors do.

But can you imagine for a moment, you're on a ship and you're casting lots, and obviously no one's died before at ship because they're all alive on that ship, right?

But they would have heard the tales. They did what they thought they knew best, cast the lots, and someone was actually revealed who actually admitted that his Lord and his God was the God of the heaven and the earth.

[13:56] So when we read that word, they were exceedingly afraid, you need to be terrified because there's a guy in your boat that God is chasing after.

You've never seen that before, right? Those are just the ancient myths that they told. But right here before them, there is a man who says, God is pursuing me.

You would have thought that guy must have done something pretty horrible that the God of the sea and the skies would command a storm to bring him back.

I believe the words exceedingly afraid are somewhat of an understatement. Verse 11, Then they said to him, What shall we do to you that the sea may quiet down for us?

For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. Remember, it's already raging. The boat's tearing itself apart. It's not just getting more tempestuous.

[15:04] It's getting more and more tempestuous. He said to them, Pick me up. Hurl me into the sea. Then the sea will quiet down for you.

For I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you. Now I want you to pay attention to the next verses because what's important is what is not said just as much as who says what.

For they reveal something about Jonah and the men. Verse 13, Nevertheless, the men rode hard to get back to dry land. Why the hesitancy?

Jonah just told them, You want to get out of this storm? Huck me over the ship. The text here, when it says they rode hard, it says they dug deeper is the term.

They made sure those oars went as deep as they could to manifest the most strength in order to get to shore. It didn't work.

[16:07] For what it says again here in verse 13, And the sea grew more and more tempestuous. So if it was tempestuous before, we've got a more and more.

Now we have another more and more tempestuous. So this storm is like six times greater than the storm that began, which was tearing it apart. Verse 14, Therefore, they all called to the Lord.

O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life and lay not on us innocent blood. For you, O Lord, have done it as it please you.

Notice what they're doing. They are calling God by his appropriate name. It is no longer the nameless pagan gods that they once worshipped, but they are calling out to the name that Jonah used to identify their God.

Verse 15, So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and the officers sacrificed to the Lord and made vows.

[17:29] That's a whole other sermon, the use of fear. Begin, they had fear, they had a little bit more fear, more fear, and the greatest amount of fear that they have is actually the calmness in the sea after Jonah is thrown in because they knew that they had seen the power of God.

Does that remind you guys of another story? Mark, being at the storm with his disciples and the storm blew, Jesus woke up, told it to calm, be calm, and it said that's when they were really afraid because the storms listened to Jesus.

They were finally getting it through their skulls that the men who sailed with was the son of God. So now, I want you to understand what is going on here. Jonah tells them that the way out for them is to throw him overboard.

What Jonah's doing, he's putting the onus on them to do the work to save themselves. Okay? The Bible doesn't say anywhere that that's what really needed to happen.

That's what Jonah is telling them they need to happen. Jonah knows God wants him. So he puts this responsibility on him. The fact of the matter is he could have just jumped over.

[18:56] Any of you guys ever see that movie, Master and Commander? Far Side of the World? All right, we got one person, two. All right. There's a scene in the movie. They're at, they're at, they're sailing for days and days.

There's no water, no wind. The crew are dying and one guy believes he's cursed and the way he has to save a ship is he gives his own life, takes a cannonball and drops, jumps over. Then the ship is, the curse is snapped.

Jonah could have done that, but he doesn't. Now these men know that there is a God that is hurling the storm at them.

This is how selfish Jonah is. They don't know whether throwing him in is the right thing or the wrong thing to do.

Do you understand? Like, they know it's because of this guy. So now they're seeing a power unlike they have ever seen. And what's the last thing they want to do?

[20:01] Do something wrong, right? Like, maybe this guy doesn't want us to throw him in. Maybe we're just supposed to turn the ship around or, I don't know, burn all our idols or take our left shoes off or whatever.

You know, the crazy things that people believed back then. The fact of the matter is throwing Jonah off could have made things worse.

Now let's take Jonah into perspective. doesn't say anywhere that he actually prays. The captain, the pagan captain has to be the one to call him to pray, right?

How embarrassing is that? You guys ever be going through anxious times? Maybe fretting over something and someone outside your faith but a good friend says, how come you're not praying about that?

Right? Don't you guys have something for that? Go to church? You know, what's going on, right? How embarrassing is that for us, right? When those outside our faith understand what we should be doing before our God.

[21:15] So Jonah here knows that he is the problem. He lets them go through the lots. He already knew he was the problem but he lets them go through this whole thing.

there he makes the other guys do the work to figure it out him. You know who he reminds me of?

He's the guy whose sin is called out. His mistake is now plain for all to see. You know who he reminds me of? Me. Reminds me of you.

We're all like that, right? What Jonah had hoped to keep hidden, God used the lots to reveal to everyone there.

You are running away from God. How many times when you and I are in storms and we don't do the right thing?

[22 : 21] sin. Our sin is before everyone and sometimes our sin just isn't rebellion. Sometimes it's just foolishness. Sometimes it's just incapability.

We can't do it. It's like my wife asking me to fix the car. I can't do it, honey. It's called Steve Whitenover so he can't do it either and I'll feel better about myself.

But right, you know, you get confronted. You just don't have this ability to fix the situation. So we say we're sorry.

But more often we're sorry we got it caught. We're sorry we got exposed. And now someone knows something about us. I remember we used to say that in sports.

You kind of go halfway. I used to play competitive sports and one of the things that happens is a guy drops a ball. Mine was baseball. A guy goes through his legs. Hey, my bad, my bad.

[23 : 27] Yeah, we know. Everyone saw it. You know, like we just lost a championship game that somehow just doesn't cover it. Right?

You see, what stops us from going all the way? What stops Jonah from, hey, guys, don't cast the lot.

It's me. Number one reason why we don't stop it, it's shame. We're afraid of shame.

We feel shame. We're afraid of not feeling accepted. what will they now think of me? You might have been putting on that visage that I am perfect.

I am the perfect father. And that might prevent you from actually asking forgiveness from one of your younger kids. Because you don't want that shame. You don't want them to think you're less than perfect.

[24 : 34] perfect. So then we tend to wallow about, oh, I'm horrible, I'm bad. The other thing that happens is that shame, the reason we're shameful is because we fear God.

We fear what other people will think. If I come clean, I'm going to be embarrassed. The reality is if people really knew how selfish, stupid, stubborn, and rebellious I really am, people will hate me.

They won't want to be my friends. I believe this is Jonah, but his shame is before God.

Shame makes us too proud to come to God. You know why? Because we make the mistake of thinking God is like us.

We make the mistake of thinking God is like us. And this is what I mean by this. Has someone ever done something and you've judged them?

[25 : 44] You ever maybe embarrassed them? Shamed them? Because we're so prone to do it, we think God's going to do it to us.

God is not us. The reason we don't come to God is because we know how judgmental we can be towards others. It's why we fear confessing and coming clean.

If that's you, I've got some good news for you. God is not us. Do you understand that? God is not us.

God is God. God is perfect. God is just.

Now, I might be surprising you a little bit because I use the word just. Usually, at this point of a sermon, a pastor is going to say, God is love.

[26 : 51] God is mercy. mercy. But to hear that God is just, that's justice. Right?

Isn't that the thing we fear? I always find it kind of funny because we have this, like, dividing point. We've got God at the top, and we've got, like, holiness.

That's kind of on the stay away from category. Then we've got God is love, right? When we go through the Old Testament with someone, well, we read that God is wrathful.

Well, we've got to make sure we plug in some really good popular things that God does, right? He's really merciful. Like, we always feel we have to defend God. And the problem is, we don't understand that God is perfect.

And in every attribute of God, he is always perfect loving, perfect, perfect loving, perfect merciful, perfect wrath, perfect holiness, perfect justice.

[27 : 51] So if we have this idea that some characteristics are better than others, we're very messed up when it comes to the idea of God.

So when people say that God is just, they want to balance it out with God is merciful. Well, we can trust his justice because we know he's going to be merciful. I say no.

I want to trust God's justice because he's perfect in his justice. he knows me intimately. He knows everything. The other week, I got a call.

It's one of those more unusual pastoral calls. A member of this church has a parent that lives in another province and had called me to visit with one of his small group members who, so she traveled out here to Squamish because her son had taken his life.

love. So I went and met with her at the memorial and she's a believer in Jesus Christ and she's a mom.

[29 : 03] She's devastated, right? And she wants me to say, please tell me my son is in heaven.

No, she goes, I know I can't tell you that, but I want you to tell me that. And often we would think about, well, talk about his mercy or his love.

I didn't. I actually went to justice. justice. He was a young man who came to Christ at the same age I did and I told her the story how I understood the gospel when I was simply grade six.

So he simply, he had that idea to understand. But the poor boy had been plagued with mental illness his whole life and in fact multiple times had he tried to take his life.

And I simply told her I would count on God's justice. God's justice because he knows everything. He knows everything that would have been difficult for him.

[30 : 07] He will make right if that profession was real and true even as a six-year-old. That's all God's going to need. And whether or not he struggled in life with all those things, with all those things working against him, all I know is God is just.

and it's perfect and that's what I hope in. It's like we think God will somewhat overlook things of life because of his mercy and love.

But I'm here to tell you right now that God knows our stories. Some of us know our challenges.

Dave and I can tell you many stories as we do more and more biblical counseling.

I hate to say it, you parents. But we see lessons that we've learned from the parents and our parents' parents and how that all ravel's out. And I have to think that God is just with some of our thinking and our actions and our emotions.

So here we have Jonah thrown over the boat. He has no hope. He knows he absolutely deserves it. He's full of shame.

[31 : 22] He has no idea what is about to happen. I'm sure that he was so frightened he had to get the men to throw him off because he couldn't throw himself off. One, because he knew who God was.

But he's thrown over. And here we get an incredible glimpse of God. Verse 17. And the Lord, Yahweh, the covenant God, appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Now I'm not going to argue with you about whether the whale is real or if it's a shark, whale shark, or maybe a sperm whale.

If you ask me personally, I think it was the Loch Ness Monster that God had called 800 years before for this specific task. But I want you to understand the Lord had appointed.

That means before time ever began, God was there to catch our Jonah. He was waiting for him.

[32 : 38] His covenant son waiting to catch him. Even though Jonah was scared out of his mind, God was there.

And you see, as God's covenant people, God protects us. God does not turn his back on us. No matter how rotten we may be, God continues to remain faithful to us.

Even in the midst of our disobedience, even in the midst of our storms, our failure to take responsibility. So, where do we go from here?

Maybe you've been in that storm. Where do I go from here, BK? I really don't feel that there is a whale waiting to catch me. Well, the first place we go as we're going to see in chapter two is that Jonah prays before God.

And we're going to look at his prayer. And I want to bring to light three characteristics that Jonah's prayer that I believe will enhance our prayer lives.

[33 : 50] Right? The first thing is to admit who you are and to admit who God is. Check out chapter two. Then Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God from the belly of the fish, saying, 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, for you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me, and your waves and your billows passed over me. Notice, he is praying in the midst of the storm. He's not waiting for calmness. He's not waiting to save himself. He's calling in the midst of the deepest part of his pain.

So often, we try to clean ourselves up. You know what? I need to get my attitude right with God. I got to get away from that sin for a bit. Right? Maybe I need to head back to church before I can get clean, so I can get cleaned up enough to reconnect with God.

Maybe I'll start giving, stop smoking, or give up whatever bad habit I might have. You see, this is just us trying to make amends.

[35 : 06] Trying to make ourselves worthy of the wonderful grace and love and forgiveness that Jesus Christ so freely offers us. You see, when we try to make amends, it's like you guys have all been in a mechanic shop.

It's like taking one of those greasy rags and trying to clean yourself off at the end of the day. You're just moving that grease all around you. You work and work and scrub and scrub, but it's just more dirt, more filth.

My advice, be like Jonah. Admit where you are. Jonah has the belief, and this incredible prayer in chapter 2 tells us how much he knew the Psalms.

He's actually repeating several of the Psalms in here. You might not know it, but what we're supposed to do is call upon what we know is true. God, you are good. You are loving.

You are merciful. You are just. I love you, even though this wretched life doesn't look like it.

[36 : 10] Because we understand that God is the only one. So notice verse 2. I called out to the Lord. That is Yahweh. He's still, he's calling out, God, I know you're good for this.

Look at verse 6 in chapter 2. The very end of the verse, it says, O Lord, my God. It knows that we didn't lose our salvation or we lost any relationship with God.

Jonah already has the faith that God will save him. Why? Because God promised he would. For us, Romans 10 9 tells us quite clearly that anyone who confesses with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the dead will be saved.

Those are the promises we need to call out for. There is no work that one can ever do to merit the free grace and love that Jesus offers.

But Jonah knew enough. The first thing you do is you go back to God in prayer. It wasn't God who abandoned Jonah.

[37 : 26] It was Jonah who abandoned God. And like Jonah, if you're willing to cry out to God in your affliction, know that God will answer.

Psalms 18 4 or 6 says, The cords of death encompassed me. The torrents of destruction assailed me. The cords of shield entangled me.

The snares of death confronted me. In my distress, I called upon the Lord. To my God, I cried for help.

From his temple, he heard my voice. And my cry to him reached his ears. Wonderful promise, isn't it?

Let's go back to the text, verse 4. Then I said, I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. The waters closed in over me to take my life and deep surrounded me.

[38 : 27] Weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to you into your holy temple.

Jonah just didn't get thrown from the boat into the mouth of the fish. He was sinking, sinking, and sinking.

Yet he still calls to him. Jonah knows that God will restore the sweet fellowship that he once had in him. My friends, what this verse so clearly tells us, it's never too late to call upon the name of the Lord.

No prison is ever so guarded. God, no night is ever so dark. No enemy is ever too powerful. You are never too far from God.

[39 : 41] There is no sin. There are no words. There are no actions that can keep you away from God. God. The thing is, there is a liar, a deceiver named Satan, and he will whisper sweet words of

shame, embarrassment.

Don't do it. What will people think? What you need to do is rebuke those lies from the pit of hell, for that is where they come from.

And the final attitude to have before God is gratitude. gratitude. Gratitude. Those who pay regard, he says, those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

But I, with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord. You know, back in that day, it was quite normal to have totems, little rock carvings, or wood carvings that represented the God that you'd have, and you'd latch them to your sash, and you could hold it, and sometimes people would have multiple gods.

Maybe in your house you'd set up idols. He clearly confronts that those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

[41 : 09] Any hope other than in God is no hope. Now, what's interesting is today, we don't have those little totems that we hang on earth's ashes, but we've got idols.

Oh, Lord, we've got idols. We've got reputations. We've got works of righteousness. righteousness. We've got addresses and jobs that we all hold to be of some esteem.

Some of us, it might be our intelligence. Others, it might be our wokeness. wokeness. How badly we feel for those who aren't doing as well.

For some, it might even be your theology. Hey, I'm good. I recycle. I'm proud, man. I stand with these people.

When Facebook something, you know, I had that orange flag up when we found out about the residential schools. Not saying that's wrong, but some people, that's their salvation. If I can do enough good things, something, I am earning.

[42 : 20] I love Mother Earth. But those things don't matter.

The Bible is quite clear that there's nothing good in us that deserves redemption. All the good that is found and needed for redemption is found in Jesus Christ alone.

The book of Ephesians teaches us that the reason Jesus Christ died for us on the cross was because of his great love for us. Didn't say we were really greatest, spectacular people.

It just says he had great love for us. You see, this is why salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone.

There is no goodness, no thoughts, no idol that somehow earn credit with God.

God. So this morning what I wanted to do and to end this sermon, I'm actually going to play you a quick video by one of my favorite pastors speaking on what it would be like to come to Jesus Christ when we die.

[43 : 32] Tablet. You're going to be into