

## **Jonah: Wrestling with Grace**

Week 1: Jonah 1

October 27, 2013

Guests: glad you're here, our vision is connecting people to God and each other, hope you experience a bit of both of those things

Especially if this is your first time ever to church or first time in a long time, glad you're here and hoping you'd come this morning

Praying that today starts a journey for you that ends with you knowing a good God in heaven who loves you

Great time to join us because we're kicking off a series through the book of the Bible called Jonah

Now as we open up Jonah 1 together this morning I'm excited because this was where we went on our first date!

The very first time I ever came here to speak I was filling in for the interim, Labor Day weekend 2011 and I spoke from Jonah 1, a one-shot deal

Now I'm a pastor-type and speaker-type guy, but I've always thought it would have been cooler to be in the band.

I'd probably have cooler clothes and just be a cooler dude altogether if I was in a band

However, I have zero musical abilities—and while that doesn't seem to stop some people from making it big, it seemed to be an impediment to me

But one of the cool things about being a musician is if you write one or two really great songs, you can work those same songs over and over again and people dig it!

And one of the downsides of being a speaker is that you can't get away with that! No matter how good last week went, you still have to have something different for the next week!

Well today I get my revenge on all the singer/songwriters out there, because I'm reusing the core of the same sermon I gave y'all 2 years ago on Labor Day 2011

Trusting in the fact that very many of you are new since then and that for the rest of you it wasn't that memorable

Jonah is somewhat famous at least among people who read the Bible because of the fantastic nature of the story

Primarily the fact that Jonah gets swallowed up by a big fish, survives for three days, and then gets burped up by that fish at the end of that three days

This makes for a great kids story—tell a third grade boy that a dude gets swallowed up by a fish and then gets burped out and they're delighted to hear that burping is in the Bible

But this has caused most modern people to dismiss it as a fictional story, which of course makes sense, especially if you dismiss miracles from the start as at all possible

But a couple of things that work against this as a work of fiction just to help some of us who might be resistant to this story to at least start to trust it a little bit

1. This guy Jonah who we meet in the first verse is Jonah the son of Amittai and he actually appears in another part of the Scriptures

In 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah of Amittai is referred to as a prophet and something that he prophesied came true, and so he gets referenced there as a real guy

So if you're going to make up a story, you usually wouldn't make it up around a guy who really existed.

2. This reads like history. They had legends and stories in ancient Israel and this doesn't fit the pattern of how those works of literature worked. This read like history

The other histories of other prophets and people in 1 and 2 Kings happening right around this same time sound much like Jonah's story

3. Jesus takes the story of Jonah seriously—he refers to this story saying that it was a foreshadowing of what he was going to do

Matthew 12:40

***<sup>40</sup> For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.***

In the end, obviously we each have to choose if we're going to believe that God could do something like this

but I want to suggest to you at the very least this story is recorded and written down for good reason

And if we'll let it, we just might meet the God of the universe here.

This morning as we dig into Jonah chapter one, we're going to dig into one particularly vexing and important question: what do we do with the fact that God says "no?"

I've got three great kids, and what's interesting to me is that it doesn't take long before people are asking them "what do you want to do when you grow up?"

And of course listening to them consider what they want to be when they grow up makes me think about what I wanted to be when I was a kid:

a wide receiver for the Dallas Cowboys

But then God made me 5'11" and 138 pounds and that didn't work out so well!

So here's what happens—we have these childhood dreams, some silly, some serious, and most of our original ideas we grow out of

But the question won't go away: what do you want to be when you grow up?

And we keep landing on temporary answers to the question don't we?

How many of you have changed careers and life paths at least 3 times in your life?

So here's what happens: we come up with different things we might want to do, and then we keep bumping up against a "no" of some sort.

I THOUGHT I might want to be a journalist in college, but two weeks on the school newspaper and I knew that wasn't going to work out.

Then I THOUGHT I'd want to be a business major, but then I took one business math class and I realized that wasn't going to work out either.

And those were all fine with me, I was the one who decided that wasn't what I wanted to do, my heart wasn't set on those things.

But for all of us along the way comes a time, when we think we're headed in a direction or towards something

and it's not our decision to not pursue it but rather the door gets slammed on our faces.

and it seems like it's God saying NO! for no apparent reason, right? Ever happen to any of you?

And sometimes it is clear if you're a Christian that God said "no" and we can't quite figure out why God said no to that particular dream or goal

And if you're not a Christian and you get a "NO" sometimes it makes you wonder if there is a God out there and if there is, he seems certainly out to get you.

Now sometimes we get a NO because of someone else's sin:

someone breaks into your house and steals something that matters to you, that's not God saying no to you, that's someone else's sin

God can *redeem* that, but that's not God saying "NO" to you in quite the same way as you not getting that job you were hoping for

This morning we're talking about "No's" that we get from God where it seems like God is stopping us from doing or getting something often that we want.

And we all have *experiences* of God's NO to us

AND THEN: To make matters worse if you're a Christian and if you take the Bible at all seriously, there's a whole bunch of "NO's" there, too, aren't there?

A whole bunch of 'don't do this and don't do that's!'

And THOSE can get pretty tiresome and can feel heavy or restrictive

And THEN some people seem to take an un-healthy amount of delight in telling us how much God says "no!"

Any of you know any people who talk about the God of the Bible as primarily the "no" God—and they seem to like a God like that?

This morning as we're digging into Jonah's story, I want to start with the bigger question of God and his story: what can we do with this God who says "NO?"

## **Jonah 1**

**1**Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, **2**"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." [THERE'S THAT ANGRY GOD! WE'LL TALK ABOUT THAT IN A MINUTE.]

**3**But Jonah [CIRCLE, COME BACK LATER] rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD [CIRCLE]. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD [CIRCLE: NOTICE 2<sup>ND</sup> TIME—DRAW A LINE THAT CONNECTS].

[PAUSE: Quick look at the map: Nineveh, Israel, here's some history of Assyrians v. Israel; goes in opposite direction to Tarshish—paradise of coastal Spain, let's see how that works out for him]

**4**But the LORD [CIRCLE, COME BACK LATER] hurled a great wind

upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. **5**Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

[PAUSE: WHO ARE THE SPIRITUALLY ALIVE PEOPLE HERE? [CIRCLE SAILORS PRAYING] WHERE'S JONAH? [CIRCLE ASLEEP] IN FACT ALL THE LANGUAGE HERE IS BIBLICAL LANGUAGE FOR DEATH: GONE DOWN, INNER PARTS, FAST ASLEEP—JONAH IS RUNNING FROM THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND THE RESULT IS NUMBNESS TO WORLD AROUND HIM AND DEATH]

**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."

[AGAIN, NOTICE WHO'S SPIRITUALLY ALIVE HERE? THE NON-SPIRITUAL DUDE CALLS JONAH TO PRAYER!]

**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 they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. **8**Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

**9**And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." **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 [CIRCLE], because he had told them.

[3<sup>RD</sup> TIME JONAH'S FLIGHT EXPLAINED AS RUNNING FROM PRESENCE OF THE LORD]

**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.

**12**He said to them, "Pick me up and 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."

**13**Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

**14**Therefore they called out 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 as it pleased you."

[NOW THE SAILORS ARE PRAYING TO THE LORD INSTEAD OF THEIR OWN GODS]

**15**So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. **16**Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

[THE SAILORS HAVE A SIGNIFICANT MOMENT HERE OF CONVERSION]

**17**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.

**Now here**, at the very beginning of Jonah 1 is this issue we were talking about, right? Here's that angry religious God saying he's ready to smite some group of people because of something they've done wrong.

Here's the picture of the "NO" God at work:

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."

God needs a PR guy, this is a terrible way to start this story—we need a kinder and gentler hook!

What's up with this God who's sending Jonah to go and call out against a whole city? What's up with this big fat "NO" of God's?

[PPT: Pic of Kids]

There's my kids, Davis, Zoe, and Emma Kate—they are wonderful  
But there are times when I wonder if there's something deeply wrong and troubled with them.

Because when they were very little sitting in the bath tub, at the end of bath time, they would frequently and quite often while sitting in soapy and dirty bath water DRINK the soapy and dirty bath water!

This is gross, I promise they did not learn this from me or from their mother.

They just delight in drinking and occasionally spitting back out dirty bath water.

So one of daddy's rules during bath time was "NO DRINKING DIRTY BATH WATER!" it incurs brain damage and is just generally disgusting.

Now when I tell my kids "NO DRINKING DIRTY BATH WATER" is my word to them ultimately a "NO" or a "YES?"

When I say no to my kids drinking soapy and dirty bath water that might give them brain damage but is most definitely disgusting and gross, is my word to my kids ultimately about the "NO" or ultimately about a "YES?"

My friends, my word to my kids when I say no to them drinking dirty bath water is ultimately and finally a "YES"—yes to health, yes to not getting sick, yes to them being not disgusting human beings.

And so I say "NO" but the NO is there to serve my larger YES.

[PPT: Jonah 1:2]

When God here says to Jonah to pronounce God's judgment, his definite "NO" over the city of Ninevah, God is declaring his emphatic "NO" to them drinking dirty bath water.

No to violence in your city, no to worshiping gods who aren't really gods, no to tying up and killing 10-year-old boys and girls in order to appease their gods  
no to temple prostitution, no to death and destruction and extortion and all kinds of things that would have been a part of the gods that the Ninevites worshipped.

NO to all those things because those things only lead to death.

And so God's "no" to the Ninevites and to you and to me today is always and only in service to God's final and larger YES that he longs to speak over all of us:

God's NO always and only exists to serve his final and decisive and louder YES!

Yes to a city where people are honored and where life flourishes and where society and culture and worship are all rich contributors to the overall life of the community rather than raping and pillaging it.

Yes to a thriving, flourishing culture, to a culture full of beauty and goodness and strength that serves and cares for the poor and those in the margins and where people are no longer exploited and where the economy thrives and where goodness and love and joy and peace and a purpose that matters.

God's "NO" is only there to serve his larger and more emphatic YES.

[PAUSE]

Earlier we talked about the one extreme in our culture of the angry religious person who goes around shouting about God's angry NO all the time—and that is ONE extreme in our culture

But there's another extreme, the opposite end of the spectrum where God's only word to us is always a lazy "YES."

In this concept of God, God's just a really nice, drowsy grandfather in the sky who just wants us all to be basically nice and good to each other  
and he wants for us all to be happy, well-adjusted human beings with a good retirement plan

This God would never deny you anything that you might think at any given moment might make you the least bit happier or more comfortable.

The lazy "YES" God, who just wants us all to be happy and nice to each other  
have you heard about that God?

My friends, here's the good news: the God of the Bible, the one True God, is much more truly loving, real, nuanced or wise than either the "ANGRY NO" God OR the "LAZY YES" God.

The one true God, the God of the Scriptures, is always ultimately the God of the "YES"—the God who speaks, shouts, declares his YES over all of his creation.

He is so emphatic about his YES that he cannot and will not stand for anything that would cut us off from his blessing—that is to say he hates sin, hates every bit of it.

Sin is broken relationship and every time we engage in sin it is destructive both to us and to everyone and everything around us

And so God absolutely declares to Ninevah and to you and to me today a definitive "NO" to anything that would cut us off from his YES

So here's what happens, and we see this right here in Jonah one.

God speaks his emphatic "NO" to Jonah: tell Ninevah to stop drinking dirty bath water

tell them to stop their violence so that they can know my peace, stop their false worship so that they can know true and right worship

And that word to Jonah is a YES to Ninevah AND it is a YES to Jonah.

Jonah, I want to speak a word of blessing through you to the people of Ninevah and YOU get to be a part of it!

You get to be an instrument of my blessing to these people; my yes to Ninevah through you is also my YES to you, Jonah! Let's go to work! Together! Let's partner in this work!

**And the Scriptures** capture this so beautifully: "But Jonah..." doesn't want anything to do with this particular YES.

**[PPT] 3But Jonah** rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah didn't want anything to do with God's yes to the Ninevites who were not Jews and who were not only not Jews but had also historically been the people of Israel's enemies

And it's not just Jonah who struggled with this—Jonah is really a picture of all of Israel—this whole story is a mirror to show Israel what her job is and how they've resisted it!

This whole thing is not just about Jonah but about Israel as a whole

See, Israel's job throughout the Old Testament was to bear witness to the nations about the goodness of God's yes—his love for all people

They were supposed to be a light to the nations, a people who acted as priests and who helped to mediate, explain, invite everyone in to worship

When God first calls Abram he says that through Abram he's going to form a nation and that through him "All the nations will be blessed!"

This was a gift to the nations but it was ALSO a gift to the Israelites—whenever God invites us to be a part of his work, to act in accordance with his plans, it's always a gift to us

Think of it this way: imagine you had the world's greatest dad. Seriously, the perfect dad, the greatest dad ever. And you were a kid living at home and you LOVED your dad, of course, because he was the greatest dad ever

And suppose the place where your dad work had a "bring your kid to work" day—you have a chance to go be with your dad, all day long, seeing what he does, hanging out with him by the water cooler, eating lunch out,

And they had planned in advance jobs for you to do with your dad so you could be a part of what he does

you can't do everything he does because you're a kid, but they've set things up, thought it all through, to make sure that you and your dad get to do something

together that actually matters, not just busy-work

If you're a normal kid who loves your perfect dad, this would be AWESOME, right? A chance to be with your dad in a different kind of a way, to work together, laugh together, high-five after a job well done!

Would any kid in their right mind cross their arms and refuse to go to work with their perfect dad if they had the chance to get that kind of time with him?

No way! Just the chance to be with dad is totally worth it!

When God invites Israel into his work, he's inviting his daughter to bring your kid to work day.

And he's saying "I want you to be with me and do this with me."

And that is not an onerous duty, that is sheer joy, sheer exhilaration, sheer delight of being with the Father and enjoying working together

And that same invitation is given to me and to you—this is what it means to live a Jesus-following life as a child of THE perfect Father who has prepared good works in advance for you to do WITH HIM for the sheer joy of being with your. Perfect. Dad.

But Israel refused that call and so they forfeited much blessing that could have been theirs—it was a loss for them as they refused to experience the grace of God in serving in his name AND it was a loss to the nations as Israel did not fulfill her call to the nations

And Jonah refused that call and he, too, is in danger of forfeiting that grace for himself and for the people of Nineveh

And his story forks at this step of disobedience that reads: "But Jonah"

First semester freshmen year of college I was kicked in the backside by love—any of you ever get kicked in the backside by love?

She was beautiful, I was as ugly as I am now but she seemed to like me anyway.

I spent the next year and a half building my world around her. I was utterly smitten.

And as I did this over the course of that whole year I began to have this uneasy feeling that maybe this wasn't the healthiest thing in the world.

Maybe I wasn't supposed to be building my world around a woman, maybe she was starting to take the place that only God was supposed to have in my life.

God was telling me that this wasn't his will for my life, he was letting me know, gently giving me his instructions, BUT ALEX didn't want to hear it.

See, Jonah has received God's invitation to step into his YES, to participate in the blessing of Ninevah with the YES of God, this is a YES to Jonah—come to work with me, Jonah!

But Jonah says “No” to this yes.

Let me ask you something, in the story of your life, how many parts of your relationship and story with God are punctuated by this same BUT?

are there times when your story, your relationship with God reads something like:

“And God made it clear to YOU that you should or shouldn't do such and such BUT YOU went and did or didn't do it anyway?”

See, God comes to you and to me with his extravagant, emphatic “YES” but it doesn't always come in a package that we want or expect, does it?

And sometimes it comes to us as a big fat “NO”

or it comes to us in a command to serve someone we don't want to serve or love someone we don't want to love or do something that's inconvenient or uncomfortable or costly.

And so God comes to us with this unexpected or sometimes unwanted “YES” and we say “NO” to his YES!

Ever do that? How'd that turn out for you?

God comes to us with his gracious and extravagant “YES.” We, in our stubbornness, confusion, fear, control-freakishness, or pride say “NO to God's YES”

And then God in his extravagant grace and mercy says his emphatic “NO” to our NO.

So God says “I will bless you” and we say “No thanks, I don't want that blessing” and God says “NO, I will—I will bless you!”

Brothers and sisters, for God to allow your “No” to him to be the last word in the conversation would be disaster for you—in fact, one day, that will be hell.

But for now, in this life, the good news is that you don't get the last word in the conversation, God does; he is a relentless pursuer and lover of his people

He loves you and me too much to let us have the last word. And he loves Jonah too much to let Jonah have the last word, either.

**[PPT:] 4But the LORD** hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.

Jonah had one “BUT” but the Lord gets the last one—“BUT THE LORD”

Jonah says no to God’s gracious plan to bless Jonah and Ninevah, and God says “NO” to Jonah’s NO

No, Jonah, I WILL bless you. I WILL bless you and I will pursue you with that blessing all the days of your life

In my dating story, I ran from God’s “NO & LARGER YES” for about a year and a half, we actually dated for only about six weeks second semester of our sophomore year and at the end of it she broke up with me and I was completely and utterly devastated and my whole world collapsed and it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me

I had ignored God’s first NO and made a dating relationship the center of my life instead of making God the center of my life

And so he in his grace and mercy had her break my heart so that I would not be a slave to a relationship but would rather have love of God at the center of my life.

It would have been the worst thing God could have possibly done to let me simply go down my own path of a co-dependent dating relationship

This is the God we worship—loves us so much he will pursue us with his “NO” to the ends of the earth that we might finally know his “YES”

### **To Jesus**

And many years later, we get an even more powerful picture of God’s yes to us a better Jonah, the perfect Jonah, the one who redeems Jonah’s story and our story perfectly

The one who is greater than Jonah has come

**This Jonah** hears the Father’s command to “go” to a group of people who have committed themselves to being God’s enemies and he doesn’t run away towards a self-interest and luxury but rather submits gladly and takes the form of a servant.

**And this Jonah** is sent not only to bring the message of God’s yes to his creation and his creatures

**He IS that** salvation

to lay his life down not for his friends, not for good people, but for people who are his enemies, who are set against him

**and this Jonah** prays that God might remove this call from his life and you know what he gets in response to his request from his Father? A “NO” that serves a larger “YES”

**and he would** spend three days and three nights in the depths and on the third day, he would rise again: he called it “the sign of Jonah”

**Jesus Christ** is God’s final, absolute declaration of his YES over all his creation, over the entire cosmos.

The Father has shouted his YES over all people for all time into eternity in the sending of His Son to rescue us from our sin and to conquer death on our behalf forever.

To all our greatest enemies in life—sin and death and the devil—God has spoken his vehement and final word: NO!

in order that you and I might know his emphatic and even more vehement YES!

And the apostle Paul sums it up in this way in 2 Corinthians 1:19-20

**[PPT]:** For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you ... was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. **20**For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.

**THIS IS GOD’S PURPOSE!** He pours out his YES to his creation, to all peoples, by making peace through his Son

### **The Fork** in the Road at Joppa

I want to circle back to the passage and pick up one glorious little detail—this is kind of a Bible-nerd detail but stick with me here

When Jonah goes to run away from the presence of the Lord over to Tarshish rather than toward Ninevah, notice where he leaves from:

**[PPT]** He went down **to Joppa** and found a ship going to Tarshish.

Jonah is the only prophet we have record of in the entire OT who is sent to a non-Jewish nation.

He is the only prophet in the Scriptures that is not sent to the Jewish people to tell them to repent, he's sent to people who are outside of God's people to call them to repentance

And the place where he runs from that calling is the port city of **Joppa**.

Now, fast forward hundreds of years to Acts chapter 10, Jesus has died and risen again and his followers have started going all over the place telling people about Jesus

But they've only been going to Jews to this point—they are Jews and they understand God's work in Jesus to be a primarily Jewish experience to this point

But in Acts 10 you've got this guy named Cornelius, a Roman, not a Jew, and he's a God-fearing man.

And one day while he's praying an angel of the Lord appears to him and says, "Cornelius, your prayers and alms giving have come up as a fragrant offering to the Lord, go and get this Jewish fisherman named Peter who will tell you all that you really need to know about God" and ultimately he'll tell him about Jesus.

**[PPT]** "And now send men *to Joppa* and bring one Simon who is called Peter..."

And oh, by the way, this Peter guy you're sending for, he's staying at a house in where? Joppa—THE SAME PLACE THAT JONAH GETS A BOAT TO RUN FROM GOD'S CALL TO THE NON-JEWS.

So Cornelius, a non-Jew, sends men to Joppa, they find the house where Peter's staying

they ask Peter who's a Jew to come to meet with Cornelius in his house and Jews aren't allowed to EVEN BE IN THE HOMES of non-Jewish people

And on top of that, Cornelius is a Roman Centurion, meaning he's a part of the occupying force of Rome in Israel—these are Israel's enemies!

Just like the Assyrians that Jonah was sent to, Peter is sent to his enemies to proclaim the YES of God

And Peter has a choice to make at Joppa: he can either go the same way that Jonah goes in Joppa and run away from the call to go to the enemies of Israel

Or he can go a different path from Jonah, redeem Joppa, and in that exact same city launch the ministry to the gentiles

"And now send men *to Joppa* and bring one Simon who is called Peter..."

**[so Peter] rose** and went away with them (Acts 10:9 & 22)

And what Peter does is he reverses the Jonah mistake. He leaves Joppa not running away from the mission but runs right into the mission in obedience to God—he says yes to his Father’s invitation to go to work with Dad day, even though it freaks him out

He goes to Cornelius’ house, preaches the gospel  
and the first non-Jewish conversions in the NT are launched from the city of Joppa.

You and I are here, the gospel went beyond the boundaries of the Jews because of what happens in Acts 10 and it is launched from the city of Joppa.

Joppa is the place of choice, the fork in the road, it’s where we choose either God’s way or our own way  
his call and his YES or our own temporal, short-sighted desires.

It’s the place where we either say YES to his YES to us or NO to his YES to us.

### **ME, WE, and Our Community: Chatham, Orange, Durham**

And I want to suggest that this Joppa principle, this place of choice and wrestling with God’s YES to us, this place where the road forks, has application on three levels: the “ME, WE, AND OUR LARGER COMMUNITY: CHATHAM, ORANGE, DURHAM, RTP”

### **ME: What will you do with God’s “YES” to you in Jesus?**

On the “me” side of things, the invitation to you this morning is to trust in the God whose purposes for you are always “YES” even and especially when he says “NO” to something that you really, really want.

**God says “NO”** that you and I might know his larger “YES”

Repeat after me: “God says NO”

“that I might know his larger YES”

### **Past Disappointments:**

Some of you right now, right here, are carrying some serious anger, some serious hang-ups and/or some serious pain about some thing that you wanted or desired or a purpose or a plan that you had for your life that has been shut down.

And you’re angry at God about it, aren’t you?

The invitation this evening is to release that anger; to trust that his temporary NO is only there to serve his larger YES

Can you do that this morning? To believe that in Jesus God's word to you is always YES even when it hurts and makes you so angry or sad you can hardly stand it?

### **At the Fork in the Road at Joppa I:**

Others of you are at Joppa RIGHT NOW wrestling with God about something: a career you really want or a relationship you really want or an addiction or a habit that you really kind of enjoy

but you know, you hear, that God's saying NO to that—and right now, you're fighting with him about it, your hanging onto it in spite of that.

You're sitting right now at Joppa—and the question for you is will you go his way or your way?

He's saying "NO" to the thing that you want; what are you going to do? Will you go to Tarshish, do your own thing, go your own way and suffer the consequences and force God to pursue you with His "NO" to you?

Or will you right here, this morning, at your Joppa moment trust him by obeying Him?

Tonight the invitation is to trust his "NO" serves his larger YES. Will you hand that over to him and trust in his purposes for your life?

### **At the Fork in the Road at Joppa II:**

For some of you, your fork in the road at Joppa that you're wrestling over is not something you're wanting to do, it's not out 'there' it's YOU.

You're not walking with God, you don't trust him as Lord over your life, you're not a Christian; maybe you thought you were once but it's been a really long time since you've done anything

This morning the invitation for you is to trust that Jesus is God's final "YES" to you; to trust him with your dreams and goals, with your past disappointments, and for those of you who haven't done so, to trust him with your life, to give yourself over to God's extravagant and gracious and generous "YES" to you.

### **WE**

But this Scripture has broader application as well, it has application for the "WE"

**PPT:** He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish.

"And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter...[so Peter] rose and went away with them (Acts 10:9 & 22)

Joppa is not just the place of making a decision about personal preferences, it's about making a decision as communities to participate in God's mission.

My friends, I want to suggest to you that churches, each church, are like Joppa—the road forks as people become part of our communities.

And people come into our Joppa-church:

And they are led in one of two ways

Either they are led toward personal comfort, safety, and having it be safely all about you and taking care of you like Jonah in Jonah 1

Or they are led into being a part of God's mission like Peter in Acts 10—headed straight toward the campus that God has given you to love and serve.

And my question for us, is this:

**[PPT:]** Is Chatham Community Church going to be like Joppa in Jonah 1 or like Joppa in Acts 10?

Is our church primarily about avoiding the world and circling the wagons and not bothering with God's mission because it's terribly inconvenient and calls us to places where we'd rather not go—that's the Jonah 1 Joppa-Church.

OR is our church a place where people are blessed and encouraged and equipped to step out in faith, even when we're confused or unsure or faltering, to be a part of God's mission—that's the Acts 10 Joppa-Church.

My prayer is that CCC would be an Acts 10 Joppa—places where you go in order to launch into mission, to head straight into the places where God has called you to go and to serve

My kids play soccer and do gymnastics and this thing called Lego League which is pretty cool

And just about every night when I pray with my kids we pray that all the families involved on their teams or clubs would know the love of Jesus

And recently I've been praying that if God would have us to be a part of telling them about his love that we're open and available for that.

So last week I was chatting with a parent who knows I'm a church guy, he asks me how things are, I tell him about Chatham serves last week, he's totally intrigued

And he says it's been a long time since he's done church; and there's my opening. I email him the next day and say "I'm always interested in people's faith journey, especially folks who have left the church, can I buy you lunch and hear your story."

Would you be willing to pray the prayer of availability to God? To simply say, “God, I’m willing to come alongside your work wherever you would have me to step in?”

My prayer is that your neighborhoods and work places and kids athletic teams are blessed with genuine, true, gracious, intentional, prayerful people  
that bear witness patiently and lovingly to the good news of the God who speaks his “YES” to them.

[PPT:] “Our Community: Chatham, Orange, Durham, RTP”

Because let’s go back to the passage for a second, is God’s word to Nineveh finally about His “NO” or His “YES?”

And who’s job was it to tell them?

And Is God’s word to your neighbors and co-workers and friends and acquaintences a NO or YES? And who’s job is it to tell them?

[PPT: God’s word to your neighbors/co-workers/friends is “YES!”] and he calls us to be a part of telling them.

God is passionate for the people who are connected to you and in your life. He is passionate and eager to declare “NO” to all the false gods, all the messed up lives, all the pain, sin, and death.

And he is fanatical that his YES be proclaimed, shouted over every man and woman, in your life

That’s the good news of the gospel—the God who is the YES God declares his love over lost and rebellious sons and daughters.

Last week, we did our best to faithfully embody and live out God’s yes to Chatham County by doing Chatham Serves.

Twice a year we cancel the service and go out and serve the community

This is one way of expressing God’s love and his “YES” to all of Chatham County—the God who is the “YES” God expresses his YES through the loving service of his church, his body

going out into the community and bringing healing and renewal and restoration wherever it might be needed.

So last week we did this and we’ve got a little summary video to show what happened last Sunday that we want to show you as we take up our offering.

As we pass the offering baskets, if you’re a guest with us please don’t feel any pressure to give

this is for us as a church body to give financially toward God's yes to our larger community

Giving is one of the ways we participate in God's yes to our community, Chatham Serves is another—I'm going to pray and then invite you to enjoy just a few pictures of what we did last weekend.

PRAY