

## Grappling with God

Jonah 1:1 -3:3

Good Morning Pastor Dave is out of town so you are stuck with me this morning some of you may know me but If not, my name is Jeff Bell.

We have lived in Nuevo on 3 different occasions 1990,1993,1998-2014 which we attended CCN just after it started at the elementary school on Lakeview Ave. serving in youth and pastoral ministry then moved to Menifee and now Sun city and we are back ready to see what God has for the days to come here at CCN

**Martian Luther once said we preach best what we need to learn the most.**

The title of today's message is Grappling with God we will be looking at the book of Jonah starting in Chapter 1:1

- In the title of the message the word Grappling is a term used in hand-to-hand combat, a sport that consists of gripping or seizing the opponent.
- Like wrestling, grappling is used at close range to gain a physical advantage over an opponent such as imposing a position, or to cause injury to the opponent.
- Grappling covers techniques used in many disciplines, styles and martial arts that are practiced both as combat sports and for self-defense.

- Grappling contests often involve takedowns and ground control, and may end when a contestant concedes defeat, also known as a submission or tap out.
- When we see the phrase Grappling with God, we immediately know who wins every time except when it's our own grappling match for some reason we think we can outlast/outsmart/or as crazy as it sounds get the creator of the universe to tap out !
- God is the undefeated champion when grappling with mankind.
- what does it look like when we grapple with God?
- The quick answer is..... several selfish deliberate decisions to do what I want to do rather than what God would want me to do until I have a change of heart and tap-out.
- How long is each round of this grappling match? When the work that God desires to accomplish is complete. So he can move to the next round if needed.
- How long does the grappling match last? Until we tap out, until we give up, or until we surrender.

## LET'S PRAY

**Jon 1:1 NLT** The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai:

- This one book of the bible probably has more negative attacks on the authenticity than any other book, rather than promoting the lies or skepticism let's examine the truths of the scriptures.

- Jonah the prophet is referenced in the OT book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings

**2Ki 14:25 NLT** Jeroboam II recovered the territories of Israel between Lebo-hamath and the Dead Sea, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had promised through Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-hepher.

- Jeroboam II was a real person, Israel was a real nation, Jonah was not a figment of imagination and God really appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah.
- Speaking of Gods promises mentioned in the verse on the wall, there are over 7,400 promises from God to mankind in the scriptures,

**Num 23:19 NLT** God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? **Has he ever promised and not carried it through?**

**2Pe 3:9 NLT** The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed but wants everyone to repent.

- If that is not enough proof of the validity of Jonah as a prophet of God and the actual book of Jonah being true, A real-life event

than how about Jesus reference of Jonah's miraculous experience in the gospels

**Mat 12:38-41 NLT** 38 One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority."

39 But Jesus replied, "Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah.

40 For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

41 "The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here--but you refuse to repent.

- The fact Jesus quotes this event of Jonah and **likens him to himself in V40,** carries a ton of weight and clearly earmarks this famous childhood story as one of the clearest demonstration of **God's love and mercy for all of mankind.**
- The LORD gave the message of repentance of sin (which is to turn from the direction you have been going that is missing the mark of Gods perfection and turn the other direction back to God) to Jonah **purely out of His Love for the people regardless of their current wickedness.**

**Jon 1:2 NLT** "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are."

- Ancient historians say that Nineveh was the largest city in the world at that time. A large, important capital of a dominating empire - surely an intimidating place to go
- A city of approximately 120,000 people known predominantly for their cruelty to fellow mankind from 900-607 BC
- The entire history of Assyria is filled with a reign of violence, terror, torture and killing conquered peoples and they proudly carried home body parts of their enemy's leaders' as souvenirs of war.
- The king of Nineveh would usually bring the severed head of a recently conquered king home, raise it on a pole in the midst of his royal banquet commemorating his victory and finally put it over the gate of Nineveh where it slowly rotted away.
- The opposing generals would get even worse treatment, some were flayed alive, then bled like a lamb; others had their throat cut, and their body was divided into pieces which were distributed over the country as souvenirs.
- It never occurred to (the Assyrian kings) that he and his men were brutal; these clean cut penalties were surgical necessities in his attempt to remove rebellions and establish discipline among the turbulent peoples, from Ethiopia to Armenia, and from Syria to Media, whom his predecessors had subjected to Assyrian rule.
- It was his obligation to maintain this legacy intact. He boasted of the peace that he established in his empire, and of the good order that prevailed in its cities; and the boast was not without truth.

- There seemed to be no act of cruelty which these conquerors had not carried out in their relentless campaign!
- Now that we have the background on the people of Nineveh let's make a list of why Jonah did not want to go.

1. He would Certainly be mocked & treated as a fool.
2. He could very well be attacked & killed if He did what the LORD wanted him to do.
3. The job seemed to difficult (I did not sign up for this.)
4. Because of the Assyrians wickedness could Jonah believe they do not deserve a chance to repent
5. Or is the Love that God has for the people of Nineveh as difficult and brutal as they were was missing or grown cold from the heart of the prophet commissioned by God.

**John 3:16 NLT** 16 "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that **everyone** who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

- It is easy to make a list of why Jonah is about to run, now let us take a moment and look into the mirror, now don't turn away.
- who or what in your mind's eye has come into focus that you would want to say right now I did not sign up for this.
- Pause

**Jon 1:3 NLT** But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the LORD. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the LORD by sailing to Tarshish.

- Breaking apart this verse shows us that we make several small decisions when we turn away from God.
  1. Jonah got up to get away from the LORD (after who knows how long of inner turmoil)
  2. Went the opposite direction
  3. He went down to the port
  4. He found a ship
  5. Not just a ship but, Leaving for Tarshish (180 degrees the opposite direction, which at the time was known as the other end of the world)
  6. Bought a ticket
  7. Went on board
    - All 7 of these small decisions Jonah had to make on purpose and obviously by his own free will.
    - Like all of us he had many small opportunities to reconsider during his grappling with God.
    - Just a side note... LOOK at all the effort that goes into trying to get away from the Lord, hoping to escape the LORD.
    - Who are we trying to fool thinking we can get away from the LORD'S Presence?

**Psalm 139:7-10 NLT** I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!

8 If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.

9 If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,

10 even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

**Jon 1:4 NLT** But the LORD hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart.

- Many times, when we read in scripture (but the LORD) a new event is set to take place, this time God brings a change of circumstances in Jonah's life with the powerful wind

**Jon 1:5 NLT** Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold.

- God brings His next means of getting Jonah's attention (people) and even better desperate sailors (not drunken sailors hanging out in the galley watching a R rated movie). These were seasoned or salty men who normally would be experienced in the weather changes but not this miracle storm hurled (thrown out by great force) by the creator of the universe.
- You might ask is God unleashing this great wind due to Jonah's rebellion, this storm is not a result of God's fierce anger, but of God's relentless love for

- Jonah
- The now involved lost and desperate sailors
- And the 120,000 cruel and relentless people of Nineveh

**Jon 1:6 NLT** So the captain went down after him. "How can you sleep at a time like this?" he shouted. "Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives."

- How could Jonah sleep? Was this another less obvious miracle by God for Jonah to be able to sleep in a God sized storm like this?
- Or was he in a spot like David clearly out of fellowship with God experiencing deep depression due to finding out the impossibility of escaping from the presence of the LORD.

**Psalms 32:3-5 NLT** When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.

4 Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.

5 Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

**Jon 1:7 NLT** Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit.

- The LORD has a sense of humor when It comes to him using people in our lives to help us get back in the right direction people

are God's tool of choice the people we least expect and the ones who are much easier to love from a distance.

- Also let's not overlook the impact that our decisions have on the people that are the closest to us at the time.
- I have spoken to many grown men that do not understand that some of their actions and behavior is not just their problem or their little issue they have with God. Our choices & rebellion effect the people around us and the ones we love even far greater.

**Jon 1:8 NLT** "Why has this awful storm come down on us?" they demanded. "Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?"

- Being called out unexpectedly from the people closest to you is not for them to gather information as much as God using this conversation for His GREATER GOOD for us to re-confirm who we are and what you are doing.

**Jon 1:9 NLT** Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

- This is not just a confession to the sailors out on the deck in the raging sea, God hears Jonah's 1<sup>st</sup> small step of confession most importantly, God uses this moment to use Jonah's own mouth to remind him who he is and who he is to worship and serve.

**Jon 1:10 NLT** the sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the LORD. "Oh, why did you do it?" they groaned.

- Now it is time for Jonah to search his heart for the harm he has caused these innocent men and their lively hood, the sailors have lost the cargo that was their source of income and the ship is being shredded by the storm. The sailors are desperate men fearing for their own lives and being used by God to drill down to the heart of Jonah, The sailors groaned "Oh, why did you do it?"

**Jon 1:11 NLT** And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, "What should we do to you to stop this storm?"

**Jon 1:12 NLT** "Throw me into the sea," Jonah said, "and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault."

- Jonah has now entered **level 2 of confession**...taking ownership of his decisions and the impact that they have on the people lives closest to him. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault."
- Has Jonah lost all hope in his failure to obey God to end his life, could he be possibly be wanting to make sure he wouldn't have to follow thru with God commissioning him to preach to the Ninevites.
- Is it possible that God having the great fish in mind already is letting Jonah give his life for the sailors since he refused with the Ninevites, which after Jonah becomes fish bait, then miraculously saved by God would empower him make the trip to Nineveh.
- Or let's go 1 step further when Jonah gives his life for the sailors God will receive the glory for saving their lives and Jonah's life with the great fish then preserving his life in the fishes belly,

transforming his life and then recommissioning his life to preach to the Ninevites all driven by God's love for all of mankind.

**Jon 1:13 NLT** Instead, the sailors rowed even harder to get the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn't make it.

**Jon 1:14 NLT** Then they cried out to the LORD, Jonah's God. "O LORD," they pleaded, "don't make us die for this man's sin. And don't hold us responsible for his death. O LORD, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons."

### **Just few thoughts on this section**

- The words: Instead, the sailors in V13 is a great picture of how we try to fix things ourselves with a last-ditch effort, it's are flesh screaming out 1 last time because we will not tap-out.
- Our flesh always causes the grappling match to go on for days, weeks, months even years longer.
- Rowing harder is easier than a complete surrender to God for most of us until we get worn out.
- The now half-hearted cry to the LORD in V14 by the sailors is strictly to get out of their circumstances not true repentance which is a common mistake we all need to acknowledge.

**2Co 7:10 NKJV** For godly sorrow produces repentance [leading] to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

- The quote from the sailors to the LORD in the last part of v14 (you have sent this storm for your own good reasons is all ways the case. The good that we see or understand does not compare with the GREATER GOOD that God plans in the circumstances in our lives)
- GOD'S GREATER GOOD for our lives does not waist 1 tear, 1 heartache, 1 failure, in our lives he sovereignly uses them all to prepare us for the next season of our lives.
- Just like the summer complements the fall which prepares for the winter then sets the stage perfectly for the spring of life events.

**Jon 1:15 NLT** Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once!

**Jon 1:16 NLT** the sailors were awestruck by the LORD's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him.

**Jon 1:17 NLT** Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

- **Note 4 more miracles in verses 15-17.**

1. The moment Jonah hits the water the storm stops **v15**

2. The sailors' eyes are truly open witnessing the power of God and vow to serve him with a heart changing personal commitment **v16**.
3. The LORD arranged (appointed) a great fish **V17** you great fish with a big mouth and no teeth move right over there.
4. Jonah was in the fish for 3 days & 3 nights and survived

**Jon 2:1 NLT** Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish.

- Jonah has now received his own personal prayer closet to begin to reunite with God where he will receive a fresh revelation from God.

**Jon 2:2 NLT** He said, "I cried out to the LORD in my great trouble, and he answered me. I called to you from the land of the dead, and LORD, you heard me!

- Because God is omnipresent, he literally hears us no matter what kind of circumstances we find ourselves in or where we are located.
- God answers our prayers, but we do not always like the answers.
- God's perfect love for us casts out all fear so when we pray because we don't understand what is going on or we are unable to cope with how something is turning out we need to end our prayer with **BUT I KNOW THAT YOU LOVE ME!**

**Jon 2:3 NLT** You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves.

**Jon 2:4 NLT** Then I said, 'O LORD, you have driven me from your presence. Yet I will look once more toward your holy Temple.'

- Even in the belly of the fish Jonah has faith that God has heard him & will deliver him. **V2**
- Jonah acknowledges it was not the sailors that threw him overboard but again God used it for the sailors and Jonah's GREATER GOOD **V3**
- **Chapter 2 V 1-4** all contain quotes from the psalms that validates Jonah is a man of God's word more than likely had no bible or lampstand, but he had the guts ( no pun intended ) to cry out to the LORD in his distress.

**Psalm 119:105 NLT** Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

- So even in the darkness on the bottom of the ocean in the belly of a great fish Gods word will provide light.

**Jon 2:5 NLT** "I sank beneath the waves, and the waters closed over me. Seaweed wrapped itself around my head.

**Jon 2:6 NLT** I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth, whose gates lock shut forever. But you, O LORD my God, snatched me from the jaws of death!

**Jon 2:7 NLT** As my life was slipping away, I remembered the LORD. And my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple.

- God has Jonah in a life threatening headlock in the famous seaweed hold that unless he taps out, he is going to get taken out let us see what true surrender looks like.
  1. In **V5** I sank beneath the waves.
  2. In **V6** I sank down to the very roots of the mountains.
  3. In **V7** My life was slipping away (If I do not surrender my life is certainly in jeopardy).
  4. In **V7** I remembered the LORD. (Lord save me, I surrender)
  5. In **V7** my earnest prayer went out to you in your holy Temple.  
(I give you my life, I am yours.)
- No matter if you are 19, 39 or 99 years old your life is slipping away it is but a vapor, like all of us Jonah has a truckload of regrets, but Gods mercies are new every morning even at the bottom of the ocean in the belly of a great fish
- Jonah's circumstances haven't gotten better but God's relentless love and mercy has captured his heart once again

**Jon 2:8 NLT** Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies.

- False gods, idols are any person, place, or thing that you put in front of God.

- We all get sidetracked chasing fame, fortune and fun but resisting God is like being an idolator which sank Jonah, but now he is ready to abandon it all.

**Jon 2:9 NLT** But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the LORD alone."

- Jonah has a personal rededication to return to the Lord due to God's relentless love for him
- The sailor's eyes were open and vowed to serve the Lord.
- Then back to the big picture of the 120,000 people of Nineveh who turn from their evil ways and repent

**Rom 10:13 NLT** For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

**Act 4:12 NLT** There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."

**Jon 2:10 NLT** Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach.

- So what do you think.....was Jonah spit out like a football kick off launched threw the air or was he spit out like a onside kick were he rolled across the sand for 10 yards or so and got a mouth full of sand completely covered in sand ?
- Now that the grappling match is over and Jonah has been spit out immediately after he tapped out, we can only imagine how he would be a different man on the outside probably a yellow

skinned hairless man in appearance, but on the inside he is a new man transformed by God and given a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance.

**Jon 3:1 NLT** Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time:

**Jon 3:2 NLT** "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh and deliver the message I have given you."

**Jon 3:3 NLT** This time Jonah obeyed the LORD's command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all.

- All that is left now is how we are to apply this to our lives now today but let us start by what not to do.
- Do not run the other direction.
- Do not row harder.
- Do not think God is done with you.
- Do not ever forget GOD LOVES YOU relentlessly.
- Now willingly get into your own prayer closet, right where you sit right now and willingly tap out /surrender to the GREATER GOOD God has for your life.

Maybe it is a 1<sup>st</sup> time commitment to cry out God to save you and give him your life.

Perhaps you have been running, rowing, trying to keep your head above water and grappling with God and you are ready to surrender.

I going to give you a time of silence to respond to God!

Let's Pray