

# Spurgeon's Exposition - Jonah

## Jonah 1

Jon 1:1-3. Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Observe the misconduct of the prophet Jonah. He had a plain command from the Lord, and he knew it to be a command; but he felt that the commission given to him would not be pleasant and honouring to himself, and therefore he declined to comply with it. We see, from his action, how some, who really know God, may act as if they knew him not. Jonah knew that God was everywhere, yet he "rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." What strange inconsistencies there often are even in good men! Here is one, who is favored with a divine commission, — one who knows God, and fears him; yet, for all that, he ventures on the fool's errand of endeavoring to escape from the Omnipresent. He "went down to Joppa," which was the port of his country, "and he found a ship going to Tarshish." Learn from this that providence alone is not a sufficient guide for our actions. He may have said, "It was very singular that there was a ship there going to Tarshish, just when I reached the port. I gather from this that God was not so very disinclined for me to go to Tarshish." Precepts, not providences, are to guide believers; and when Christian men quote a providence against a precept, — which is to set God against God, — they act most strangely. There are devil's providences as well as divine providences, and there are tempting providences as well as assisting providences, so learn to judge between the one and the other.

Jon 1:4. But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.

Learn, hence, that "Omnipotence has servants everywhere." The Lord is never short of sheriff's officers to arrest his fugitives, and on that occasion he "sent out a great wind into the sea." "The wind bloweth where it listeth." That is true, but it is also true that the wind bloweth where God listeth, and he knew how to send that great wind to the particular ship. No doubt many ships were on the Mediterranean at that time; but, possibly, unto none of them was the storm sent save unto the one which carried Jonah son of Amittai. We say, "Every bullet has its billet," and this great wind was sent to pursue the fugitive prophet.

Jon 1:5. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, —

If there is ever a special time for prayer, it is a time of need. Nature seems then to compel men to utter prayer of such a sort as it is, for it is but nature's prayer at the best: "The mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god," —

Jon 1:5. And cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them.

Life is precious, and a man will give up everything else in order to save it.

Satan spoke the truth when he said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life." From the action of these mariners, we may learn that sometimes we may lighten our ship for the safety of our souls. When we have less to carry, probably we shall sail more safely. Losses and crosses may turn out to be our greatest gains. Let the ill-gotten ingots go to the bottom of the sea; and lo, the ship rights herself at once!

Jon 1:5. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.

The greatest sinner on that ship appeared to be the least concerned about the storm which had come because of him, he did not

even seem to know that there was a storm, for he had “gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.”

Jon 1:6. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.

It is hard when sinners have to rebuke saints, and when an uncircumcised Gentile can address a prophet of God in language like this.

Jon 1:7. And they said every one to his fellow, Come and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

We commend not the action of these men in casting lots, but we admire the providence by which is the lot fell upon Jonah. Solomon says, “The lot is cast into the lap,” but he did not say that it was right that lots should be cast into the lap; and he very properly added, “but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

Jon 1:8. Then they said unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us, What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

I do not know whether these men had traded with those who then lived in these islands, but they had a very English custom of not judging a man before they had heard him speak. It would be well if we all practiced it more, — so that, before we condemn men, we were willing to hear their side of the question. Considering that there was such a storm raging, the questions put to Jonah were remarkably calm. They were very comprehensive, and went to the very root of the matter.

Jon 1:9. And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew:

That let them know whence he came, and what his country was.

Jon 1:9. And I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

That, I suppose, must be regarded as his occupation; and what a blessed occupation it is, — to be occupied with the fear of the Lord! So, you see that, though Jonah was not properly following his occupation while he was on board that ship, yet he did not hesitate to avow, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.” The child of God, even when he gets where he ought not to be, if you test him and try him, will stand to his colors. He will confess that he is, after all, a servant of the living God.

Jon 1:10. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this?

Jonah had to go through this catechism, question after question, and this was the hardest of them all: “Why hast thou done this?” Could you, dear friend, submit every action of your life to this test? “Why hast thou done this?” I am afraid that there are some actions, which we have performed, for which we could not give a reason, or the reasons for which we should not like to give to our fellow men, much less to our God.

Jon 1:10-11. For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?

Here is another question; the catechism is not yet finished, and this is one of the most difficult of all.

Jon 1:11-12. For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so

shall the sea be calm unto you:

Notwithstanding all his faults, Jonah was an eminent type of Christ. We know that from our Lord's own words, for he was as long in the belly of the whale as Christ was in the heart of the earth. Here he seems to be a type of our Saviour: "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea: so shall the sea be calm unto you."

Jon 1:12-13. For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land;

They showed a deal of good feeling in all their treatment of Jonah. They could not bear to take away a fellow-creature's life, so they pulled and tugged in order to get the ship to land.

Jon 1:13. But they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.

Their safety lay in the sacrifice, — not in the labour. They rowed hard to bring the ship to land, but their efforts were of no avail. If they would cast Jonah overboard, then they would be safe.

Jon 1:14-15. Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, —

Put the emphasis on the first word, "So they took up Jonah"; that is, with great reluctance, with much pity and sorrow, not daring to do such a deed as that wantonly and with a light heart. When men do deeds like this, on a far greater scale, and go to war with a light heart, they will have a heavy heart before long. If ever you have to cast a brother out of the Church, —if ever you have to relinquish the friendship of any man, — do it as these men did with Jonah, patiently, and carefully. Investigate the matter, and do not act until you are driven to it after consulting the Lord.

Jon 1:15-16. And cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.

Jonah had been the means of causing a greater change than he expected. His conduct and punishment had been a warning to those thoughtless sailors. They could not but believe in the God who had thus followed up his fugitive servant.

Jon 1:17. Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

He prepared a storm, he prepared a fish and we afterwards read that he prepared a gourd, and he prepared a worm. In the great things of life, and in the little things, God is ever present. The swimming of a great fish in the sea is, surely, not a thing that is subject to law. If ever there is free agency in this world, it must certainly be in the wanderings of such a huge creature that follows its own instincts, and ploughs its way through the great wastes of the wide and open sea. Yes, that is true; yet there is a divine predestination concerning all its movements. Over every motion of the fin of every minnow predestination presides. There is no distinction of little or great in God's sight, he that wings an angel guides a sparrow. "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah."

Jon 1:17. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

So round about the truant prophet was the preventing grace of Jehovah.

Jon 2:1. Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly.

What a strange place for prayer! Surely then is the only prayer that ever went up to God out of a fish's belly. Jonah found himself alive;-that was the surprising thing, that he was alive in the belly of a fish;-and because he was alive, he began to pray. It is such a wonder that some people here should continue to live that they ought to begin to pray. If you live with death so near, and in so great peril, and yet you do not pray, what is to become of you? This prayer of Jonah is very remarkable because it is not a prayer at all in the sense in which we usually apply the word to petition and supplication. If you read the prayer through, you will see that it is almost all thanksgiving; and the best prayer in all the world is a prayer that is full of thankfulness. We praise the Lord for what he has done for us, and thus we do, in effect, ask him to perfect the work which he has begun. He has delivered us, so we bless his holy name, and by implication we beseech him still to deliver us. Notice that it says here, "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God." He was a runaway; he had tried to escape from the presence of God; yet the Lord was still his God. God will not lose any of his people, even if, like Jonah, they are in the belly of a fish, Jehovah is still their God: "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly," —

Jon 2:2. And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me;-

You see that this is not praying, it is telling the Lord what he had done for his disobedient servant. Jonah had prayed, and the Lord had heard him, yet he was still in the fish's belly. Unbelief would have said, "You have lived so long; Jonah; but you cannot expect to live to get out of this dreary, damp, fetid prison." Ah, but faith is out of prison even while she is in it. Faith begins to tell what God has done before the great work is actually accomplished; so Jonah said, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me;" —

Jon 2:2. Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

He was like a man in the unseen world among the dead. He felt that he was condemned and cast away; yet God had heard him, and now he sings about it in the belly of the fish. No other fish that ever lived had a live man inside him singing praises unto God.

Jon 2:3. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas;

The word Jonah used implies that God had violently cast him away into the deep. "Cast me not off," prayed David, but here is a man who says that God did cast him out like a thing flung overboard into the vast deep: "Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas;" —

Jon 2:3. And the floods compassed me about:

"They rolled all over me, beneath me, above me, around me; 'The floods compassed me about:'" —

Jon 2:3. All thy billows and thy waves passed over me.

Jonah had evidently read his Bible; at least, he had read the 42nd Psalm, for he quotes it here. It is a blessed thing to have the Bible in your mind and heart so that, wherever you may be, you do not need to turn to the Book because you have the Book inside you. Here is a man inside a fish with a Book inside of him; and it was the Book inside of him that brought him out from the fish again.

Jon 2:4. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

What grand faith Job displayed when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;" and here is another splendid manifestation of faith, "'I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.' If God does not look at me, I will still look towards the place where he dwells. As I am being flung away from him, I will give one more look towards his holy temple."

Jon 2:5. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul:-

They seemed to get right into his spirit; his heart became waterlogged: "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul:" —

Jon 2:5. The depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

Like his winding-sheet,-as if the cerements of the grave were wrapped about his mouth, and ears, and eyes, and he was consigned to a living tomb. This narrative is a graphic description of the natural motion of the great fish which had swallowed Jonah. When the fish found this strange being inside him, the first thing that he did was to plunge as deep as ever he could into the waters. You will see that Jonah did go down very deep indeed. The next thing was for the fish to make for the weeds; as certain creatures eat weeds to cure them when they feel very ill, this fish went of to the weedy places to see if he could get a cure for this new complaint of a man inside him.

Jon 2:6. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains;-

To the very roots and foundations of the mountains, where the big jagged rocks made huge buttresses for the hills above: "I went down to the bottom of the mountains;" —

Jon 2:6. The earth with her bars was about me for ever:

Down went the fish, as deep as he could go: and, of course, down went Jonah too, and he might well imagine that he was in a vast prison from which there was no way of escape,

Jon 2:6. Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.

And, dear friend, God can bring you up, however low you may have gone. Though, in your own feelings, you feel as if you had gone so low that you could not go any lower, God can, in answer to prayer, bring you up again. O despairing one, take heart, and be comforted by this story of Jonah! God is dealing with you as he was with him. There may be a great fish, but there is a great God as well. There may be a deep seas, but there is an almighty God to bring you up out of it.

Jon 2:7. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD:

It is a blessed memory that serves us faithfully in a fainting fit. Mostly, when the heart faints, the memory fails; but Jonah remembered the Lord when his soul fainted within him.

Jon 2:7. And my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

Think of Jonah's prayer going right within the veil, and reaching the ear and heart of God in his holy temple. He said that he was cast out of God's sight, yet his prayer went into God's temple. Oh, the prevalence of a bold believing prayer! "My prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple."

Jon 2:8. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

If you trust anywhere but in God, you will run away from your own mercy. God is the only really merciful One who can always help you; but if you trust in your own righteousness, if you trust in priest craft, if you trust in any superstition, you are observing lying vanities, and forsaking your own mercy. God is the source of your mercy; do not run away from him to anyone or anything else.

Jon 2:9. But I will sacrifice unto thee--“

I long to do so. I cannot do it just now, but I would if I could; and I will do it when thou shalt grant me deliverance from my present peril.”

Jon 2:9. With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

That is one of the grandest utterances that any man ever made: “SALVATION!” Write it in capital letters. It is a very emphatic word in the Hebrew, and I might read it, “Mighty salvation is of Jehovah.” This is real, old-fashioned Calvinistic doctrine spoken centuries before John Calvin was born. The whale could not endure it, and he turned Jonah out directly he said, “Salvation is of the Lord.” The world does not like that doctrine, and there are many professing Christians who do not like it. They say, “Salvation is of man’s free will; salvation is of the works of the law; salvation is of rites and ceremonies;” and so on. But we say, with Jonah, “Salvation is of the Lord.” He works it from beginning to end, and therefore he must have all the praise for it for ever and ever.

Jon 2:10. And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

God has only to speak, and even sea-monsters obey him. I know not how he spoke to the fish; I do not know how to talk to a fish, but God does; and as the Lord could speak to that fish, he can speak to any sinner here. However far you may have gone from all that is good, he who spoke to that great fish, and made it disgorge the prophet Jonah, can speak to you, and then you will give up your sins as the whale gave up Jonah. God grant that it may be so this very hour! That is the prayer of an ancient mariner, may it be ours, as far as it is suited to our circumstances, and may we be brought by God’s grace to cry, with Jonah, “Salvation is of the Lord”!

## Jonah 3

Jon 3:1-2. And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

There is no preaching like that which Gods bids us. The preaching that comes out of our own heads will never go into other men’s hearts. If we will keep to the preaching that the Lord bids us, we shall not fail in our ministry.

Jon 3:3. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.

For those times, Nineveh was “an exceeding great city,” but it is far exceeded in size by this modern Nineveh of London.

Jon 3:4. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

His message was short and sharp, there was not a word of mercy in it. There was nothing to distract the attention of the hearers from the one point and the one subject; and there is a great deal in that. We may sometimes say too much in a single sermon, and give our hearers a field of wheat instead of a loaf of bread. · But Jonah said what he was bidden to say, no more and no less: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

Jon 3:5-9. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and

beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

Note that the only message they had heard was a prophecy of impending judgment. God had sent his servant to warn them of the coming destruction; and, since he had warned them that he meant to destroy them, they could infer that he might possibly intend pity towards them should they repent, but there was as yet no verbal declaration of mercy or hope. These people went to God with nothing better to sustain them than this, "Who can tell?" How much more guilty than these Ninevites are they who refuse to humble themselves before God, even when they have distinct injunctions from God, and explicit promises that whosoever shall confess and forsake his sins shall find mercy! These men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment against the men of London, and the men of this generation, and condemn them, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now men do not repent even at the testimony of Jesus Christ the Son of God. To despise the prophet Jonah, would have involved these people in certain destruction; of how much sorer punishment shall they be thought worthy who despise the Christ of God, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace.

Jon 3:10. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.

There is no change in God, absolutely considered, but there is often an apparent change, that which he threatens, while men remain in sin, is not executed upon them when they repent and turn to him. He is always the same God. From the beginning, he has been "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." If he did not pardon sin, when men turn from it with sincere repentance, he would have changed his method of dealing with the penitent; but when he does forgive, it is according to his way from the beginning, for he has ever been a tender, and compassionate, and gracious God.

This exposition consisted of readings from Jonah 3; Jon 4:1-2; and Romans 5.

## Jonah 4

Jon 4:1. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.

A nice prophet this! Jonah was a man of a somewhat ugly disposition, yet I think he has been misunderstood. He was the true child of Elijah, the prophet of fire. Elijah was a rough, stern servant of the Lord, who felt that the indignities which had been done to Jehovah deserved instant and terrible punishment; and he seemed almost to wish to see that punishment inflicted, as he accused the people unto God, saying, "the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." He was bravely stern for God, and Jonah was cast in a similar mold. He seemed to feel, "I have been sent of God to tell these people that they will be destroyed for their sin. Now, if they are not destroyed, it will be thought that I have not preached the truth, and, what is far more serious, it will be thought that God does not keep his word." His whole thought was taken up with the honour of God, and his own honour as involved in that of the Lord. There are many people, nowadays, who seem to think everything of man, and very little of God; and, consequently, they fall into grievous errors. Jonah, on the contrary, thought everything of God, and very little of men. He fell into an error by so doing, and there was a want of balance of judgment, yet is Jonah's error so very seldom committed that I am half inclined to admire it in contrast with the error on the other side. He felt that it would be better for Nineveh to be destroyed than for God's truthfulness to be jeopardized even for a single moment. God would not have us push even concern for his honour too far; but we are such poor creatures that, very often, when we are within an inch of the right course, we fall into a snare of the enemy. It was so with Jonah, when he was exceedingly displeased and very angry at what God had done in sparing the repentant people of Nineveh.

Jon 4:2. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish : for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

This was as much as if he had said to the Lord, "I went and did thy bidding, and told the Ninevites that they would be destroyed; but I knew in my heart that, if they repented, thou wouldst not carry out thy threat, and now thou art too gracious, too kind, to these

wicked people." It is a strange thing, is it not, that Jonah was angry because his message was blessed to his hearers? As a good commentator says, "When Christ sees of the travail of his soul, he is satisfied; but when Jonah saw of the travail of his soul, he was dissatisfied." There are some men who leave off preaching because they do not succeed; but here was one who was ready to give up because he did succeed. It is strange that such a good man as Jonah was should fall into such a foolish state of mind; but God still has a great many unwise children. You can find one if you look in the right place; I mean, in a looking-glass. We are all foolish at times; and it should be remembered that, although Jonah was foolish, and wrong in certain respects, there is this redeeming trait in his character, — we might never have known the story of his folly if he had not written it himself. It shows what a true-hearted man the prophet was, that he just unveiled his real character in this Book. Biographies of men are seldom truthful, because the writers cannot read the hearts of those whom they describe; and if they could read them, they would not like to print what they would see there. But here is a man, inspired of God to write his own biography, and he tells us of this sad piece of folly, and does not attempt in the least degree to mitigate the evil of it. Now turn to a very different portion of Scripture, Romans 5

This exposition consisted of readings from Jonah 3; Jon 4:1-2; and Romans 5.

You know all about Jonah's refusal to go upon the Lord's errand, and how he was held to it, and carried to his work in a great fish as he would not go by himself. Somehow or other, God will make his servants do his will; and the more speedily they do it, the better it is for them. You know also how the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah, and how the Lord had mercy upon them.

Jon 4:1-3. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

"For, if I live, the Ninevites will say, 'This man scared us needlessly. He is a prophet of evil, and he is a liar, too, for our great city is not destroyed. He frightened us into a kind of repentance for which there was no necessity, for his God does not carry out his threatenings,'" and so forth. And poor Jonah could not face such talk as that. But, brother, if you preach God's Word as he gives it to you, you have nothing to do with the consequences that come of it. God will justify his own truth; and even if it should seem that the worst rather than the best consequences ensue, it is for you still to go on in the name of him who sent you. Whenever you and I begin to try to manage God's kingdom for him, we find the divine scepter too heavy for our little hands to hold; our case would be like that of Phaeton trying to drive the horses in the chariot of the sun. We cannot hold the reins of the universe. And poor Jonah, wanting to manage everything for God, makes a dreadful mess of it, and in his anger makes a very foolish request: "O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me."

Jon 4:4. Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

How kind of God to speak thus gently to his rebellious servant. Are any of you given to anger? Might not the Lord say to you, "Doest thou well to be angry, so soon, — so often, — so long, — about such little things?"

Jon 4:5. So Jonah went out of the city, —

When, no doubt, everybody would have been willing to entertain him, for all, even to the king, must have felt a deep respect for the messenger who had brought them to their knees before the Lord: "Jonah went out of the city," —

Jon 4:5. And sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

To see those forty days out; half hoping, perhaps, that there would come an earthquake, to shake the city down; and then, under his little booth of boughs, he would not be hurt by the falling edifices. In as sulky and surly a spirit as he could be, he put himself to great inconveniences. The damp of the night fell on him, and the heat of the sun would soon wither up the branches. If, dear friends, like Jonah, you want to complain, you will soon have something to complain of. People who are resolved to fret, generally make for themselves causes for fretfulness.



Jon 4:6. And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

Those who are angry with God show the littleness of their minds. "Little things please little minds;" so a gourd made Jonah glad.

Jon 4:7-8. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, —

Jonah was soon up, and soon down. Yesterday, he "was exceeding glad of the gourd;" today, he is fainting because of the heat of the sun. If we allow our mercies to become too sweet to us, they will soon become, by their withdrawal, too bitter for us. When we feel too much affection for the creature, we shall soon find a great deal of affliction from the creature. "The sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die," —

Jon 4:8-9. And said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.

He had gotten into such a bad spirit that he could even brave it out with his God. Oh, that we might be preserved from such an evil temper! It is well for us that, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." When a child is in a fever, and says a great many naughty things, his father puts it down to the sickness rather than to the child. So it was with God's poor fainting servant Jonah.

Jon 4:10-11. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, —

"Nineveh, for which I have laboured; Nineveh, which I made to grow; Nineveh, which has been many years in the building; Nineveh, which contains multitudes of immortal souls which will not perish in a night: 'Should not I spare Nineveh,'" —

Jon 4:11. That great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; —

This is always supposed to mean infants, and I judge that the supposition is a correct one. So Nineveh had a population of over one hundred and twenty thousand who were under two years old, so it must have been an immense city. Who can tell the blessing that even infants bring to us? It may be that God spares London for the sake of the children in it. What a deal the Lord Jesus Christ made of children! He suffered the little children to come unto him, and forbade them not. Does God care for children? Ay, that he does; and so should his servants! They are the better part of the human race; there is more in them that is admirable than there is in us who are grown up. They are, in many respects, a blessing to the city, as these six-score thousand little ones were to Nineveh. But how singularly does God add —

Jon 4:11. And also much cattle?

Does God care for cattle? He does; and how that fact should teach his servants to be kind to all brute creatures! There is some truth in those lines of Coleridge, —

"He prayeth best, who loveth best All things, both great and small,"

for everything that lives should be the object of our care for the sake of him who gave them life; and if he has given us to have dominion over all sheep and oxen, and the birds of the air, and so forth, let not our dominion be that of a tyrant, but that of a kind and

gentle prince who seeks the good of that which is under his power. Here ends the story of Jonah which he tells himself; and he did not add anything to it because nothing needs to be added. The Lord's question to him was altogether unanswerable, and Jonah felt it to be so. Let us hope that, during the rest of his life, he so lived as to rejoice in the sparing mercy of God. He had stood outside the door, like the elder brother who was angry, and would not go in, and who said to his father," Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." But after his father had said to him, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine," I hope that he went in, and I trust that Jonah also went in and lived with the penitent Ninevites, and that all were happy together in the love of the God who had been so gracious to them.